

Report for RfP Nepal –ACRP meet in Seoul Korea 28-30 April 2016

It is exactly one year since the big earthquake struck central Nepal on 25th April 2015. Thousands died and many more were injured and rendered homeless. Now, even after one year, we still continue to feel the aftershocks in our capital city of Kathmandu and surrounding districts. **(Pic 1)**.

Many organizations and groups from various faiths have worked and are still working to provide relief amidst the suffering. To add to these efforts, RfP Nepal, in cooperation with Rfp International and ACRP, launched a project titled “Supporting Earthquake Survivors and Advancing Social Cohesion through Multi-religious Cooperation” from May 1, 2015 itself. The project targets helping nearby victims from Kathmandu city and its surrounding districts of Lalitpur, Nuwakot, and Sindhupalchock.

The project has thus been going on for a year now. We had started with the first interfaith prayer service (involving different religions together) for the peace of the souls of the victims. This was held in Kathmandu’s Jain Temple. **(Pic 2)** on May 20th 2015. Two weeks before this on 7th of May 2015 members of RfP Nepal had organized their first relief distribution event in which various faiths distributed relief **(Pic 3)**. Supplies (mats, plastic buckets, cooking pots, cooking utensils, blankets) were reached to a suburban village on the outskirts of Kathmandu city, named “Mathilo Halchock”. Recipients included those who had lost family members and the very old.

On 20th of May 2015: Supplies (mats, plastic buckets, cooking pots, cooking utensils, blankets) were reached to Kakani -- a village northwest of Kathmandu city -- just outside the Kathmandu valley rim. **(Pic 4)**. The local police helped manage the crowd during the distribution. The recipients were mainly very poor Tamang tribals from villages that were walking distance from Kakani in NUWAKOT DISTRICT.

In the end of May 2015 a team RFP-Nepal members (along with RFP International staff from New York, Ms.Deepika Singh) went and made evaluations at the quake effected village of Ghusel south of Kathmandu city in LALITPUR DISTRICT. Galvanized tin sheets (roofing material) were bought at factory price in Kathmandu (starting on June 1st, 2015) and distributed to some worse effected villagers here. 74 households got tin sheets to cover their damaged houses or they used the sheets to make temporary houses. **(Pic 5)**

On 8th of July: A RfP Asia (ACRP) team led by Rev. Masamichi Kamiya came to Nepal and visited earthquake affected areas in Kathmandu and nearby villages. They also went (along with RFP Nepal members) on an evaluation trip to remote Thanapati village northwest of Kathmandu in NUWAKOT DISTRICT. There they interacted and spoke publicly with the locals. Soon after the ACRP team left, RFP Nepal was able to buy (in Kathmandu) galvanized tin sheets (30 bundles) and distribute it to the villagers of Thanapati in the **end of July**. This sufficed to provide roofing to 15 houses only. Most of the villagers here are poor Tamang tribals. **(Pic 6)**

In the **end of July 2015** RfP Nepal was to provide 30 bundles of galvanized tin sheets to villagers of Ainchowk village in Dhading district. This amount has provided roofing to 15 households. This district lies north-west of Kathmandu city.

Special Interfaith SHARING and DISCUSSION PROGRAM on EARTHQUAKE relief: This was held and organized by RfP Nepal on **June 22nd 2015** in a hall in central Kathmandu among prominent religious leaders of various faiths. This was the only JOINT interfaith discussion on quake relief experiences by various faith communities held in the country. Interfaith relief cooperation and possibility towards quake victims were discussed (**Pic 7**).

<< Villagers leaders from various villages (where relief was given – example: Ghusel and Thanapati) also attended interfaith discussion programs organized by RfP-Nepal in central Kathmandu.

Local TV channels, particularly the popular “Image TV” channel broadcast each and every activity of RFP Nepal in their daily prime time and weekly broadcasts. >>

No quake relief works have been able to be carried out in August, Sept. and October of 2015 due to monsoon rains and the political situation.

A high level interfaith symposium (inter-religious talk/paper presentations by experts of various religions and commentaries) was held at the National Academy in central Kathmandu on 28 Sept. 2015. Attended by over a hundred participants from various religions, it was held at a very (politically) sensitive time just after the national constitution had been promulgated after years of violent protests and delay. This program was held – after having to be postponed by a week, as leftist extremists (a faction of the self-proclaimed “Maoist” party) enforced a “sudden” nationwide strike on the day the interfaith meet was first scheduled. The international TRUSTEE of RfP international Dr. Kul Chandra Gautam was the chief guest and spoke at the program, enlightening all on the need of joint interfaith prayers and efforts during this difficult time for Nepal. (**Pic 8**)

The participants for the SYMPOSIUM would have been many more in number, but the economic blockade of entry of goods (including vehicular fuel) into landlocked Nepal had started – so many of the participants walked to the venue.

Factors and hurdles effecting quake relief for RFP (and even the Nepal government and other donors) were the monsoon rains where access to villages was not possible by vehicles. Nepal was politically paralyzed as a humanitarian crisis loomed.

NO EARTHQUAKE RELIEF activities were possible in November and December of 2015 -- until the political problem ended.

Project Challenges: Factors and hurdles effecting quake relief for RFP (and even the Nepal government and other donors) were the monsoon rains in the middle of 2015 where access to villages was not possible by vehicles. The political situation, in which the first constitution of the country was being debated and promulgated amidst violent protests shut areas the country down frequently. The wait for the monsoon rains to be over ended with acute petrol and diesel shortage.

Petrol, diesel and galvanized tin sheets were not available in the market. The project priority was to obtain these tin roofing sheets and reach and distribute them to villagers who still do not have adequate shelters even after 6 months have passed after the earthquake. Quake reconstruction projects in Nepal for all earthquake victims was supposed to start right after the monsoon rains in the end of August 2015 BUT STILL HAVE NOT STARTED AS OF APRIL 2016. The unfortunately political situation and the protests that have followed paralyzed the entire country for over five months. For months even the capital city felt like a ghost town with hardly any vehicles plying as there has been an acute shortage of vehicular fuel and cooking gas – along with other items in the market. In winter, starting in November 2015, the plight of the quake victims almost turned into a humanitarian tragedy. RFP-Nepal's work was and is but a drop in the ocean of what is needed. But it was a necessary and a very SYMBOLIC DROP and we were proud of what little we accomplished in 2015.

THE TIMEFRAME (that was initially only until the end of December 2015) WAS RENEWED BY FURTHER 6 MONTHS.

Project Activities FOR THREE MONTHS of January, February and March 2016

1230 (number of) BLANKETS and 550 (number of) CAPS distributed by RFP-Nepal in January and February of this year : As an exceptionally severe winter (weather) over January and February continued threatening lives of villagers (specially old people and children) who continuously suffered from the earthquake (of mid-2015), RFP-Nepal felt the need to do whatever it could. The situation had worsened amidst lack of petrol/diesel and a many months-long very strict economic blockade had been politically imposed nationwide.

But amidst scarcity of petrol/ diesel and difficult road conditions members of RFP-were able to buy (in central Kathmandu) and reach blankets and some caps -- and plants and seeds to several places (using mostly 4 wheel jeeps to travel) in the three months of January, February and March 2016.

The blankets and caps were distributed in **FIVE PLACES:**

1. **11th January 2016** – Blankets and caps distributed at Talakhu village in Nuwakot district north east of Kathmandu city. 15 % of the recipients were single women and overall 60 percent of recipients were elderly folk. This is a predominantly Tamang tribal village.

Number of blankets distributed : 235 and “some” caps

2. **18th January 2016** – Blankets and caps distributed at Thanapati village in Nuwakot district north west of Kathmandu city **Number of blankets distributed : 250 and “some” caps.** The majority of recipients were also mostly Tamang tribals and over 50 percent of them were women.

3. **27th January 2016** – Blankets and caps distributed at two villages of Goldhunga (northwestern part of Kathmandu valley) and Godamchaur (southeastern part of Kathmandu district),

At GOLDHUNGA (ALL RECEIVERS WERE WOMEN only) : Number of blankets distributed : 120 and “some” caps

At GODAMCHAUR: 116 blankets distributed and “some” caps. In Godamchaur 60 % of the recipients were women and over 70 % were elderly.

4. **31th January 2016** – Blankets and caps distributed at Sankhu village in eastern part of Kathmandu valley: **Number of blankets distributed : 182 and “some” caps.** Ten percent of the recipients were low caste (dalits). Of the total, one third were single women (without spouses).

5. **18th February 2016** – Blankets and caps distributed at Buddhasingh village of Nuwakot district and Layachang village in Nuwakot district north east of Kathmandu city

At BUDDHASINGH : 92 blankets distributed (no caps given here). The blankets were given to families rather than individuals, and 50 % of the inhabitants of this village were Tamang tribals.

At LAYCHANG: 235 blankets distributed & “some” caps.

65 % of recipients were women and this is a TAMANG tribal village.

As priority was given to elderly folks, over 40 % were elderly.

ON 21st March 2016 an interfaith meeting titled “Multireligious Collaboration to Support Earthquake Survivors and Advance Social Cohesion and Resilience” held at Hotel Manasalu, Kathmandu among TWO DOZEN members/ leaders and representatives of various religions . In addition to two dozen participants from various religions, two ACRP members (including Rev.Masamichi Kamiya from the Asian Council for Religions for Peace) and Ms.Deepika Singh (Director of Programs of RfP International) also attended this meeting.

On 22nd March 2016 several members of Religions of Peace Nepal accompanied two visiting ACRP members (including Rev.Masamichi Kamiya from the Asian Council for Religions for Peace) and also Ms.Deepika Singh (Director of Programs of RfP International) to various shrines and complexes situated inside Kathmandu city. The visits were to the Jain shrine, Buddhist stupa of Bouddha., Sikh Gurudwara, Catholic Christian Church, Mosque, and the Bahai center.

On 23rd March 2018 several members of Religions of Peace Nepal accompanied two ACRP members (including Rev.Masamichi Kamiya from the Asian Council for Religions for Peace) and Ms.Deepika Singh (Director of Programs of RfP International) to Ghusel village in southern

part of Kathmandu district. They handed over plants and seeds to the villagers who had been affected by the earthquake of April 2015.

11 KINDS of PLANTS (number of plants being 1465) and 16 KINDS of SEEDS were distributed

Project Successes in the year 2016: Even before there was a change in the political situation (that had resulted in the blockade of essential goods and supplies into the landlocked Nepal) RfP Nepal was able to ACT and distribute some blankets and caps as the winter ended. The visit of ACRP and RfP International members was an encouragement to all involved.

Project Challenges in the year 2016: Access to faraway villages is still not easy. The political scenario in Nepal improved in February but there is still no guarantee that yet another blockade of essential goods will not be enforced again (by disgruntled political parties who continue to protest). As of the beginning of April 2016 availability of some essential supplies (like cooking gas) still remains effected. Any heavy monsoon rains could bring disaster to the hilly country.

Project Priorities for Next Period including Proposed Changes/Corrective Action: The aim for the last quarter of the project covering 1 April 2016 to 30 June will be to continue to strengthen relations with the earthquake victims/families that RfP Nepal has already met/worked with in the key villages of Ghusel (south of Kathmandu city) and also villagers of Thanapati (north-west of Kathmandu city) rather than going into newer areas. RfP Nepal will also seek to strengthen and renew relations between various religions in the last quarter. RfP Nepal will also try to strengthen its own organizational and working capabilities in the last quarter.