

A year later hardly any house has been reconstructed

Why is the aid still failing?

Original text: Iris Ludeker

Foreign editorial office

Exactly one year ago Nepal was struck by an earthquake which cost the lives of almost 9000 people. But that was only the start of the misery. After the natural disaster came the political chaos, and after that a by mankind created catastrophe. Result: one year after the tremor, almost nothing has been done for rehabilitation. Deepak Raj Sapkota even laughs a bit when asked how many of the 600.000 collapsed houses have been rebuild. "Less than one percent" says the chairman of the Karuna Foundation, a development organisation with funds from the Netherlands who is focused on persons with a disability in Nepal. "The people who were struck by the earthquakes often live in remote areas, they are poor and they have no money to rebuild the destroyed houses." But there are also no building materials available, he says, transport is a problem and the information that the government provides is not always as clear.

Sapkota, who recently visited the Netherlands, explains that the attention for reconstruction– after the first few months when relief packages were flooding into the country – after some time reduced. First there was a political problem of the new constitution and the election of a new government. The National Rehabilitation Authority, created to coordinate the reconstruction and divide the six billion dollars' international aid, couldn't work for months because of these problems. On top of that there was the border blockade with India by ethnical groups who couldn't find themselves in the new constitution (and who were supported by India, Sapkota states). At first people felt the urgency to go for the reconstruction", Sapkota says. "But when the blockade came, that attention passed away because the impact of the blockade was bigger than the earthquake. The earthquake affected 14 of the 75 regions of Nepal, whilst the blockade struck everyone." For months the import from and to India came to a halt, gasoline and fuel to cook on were running out. The transport of building materials

stopped as well. "That was already bad, but the consequence was that there was less attention for the victims of the earthquake. It was a new disaster, but this time it was created by people." Even though the blockades have been solved, there are still shortages. The increased prices still haven't reached their initial levels. Still, Sapkota does not want to judge the government of Nepal too hard. The rehabilitation is an enormous project, he states, and there needs to be consensus between the many different factors. "We had to find out how we were going to tackle this megaproject. The intentions of the government are good, but they don't always know what the best approach is." For example, there is a lot of confusion about the financial support that the victims of the earthquake can get. Soon after the quake it went wrong when 15.000 rupees (approximately 120 euros) were promised. "It took a long time for the people to get that money, because not every village has a bank and there was not a clear picture of those who were in need." Now the victims can claim another 200.000 rupees (1900 euros) and also a loan of 300.000 rupees. But once again it isn't going as planned. The payments are taking a lot of time, the conditions to get it are very vague, and there are rumours that people who have started to already build themselves are building, or with another development organisation won't get the money.

Consequently, everybody is waiting everybody and according to the Red Cross about 4 million people are still not living in their own house. They aren't being housed in the city anymore, but close or in the village they came from – "in hopes of the reconstruction and local economies restarting soon", Sapkota states. However, he warns, that will not go as quickly as some think. "if everyone is building at the same time, they will need an enormous amount of building materials and people. That won't happen at once."

Lessons of the aid after the earthquake

Just after the earthquake, Deepak Raj Sapkota quickly transformed his Karuna Foundation into an emergency aid organisation, supporting the victims. Consequently, he saw everything that went wrong in the beginning. "in the

first place, our government is weak. They couldn't control and facilitate the help in a good manner. There was hardly any information about who did what and where they did that."

The system that was available, didn't work, so Sapkota says. "Every village got two or three NGO's which were supposed to help them, and these (I)NGOs got permits to be active there. We were too late with Karuna so I contacted with the organisations that did get a permit. Then we found out that some NGO's had a great number of permits because that made it easier to raise donor money."

On top of that, many different organisations that came in the country had no idea about the geographical conditions of the country. "sometimes you need to walk for three days before you get to the next village. The people then got supplies for three days. Are they helping, or are you teasing them? At least give them supplies for two weeks."

Apart from these practical issues, Sapkota believes that (international) organisations in general have too much influence in his country, and are sometimes overruling the government. "You can never run a country by making the government weaker. Us, the NGO's, are sometimes just like a parallel government – despite our good intentions, we get involved too much, in a negative way. There shouldn't be any competition with the government, we are complementary."

Giro 555

The Collaborating Help Organisations (SHO, eleven big help organisations, also known as Giro 555) collected over 25 million euros after the earthquake for humanitarian help for Nepal. In an mid-term report, published on Saturday, it becomes clear that until January 31, 61% of this money has been spend, mostly on direct emergency help (tents, blankets, vaccinations, sanitary services). The SHO's have also determined that the rehabilitation has had a very slow start due to all sorts of setbacks and a chaotic government that is slowly getting started. The remaining 39% of the funds need to be spent by December 31st of 2017.

Women are the motor behind the rehabilitation of Nepal

Inequality is still big in this society

Original text : Lucia de Vries

Dakchhinkali, Nepal

The earthquake in Nepal was officially commemorated yesterday. The moment the Nepalese prime minister put down a wreath at the Daharaha-tower, where many people lost their lives, Sunita Tamang and Srijana Maharjan together carried a load of mud. They were wearing rubber gloves, safety helmets and dust masks. Joint by approximately 30 other women, Sunita and Srijana are restoring a water reservoir in their village of Dakchhinkali.

With the help of the Cash for Work program of Oxfam, the women are getting paid for twenty days to clean and restore the reservoir. "It's hard work, but we find it pleasant to restore the irrigation of our village together with our friends", the women say.

Other women in the village have restored irrigation canals and a Drinkwater system before. Some neighbourhoods are still dried out. Sunita: "Before the earthquake, our village had three water sources, but the whole system got messed up. Now we don't even have water to wash our hands, let alone to cultivate crops."

According to Bimala Balami many men are absent, so all the work, from house work to heavy labour, is being done by women. "I believe we are capable enough, and that in fact it's the women who are restoring and developing the villages", she concludes.

Even though millions of people have been living in sheds made of wood and corrugated sheets for over a year, waiting for the governments' support, the women are using every opportunity to provide for their own maintenance and rebuild their village.

Over a quarter of all the Nepalese households is being run by women. Their men have either passed away or are working as guest workers in other countries. The say women have is being stimulated by the government, who has established certain quotas.

"women are participating actively in the decision making revolving around the rehabilitation", says Nani Maya Thapa, director of Rural Women Creative Forum, active in the different regions that were struck. "donors believe in women: They are more reliable. That strengthens their negotiating position."

But this doesn't apply to all women. Only one in five women have land ownership papers. More than a quarter has no identity card. This is why a lot of women are missing out on government support. Cecilia Keizer, director of Oxfam Nepal, called out the government to make sure that women and other disadvantaged groups get the right papers so that they can also get emergency help. "this is a unique opportunity to create a stronger but also more equal Nepal."