



# INTER AGENCY COMMON FEEDBACK PROJECT

## Focus Group Discussion Report

January 2017



# Introduction

In late November – December 2016 the Common Feedback Project (CFP) held a series of 23 focus group discussions in November, with earthquake affected communities across seven of the 14 priority affected districts: Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Dhading, Gorkha, Ramechhap, Dolakha and Sindhupalchok. The valuable feedback gathered through the focus group discussions is summarized here, in CFP's first qualitative only report.

As in every report, the CFP hopes to present the feedback it has gathered from communities in an accessible and actionable way to recovery partners. Specifically, the objective of the focus group discussions was to obtain greater depth, detail and voice on aspects of particular interest in Reconstruction and Protection themes, in lieu of the regular monthly survey.

The 23 FGDs included 399 participants, with four female only groups, two male only groups and one group in a temporary settlement. Locations for focus group discussions included both urban and rural areas of each districts including municipalities and VDCs.

The feedback provided through these focus group discussions is summarized under the following broad themes which emerged as priorities for the communities that participated:

1. Reconstruction Needs
2. Safer Building Practices
3. Information Needs
4. Reconstruction Plans
5. Protection Issues

## Key Findings

Several key issues were persistently raised throughout all focus group discussions, including:

Women have reported being unable to withdraw the first tranche payment to begin reconstruction in the absence of their husbands. This is a particularly acute problem in families where husbands are working abroad and not in Nepal. Grant agreements have been compulsorily made between male heads of households and the government, even when that male household member is not in Nepal. This has caused significant issues for many female household members to access reconstruction funds for their homes.

Single, divorced and widowed women, as well as those whose husbands practice polygamy have faced additional barriers to getting access to reconstruction support, such as being excluded from beneficiary lists. These women also feel less informed on vital information regarding the reconstruction process, and how to file grievances.

Affected people face great challenges in getting access to the government engineers assigned to their VDC. Nearly all focus group discussion participants reported that they had been unable to consult with an engineer, despite making numerous calls and inquiries at their VDC secretariat. For the most part, people understand the challenges engineers face to move around an entire VDC, especially considering that they have no transportation provided. However, they remain frustrated by the delays in their housing reconstruction this has caused.

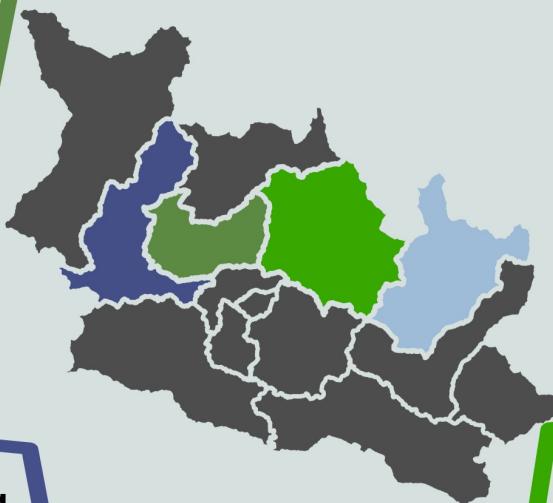
Rapid increases in the costs of skilled labour, building materials, transportation and even water to build with, as a result of supply shortages, are putting extreme pressure on the already limited financial resources homeowners have at their disposal to rebuild their homes.

# Housing Reconstruction Needs

## What are people saying?

### Thaprek, Nuwakot

We don't have access to the road and lack building materials. How can we rebuild our houses?



### Mainapokhari, Dolakha

We used to pay NRs.500 per day for labour now we are paying NRs. 1000.

### Salyantar, Dhading

I had spent 100,000 rupees on water to construct my new house as all our water sources have dried up.

### Chautara, Sindhupalchowk

Chautara Municipality has decided to widen the road, annexing the land for our house and leaving us in a dilemma to start rebuilding.

## Key findings

One hundred percent of focus group discussion participants feel that their main housing reconstruction need is additional cash support. The majority are unsatisfied with the 300,000 rupee housing grant. They are expecting an 800,000 rupee subsidy loan to be arranged soon by the government.

All building materials, including stone, mud, brick, rod and wood are becoming scarce. The increased demand has lead to an increase in the price of these materials.

A limited number of experienced masons has resulted in a drastic increase in the labour rate from NRs. 500 to 1200 per day, making skilled labour unaffordable for the majority of the affected population.

Consultation with engineers was also found to be extremely difficult for affected people. The majority of focus group discussion participants stated that they have not yet seen an engineer in their VDC, and that the reconstruction of their house is delayed as a result. Of concern is a trend in Gorkha Bazar in particular, where government engineers have been refusing to accept consultations, citing lack of time, and instead referring people to private engineering firms which charge up to four times the government rate. Recently, 12 such firms have opened in Gorkha to exploit this market.

Finally, drying up of water resources has been a hindrance to the reconstruction process. People are now forced to buy water to mix mud and concrete, up to as much as 100,000 rupees.

## Top housing reconstruction needs



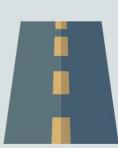
Additional  
Cash  
Support



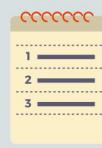
Building  
Materials



Skilled Labour/  
Technical  
Assistance



Road and  
trail access  
(35%)



Grievance  
cases  
(100%)



Limited  
financial  
resources  
(100%)



Limited labour  
and high wage  
rates  
(100%)

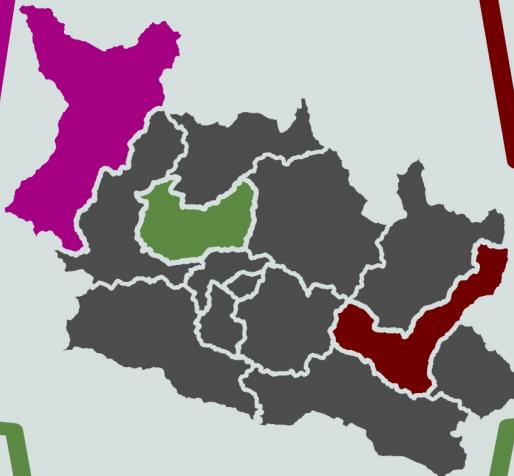
## Top housing reconstruction barriers

# Use of Safer Building Practices

## What are people saying?

### Devitar, Gorkha

I have realized the importance of safer building practice after this earthquake. I will not compromise on the safety of my house.



### Betali, Rammechhap

I have consulted a mason with 20 years experience while constructing my house. I will consult with engineers at the time of approving my second tranche.

### Samari, Nuwakot

I am aware of safer building practices, but I am only applying a few elements. I do not have the money to adapt all practices.

### Thaprek, Nuwakot

I do not understand the technical words used, it would be great if technical words could be simplified to be understood by laymen.

## Key findings

All 23 focus group discussions reflected that participants have at least a nominal awareness of safer building practices. Most participants were also positive on their intentions to use some of the elements of safer building practices; however, for the most part they feel that they do not have enough money to apply all safer building practice elements. They believe that applying a few elements is better than applying none.

Most focus group discussion participants stated that they will consult with engineers before and during their house reconstruction. However, some participants indicated their plans to consult only experienced masons instead of engineers.

Male participants had been exposed to more knowledge and training on safer building practices than female participants.

## Barriers to using safer building practices



Limited training/learning opportunities



Limited financial resources to incorporate all SBP elements

## My story

Ramhari Sapkota lives in temporary shelter in Samari, Nuwakot. He has learned about safer building practices from radio, TV and other sources, and recognizes their importance after watching the collapse of all the houses in his village during the April 2015 earthquake. He does not know whether he should take the first tranche or not. He estimates the cost of reconstructing his home using the government safer build practice guidelines will cost 800,000 rupees. As he does not have any additional finances on top of the 300,000 rupee grant to contribute. Ramhari is afraid that if he takes the grant tranches and does not implement all government directed safer building practices he could be punished.

## Significant findings

63%

Participants plan to apply all elements of safer building practices.

39%

Participants wanted to receive training on safer building practices.

87%

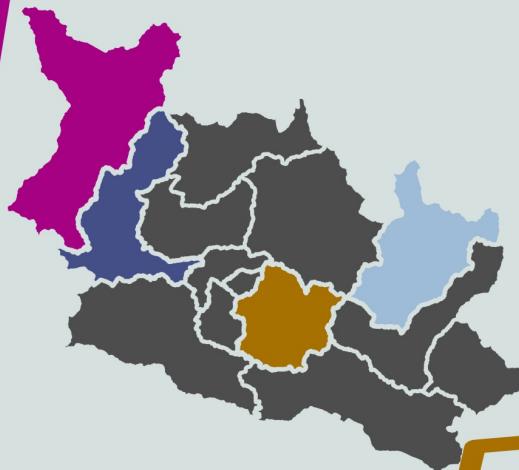
Radio, TV, pamphlets, social mobilizers, observation, and experience are the main sources of information regarding safer building practices.

# Information Needs

## What are people saying?

### Palungtar, Gorkha

Even if we receive cash support, how will we construct house when we are not even getting enough water to drink?



### Madanpur, Dhading

Do I have to pay engineers when they come for inspection services?

### Bhimeswor, Dolakha

Can I construct my house in Dolakha with the housing grant I received from Ramechhap?

### Kusadevi, Kavrepalanchok

I am unable to withdraw the first tranche from the bank without my husband being present, even though I have all the documentation. What should I do?

## Key findings

The series of focus group discussions found that people generally feel well informed on how to receive reconstruction support. The information has been disseminated through radio, community members, VDC secretariat, and social mobilisers.

However, many participants remain completely unaware of why their name is missing from the grant beneficiary list, as their house was completely destroyed and they followed the same procedures and documentations as their neighbours. They are similarly unaware of the costs associated with engineer consultation or house design approval.

Many women felt that they were always the last to know about reconstruction issues in their locality. Furthermore, those whose husbands were working abroad have reported being unable to withdraw the first tranche from the bank, and would like to know the procedure for receiving money by the wife.

## My story

Pasi Damini of Palungtar, Gorkha lives with her small daughter in temporary shelter. Her husband lives with another wife and does not contact her. While she has received her first tranche in a bank account, she has not withdrawn it because she is afraid that if she takes the money out she will spend it in daily necessities and end up in trouble with the government. She also worries about what will happen to the money if she does not withdraw it. She wants to know if it will go back to the government. Similarly, she has heard the government has provided a five year timeline to complete house construction, but she doesn't know from when that time will begin -- from the earthquake, or from the receipt of funds. She wonders if all the information she has heard is even true, or just rumours.

## Persistent Questions



What will happen to the grant if I can't complete construction in given time?

When will the second tranche be received?

When will grievances be addressed?

Are there fees associated with engineer inspections?

## Key Information Issues



Rumors are spread and believed by communities as they lack a means of verifying the facts.



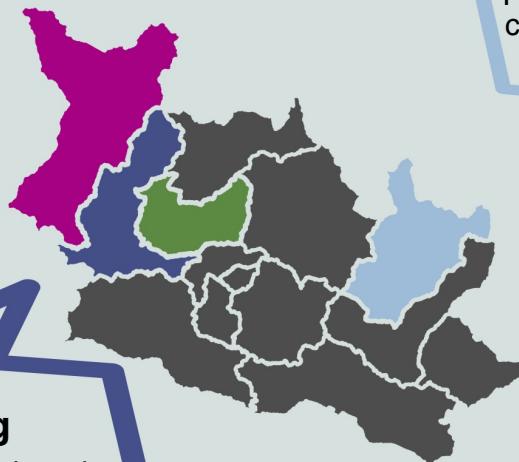
Beneficiary selection criteria is not clear, and information on government loans are very much desired by communities.

# Reconstruction Plans

## What are people saying?

### Paslang, Gorkha

We will commit communal labour and time to build each others houses.



### Jiri, Dolakha

I will do soil testing before constructing my house.

### Salyantar, Dhading

I will start construction work in the rainy season as all our water sources have dried up, forcing us to buy water. This costs NRs. 100,000 per house constructed. This is one-third of my total grant amount.

### Samari, Nuwakot

I will not consult an engineer in building my house as it is too expensive for me.

## Key findings

People in rural areas are predominantly planning to rebuild their houses using mud, stone and wood. Some of those living in urban areas plan to use the same traditional materials, whereas others plan to use brick, cement and steel rods.

In all 23 focus groups people are aware of the importance of adapting safer building practices while constructing their houses. Every household, in both rural and urban areas, plan to build earthquake resistant houses as much as possible.

The one common finding is that participants do not feel the housing grant is sufficient to construct a house. Only a few participants claimed to be able to build their home on their own, whereas the rest plan to take a loan from the government, bank or the landlords of the locality.

The majority of participants stated that they had not yet removed their rubble. The first tranche received will be used to remove the rubble of their house and clear the land for building.

### Model Houses

Respondent feel that 17 model houses circulated are not cultural sensitized and inapplicable for hill areas. As a result respondents plan to design their own houses, even they lack financial and technical capacity to do so safely.



## My story

Radheshyam Tiwari is currently living in Jiri municipality, but his home is in a village. He claims that there are many people in his village who have practical information about constructing homes -- experienced masons, local experts and elderly people with indigenous knowledge on safe construction. He wishes to incorporate that knowledge with modern engineering to build his new home. Tiwari says that this type of knowledge has been used locally as it is suitable to their culture. He suggested that indigenous knowledge should be incorporated within the plans for model houses for that locality. Similarly, in Kuri, Dolakha local people said they build their homes only with wood, which is most appropriate for the local climate.

## Top reconstruction plans



Land suitability assessment



Debris management



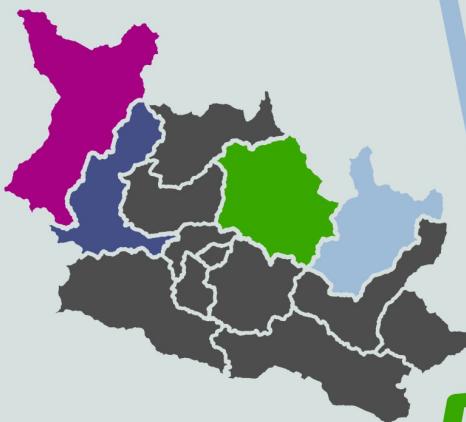
Committing local resources, communal labour and time.

# Protection

## What are people saying?

### Palungtar, Gorkha

I have to wake up at 3 am just to fetch one pot of water. This has greatly increased my chore burden.



### Baireni, Dhading

We have no privacy living in this one room temporary house.

### Mainapokhari, Dolakha

My child's face and eyes are swollen every morning because of living in temporary settlement.

### Chautara, Sindhupalchowk

I skip school for 2 or 3 days at the time of mensuration due to no proper toilet and water in my school.

# Fairness

Many female participants feel discriminated against because even though their homes are completely destroyed, because the land is not in their name they are not included in the eligibility list.

Women consistently shared that they are unable to withdraw first tranche as the funds are deposited in their husband's name. The agreement was only made with household heads, even when they were not physically present. This is a particular problem for women whose husbands are working abroad. Now, women are being denied the right to withdraw the first tranche in the absence of their husbands.

Single or divorced women and women whose husbands practice polygamy are facing particular problems in accessing government relief, and report feeling that their voices are not being heard, nor their needs addressed in the reconstruction process.

# Health and Sanitation

Lactating, pregnant and menstruating women face problems in temporary and integrated shelters due to lack of female friendly facilities, improper toilets and limited water.

Female participants reported facing an increased burden of domestic chores. Particularly girls are increasingly asked to support their parents in ensuring adequate food, shelter and water.

## My story

Maya's husband has been living with his first wife in Kathmandu for the past eleven years, while she has been living in Madanpur, Nuwakot. She has two school aged sons. Initially, she had her own A class earthquake victim ID card, and had been receiving relief and support. At the time of the government housing grant survey she was told to take a joint photo with her husband. She later found out that her husband requested the engineer to tell her this false requirement during the inspection, which he was present for.

When the beneficiary list was released Maya found that her name was not included, but instead the name of her husband. She felt he had cheated her. As per the suggestion of her VDC secretary, Maya filed a grievance form. She says that despite the fact that everyone in her community knows the truth, no one will hear her voice, or advocate for her. She has no other way to rebuild her home.

# Child Related

The transfer of students from one school to another due to structural damage is a persistent concern for parents. There has been a marked increase in school absentee rates owing to the structural damage of schools and their facilities.



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