

Brief Report of Visit to Sindhupalchowk District

27 April 2015

Mark Zimmerman, Stephen Knoble / Nick Simons Institute (NSI)

On the day after the Nepal earthquake, Nepal's Ministry of Health and Population requested that NSI send a team to a severely-affected area in the west of Sindhupalchowk District (3 hours northeast of Kathmandu). Today we conducted a road and walking survey of the village development areas of Mahankal and Ichok (driving from Sankhu to Malemchi, and then walking from Chanauti). Three of us stopped in 12 -15 villages, inspected buildings, and spoke to local people and community leaders.

Physical Impact

In a word, the area was devastated.

- 80-90% of buildings have been rendered uninhabitable; 20-30% were razed to the ground. Pillared concrete buildings (accounting for less than 5% of the total) appeared to be intact. Almost no stone/brick/mortar buildings are now inhabitable.
- Many village roads, asphalt and cinder, have long cracks 3-6" wide. Only a few roads have craters large enough to prevent driving, but many are blocked by rock landslides. Sections of roadway will be pried away by the coming monsoon rains.
- Along our route, all bridges were intact with no overt signs of damage.
- Malemchi Primary Health Center (PHC), being a concrete building, is still intact. This is true of all police, army, drinking water, and other organizational buildings.

Human Impact Medical

- Almost all village areas (wards within VDC) registered deaths: Takani #3 (4), Piple (0), Takani#4 (8), Basbari (26), Pataksila (23), Mahankal #6 (20), Ichok #2,3,4 (total 21), Gore #3,4,5 (total 21).
- Malemchi government PHC saw a large number of injured. On day after the quake, 600 patients were seen, of whom 200 were sent to KTM, of whom 55 went by helicopter. On day 3 the PHC was still seeing patients, but most had cuts and a few fractures.
- Few of the villages on the road requested medical assistance.
- Ichok village still has 8-10 patients needing medical care, including one spinal injury and some with fractures. Rather than carrying the patients to the PHC (2.5 hours away), they are waiting, hoping for a helicopter. There are no medical personnel or supplies in that location, nor in areas further into the mountains from there.

Housing

- Everyone is sleeping in makeshift lean-tos out in the field. These have been constructed of branches and bamboo with tarps or salvaged roof aluminum.
- People are sleeping directly on the ground with no mosquito protection and sparse bedding.
- Given the house destruction, alternate shelter will be needed for 6 – 12 months minimum.

Food

- Every village person whom we spoke with said food shortage was imminent. Those people whom we saw were eating plain rice.
- We did not assess the situation for breastfeeding mothers or infants.
- People explained the shortage of food by saying that their food stores had been crushed in buildings, large numbers of cattle and poultry killed, and mills rendered useless.

Water/Sanitation

- We travelled along the Malemchi River Valley, where water was generally abundant. There were reports of burst water pipes in certain villages.

- Given the makeshift nature of housing, water purification is likely to become an issue. People asked for 'Piyush' to address this need.
- Among multiple community ad hoc housing 'projects', we saw no toilets provision. Open defecation can be assumed.

Relief Response

Government

- The Malemchi PHC relief response (with help from Malemchi Safe Water –CMC) was impressive. They were continuing to see all patients coming to them, having coped well with the flood of patients in the first two days.
- Government helicopters ferried many patients into Kathmandu, with a handful of villages higher up left to be visited.
- Police and army were seen supporting the rescue, clean-up and medical relief.
- There was no sign of housing or food relief

International Aid

- We saw no vehicles or evidence of international relief on this, the second day after the earthquake.

Local Response

We saw an unquantifiable, but impressive resilience of the local people. On the day of the quake, they immediately began constructing makeshift housing and shifting into a community mode of living. We found people digging out structures, salvaging bits, planting rice, and caring for their injured. In the face of such destruction, this was the most impressive thing.

Summary and Needs

1. Temporary housing

- To last minimum 6-12 months
- Assure protection from monsoon rains and mosquitoes
- Include some bedding assistance
- Associated water and sanitation provision

2. Food The western area of Sindhupalchowk (west of the Malemchi River) suffered massive losses of human life, housing, and livestock in the 2015 earthquake.

Extrapolating our one-day village to-village survey, would estimate that this district of 290,000 will have a mortality of 3000 (1%) from this earthquake. The immediate needs are:

- Energy and protein needs for adults
- Infant auxiliary feeding
- Assurance of breastfeeding support for mothers

3. Medical outreach to unreached areas

- Link beyond roads and mobile network
- Extension of existing system of referral (rather than mobile camps) Long-term needs will include:

4. Support for rebuilding of houses and farm structures

5. Rebuilding of roadways

Images from Sindhupalchowk

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[NB These photos reflect this area's norm, rather than its extreme.]