

**Wednesday 10th of June - 13:46 HKT**

Dear friends,

Thank you for all your continued donations and kind words of encouragement towards CWS and our partners and the communities in Nepal. Your support is felt over there and gives them hope. My apologies for the delay in getting another update out. I have been in Nepal working with Douglas and our partners to better understand the amazing work they carried out for our relief work and to discuss how we can move forward and invest wisely in the rebuilding of villages in devastated Districts.

The challenge facing Nepal now is the next disaster – not another earthquake, but homes and farm lands that will be destroyed when the monsoon rains trigger landslides on the mountains that have been loosened as a result of constant tremors.

Since our last update of 22<sup>nd</sup> May CWSHK has not sent any further funding to Nepal and our plans are still as they were in that update (i.e to provide strong temporary structures now and to rebuild in September after the monsoon period). Today's update is more of an informal update on what we saw and learnt in Nepal and how we feel about the future. Apologies in advance for its length, it was hard to keep it short even though I have only included 20% of what I had originally wanted to write. Our next update will be more formal, with plans and budgets.

When I landed in Kathmandu I was pleasantly surprised at what I saw. There was devastation but not to the extent the media had portrayed. 20% of homes are destroyed. There is power, shops are stocked full of food and aside from the constant fear and psychological problems people face, life is as normal. They need tourism and they need business; they do not need handouts or to rely on foreign teams to rebuild their country. Foreign experts to advise, yes, but it must be local teams to manage and execute. Relying on local experts will help local employment, reduce the costs of translators, reduce the margins of error caused by the lack of cultural understanding, ensure money is going to the villages and the actual rebuilding process rather than salaries of foreigners who are costly and inefficient in a local village context. CWS' plan is to not only rely on local Nepali's but to work with locals within the particular village we are rebuilding. Our first step, once discussions with the Government have been finalized, is to employ a social mobiliser from the village itself. This person is already on board as a volunteer and has been key to providing us with household information, logistical support and coordinating meetings with the heads of the nearby villages.

The picture in the villages is completely different from Kathmandu – 100% of houses and schools are gone in some areas. Over 400,000 homes are lost and more than 20,000 schools damaged or destroyed. It was so sad walking around the villages, seeing the beautiful traditional Nepali houses in ruins; with children, all out of school, playing games amongst the rubble. One thought kept crossing my mind, how utterly devastating it would have been if the earthquake happened during school hours – 20,000 schools gone, would have wiped out an entire generation in many villages.

Despite the sadness that is everywhere you look, the village people are hopeful. They are grateful for the tarps, food, clothes and seeds they received in the first month after the earthquake but have clearly said they no longer need these items. They are already busy working the fields during the current rice plantation season. What they need now is tin (corrugated iron sheets) so they can build temporary shelters that can last up to 2 years. They have managed to salvage some old tin and have built some structures already; new tin sheets will reinforce their temporary structures to ensure they are strong enough to survive another earthquake and to ensure they don't leak during the monsoon rains. The good thing about these tin sheets is that they will become their roofs when they rebuild

their homes – nothing is wasted. Even the tarps we sent them for temporary shelters are being reused to cover their animal sheds and food stock to make them stronger and water proof.

I am amazed at how the villagers have moved on. Apparently they stayed as a community under the tarps for 18 days, cooking and eating together as a village. Then they decided it was time to build their temporary structures and house by house they helped each other build a structure right next to their old home. To get from one house to another you have to walk over piles and piles of rock rubble. This rubble is being cleared slowly and all the rocks will be reused when the rebuilding starts September. This means that the only thing that needs to be brought in is cement, some iron rods as well as training to educate people on how to rebuild strong earthquake resistant structures. Per house the costs will be low, but there are many houses to rebuild!

### **Housing - In Summary: -**

May – June: - For immediate relief, the people have already built small tin shacks using the roofing CGI sheets that they have salvaged from the ruins of their houses – we will provide more sheets as some families don't have enough.

June – Aug: - Once they have built their tin shacks, the next thing will be to dismantle their collapsed houses (*safely, help needed here*) and segregate the building materials, and clean the stones and stack them up, along with any other building materials that can be used. They are busy with rice plantation season now but can hopefully do this over the monsoon period.

Sept: After monsoons, (*assuming no more tremors*), start to rebuild their houses using the stones and other salvaged materials, however this time use cement mortar to bond the stones together (rather than the mud mortar previously used). Also use steel rebars and concrete at critical areas to give the houses more structural strength which would perform better during earthquakes.

So we reuse the old materials, use local manpower, and also end up with a house that looks and fits the landscape and local architecture and will retain their original character. We can also help improve their water, sanitation and health infrastructure to make the whole village better and stronger than was before.

We have not completely turned away from the use of earth bags; the community and debate on earth bag technology is very interesting and growing and Douglas, together with our experienced architect volunteer is debating on its structural strength for lateral forces as the sacks are held together only by barbed wires, but nevertheless a fascinating low cost technology, especially for remote and areas. Discussions are on going.

### **Schools - In Summary:**

The Government, together with their large international funding partners, will rebuild the schools in Nepal. However, some villages may still need some extra funding and we are trying to understand what this may be in the villages we will work in. For now we are focusing on the immediate needs; what children need between now and when their new schools are rebuilt are temporary structures called TLC – Temporary Learning Centres and at this point CWS has committed to building 15 centres in 2 Districts (half already completed). The costs per centre is roughly US\$1,000 and includes the following: -

- Building temporary classes: corrugated zinc sheets and other minor construction materials such as nails. Local materials may also be available. (Zinc sheets will be reused for the permanent structure)
- Teaching/learning materials for classes such as boards and stationery (shifted to permanent structure when ready)
- Reading materials for children: school bags, books and stationery, some children may also need clothes (can be used all year long)
- Psychological counseling/mental health

We are continuing our discussions with the Government and will be committing to more TLCs in the coming week.

**Our next step: -**

Our relief efforts in the 4-6 weeks after the earthquake were with 5 partners who worked tirelessly to get emergency supplies to villages. Going forward, we will be working with 4 of the same partners:

- Right4Children to rebuild villages (create model villages)
- Child Welfare Scheme Nepal (CWSN) to build Temporary Learning Centres
- Kopila to provide counseling to survivors
- Shakti Samuha to protect vulnerable children from being trafficked (this partner intercepted a truck with 11 children on board heading to India last week).

Right4Children is now finalising plans with the government as to which villages we will be rebuilding from September onwards. CWSN is already building Temporary Learning Centres and the Government has asked if they can do more. We have been extremely impressed by the Nepalese Governments and the Army. The Army is working tirelessly to clear the school grounds so that new schools can be rebuilt starting in September. The Government has been very good at monitoring which organization does what. Of course this was not perfect during the relief stage and they were not able to monitor it so tightly. It is so easy to make mistakes with everyone rushing to do the right thing, reacting from the heart. However, so many mistakes have already been made in Nepal with international organisations not understanding local politics and culture, not understanding the lay of the land and the need for organisations to work hand in hand with the Government. As a result; duplication is seen in many places. We saw first-hand how some large organizations have been dropping off materials to villages that have already been served by our smaller local grassroots partners. Some groups were dropping off tarps (to make tents) 2 weeks ago – 5 weeks after the earthquake and 4 weeks after we had already distributed them! The local villagers did not need them and kindly passed them back because they had already built temporary structures using tin they salvaged from the wreckage!

Co-ordination is key; working with village chiefs, women's groups and local District government officers is instrumental in making the right decisions and plans.

Thank you again; for all the positive energy generated by your amazing support. We are continuing to work hard, to make the right decisions, to rebuild communities using local people, local resources

and local know-how. I share with you an informal update from my visit to one of the projects which helps injured victims of the earthquake. I hope you will take the time to read it as it offers just one example of thousands more showing what we have been able to do with your donations. Life is fragile but together we really have helped so many recover in desperate times.

Thank you from us all,

Zein & all at CWS

### ***My visit to our emergency shelter for injured victims and their families***

*My first visit was to the JYOTI Vocational Training Centre (vacant at the time of the earthquake due to semester break) that was turned into a shelter to house and feed around 200 people recovering from operations. I had geared myself up for a sad afternoon, confronted by helpless and hopeless victims. However, the moment I walked into the centre, I could feel the relaxation in the air, the warmth at the sight of men, women and babies sitting on picnic blankets on the grass and the sounds of children playing ball. It was humbling. Immediately, Ashmita, an 8 year old girl, grabbed my hand and gave me the tour. The kitchen, child friendly room, counseling area, health checkup and medicine area, the skills room where the older ladies were making beautiful stools from corn leaves, and lastly the accommodation unit.*

*It was in the accommodation unit that I met Ashmita's mother. Ashmita's mother was sitting upright; unable to move as a result of both her collarbones being broken. Her mother told us that Ashmita saved her life. This was the first time we had heard of such a thing; even though we had already spent 2 hours with Ashmita – her humble and happy nature was focused on meeting new friends rather than dwelling on the horrors of the past.*

*When the earthquake hit they were all inside; the house fell on them all. They screamed but no one came. When her mother passed out (Ashmita and her father thought she was dead) she realized if she did not find a way out that they would all die. She dug through the mud and found a gap in the wood and managed to crawl out. She found help and a helicopter took the whole family to Pokhara; greeted by our Asha ambulance and taken to the government hospital for an operation before returning in the Asha ambulance to the JYOTI Centre for recovery, both physically and psychologically. Ashmita's mum does not want to go home because there is nothing waiting there for her.*

*Next to Ashmita's mum was a teenage girl, lying flat unable to move having broken her back, pelvis and hip bones. She was crying quietly nonstop; terrified and traumatized, not knowing when she would recover; if ever. A counsellor was by her side.*

*5 babies, under 1, were in the room, all healthy and happy, providing the joy and relief that baby's do.*

*The counsellors have done a fantastic job over the past month; it was obvious from the energy in the centre. Despite so much pain and uncertainty there was still so much calm and joy. There were many children with broken arms and legs, being pushed around on wheel chairs with babies laughing happily in their laps. The strength children have is beyond comprehension.*

*The JYOTI and Asha teams have been phenomenal over the past 6 weeks; managing to carry out a top notch primary health care unit, a counseling centre and family accommodation in what used to be (and will be once again soon) a Vocational Training Centre for disadvantaged youth! The challenge facing the team now is how to encourage these patients to return home. Fortunately, half*

*are already gone, sent off with transport allowance and a startup kit (kitchen ware and sanitary kit). However, many are too scared to leave and they will need a little longer.*