

Anatomy of disaster response: What happens when disaster strikes?

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While the first instinct among everyone abroad and far away is to help, there is often a pattern in how the government and international community together respond to a disaster. The Nepal earthquake is special to us, because it has happened at home and affects the people closest to us. Every disaster is different and every situation unique. At the same time, knowing how national and international efforts might unfold next is useful and even necessary. Although of course, nothing is set in stone and the specifics might differ from the usual narrative. But understanding the anatomy of disaster response will prepare us to think about the long-term recovery and how we can contribute next.

So we talked to two friends with experience in disaster management and search and rescue in Nepal and around the world. They helped us put together a timeline of how things unfold during the response to a disaster like the Nepal earthquake. It is a general outline of how relief and recovery processes unfold, who gets involved and for how long. Due to directly relevant experience in Nepal, we were also able to get a list of all of the actors that are involved in the efforts. We think understanding that process will help us know what might happen next, how and what we would be able to do in the coming days.

TIMELINE

Disclaimer: This is generally the timeline in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and during recovery and relief efforts, with references to what was planned and is taking place in Nepal.

Time	Activity	Actors/Details
Day 1-3	local community and government reacts	local community, Red Cross Youth, first responders recover people from the rubble; people take stock of family/neighbors/friends; impromptu camps and shelters are established, mobilizing local food/water/health resources etc.
	Search And Rescue (SAR) react	local and international actors (US, China, India, Australia, Israel, etc. plus the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepal Army)
	emergency medical, food, water	local groups and international organizations that are working in the country prior to the disaster
Day 4-7	SAR slowly tapers off	teams remain active for up to 2 weeks after disaster

Day 4-7 (contd)	establishment of international coordination system (the “cluster system”) in response to the government’s call for international assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated through the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) “clusters” are sectors of response, e.g. shelter, WaSH (water/sanitation/hygiene), early recovery (debris removal, economic recovery) and more. - Cluster leads (one government entity paired with one or two international agencies) are predetermined, but other organizations can take part in coordination meetings.
	international NGO assessments, grant writing, and launch of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International NGOs (INGOs) already working in Nepal will move to framing next steps (assessments, distribution, medical responses, etc). - Some INGOs will arrive just in response to the disaster and have to do assessment of their own. - While doing these assessments, all INGOs will simultaneously frame proposals to get access to the large amounts that foreign governments will make available. For example, the UN is asking for \$415 million from international donors for recovery activities from Apr-July 2015 in the first flash appeal; these funds will largely power the bigger-scale cleanup and recovery programs, some of it is earmarked for specific clusters.
Week 1-3	relief activities ramp up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International NGOs (INGOs), local established NGOs, and formal and informal community leaders participate - INGOs are getting their plans together and will start to put out their own updates, so you can get a better idea of what they will be doing in the coming weeks and months. - INGOs will continue to refine their assessments and will take responsibilities for certain geographical areas and for clusters of work (e.g. UNHABITAT will do shelter in neighborhood X) - INGOs establish partnerships with local NGOs for program implementation - NGO internal processes ramp up to support a sustained recovery effort (hiring additional staff, getting finance/procurement systems, etc. built up, and more)
	some normalcy in the community is restored	local supply chains come back online, business/work/school gets going again as the situation allows
Months 1-6? (depends)	ongoing relief/recovery activities	Depending on scale of disaster and the amount of funding available, relief programs may last a few months, a year, or more
Year 1+	more recovery and reconstruction	Some INGOs will likely move on at that point, while the ones that had a strong presence in the country before the earthquake still remain carrying out assigned tasks

Chart 1: Nepal government coordination with international organizations

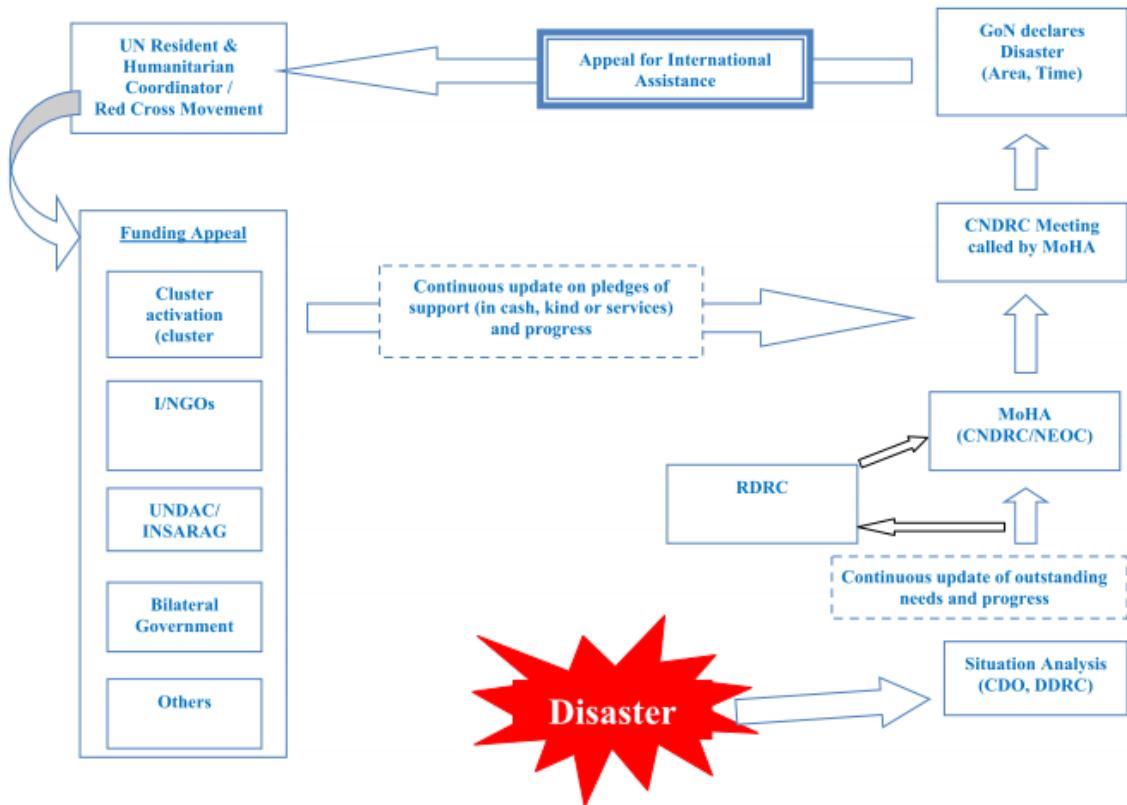


Chart 2: UN OCHA Cluster system

Name of clusters	Health	WASH	Shelter	Food security	Logistics	CCCM	Education	Protection	Telecommunication	Nutrition	Early Recovery Network
Cluster leads (Government)	MoPH	MoUD	MoUD	Mo AD	MoHA	MoUD	MoE	MoWCSW / NHRC	MoIC	MoHP	MOFALD
Cluster Co-leads (Humanitarian Agencies)	WHO	UNICEF	IFRC/UNHABITAT	WFP/FAO	WFP	IOM	UNICEF/SC	UNHRC/UNICEF/UNFPA	WFP	UNICEF	UNDP

Planned cluster now activated at: <http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/nepal>

Some (NOT all) actors:

CNDRC - Central National Disaster Relief Committee (**main Nepali decision making body**)

NEOC - National Emergency Operations Center (located with MoHA in Singha Durbar)

SAR - Search and Rescue (many international teams)

INSARAG - International Search and Rescue Advisory Group - an international body located in Geneva that sets guidelines for international SAR teams

UN OCHA - Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN DAC - UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination

US AID DART - US Agency for International Development Disaster Assistance and Response Team

Resources to track international response

ReliefWeb (where the international community posts updates; scroll down for updates from donors, NGOs, govts, etc)

<http://reliefweb.int/disaster/eq-2015-000048-npl>

Humanitarian lessons learned for urban disaster response

<http://www.urban-response.org/resource/7772>

Nepal Flash Appeal Apr-July 2015 (details on the US\$415 that's been requested by UN OCHA on behalf of the international response)

<http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/nepal-flash-appeal-response-nepal-earthquake-april-july-2015>

Many thanks to:

- **Stef** has worked in international disaster relief, management and recovery for over 7 years. She was a part of the post-relief recovery work after the Japan and Haiti earthquakes and the recent Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone.
- **Dan** worked with the UN and the Nepal government on emergency preparedness in Nepal for a year, specifically Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, with his assignment ending several months before the earthquake. Outside his official capacity, he also met with civil society organizations outside the government spreading awareness about the threat of an earthquake.