

About Nepal 2015-2025



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About Nepal 2015-2025

When the Earth Trembles – Experiences from Nepal and the Challenges of Disaster Preparedness

On April 25, 2015, the earth shook beneath Nepal. An earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 left the country in ruins, costing thousands of lives and uprooting the foundations of millions of people. In an instant, daily life changed drastically – villages were leveled, historic temples collapsed, and families lost everything they owned.

I arrived in Nepal in June 2015, deployed as a Logistics Delegate in one of the largest humanitarian operations in the country's history. My role was to manage the transportation of relief supplies, including non-food relief items (NFRI), water, sanitation, and hygiene articles (WASH), and emergency response equipment. The days were marked by logistical challenges, political tensions, and a race against time to get vital supplies to the most vulnerable.

Ten years later, Nepal still bears the scars of the disaster, but also the hard-earned experiences that have shaped the country's approach to preparedness and reconstruction. This book draws connections between my experiences in 2015 and the broader humanitarian efforts in disaster situations worldwide. It highlights what we can learn from Nepal's history – both as aid workers, decision-makers, and people who want to understand how we can best support communities in crisis.

How do we handle disasters when political and economic priorities push preparedness to the background? How do we ensure that aid reaches everyone without discrimination? And most importantly –

how can we build a more resilient preparedness so that communities can recover faster after disasters?

Nepal's earthquake was a reminder of nature's ruthlessness, but also of human strength and solidarity. This book is a reflection on the choices and compromises we face when disaster strikes.



Chapter 1: A Country in Transition – Nepal before the Disaster

In the months leading up to the earthquake in April 2015, Nepal stood at a historic crossroads. After decades of political turmoil, the country was in the process of drafting a new constitution, a process that was meant to define Nepal's future and structure the power among various political factions. However, instead of bringing stability, the constitutional process created deep divisions in society, where political disagreements and ethnic tensions surfaced.

The political situation was marked by protests, demonstrations, and negotiations between different parties seeking to secure their position in the new political landscape. Local tensions were particularly prominent in the southern regions, where ethnic minority groups like the Madhesi people felt marginalized by the political process. They feared that the new constitution would perpetuate their political and economic inequality, leading to unrest and periodic clashes with authorities.

While politicians fought for power, the population faced other challenges. The economy was fragile, and the country's infrastructure was underdeveloped in many areas. Many villages relied on agriculture, while cities experienced growing urbanization without necessary investments in safety and preparedness. Earthquakes were a known risk in Nepal, but preparedness plans were inadequate, and many buildings were vulnerable to major tremors.

Amidst this unstable political and social context, the earthquake struck on April 25, 2015. It was not just a physical disaster but also a test of Nepal's strength as a society. A country already divided was

forced to come together in the face of one of the most devastating natural disasters in its modern history.



Meeting Nepal's Youth – A Struggle for the Future

When I visited Kathmandu a few weeks before the earthquake, I was greeted by a friendly and welcoming population. The young Nepalese particularly caught my attention – they spoke good English, were open and curious, and had a natural confidence in meeting strangers. It was easy to get them to talk about their lives, their dreams, and their views on Nepal's future.

But the more I listened, the clearer it became that they lived in a constant struggle for survival – not just for themselves, but also for their families. Every thought revolved around money: money to be earned, money to be spent, money for today's and tomorrow's challenges. They did not see a future for themselves in Nepal. For them, a life abroad was the only way to a more sustainable and stable existence.

Many of the young people I spoke with dreamed of working in other countries, but they knew their opportunities were limited. Most could only get jobs as salespeople, receptionists, or cleaners. Even those with a university degree from Nepal felt that their level was not high enough to compete internationally.

Political turmoil and lack of structure in the country had crushed their hopes. The ongoing constitutional process, the absence of real reforms, and a government that did not enforce law and order had left them with a deep sense of isolation. They felt alone in the world – detached from their country and without a belief that they were part of a larger community.

This was the situation in Nepal in the days before the disaster. A population on the brink of desperation, a youth life marked by

uncertainty, and a political context that offered no future. And then, without warning, the earth shook beneath them.



Chapter 2: When Disaster Strikes – The Moment the Earth Trembles

On April 25, 2015, just before noon, Nepal was hit by an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8. The epicenter was near Barpak in the Gorkha district, a mountain village located between Kathmandu and Pokhara. Minutes later, the first shockwaves began to roll through the valleys, tearing buildings apart, triggering landslides, and sending people into panic on the streets.

When the news of the earthquake reached me, I felt an unbearable weight. My first instinct was that this was a disaster Nepal would not be able to handle alone. The infrastructure was already fragile, and the country was politically unstable. I knew that the reconstruction would require massive international support from governments, organizations, and individuals. There was no doubt that Nepal needed all the help the world could offer.

At the same time, I couldn't ignore a personal thought: Could I have made a difference if I were still in Nepal? I felt an inner conflict – a mix of frustration over not being there and a rational realization that the situation would require global cooperation far greater than one person's efforts.

As I tried to grasp the extent of the disaster, the first reports emerged: thousands dead, homes destroyed, inaccessible mountain villages, and people trapped under the rubble in Kathmandu. The day after, a strong aftershock of 6.7 hit, and in the following weeks, Nepal was shaken by over 400 aftershocks, each a reminder that the danger was far from over.

The International Community

International organizations such as the Red Cross, the UN, and private NGOs began to mobilize their relief efforts. The Red Cross activated its Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT), which was quickly sent to the hardest-hit areas to assess the extent of the damage and coordinate aid. FACT is a specialized Red Cross unit consisting of experts in disaster management and operational coordination.

At the same time, the Red Cross' Emergency Response Units (ERU) were activated. ERU consists of mobile units that deploy to disaster areas with expertise in health, water, sanitation, logistics, and telecommunications. Their goal is to establish the necessary facilities for emergency relief and ensure that vital supplies reach the affected populations.

In Nepal itself, the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) was already in action. Their network of volunteers and district offices immediately began organizing the response. However, they faced massive challenges: many roads were blocked, communication was unstable, and landslides made it nearly impossible to reach the worst-hit areas.

This was the beginning of one of the largest humanitarian operations in Nepal's history – a race against time, chaos, and limited resources.

Chapter 3: The First Days after the Disaster – Survival and Chaos

As the dust from the devastating earthquake began to settle, Nepal faced one of its greatest trials. Buildings lay in ruins, thousands of people were dead or injured, and families desperately searched for their loved ones in the rubble. In the first hours, there was no coordinated effort – people helped each other as best they could, while authorities and relief organizations worked to get an overview of the extent of the disaster.

In Kathmandu, fear filled the streets. Survivors sought open spaces, away from buildings that could still collapse under the aftershocks. Hospital corridors were overcrowded, as doctors and nurses worked tirelessly to treat the many injured. Strong aftershocks created fear and panic, making it difficult to organize a structured response.

NRCS' Initial Efforts

The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), the most established humanitarian organization in the country, mobilized its district chapters and volunteers. The first steps were a rapid mapping of the damage and needs, so supplies and aid could be prioritized correctly. Water systems had been damaged, making clean drinking water an urgent necessity. Tents and temporary shelters became a priority, as tens of thousands of people were left without a safe place to sleep.

NRCS' existing warehouse facilities were put into play, but logistics were a huge challenge. Roads were blocked by rubble and landslides, and many of the most isolated villages could not be reached at all. At the same time, communication was unstable – the phone network worked only sporadically, and electricity was cut off in large parts of the country.

International Aid Arrives and the Cluster Approach is Activated

The first international relief teams began arriving in Nepal within 48 hours of the earthquake. The Red Cross activated its Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT), which was quickly sent to the hardest-hit areas to assess the extent of the disaster and effectively coordinate the humanitarian response. Emergency Response Units (ERU) were dispatched to the most critical areas to establish health assistance, water supply, and logistics.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) activated the Cluster Approach, a system that organizes humanitarian efforts into sectors, each with a Cluster Lead Agency responsible for coordinating aid within its sector. The World Food Programme (WFP) became the Cluster Lead Agency for logistics and established logistical services that other relief organizations could use. WFP's warehouses were opened to support the distribution of relief supplies, and transportation options were coordinated to ensure that supplies reached the affected areas as quickly as possible.

Despite the international mobilization, the situation remained chaotic. Many villages had not yet been reached by aid, and the uncertainty about the number of dead and injured created an eerie insecurity among the population.

The Strength and Solidarity of the People

Amidst the tragedy, there were also examples of human strength and solidarity. The Nepalese helped each other, sharing food and water, and organizing locally to clear rubble and find survivors. Volunteers outside the official emergency response stepped in and made a huge difference in the first days when chaos and fear dominated.

This was only the beginning. Nepal faced a long struggle for reconstruction, and the coming weeks would determine how effective the relief efforts would be.



My First Contact with Danish Red Cross

After my return from Nepal, I visited the HR advisor at the Danish Red Cross headquarters in Copenhagen. We knew each other from previous courses, trainings, and my earlier deployments – including to the Philippines the year before and Sierra Leone earlier that year. Our conversation revolved around the expectation of a major earthquake in Nepal, other disaster threats worldwide, and the logistical challenges that come with a relief operation.

When the earthquake struck, it was therefore not surprising when the HR advisor contacted me shortly after with the question: Are you

ready to go again? My employer could give me the opportunity to participate in the operation from the beginning of June, and I knew that my engagement with the Danish Red Cross ERU (Emergency Response Unit) was based on short-term contracts activated as needed. Typically, an ERU is deployed for four months, with the first team in the field for four weeks, and subsequent teams taking six weeks at a time.

In Nepal, the first Red Cross specialists had already arrived on April 29-30, and situation reports (SitReps) began to flow in from the disaster area. These reports formed the basis for coordinating the response and cooperation among international actors.

Plans for my deployment began to take shape. My role would be to assist the operation with an overview of inventory and transportation between warehouses and distribution points. Additionally, I could potentially serve as Deputy Team Leader for a Logistics ERU consisting of specialists from Finnish and Danish Red Cross. The tasks suited me well – in the Philippines, I had managed a relief warehouse and coordinated truck loading with a French Relief ERU, and in Sierra Leone, I had been Logistics Team Leader associated with an Ebola treatment center. Both operations were Joint ERU deployments consisting of Finnish and Danish experts, so it felt natural to go to Kathmandu, a city I was already familiar with.

Packing and Preparation

Preparation for a deployment involves a series of formalities that must be in place before departure. This ranges from practical details such as purchasing medicine and clothing to important administrative procedures, such as signing insurance papers, adhering to the Code of Conduct, and approving the employment contract. Additionally, I had to collect my equipment, receive a briefing from the HR advisor

and logistics manager, and get the necessary vaccinations at the hospital.

I have always had a conscious approach to packing—light and practical. A large backpack and a smaller backpack were my standard. The small one contained essential items like extra clothes, PC, phone, chargers, medicine, documents, and money—everything I would need in case of an emergency. The large backpack could hold the rest: clothes and equipment that I could ultimately do without if the situation required it.



Arrival in Kathmandu

The first thing that struck me upon arrival at Kathmandu airport was the enormous amount of relief supplies and equipment lined up along the runway, waiting to be handled by airport staff, NGO workers, and customs officers. Among the equipment, I spotted a generator with the IFRC logo - a clear sign that I had arrived at the right place.



The entry itself went smoothly, and shortly after, I met the driver from the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), who was ready to transport me to my temporary accommodation. The journey from the airport was relatively short, and soon we arrived at the hotel where the Red Cross had established its temporary office. It was a practical choice - located close to the Logistics ERU tents, where supplies and equipment would be stored and distributed from, and also near

NRCS' headquarters. The hotel had not been damaged by the earthquake, and I had no expectations that aftershocks would put us in danger while we were there.

Meeting the Logistics ERU

Within the first hours, I met the rest of the Logistics ERU, the team based in Kathmandu. The Swiss Red Cross had a logistics team stationed elsewhere in Nepal, but the tasks in Kathmandu had been assigned to the Finnish and Danish logistics team. Several of them I had previously worked with in the Philippines and Sierra Leone, which created a sense of continuity in the work.

However, my tasks were changed upon my arrival. Instead of primarily being responsible for inventory management, I was now tasked with procuring trucks and coordinating their loading. The first papers I received were contracts with transport companies, detailing the fixed prices for transportation between different cities and districts. This ensured that we had a standardized and transparent transport structure - something that made my work much more efficient.

The British Red Cross had simultaneously deployed a person to coordinate the contact between Relief and Logistics, and this became a central position that I would work closely with in the coming weeks.



Logistics Setup

To ensure an effective relief operation, the Logistics ERU (Danish, Finnish, and Swiss Red Cross) established two main warehouses – one near the HQ in Kathmandu and one in Bharatpur, Chitwan District. Additionally, remote warehouses were set up in the most affected districts to address logistical challenges such as road blockages caused by landslides, aftershocks, and collapsed bridges, as well as human factors like demonstrations, protests, and curfews.

The central remote warehouses were located in:

- Charikot, Dolakha District
- Chautara, Sindhupalchok District
- Bidur, Nuwakot District

From the beginning of the operation, local Nepalese staff were recruited to support the international logistics specialists. The aim was to integrate individuals with local knowledge, including language skills, networks, and cultural understanding, to make coordination and communication as smooth as possible. At the same time, it served as capacity building, where locals were trained in the four main areas of logistics:

- Warehouse management
- Transportation management
- Procurement
- Custom clearance

This was part of the exit strategy, where local staff gradually took over the logistical tasks so they could continue the work when the ERU team withdrew from Nepal.

The Logistics ERU office in Kathmandu was established at NRCS' headquarters, ensuring close cooperation with the Nepal Red Cross and making it easier to coordinate the efforts.



Airport and Customs Clearance

In the first weeks after the earthquake, Kathmandu Airport became a crucial hub for the relief operation. The volume of relief supplies and equipment sent to Nepal was enormous - especially until the beginning of June. This created significant challenges in prioritizing the most necessary supplies, getting them quickly into the country, and processing them through customs.

To handle this critical phase, a logistics unit was established directly at the airport, consisting of:

- Two logistics specialists from the Red Cross
- Three Nepalese assistants

Their main task was to coordinate the receipt of shipments from various Red Cross societies and IFRC warehouses, in collaboration with the Regional Logistics Unit (IFRC, Kuala Lumpur). This work required close cooperation with:

- Airport staff
- Customs Clearance Authority
- Logistics Cluster, which coordinated the overall humanitarian transport effort



NRCS also played a crucial role, supporting customs processing from the headquarters, which contributed to a smoother process.

To expedite customs clearance, agreements were made with the Nepalese government. NRCS' legal status as an operational actor in

Nepal was a significant advantage - in theory, this status should make cooperation more efficient between the involved parties. However, despite these agreements, the process was still slow, and document approval and customs processing could take significantly longer than desired.

This challenge became a central part of the logistics work in the first weeks after the earthquake, where it was necessary to balance efficiency, coordination, and diplomacy to ensure that vital supplies reached the most affected areas in time.



Roadblocks – Overcoming Infrastructure Challenges

One of my first tasks in Nepal was to transport equipment to a Health ERU from Kathmandu to Dolakha District. The health team was to operate from temporary and local clinics, as well as establish mobile

medical units in the district. Shortly after their arrival, it became clear that they needed a Toyota Land Cruiser 4WD from the Logistics ERU to reach the remote villages. They quickly faced enormous transport challenges: landslides, aftershocks, and heavy rain made the roads difficult to pass, and the work and overnight stays under these conditions posed serious risks to the team's safety. It was almost impossible to run a safe operation without reliable transport.



Rasuwa District remained one of the hardest areas to reach. The roads were constantly impassable, making it nearly impossible for both relief personnel and supply trucks to get through. The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) was activated for helicopter transport, but these were primarily used for personnel and light goods. To be ready to move quickly, I hired a truck to stand by

at the warehouse in Bidur, Nuwakot, so we could transport supplies north if/when the roads became passable.

One of the first distribution attempts in Gorkha District resulted in trucks getting stuck on impassable roads while en route to a remote distribution point. Some drivers feared for their safety and refused to continue, creating an acute logistical challenge. After discussing with the relief team, we changed the distribution plan and moved the distribution point to a safer location closer to a main road.

Similar problems arose in Kavre, Okhaldhunga, and Sindhupalchok Districts. The fragility of the infrastructure after the disaster forced us to be flexible and pragmatic to ensure that aid reached the most vulnerable communities.



Logistical Challenges in the Supply Chain

A large portion of the supplies arrived via India through the port of Kolkata, but customs procedures and the impact of the monsoon caused significant delays in container deliveries. This disrupted the

original distribution plans, and one of the biggest challenges was obtaining reliable information from transport providers and customs brokers about the exact arrival times of the supplies.

The ongoing uncertainty meant that distribution plans could often only be finalized a few days before a specific distribution was to take place. These constraints made it extremely complex for NRCS and the Relief team, who simultaneously had to manage local coordination and security challenges.



Deployment and Transport Management

From June 3 to August 31, 2015, I was deployed as a Logistics Delegate, responsible for managing the transportation of non-food relief items (NFR), water, sanitation, and hygiene articles (WASH), as well as ERU equipment.

The supplies were delivered to distribution points, as well as to District Chapter and Sub Chapter warehouses. Road transport primarily took place in the central districts, with occasional deliveries to eastern and western areas outside the most affected zones. My contact with local communities was indirect, through coordination and meetings with NRCS personnel, as well as Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRT) and ERU relief delegates responsible for the distribution plans. Additionally, I was in dialogue with local transport providers and relief delegates regarding road conditions and the risk of landslides caused by aftershocks and heavy rain.



Local Collaboration for Realistic Information

Throughout my time in Nepal, I had a local assistant who served as an important contact with the transport sector. He communicated with the transport companies and their drivers to get status updates on ordered trucks, and at the same time, he obtained information from NRCS staff about road conditions and delivery possibilities in the most isolated areas.

This approach was crucial to avoid language misunderstandings and ensure the most accurate and realistic information. The advantage was that my assistant personally knew the people in the transport industry, which allowed him to get more accurate and reliable information than I could as an international delegate.



An important lesson for me was understanding local time perception. For example, "the truck has arrived" meant it could be expected within the next 30 minutes. Similarly, "the truck will be there in 1-2 hours" indicated there were problems with the transport, and the truck would likely arrive later the same day.

Logistical Challenges in Kathmandu

We experienced several issues with getting trucks to arrive on time due to restrictions on truck traffic within the Kathmandu city ring. It took me a while to identify the cause of this problem, but eventually, we found a solution: I wrote and signed an official declaration stating that the truck with this declaration was involved in the Red Cross' relief distribution to earthquake survivors and recipients.

This allowed the trucks to gain access, and the distribution operation could continue more smoothly.



Standardization of Requisition Forms for Efficient Logistics

To optimize transport coordination and ensure a streamlined distribution process, a new standard for requisition forms was implemented. This system ensured that relief supplies were precisely coordinated between the Relief team (ERU, RDRT, and NRCS), the Relief & Logistics Interface Delegate, and the Logistics ERU.

Each requisition had to include the following information for each delivery destination, in addition to the specific items and quantities:

- GPS location
- Description of the destination
- Description of the route to the destination
- Name of contact person(s) at the destination
- Phone number of contact person(s) at the destination
- Name of contact person(s) in the Relief team
- Phone number of contact person(s) in the Relief team
- Types and sizes of vehicles that can be used
- Desired delivery date
- Desired delivery time from HH:MM to HH:MM

Despite this detailed planning, it was often necessary to make last-minute changes. Due to the constant risks from road conditions, landslides, and aftershocks, it was only possible to finalize the transport plan the day before a delivery was to be loaded at a warehouse.

Even after departure, routes could change en route if new problems arose. A significant communication challenge was that the mobile

network was often unstable, and since truck drivers did not have satellite phones, it was not always possible to update them on route changes in real-time.



Demonstrations, Protests, and Curfew – Security Challenges in Logistics

During the relief operation in Nepal, demonstrations and protests became a significant logistical challenge, affecting transportation, warehouse management, and distribution of aid. Close to NRCS' headquarters, opposite the Operations HQ, was a government institution that was a regular target for demonstrations. When protests occurred there, we were prevented from accessing the street, and as a safety measure, we closed the warehouse. My impression

was that demonstrators were often brought in from other districts, making the protests more organized and extensive.

Larger demonstrations took place elsewhere in Kathmandu, and when this happened, the police were heavily present in the streets, resulting in driving bans and movement restrictions in the city.



The situation escalated particularly in southern Nepal, where protests blocked the roads from the Indian border to the warehouse in Bharatpur, Chitwan. To ensure the safety of the staff, we chose to close the warehouse for several days until the situation was stable enough to resume work.

Some of the planned NFRI distributions were postponed due to demonstrations and protests, as well as uncertainty about whether the distributions could be carried out safely and in an orderly manner.

Risk Assessment – Managing Safety in Disaster Preparedness

My primary knowledge of security risks in the field came from delegates operating in the affected areas. At the same time, I had a good collaboration with the Security Delegate, as we lived in the same accommodation and regularly exchanged information about threats and security conditions.

Risk Assessments for Distribution Points

The relief team conducted risk assessments to ensure that the choice of distribution point and timing was strategically and safely sound. This was done in close collaboration with NRCS district staff and local community leaders.

Several factors had to be assessed:

- Could we use NRCS facilities, schools, or other buildings where supplies could be stored safely?
- Should the distribution take place directly by a mountain road, where the distance to recipients also played a role?
- Should the distribution site be a neutral, well-known place that everyone felt safe visiting?

In addition to ensuring safety for the recipients, it was crucial that the relief team, NRCS staff and volunteers, and trucks with supplies could arrive and leave the site safely. This applied before, during, and after a distribution.

An emergency plan was necessary if a distribution became chaotic - either because non-recipients tried to disrupt the event or because recipients became frustrated and potentially violent.

Safety Procedures and Communication

All newly arrived Red Cross staff underwent a safety briefing before leaving Kathmandu to work in the field.

Movement restrictions were communicated via emails and SMS messages from the security team, so all delegates were updated on changed access conditions and potential risks.

The Security Delegate regularly traveled to the most affected areas to get firsthand information and conduct new risk assessments. This was a challenging task, as the situation often changed from day to day - and even from hour to hour in the most isolated areas.

Standardized NFRI Kits

To ensure effective and uniform distribution, a standard kit was created for each recipient:

- 2 tarpaulins (for temporary shelter and protection)
- 2 blankets (for warmth and comfort)
- 1 shelter kit (tools and materials for temporary structures)
- 1 kitchen set (essential kitchen utensils for cooking)
- 1 cash component (financial support for urgent needs)



Determination and Distribution of NFRI Kits

To ensure effective relief distribution, decisions about the number of recipients and the allocation of supplies were made by the Head of Emergency Operations (HeOps), FACT, and the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS). The entire process was coordinated through the Cluster Approach, where the Nepalese government was represented, integrating the humanitarian effort with national priorities.

A Relief & Logistics Interface Delegate (British Red Cross) was placed in the Logistics ERU office in Kathmandu with the primary responsibility of coordinating distribution plans between NRCS, Relief ERU, and Logistics ERU, ensuring the supplies were distributed most effectively.

The final recipient distribution per district was established early in the operation, but some districts reported too many recipients, requiring adjustments to ensure a fair and structured distribution.



Distribution Per District

The total distribution of Non-Food Relief Items (NFRI) reached 40,000 units across the affected districts. The final distribution of NFRI kits was established as follows:

Central Districts

- Kathmandu: 3,000 units
- Bhaktapur: 2,000 units
- Nuwakot: 4,000 units
- Kavre: 4,000 units
- Lalitpur: 2,000 units
- Most Affected Districts
- Rasuwa: 1,800 units
- Sindhupalchok: 5,000 units
- Dolakha: 3,000 units
- Ramechhap: 1,500 units
- Okhaldhunga: 1,800 units
- Sindhuli: 1,800 units

Other Distribution Areas

- Dhading: 3,000 units
- Gorkha: 4,100 units
- Makwanpur: 2,000 units
- Nawalparasi: 50 units
- Udayapur: 50 units
- Khotang: 100 units
- Bhojpur: 100 units

- Solukhumbu: 100 units
- Lamjung: 100 units
- Chitwan: 100 units
- Tanahun: 100 units
- Syangja: 50 units
- Baglung: 50 units
- Parbat: 100 units
- Palpa: 50 units
- Gulmi: 50 units



FACT and ERU – Structuring the Relief Operation

The IFRC was ready to deploy FACT (Field Assessment and Coordination Team) and ERU (Emergency Response Units) across a wide range of relief functions, including:

- Field coordination
- Civil and military coordination
- Basic health care
- Rapid Deployment Hospital
- Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)
- Temporary shelter and reconstruction
- Relief and cash assistance programs
- Logistics
- IT/Telecom and information management
- Communication and restoring family links
- Forensics
- Planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting (PMER)

The operation's headquarters was established in Kathmandu at a hotel close to NRCS' headquarters, ensuring a close connection to them and Partner National Societies (PNS) that already had existing offices at NRCS HQ before the earthquake.

Shortly after my arrival, I was introduced to NRCS' logistics leaders. Although I was not to work directly with them, it was important to meet and gain a mutual understanding of our goals and coordination. Therefore, I also chose to visit the Danish Red Cross' Country Representative to inform him of my presence and role in the operation.

Information Management and Mapping

To create transparent and effective management of the operation, daily maps and overviews with the most reliable information were produced for NRCS staff and delegates. These included:

- Global FACT & ERU Deployments – an overview of the Red Cross' international response operation.
- Distribution plans – updates on supply deliveries to the districts.
- Locations of teams and individual delegates.

There seemed to be no limits to the collections of information and maps that could be produced - everything was done to ensure that all actors had the best basis for understanding the operation's context and gaining the necessary overview.

Decision-Making in Humanitarian Operations – Logic over Emotions

A humanitarian operation requires a constant stream of decisions, often under time pressure and with limited resources. Every logistical choice – from how supplies are distributed to when and where distribution should take place – must be made based on rational analyses and operational priorities, not emotional reactions.

Although the goal is to help people in deep crisis, it is paradoxically often necessary not to let emotions drive decisions. If one focuses too much on individual fates, one risks overlooking the big picture and losing efficiency in an operation where every minute and every resource counts.

These challenges are particularly evident in situations such as:

- Determining the number of recipients – Some communities report a higher number of recipients than agreed upon, but the system requires us to reject excess lists to maintain structure and fairness.
- Adjusting distribution plans – If supplies are delayed or blocked, we must change plans quickly, even if it means some communities must wait longer.
- Security considerations – If a distribution can become chaotic or dangerous, one must choose to cancel or move the location, regardless of how urgent the need is in the area.

Humanitarian work is about saving lives, but also about maintaining the structure of an operation that must function in chaotic environments. It requires a willingness to make tough decisions, even when they go against the instinctive feeling of wanting to do everything for everyone.

From Relief Effort to Reflection

The chaos of the earthquake, the speed of decisions, and the logistical challenges filled my days in Nepal in 2015. I was part of an operation where we had to think quickly and act without hesitation. Systems were put in place, supplies were delivered, and risk assessments were an integral part of everyday life.

But even amidst the streamlined structure, there were moments when I paused and asked myself why I was here. Why did I choose to spend my resources and time helping people I had never met before? How did they perceive my presence?

These reflections only became clear later—but they began in Nepal, in a private residence where daily life had a different rhythm than the operation’s headquarters. In a shared living space with a handful of Red Cross delegates, conversations took on a more personal depth, and questions about motivation, culture, and identity became as central as supply chains and distribution plans.

It was here that I had conversations that sparked thoughts that still live on in me today. Thoughts that would prove to be even more significant when I returned to Nepal six years later.



Chapter 4: Reflections from a Shared Home in Kathmandu

After a few weeks in Nepal, I moved from the hotel to a private residence in Kathmandu that served as a communal living space for Red Cross delegates. Each resident had their own room, while we shared a kitchen, a living room, and an enclosed garden, surrounded by walls that provided us with a sense of peace amidst a hectic operation. The residence was just a 10-minute walk from the operation's headquarters, making it convenient in a daily life marked by long working hours and rapidly changing situations.

The homeowner became a central figure during my time there. We had several deep conversations about Nepal, the fundamental values of life, and the differences in our perspectives. One conversation left a particular impression. He asked me directly: "Why are you here? Why have you come to Nepal to help strangers when you could be at home in Denmark with your family and friends?"

For him, family and close friends were the absolute most important. He expected no support from the state, the local community, or external actors - he saw it as his personal duty to ensure that his loved ones had a good life. Exposing oneself to physical danger and stress to help people he didn't know was, for him, an incomprehensible decision.

After this conversation, I began to reflect on whether he represented a general view of life in Nepal, and whether there was a cultural difference in how we perceive responsibility and community. At the same time, it sparked a more personal contemplation - what was really my inner drive to work with the Red Cross and be involved in humanitarian operations abroad?

Returning to Nepal – Six Years Later

In December 2021, my feet were in Nepal once again. Six years had passed since I left the country after three months as part of the international earthquake response, and now I was back to follow up on the consequences of the work done back then and to understand how the country had developed in the meantime.

As a humanitarian worker, I have been deployed to developing countries and disaster areas for nine years, with tasks in both emergency relief and long-term development. The transitions between these two types of operations are often challenging - not only due to resources and partnerships but also because disasters require immediate action, while development aims for long-lasting solutions.

On my way to Nepal, I had planned to investigate water access and management, as it is one of the most crucial factors in solving fundamental societal problems:

- Urban migration and disproportionate population growth.
- Lack of stable income and living conditions that ensure a dignified existence.
- Poor health due to sanitary and water-related issues.

My approach was simple: I wanted to listen to the Nepalese. My mission was not to come up with ready-made solutions but rather to open a dialogue about the challenges and their future possibilities.

Perspectives on Society and Identity

During my stay, it became clear that the perception of life's values in Denmark and Nepal is so different in certain areas that we risk misunderstanding each other's intentions, needs, and behaviors. A concrete example is how large sums of money can lead to greed and short-term agendas, which in the long run can create long-term societal problems.

In Denmark, individualism is considered the most important. Therefore, men and women separate once they feel they should no longer be in a relationship or marriage. Economic conditions and social norms enable individuals to live and manage independently. In Nepalese society, spouses and their families are so interdependent that divorce can become messy. Divorce cases in Nepal are increasing in the urban areas, while the rural areas are more traditional in their family relationships. People are generally worried about their family reputation in society and their financial security, so they do not even consider divorce as an option.

I began to reflect on whether Nepalese culture should resist external influence or balance tradition and modernity. For years, the country has been in a political and social transition, where people have a deep moral obligation to family and close relationships - something that often surpasses national institutions and community obligations.

In Denmark, transparency and legislation are fundamental principles that ensure less corruption and nepotism. We strive to create equal opportunities for everyone, which means we do not favor family over strangers in job and business decisions. But in Nepal, I see that people do everything to keep the family together, and this obligation can be both a strength and a challenge.

In Denmark, the traffic rules are mainly followed by cars, while bicycle riders move more according to the practice by motorbikes in Kathmandu. There seems to be a natural, pragmatic logic to how soft road users merge and cross lanes. The more vulnerable people are, the better they can read situations and navigate in a seemingly chaotic scenario. Perhaps the same is reflected in our behavior in society. If you are used to living in chaos, you adapt to these conditions, which indicates that the longer you are in turmoil, the more it becomes the norm, and the alternative gradually disappears from your mind.

Through my conversations and observations, it became clear that Nepalese society is more adapted to daily challenges than to long-term planning. Many find ways to get by from day to day, rather than relying on long-term strategies. Perhaps this is a result of decades of political and economic instability, where surviving the day is more important than planning for tomorrow.

Nepalese feel that daily challenges dominate their lives more than in well-organized societies. They may not have a long-term plan but always find a way to survive the day. The idea of planning may feel useless because context and circumstances may change tomorrow.

Nepalese should not lose themselves and their identity due to influence from other countries. But Nepalese should strive to make sustainable strategic plans for the future with clear tactical and operational perspectives without relying on significant financial assistance and management of the country's development from foreign partners. International support and advice must help to achieve well-defined and specific plans.

A New Perspective on My Work

My reflections in 2021 made me return to my experiences in 2015 - where my logical and operational focus on emergency relief sometimes conflicted with the human dimension of disaster management. It was a reminder that humanitarian work is not only about strategies, supply chains, and logistics - it is also about the people we help and how they see the world.



From Personal Reflection to Systemic Analysis

My return to Nepal in 2021 was not just a journey to see the consequences of our efforts six years earlier. It was also an opportunity to understand the deeper systems that govern both emergency relief and long-term development.

One of the most significant challenges in any humanitarian work is the interaction between organizations, governments, businesses, and local communities. In theory, these actors should work together towards a common goal, but in practice, competition, political agendas, and economic barriers often overshadow the actual efforts.

How do we ensure that development happens on the right terms - and that external actors do not take over the process at the expense of local capacity building? How can emergency relief and development work merge so that it is not only an immediate reaction but a long-lasting solution?

These questions are more than theoretical - they are crucial for how humanitarian operations function. In Chapter 5, we delve into this complexity, where we look at how cooperation can overcome competition, and where we reflect on whether it is possible to unite the interests of the actors in a common development strategy.

Chapter 5: Can Cooperation Overcome Competition?

When a disaster strikes, it is often humanitarian organizations that are the first to respond, delivering life-saving aid. Governments and authorities hold the institutional responsibility, while businesses bring capital and innovative solutions, and local communities carry the cultural and practical knowledge of the needs on the ground. The ideal vision is that these actors work together without hidden agendas, competition, or economic interests that distort the purpose. But can it all be united in practice?

Barriers to Long-Term Cooperation

In many humanitarian operations, unconscious competition arises between organizations for funding, resources, and visibility. When aid depends on donors and political priorities, projects risk becoming short-term or targeted at specific narratives rather than a holistic long-term strategy. Businesses can contribute technology and investments, but they often have a profit-driven approach that does not always align with humanitarian ideals. Local communities may have insights into their own needs, but without political power or funding, their voices can be overlooked in the larger decision-making process.

How Do We Create an Integrated System?

To ensure effective and sustainable interaction, it requires:

- **National Ownership** – Projects must be led by local actors, with international organizations serving as mentors, not decision-makers.

- **Long-Term Partnerships** – Humanitarian initiatives must not only be reactive but should be built into existing development strategies, so aid is integrated with the community's own growth.
- **Transparent Financing** – Funds should be allocated based on needs, not visibility, meaning investors and donors should work with strategic goals rather than PR values.
- **Education and Capacity Building** – Local communities must be empowered to manage their own development projects without being dependent on external actors indefinitely.

The goal is not to eliminate the role of external organizations but to redefine it so their contributions act as catalysts rather than governing entities.

But the question remains: Can all actors truly put common interests above their own?

From Cooperation to Development

Humanitarian organizations, governments, businesses, and local communities face the same fundamental challenge: How do we create long-term sustainability instead of short-term solutions?

Ideally, all actors should cooperate without competition and hidden agendas. But as we have seen, challenges often arise with funding, political interests, and structural barriers that make it difficult to create holistic development programs.

Nepal is one of the countries where this balance between external support and national ownership has been significant. After the earthquake in 2015, Nepal faced an enormous reconstruction task, where both humanitarian organizations and authorities played a critical role. Six years later, in 2021, I returned to follow up on the consequences of the efforts we initiated back then.

But what does the situation look like in 2025? Has Nepal managed to strengthen its own capacity, create long-term development, and withstand natural disasters in a more sustainable way?

To answer these questions, we now delve into Nepal's economic, social, and political development in 2025, and examine which strategies have had the greatest impact on the country's resilience.



Chapter 6: Nepal in 2025 – A Country Shaped by Past Challenges and Future Opportunities

Ten years after the devastating earthquake in 2015, Nepal is a country still marked by both the traumas and the lessons the disaster brought. The reconstruction has been a complex process, where political, economic, and infrastructural factors have played a crucial role.

But what does Nepal look like today? Is the country able to withstand new challenges, or are there still vulnerabilities that could hinder future development?

In the following, we delve into three critical perspectives that paint a picture of Nepal in 2025:

1. **Economic, Social, and Political Landscape** – How has Nepal's society developed? Is the growth sustainable, and how are the structural challenges being managed?
2. **Natural Disasters and Infrastructure** – With climate change as an increasingly significant factor, how is Nepal responding to floods and other natural disasters?
3. **Resilience and Preparedness** – What strategies have been implemented to make the country better equipped for future crises?

This analysis provides a current insight into Nepal's situation in 2025 and creates a framework for understanding how ten years of experiences have shaped the country's preparedness, economy, and society.

Nepal in 2025 - Economic, Social, and Political Landscape

Nepal has experienced moderate economic growth in 2025 but still faces structural challenges. According to the World Bank's Nepal Development Update, the country's real GDP grew by 4.9% in the first half of fiscal year 2025, primarily driven by agriculture and industry, while the service sector has seen slower progress.

Inflation has decreased to 5%, which is an improvement from previous years, but food prices remain high, especially for vegetables, which have increased by 26.6%.

The trade balance has improved as imports of goods and services are at their lowest level since 2016, mainly due to reduced imports of oil products and fewer outbound travels. At the same time, remittance revenues have declined as fewer Nepali workers travel abroad, especially to Malaysia, where migration has dropped by 74%

Political Stability and Infrastructure

Nepal still faces political instability, which hampers long-term reforms and investments. Although the country has seen moderate growth, there are still challenges with corruption, inefficient government structures, and slow decision-making processes.

Infrastructure projects have been a mixed success. The upgrade of Tribhuvan International Airport, which began in November 2024, has caused major disruptions in tourism, as flight traffic is limited and ticket prices have increased.

Humanitarian and Development Projects

Nepal still has a significant dependence on external actors in development work. International organizations play a major role in

water supply, health, and disaster preparedness, but there is a growing debate about national ownership and the need for more local capacity building.

Climate challenges have also had a major impact. Floods and landslides have caused damage, affecting agriculture, infrastructure, and social services.

The Way Forward

Nepal stands at a crossroads in 2025. The economy shows signs of stability, but political unrest, climate change, and dependence on external actors create uncertainty about the country's future development.

To ensure long-term growth and stability, there is a need for:

- **Strengthening national institutions** to reduce dependence on external actors.
- **More transparency in governance** to attract foreign investments.
- **Sustainable infrastructure solutions** that can withstand climate change.
- **Strategic planning of tourism** to restore the sector after recent disruptions



Nepal in 2025 - Natural Disasters and Infrastructure

Nepal has experienced severe flooding, especially in lowland areas and cities. The monsoon season has been more intense than in previous years, leading to more flash floods, landslides, and destruction of critical infrastructure.

Extent of Flooding

- The Bagmati and Koshi rivers have seen extreme water level rises, leading to the evacuation of thousands of people.
- The districts of Dhankuta, Ilam, and Jhapa have been particularly hard hit by flash floods, which have destroyed homes, roads, and agricultural land.
- The Kathmandu Valley has seen an increase in flooding, primarily due to poor urban planning and inadequate drainage systems.

Causes of Worsened Flooding

- **Urbanization and River Encroachment:** Urban development has pressured rivers, reducing their natural ability to absorb water.
- **Deforestation:** The removal of forest areas has worsened erosion and increased the risk of landslides, exacerbating the flooding.
- **Climate Change:** The La Niña effect has prolonged the monsoon season, increasing the risk of extreme weather events.

Consequences for Local Communities

- **Thousands of families have been displaced**, and many have lost their homes and livelihoods.
- **The agricultural sector has suffered significant losses** as floods have destroyed crops, leading to food shortages.
- **Health risks have increased** as contaminated water has led to outbreaks of diseases, including cholera and dengue fever.

Destruction of Infrastructure

- **Roads and bridges have collapsed**, disrupting transport and supply chains.
- **Water supply systems have been damaged**, limiting access to clean drinking water.
- **Schools and hospitals have been flooded**, preventing access to education and healthcare.

The Way Forward – How Nepal can strengthen its Resilience to reduce future disasters; there is a need for:

- **Better urban planning** that protects rivers and drainage systems.
- **Restoration of forest areas** that can stabilize the soil and reduce erosion.
- **Investment in climate-resilient infrastructure** that can withstand extreme weather events.

- **Strengthened disaster preparedness**, where local communities have better access to early warnings and evacuation plans.



Nepal in 2025 - Resilience and Preparedness

From Reaction to Prevention

Nepal is in the process of implementing a national Anticipatory Action Framework to improve disaster preparedness by predicting and acting on risks before they occur.

- **Early Warnings:** Systems for meteorological and hydrological forecasts have been strengthened so the government can activate preventive measures before floods and landslides.
- **Predictable Financing Mechanisms:** A new model ensures that funds are released before a disaster, allowing communities to prepare instead of waiting for emergency aid.
- **Capacity Building:** Local authorities and NGOs receive training in risk management so they can act quickly and effectively in critical situations.

Infrastructure Development – Climate-Resilient Projects

Nepal has invested in improved infrastructure that can withstand natural disasters:

- **Strengthening Bridges and Roads:** Critical transport routes are being rebuilt with better drainage systems to withstand monsoon floods.
- **Landslide Protection:** The government has implemented new reforestation projects that stabilize mountain slopes and reduce erosion.

- **Water Supply Systems:** New climate-resilient water projects ensure that communities have access to clean water even under extreme weather conditions.

Financing and International Partnerships

Nepal has entered into an agreement with the World Bank for a disaster preparedness fund of USD 150 million, which can be activated in the event of natural disasters

- **Immediate Financing:** Funds can be released quickly so the government does not have to wait for international donations.
- **Strengthened Disaster Preparedness:** The fund's resources are used to improve early warnings, risk management, and the reconstruction of critical infrastructure.

The Way Forward – How Nepal can become even more resilient

To further strengthen its disaster preparedness, Nepal should focus on:

- **Better Integration of Technology:** AI-based systems can predict floods and landslides more accurately.
- **Greater Local Capacity Building:** Communities should be trained in disaster management so they can act quickly without relying on external actors.
- **Long-Term Urban Planning:** Cities should be designed with better drainage systems, so floods do not cripple the infrastructure.

