



SPECIAL ISSUE

Nepal Trip 2016



Our GNE team returned to earthquake-ravaged areas of Nepal for nine days in February. Our group was comprised of five from the U.S. and 10 from Nepal. Our purpose was to visit a few of the 25 schools Narayan Bhandari and local Nepalis had built with funds provided by GNE in remote areas following the earthquake. We experienced a range of emotions; we were saddened by the harsh conditions in which the earthquake survivors have lived for almost a year, with little shelter, food or water. But we also were inspired and impressed by their resilience and hospitality.

We visited nine villages in Sindupawlchuck and Nuwakot in the hill region of Nepal. More than 100 people shared their post-quake experiences with us.

These people are surviving -- even smiling -- after losing almost everything to devastating earthquakes last April and May.

Emotionally, they still grieve the loss of family and friends who were among the 8,100 killed in the quakes. Many more were injured.

Economically and financially, they still are reeling. Their livestock was wiped out; all of last year's crop stores and seed for this year lie under the rubble of the three-story buildings that had served as their home, livestock shelter and storage for their crops and seed.

I can't begin to imagine how they've managed to survive, yet they walked miles in the dark to greet us with a local band; they offered us their home brew and shared their food. Around a campfire, they danced their traditional Nepali dances.

Here is summary of what happened since our last visit, their current challenges and what they need to move forward.

After the earthquakes

It was three days after the first 7.8 quake struck last April 25, before volunteers from Nepal and international aid groups brought food, tarps, supplies, sanitation essentials and construction aid. They built temporary schools and held health camps. The aid lasted for six months.

But three months ago, all the International Non Government Organizations (INGOs) and Nepal volunteers left; none have returned. Some volunteers had to return to their jobs and families. Gas shortages made the difficult journey practically impossible. A prohibition on obtaining goods on the "black market" and little government sanctioned options simply hamstrung some INGOs seeking to help rebuild. In almost a year, the Nepal government has yet to enact a viable rebuilding plan.

Housing

In all of the areas we visited, meager tin shelters had replaced the ruined three-story house/barn structures, which were of slate roofs, stone walls and wooden support beams. The tin shelters are hot in the summer and cold in the winter. When the monsoon rains hammer on their roofs, the deafening noise sounds like another earthquake is coming. The Nepal government initially gave each household \$100 for food and shelter, and later \$150 for clothing and housing -- a total of \$250 in nine months. All else has been provided by Nepali individuals, groups of volunteers or INGOs. Some people were too old or injured to make it to the distributions. They didn't get any government help.

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