National UN Volunteers in the front line of emergency response for Nepal earthquake

The April 2015 Nepal 7.8 magnitude earthquake, also known as the Gorkha earthquake, killed more than 8,800 people and injured more than 23,000. Thousands of houses were destroyed and entire villages were flattened. It is estimated that around 2.8 million people require humanitarian assistance and over 860,000 now face poverty, limited accessibility and homelessness. In the aftermath of the earthquake, volunteers were rapidly mobilized from other parts of the country and provided emergency aid on-site. National UN Volunteers were in the front line of emergency response alongside over 300 agencies supporting the government-led efforts.

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A team of eight national UN Volunteer civil engineers are serving under a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) demolition project. They form two teams which carry out building damage assessment and supervise demolitions. Daily, these teams assess whether or not the buildings in various wards are structurally sound or at risk of collapse. If deemed unsafe, the demolition team handles and coordinates a safe collapse. So far, they have handled the damage assessment of 250 households, which benefitted approximately 1,500 people.

In the Irkhu Village Development Committee area, a thousand more buildings need to be assessed and potentially torn down within the next three weeks before the monsoon arrives.

The current situation in Nepal is quite challenging as the earthquake has triggered landslides in many areas within the districts, but the UN Volunteer teams are working to identify safe places for residents to resettle in transitional shelters before the monsoon arrives and conditions worsen. The residents are required to vacate the premises for their safety. In fact, they have moved into temporary shelters that they have built themselves using scrap materials such as corrugated metal sheets and wood. While unpleasant, it is still safer than staying in a home at risk of collapsing.

Many people have also gone back to their farms to grow crops for the next season. This is extremely important because most food stocks were buried under the debris.

The national UN Volunteers have made the personal sacrifice to be apart from their families and stay in tents or camps alongside other government officials and front line responders. While these are safe and secure conditions, they are not the most comfortable or convenient. The resolve of these national UN Volunteers is unparalleled.
Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being