UNV Deputy EC visits UNV Civil Engineers clearing quake debris in Nepal

UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, Rosemary Kalapurakal, accompanied by UNDP Country Director, Renaud Meyer, visited the quake-affected cities of Irkhu and Chautara in the district of Sindhupalchowk during a recent visit to Nepal. She met 24 of the 84 national UNV Civil Engineers deployed in Nepal since the quake and saw them in action managing debris removal and demolitions.

During a recent visit to Nepal, UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator, Rosemary Kalapurakal, accompanied by UNDP Country Director, Renaud Meyer, visited the quake-affected cities of Irkhu and Chautara in the district of Sindhupalchowk. There they witnessed first-hand national UN Volunteers in action, managing earthquake debris and the demolition of dangerous structures under a UNDP project. This initiative is a successful collaboration
amongst UNDP, the Government of Nepal and UNV.

Irkhu is one of the three Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the Sindhupalchowk district, where, along with Kunchowk and Karthalli, UN Volunteers are serving. UNV initially mobilized nine UN Volunteer Specialists during a pilot phase, then fielded a larger group of 75 UN Volunteer Specialists and Youth Volunteers. To date, 84 UN Volunteers are supporting debris management and demolition.

“UNV and UNDP are partnering jointly in this debris management project because this is one of the first things that needs to be done before the other teams can come in for shelter, water and sanitation, health and…so forth,” said the UNV senior executive.

The UN Volunteers’ responsibilities include assessing every building in the VDCs for structural integrity and carrying out the safe collapse of buildings which do not meet the minimum safety requirements.

Prior to their deployment, they received a week-long induction training session led by disaster management experts. The first nine national UN Volunteers deployed in the pilot phase now serve as team leaders.

These pilot phase engineers trained 200 community workers on width and length measurement of the buildings during damage assessment, taking attendance of workers in UNDP’s Cash for Work scheme, reporting, and supervising, to ensure work continues after the departure of the UNV Civil Engineers.

In Irkhu, Rosemary met with a group of 24 national UN Volunteer Civil Engineers who were in good spirits and shared their experiences. They explained that demolition sites are sometimes an hour away on foot in a single direction. Nonetheless, the UN Volunteers remained highly motivated despite living in difficult conditions, and the pride they so evidently take in their support to recovery efforts is a source of inspiration to everyone who sees them in action.

In Chautara, the district capital, Rosemary saw the worst affected sites of the April earthquake’s destruction and visited the UN camp site.

Having heard of the remarkable work the UN Volunteers were doing, the local priest had called upon them to demolish the Buddhist monastery which had served three VDCs but had been reduced to rubble. A group of UNV Civil Engineers gave Rosemary a tour of the demolition site where she saw the work being done to clear the way for a new monastery to be built.
It is noteworthy that of the 80 plus civil engineers, more than 30 are youths and 13 are women, with one of the three teams being led by a woman,” said UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator Rosemary Kalapurakal in reference to the entire complement of national UN Volunteers deployed in the pilot phase.

The current situation in Nepal is quite challenging as the earthquake has triggered landslides in many areas within the districts but the team is working to identify safe places for residents to resettle in displacement sites before the monsoon begins.

As of 26 June 2015, 183 brigades, comprised of from 15 - 17 construction workers each, had been mobilized in the three VDCs of Sindapalchowk district, benefitting 3,016 participants in the Cash for Work scheme, which has 43% female participation. Each UN Volunteer leads one to three brigades.

To date, some 745 structures, including homes, schools and temples, have been demolished. Lessons drawn from this first phase will be applied to the extension phase in Dolakha and Nuwakot districts.

The national UN Volunteers have made the personal sacrifice to be separated from their families and to stay in tents or camps alongside other government officials and front line responders.

“It is remarkable that these demolition and debris clearance volunteers are able to accomplish so much, living in such difficult conditions,” the UNV Deputy Executive Coordinator shared.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In 2014, UNV deployed 6,325 UN Volunteers globally in support of the development and peace interventions of UN and other partners. These UN Volunteers came from 155 countries, and 81 per cent were from countries of the South. The majority are professionals who play key roles contributing to peace and making an impact on development results.
Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 3: Good health and well-being**