

## Proceedings Report

# Nepal Earthquake and Lesson for Civic Engagement in Large Scale Disaster Management

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Following the overwhelming response by the civil society in providing support for relief and reconstruction after the 25<sup>th</sup> April earthquake, a number of questions regarding the capacity, role and engagement of civil society in disaster preparedness were raised. Nepal Economic Forum and Niti Foundation jointly organized an event “**Nepal Earthquake and the Space for Citizen Engagement in Disaster Management**” to discuss relevant policy discourses, accommodating ground level representation in policy processes and identifying prospective policy reforms concerning disaster preparedness and management. 18 volunteer groups and organizations functioning in diverse areas were brought together to reflect on their experiences in relief work and the challenges they faced.

The discussions at the event raised four key concerns in civic engagement in disaster management:

**Accountability is Key:** Once the government clamped down on the funds being transferred into the country for relief, declaring that all funds for relief would be pulled into the [Prime Minister’s Disaster Fund](#), many organizations routed money through more informal channels such as transfers into personal accounts. Subsequently pressures from various groups to reconsider their stance, the government changed their policy to allow funds for relief to be received by NGOs. Many volunteer groups were able to use this route to bring funds into the country.

**Resilient Communities:** Community members themselves have shown resilience, for example by building temporary structures for themselves and their livestock and recording the data to estimate damages and communicate needs. There were also instances where members of the affected communities, who had lost everything in the earthquake, were offering to share whatever little they had with visitors in the area.

**Scope of Engagement:** The variety in the scope of engagement of volunteer groups showed the disparity in the longevity of their efforts, as shown below.

Volunteer groups that worked with established NGOs identified that would continue their efforts for a longer period of time;

- Groups working with established NGOs identified that engagement would be long term;

- Some groups planned to register themselves as NGOs to continue their effort;
- Some volunteer groups were considering handing over their initiatives to another institution;
- Some volunteer groups were unsure about how they would proceed in the future.

**Lack of data on Distribution of Relief Materials:** Data on the needs and distribution of relief materials was not available which made efficient distribution a challenge and subsequently led to duplication in many cases.

Given the four key concerns raised, the way forward presents a challenge but simultaneously offers an opportunity for the nation. Some of the key issues to consider are the following:

**Institutionalizing Knowledge and Sharing:** We must leverage the lessons drawn from civil engagement experience, not just for future purposes but also as an exemplary learning tool for other nations in any event that may require large scale civil engagement;

**Institutionalizing Volunteerism:** Given the short term scope of volunteer engagement, it is necessary to institutionalize the effort to facilitate more effective and coordinated approaches in the future.

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