

Standard Project Report 2015

Reporting Period: 1 January - 31 December 2015

NEPAL

Provision of Humanitarian Air Services in Nepal

Project Number	200849
Project Category	Single Country Special Operation

Project Approval Date	29 Apr 2015
Planned Start Date	28 Apr 2015
Actual Start Date	28 Apr 2015
Project End Date	31 Dec 2015
Financial Closure Date	n.a.

Approved budget as 31 December 2015 in USD	
Capacity Dev.t and Augmentation	15,352,665
Direct Support Costs	935,720
Indirect Support Costs	1,140,186
Total Approved Budget	17,428,571

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COUNTRY BACKGROUND

Nepal is a least developed country, ranked 145 out of 187 nations on the 2015 Human Development Index. Twenty-five percent of the population (28.2 million) live on less than USD 1.25 a day and nearly 8 percent are undernourished. An unstable political context, low agricultural productivity and slow economic growth has hindered the country's development, while the country's geographical location on a tectonic fault line increases the risk of being struck by major earthquakes.

More than 70 percent of Nepal's population works in the agriculture sector, which accounts for a third of the gross domestic product. About 29 percent of Nepal's total land area is arable. Isolated geography and poor infrastructure complicate efforts to improve livelihoods, transport goods and services, and establish functioning markets that are essential for ensuring food security. In this context, remittances from out-migration are a significant source of household income, and account for more than 25 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

Undernutrition is a serious concern: 37 percent of children under the age of five years are stunted, 30 percent are underweight, and 11 percent are wasted. The prevalence of stunting in mountainous districts is extreme, reaching up to 58 percent. Poor dietary diversity and poor hygiene and sanitation contribute to this situation.

Enrolment rates for primary school education stand at 96 percent, with 99 girls for every 100 boys enrolled. Many schools lack adequate numbers of trained teachers and do not meet minimum enabling conditions set by the government, affecting the quality of education. Around 5 percent of children drop out before completing eighth grade.

On 25 April 2015, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, causing severe damage to infrastructures and livelihoods. This was followed by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake two weeks later. As a result of these earthquakes, 8,700 hundred people lost their lives, while 900,000 houses were fully or partially destroyed. It was estimated that 2.8 million people were affected and needed immediate humanitarian assistance. Fourteen districts, of the central and western development regions were the worst affected, accounting for 90 percent of the destruction.

Following eight years of deliberations, Nepal promulgated its new constitution in September 2015, leading to increased incidence of civil unrest, mainly in the Terai region along the Indo-Nepal border, as a result of opposition to the newly established federal border demarcations. Consequently, there has been a drastic reduction in cross-border trade with greatly reduced supplies of fuel, cooking gas and consumer goods coming into the country, contributing to rising market prices of essential commodities.

SUMMARY OF WFP ASSISTANCE

The earthquake in April caused almost 9,000 deaths and widespread damage to infrastructure. At the request of the Government of Nepal, WFP began three humanitarian operations; the emergency operation (EMOP) serving earthquake-affected populations with food and cash assistance; and two special operations to support the humanitarian response through the logistics cluster and common air services. Given the scale of the response, it was classified at severity Level Two requiring regional augmentation of capacity and resources. The humanitarian response was concentrated in 14 remote mountainous districts with access posing a major operational constraint due to the topography, poor road networks and frequency of landslides. Additionally, in 2015, WFP concluded an emergency operation started in 2014 to provide food assistance to flood-affected populations in Mid and Far Western Regions.

Working in Nepal since 1963, WFP also has an ongoing Country Programme (CP) and a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) serving Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. These operations aim to prevent undernutrition and enable year-round access to food for vulnerable groups, including pregnant and lactating women, and young children and directly contribute to four of the five pillars of the Zero Hunger Challenge. The CP (2013-2017) is implemented in the Far and Mid-Western development regions of Nepal, aligned with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the Country Programme Action Plan signed with the Ministry of Finance. There is also focus on social safety nets in nutrition, education and livelihoods.

Through the PRRO, WFP supports Bhutanese refugees in Nepal with food assistance. The project contributes to the support of the Government of Nepal and partners, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). In 2015 WFP, together with the Government of Nepal and UNHCR, put in place the foundation of a targeted, needs-based food distribution system which will increase efficiency and sustainability of relief to Bhutanese Refugees. It is planned to be initiated in January 2016.

WFP also works in partnership with UN Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on a joint programme for Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (RWEE). WFP has worked together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to implement school-based water and sanitation activities and to develop a guideline for the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition. Through the Adaptation Fund, starting in 2016, WFP will assist vulnerable households in the mountains to adapt to climate change through improved management of community assets for livelihoods.

WFP collaborates with the Ministry of Agricultural Development and the National Planning Commission to strengthen and institutionalise the nationwide Nepal Food Security Monitoring System (NeKSAP), enabling evidence-based decision making for food security policies and programmes. Additionally, WFP supports the Ministry of Home Affairs and other humanitarian partners in the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunication Cluster to augment their capacity to respond to a major earthquake in the Kathmandu Valley. This proved to be a vital example of preparedness when the earthquake struck in April 2015. Activities of the CP, PRRO and EMOP directly contribute to the Millennium Development Goals 1, 2 and 5.

Beneficiaries	Male	Female	Total
Number of children below 5 years of age	150,281	156,792	307,073
Number of children 5 to 18 years of age	484,893	498,402	983,295
Number of adults	579,661	616,415	1,196,076
Total number of beneficiaries in 2015	1,214,835	1,271,609	2,486,444
Total number of beneficiaries in 2014	257,455	267,498	524,953
Total number of beneficiaries in 2013	282,595	294,853	577,448

Distribution (mt)						
Project Type	Cereals	Oil	Pulses	Mix	Other	Total
Single Country PRRO	2,865	174	634	203	92	3,968
Single Country EMOP	15,147	393	1,565	366	6	17,476
Country Programme	1,052	258		2,801	221	4,332
Total food distributed in 2015	19,064	826	2,199	3,369	320	25,777
Total food distributed in 2014	8,842	686	791	4,071	619	15,009
Total food distributed in 2013	15,363	505	2,070	3,822	587	22,347

Operational SPR

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE

In the aftermath of the earthquakes that struck Nepal on 25 April and 12 May 2015, the Government of Nepal declared a state of emergency in the Central and Mid-Western development regions and requested the international community to assist with the immediate needs of over a million affected people in the 14 districts of Bhaktapur, Dhading, Dholaka, Ghorka, Kavrepalanchok, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Makawanpur, Nuwakot, Okhaldunga, Ramechhap, Rasuwa, Sindhuli and Sindhupalchok. The country's unique geographical setting on the Himalayan mountain range meant that most communities lived on high mountains and hills with little or no road access. Humanitarian agencies encountered many logistical difficulties in reaching these communities and the seasonal monsoon rains made it more challenging to deliver humanitarian aid to many of Nepal's mountainous villages. The remoteness of the locations, the high altitudes and poor road conditions made most villages accessible only by air or through porters or pack animals. Difficulty of access to the remote districts was further compounded by disrupted commercial air services in the country. In this context, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) was mobilised to deliver vital food and non-food humanitarian cargo to remote, high-altitude locations.

Joint assessments on food security, livelihoods and early recovery were conducted in the aftermath of the emergency by agencies such as United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), WFP, FAO and UNDP, the REACH Initiative and the Nepal Red Cross Society under the umbrella of the Humanitarian Country Team and the Humanitarian Coordinator in six of the critically affected districts. The surveys revealed that food insecurity levels increased in tandem with elevation; therefore the higher the village, the more food-insecure it would be. Based on these findings, WFP prioritised food deliveries to remote locations and needed airlift services for reaching the villages located at high elevations.

UNHAS provided the entire humanitarian community in the country with access to hard-to-reach locations and the capacity to deliver urgent humanitarian supplies, facilitating the implementation of life-saving projects. The UNHAS operation in Nepal was aligned with WFP's strategic plan (2014-2017) and contributed towards WFP Strategic Objective 1: save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies.

RESULTS

In response to the earthquake emergency, UNHAS completed 4,848 flights to the 14 priority districts identified by the government (Bhaktapur, Dhading, Dholaka, Ghorka, Kavrepalanchok, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Makawanpur, Nuwakot, Okhaldunga, Ramechhap, Rasuwa, Sindhuli and Sindhupalchok) facilitating air transport and delivery of relief items.

The Logistics Cluster coordinated cargo movement requests to be transported by UNHAS and prioritising of airlifts was made in line with the list of priorities established by the Humanitarian Country Team and the Humanitarian Coordinator in accordance with the mandate of the common services.

Flight schedules were issued on a daily basis to ensure flexibility and adaptation to the ever-changing needs of the humanitarian community. UNHAS reviewed cargo requests on a daily basis and coordinated through the Logistics Cluster and managed passenger requests as well. Due consideration was given to passengers carrying out needs assessments for programme interventions. In response to users' requirements and requests, UNHAS carried out over 200 regular field assessments in order to identify potential landing sites.

After initial delays in having aircrafts in place and setting up the process, UNHAS started operations with a fleet of six helicopters; four MI-8 helicopters each with a capacity of 2.5 mt for cargo operations, and two AS350 helicopters suitable for performing field assessments and transporting passengers. In November 2015, the dedicated fleet was reduced to just three aircraft; two MI-8 helicopters and one AS350. Due to further funding constraints, one of the MI-8 helicopters and the AS350 were placed into ad-hoc contracting service in December 2015.

Until September 2015, UNHAS relied entirely on donor contributions and the service was offered free of charge to humanitarian partners responding to the needs of the earthquake affected population. However, a cost-recovery mechanism was introduced from September 2015 onwards due to resource constraints.

UNHAS activities served as an extension to the priorities of the humanitarian clusters, and demands on UNHAS services depended heavily on the changing priorities and possibilities of accessing remote terrain. The fuel crisis that affected the country from September 2015 had an adverse effect on local road and air transport services. In view of the need for humanitarian air transport to reach otherwise inaccessible locations, the government prioritized fuel supplies to UNHAS. Although accessibility for land transport (through trucks, tractors, porters or mules) decreased with the monsoon rains and snow in the winter months, the negative effects were off-set by the logistics air-lift capacity of UNHAS to the 14 most affected districts.

'Story Worth Telling'

Drawing his four children close to him, 47 year old Som Bahadur Tamang looked up into the sky as the whirring sound drew nearer, eagerly awaiting the sight of the helicopter.

Som's family of six members had very little food to eat after their house collapsed and their harvested crops were destroyed in the major earthquake that hit their home in Bhotang village of Sindhupalchok district on 25 April 2015. Som had heard from other villagers that UNHAS helicopters were delivering food to the earthquake-affected areas, and they had waited for many days for the helicopter to come to their village. No sooner had it landed, then Som ran forward to help the staff who had arrived in the helicopter to unload the cargo.

Som and his family had not had a square meal since that fateful day when the earthquake struck and destroyed their home and farmland along with other houses, schools, community buildings and irrigation channels. "My wife and I were tilling the farmland when we heard a sudden rumbling sound," recalled Som. "The land started shaking and the ground ruptured. Our children came running to us and we held on together for safety," he said. "Looking up at the mountain, I saw the earth starting to slide down. The sound was deafening. We ran across to the next field and down to the road to get to a safe place." He drew his children close and continued, "there was the river below us, and the earth seemed to be coming down from all sides and we didn't know where to run. I really believed that we would not be able to survive".

Afterwards, they found the collapsed remains of their house; the only asset that they had owned. Their cattle were dead, caught under the falling debris and the stored grain from their last harvest was buried beneath the rubble. Som's main concern was how to feed his children as he tried to dig out the millet and potatoes from underneath the collapsed house. Moving to another location was dangerous, as landslides had destroyed most of the walking trails and rural roads. As the days passed, the family managed to gather whatever food they could find and have one meal a day, as did the 33 other families in their settlement, hoping that help would arrive soon.

UNHAS helicopters became the lifeline to airlift rice and other food commodities as well as evacuate injured people in villages located at high altitudes when WFP launched the emergency operation immediately after the earthquake. After many cargo deliveries to the 14 affected districts, UNHAS reached Bhotang on 16 July 2015 with a load of rice. Som and the other villagers helped offload the cargo and distributed the rice among the families. "Now we can eat rice after such a long time" smiled Som, as the children ran around excitedly. "This food will be enough for us for a month, but soon we will start growing our crops again".

Som and the other villagers were grateful to UNHAS for bringing them food at a time when they had lost all their crops and belongings. "If the helicopter did not come, we do not know how we could have got more food" said Som, preparing to take their rice bags to the temporary hut they called home.

Outputs

The UNHAS Special Operation was implemented by an initial deployment of six aircrafts. Due to funding constraints, a budget revision of the project was done at the end of October 2015, decreasing the number of aircraft to three: one dedicated MI-8 helicopter along with one AS350 and one MI-8 aircraft on an ad-hoc contracting basis. However the operational targets and requirements were also adjusted as a result of increased demand for the service from November to December 2015.

Notwithstanding resource constraints and challenges posed by adverse weather as a result of the monsoon season, UNHAS completed 4,848 flights and airlifted 2,704 mt of humanitarian cargo by December 2015. These flights were carried out on behalf of 140 organizations comprising of NGOs, United Nations agencies, donors, government counterparts and other humanitarian partners, reaching some 155 destinations. The operation started on 28 April immediately after the earthquake emergency was declared, and due to the initial, continuously changing needs of the humanitarian community, it was difficult to plan the required output numbers at the start of the operation.

The country's unique setting and the monsoon season made it more challenging to deliver aid to many communities in Nepal's mountainous terrain, which were accessible only by air. Requests received for UNHAS services were 40 percent higher than anticipated and demand for UNHAS remained high in the country, as aid workers were heavily reliant on UNHAS to access areas in need. As a result of the operation being air-access intensive, the UNHAS aircraft flew more hours than originally planned. There was persistent demand for air capacity and at the height of the response, more aircraft than initially planned were used. The situation was compounded by the winter and monsoon seasons which made the use of surface means impracticable. However, UNHAS was flexible and adapted its flight schedule and coordination mechanisms according to requirements.

Output	Unit	Planned	Actual	% Actual vs. Planned
SO 1: Special Operations (Airops)				
Average no. of mt (food or NFI) transported monthly	mt	300	333	111.0%
Average no. of passengers transported monthly by air	no.	400	477	119.3%
Frequency of the users' groups meetings	no.	60	68	113.3%
Number of agencies and organizations using humanitarian air services	no.	20	140	700.0%
Number of aircrafts made available	no.	5	7	140.0%
Percentage of requests for medical and security evacuations fulfilled	%	14	14	100.0%
Percentage utilization of the contracted hours of aircraft	%	100	127	127.0%

Outcomes

In May and September 2015, UNHAS conducted a survey of passengers to determine the users' satisfaction rate. User satisfaction is linked to the continuous augmentation of aircraft capacity to meet the increase in demand, as well as the constant engagement with all users and stakeholders, leading to a better understanding of travel needs. In the first passenger access satisfaction survey conducted by UNHAS in May, over 70 percent of the respondents reported the service to be very good, and the perception of partners interviewed was that while the operation was relevant and necessary, there was a delay in having sufficient capacity for the response. This was due to the initial delays in starting the operation. The survey in September 2015 however, revealed that only 50 percent of users were satisfied. This was following the shift to the partial-cost recovery model, which became effective on 1 September 2015. However, the overall perception of humanitarian partners interviewed indicated that the operation was necessary for delivery of urgent humanitarian aid, notwithstanding initial delays in the start-up of operations.

The services provided by UNHAS enabled the humanitarian community responding to the emergency in Nepal to better reach and assist the population affected by the earthquake. Anticipating the onset of winter at and above 1500 metres in altitude in six districts where 81,000 beneficiaries lived, projected targets were reviewed upwards during the month of November 2015. As a result, UNHAS made an augmentation of airlift capacity for humanitarian deliveries, resulting in most of the planned targets being exceeded.

After the shift to a partial cost-recovery model in September 2015, user organizations took time to allocate their budgets for air transport. This created a build-up of pending cargo deliveries and UNHAS had to increase its airlift capacity by flying above the planned ad-hoc contracted hours of the two MI-8 helicopter to clear the backlog. This continued throughout the operation. On the whole, as a demand-driven service, UNHAS demonstrated that it was the critical lifeline between the humanitarian community's responders and the affected population.

Outcome	Project end Target	Base Value (at start of project or benchmark)	Previous Follow-up (penultimate follow-up)	Latest Follow-up (latest value measured)
Strategic Objective 1: Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies				
User satisfaction rate				
Previous Follow-up: May-2015, User satisfaction survey, Programme monitoring. Latest Follow-up: Sep-2015, User satisfaction survey, Programme monitoring.	80		75	50

Sustainability, Capacity Development and Handover

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the government with the assistance of the humanitarian community, re-constructed roads and other infrastructure with the goal of extending access to all 75 districts. Following the significant rehabilitation of roads and trails which helped to open up access routes in most earthquake-affected districts, and the subsequent deactivation of the emergency, UNHAS activities were terminated at the end of December 2015.

Domestic air transport services that were initially disrupted due to the emergency situation have gradually been reinstated and local road transport service providers have started initial services. The humanitarian community has the opportunity to avail itself of the transport services provided by the Logistics Cluster until it is deactivated in April 2016 and thereafter, it is envisaged that agencies will resort to using local transport services available in the market.

MANAGEMENT

Partnerships

Coordination and information sharing through the Logistics cluster with MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) was a key aspect in UNHAS operations. Operating in deep-country, remote access locations, MAF had pre-positioned fuel hubs in high elevation areas, using smaller airlift capacity on AS350 helicopters with a payload of 600 kg or 4 passengers. They were effective in short flights between the high altitude locations and complemented the UNHAS heavy airlifting capacity.

In order to ensure a needs based and coherent response, a key pillar of the UNHAS operation was to coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors. In Nepal, the coordination of UNHAS activities through the User Group Committee (UGC) and Shelter Cluster meetings improved the effectiveness of the service by ensuring a better feedback mechanism and accountability. Active participation of NGOs, United Nations agencies and donor representatives in the UNHAS UGC was instrumental in ensuring that the services responded to the humanitarian community's needs. Several UGC meetings were organized and key decisions were systematically followed through and members updated on progress. UNHAS also participated in United Nations and NGO fora for information sharing.

The findings of joint assessments and surveys on food security, livelihoods and early recovery revealed the level of food insecurity in remote villages, which appeared to increase proportionally with elevation. Based on these findings, WFP prioritised food deliveries to the remote villages extensively using UNHAS airlift services. WFP's food commodities consisted of 36 percent of the overall transported cargo on UNHAS aircrafts, while the humanitarian cargo of Speedway Foundation, Nepal Share and the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development comprised up to five percent. The cargo of many other NGO partners of the Logistics Cluster made up the balance of the overall cargo airlifted.

In anticipation of oncoming winter conditions in the high-altitude locations, the Shelter Cluster focused on a campaign to draw donor support to prepare for shelter requirements for the cold months ahead. In December, UNHAS and the Shelter Cluster engaged in joint fundraising efforts. The Shelter Cluster conducted a survey amongst its partners to understand how shelter NGOs would be affected by the early withdrawal of UNHAS due to resource constraints and used the results to convince donors to allocate additional resources to the service. This was a trigger factor for additional funding to augment UNHAS's capacity.

At the peak of the response in June and July 2015, UNHAS helicopters flew a total of 1,114 flying hours which amounted to 132 percent in excess of the contracted hours. This was a heavy strain on the initial operations and necessitated a budget revision. To cover the shortfall of funds in the revised budget, UNHAS received a grant of USD 1.2 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund in collaboration with UNOCHA in early November. These measures served to continue UNHAS air services till December 2015.

Lessons Learned

As humanitarian needs escalated with the oncoming winter, UNHAS continuously advocated for funding and communicated needs to in-country donors, as well as donors at their headquarters. UNHAS and the Logistics Cluster also encouraged partners to advocate on behalf of the common services, and United Nations agencies and NGOs continued to raise awareness with their respective donors to raise funds for the service.

There were initial delays encountered in getting all the helicopters in place and ready to fly, which was a setback to the emergency logistics operation. Adequate funding, improved planning and having aircrafts in mission-ready status were crucial elements of the operation that UNHAS needed to have in place, in order to deploy immediate humanitarian air support.

Due to limited funds, the dedicated fleet of helicopters was reduced to just three aircrafts, two MI-8 helicopters and one AS350, in November 2015. Due to further funding constraints, one of the MI-8 helicopters and the AS350 were placed into ad-hoc contracting service in December 2015. As commercial air transport services were disrupted, humanitarian agencies had only the services of UNHAS to rely on. It is therefore crucial for UNHAS to have a contingency plan from the start, to address funding gaps that may arise during the course of operations.

The Humanitarian Country Team supported the continuation of UNHAS as a vital requirement for the continuation of the humanitarian response. The UNHAS special operation played a pivotal role in the humanitarian response as the air service was the only way of reaching the earthquake-affected populations. UNHAS completed the rapid collection of coordinates for helicopter landing zones by deploying geographical information systems teams in the field. Staff were dispatched to the forward hubs (Chautara, Charikot, Deurali and Salyantar) to supervise and monitor the cargo loading and off-loading process, documentation and correct consignee deliveries from the hubs in order to maximise the usage of the air assets.

By adopting the special-request flights prioritisation system from the Relief Item Tracking Application team, UNHAS was able to improve flight planning and consignments tracking. Providing partners with daily flight schedules assisted in properly coordinating flight requests. Refueling the aircrafts from fuel drums located in the logistics hubs was temporarily executed, but when the fuel was found to be contaminated, aircrafts had to be taken off their mission-ready status. This resulted in a 25 percent reduction of the airlift capacity from August to October 2015. In order to mitigate the risk to air safety, remote refueling was discontinued in the operation.

In the passenger access surveys conducted in May 2015, a majority of respondents reported the service to be very good and the operation was relevant and necessary. However it was also emphasized that there was a delay in setting up the UNHAS operations. Due to the shift to the partial-cost recovery model in September, the follow-up survey revealed that only 50 percent of users were satisfied.

Despite the funding challenges, the operation achieved excellent results due in part to internal WFP lending mechanisms that ensured UNHAS was able to continue flying whilst resources from donors were being confirmed. The mechanisms to bridge funding gaps will remain crucial in future emergencies.