

## **CHAPTER III**

### **THE IMPACT OF NEPAL EARTHQUAKE DISASTER 2015, INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE AND THE DILEMMA OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE**

This chapter will explain about the leading case of this thesis which is Nepal earthquake disaster of 2015, including the impact of earthquake on economic, environment, and psychological. The chapter is also continued by discussing the disaster-related activities during the disaster which is the humanitarian assistance from International and its dilemma that occur during the disaster situation.

#### **A. Nepal earthquake disaster 2015 and Its Aftermath**

On April 25, a powerful shock hit the Himalayan country and brought extreme devastation across much of Nepal. A 7.8-magnitude earthquake called as "The Gorkha Earthquake" struck the country resulting in severe damage in 14 out of the 75 districts in the state. The epicenter located near the Barpak Village of Gorkha district which is 81 km northwest of the capital city, Kathmandu. The shock severely affected a total of 14 districts (Gorkha, Dhading, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kavrepalanchowk, Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha, Sindhuli, Makawanpur, Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga) and another 31 districts affected to varying extents.

Two weeks later after the first struck, on 12 May, another quake of 7.3 magnitudes hit, worsening the chaotic situation. This subsequent earthquake resulted into additional losses of life and property. Moreover, it naturally triggered a series of landslides, which further hampered the rescue operation and relief efforts. The 2015 earthquake disaster is considered as

the worst to hit the country after the Nepal–Bihar earthquake occurred in 1934. (Nepal M. o., 2015)

**Table 3.1: Losses due to Nepal earthquake disaster 2015**

*Source: (Nepal M. o., 2015)*

<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Nos./Amount</b>
Persons dead	8,896
Missing	198
Injured	22,302
Affected Families	8,86,456
Displaced Families	6,49,815
House Damaged (Fully)	6,04,930
House Damaged (Partially)	2,88,856
Total Material Loss	NPR's. 706 billion, US\$ 7 billion

Based on the report from the Ministry of Home Affairs, as the result of the earthquake, a total number of 8,896 people died, and more than 22,302 people were injured. Also, the disaster caused more than 8,86,456 affected families, and 6,49,815 families temporarily have been displaced. The number of houses fully damaged by the earthquake exceed 6,04,930 and partially damaged around 2,88,856. Overall, the total material loss reached 706 billion US\$. (Nepal M. o., 2015)

In another source, according to a data from Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDA), the earthquake caused damage to at least 498,852 private houses and approximately 2,656 government buildings. Another effect of disaster cause around 256,697 private residences and 3,622 government buildings were partially destroyed. In addition, the public infrastructure such as school also suffered from a total number of 19,000 classrooms were destroyed and 11,000 damaged (NPC 2015). In fact, many buildings in Nepal were made up of poorly construction and material that caused the prone condition of buildings to collapse during the shock. (National Reconstruction Authority, 2016)

As the impact of the disaster, the country suffered tremendous losses in every sector, as follows:

#### 1. Environmental impact of a disaster

According to the rapid environmental assessment of the 2015 earthquake from Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment of Nepal, the 7.8- magnitude earthquake that struck the country has triggered at least 2,780 landslides, and many cracks on the ground were found covering 31 districts of the state. Additionally, the identification from imagery satellite found that there is the escalation of the frequency of landslides to happen in the country, which was three times greater than before the earthquake. The effects of the earthquake on the environment will significantly damage settlements, buildings, and infrastructure, agricultural land as well as forests. The disaster also disrupted water supplies and sanitation infrastructure for hundreds of thousands of people, putting them at risk of serious illness. (Nepal M. o.-M., 2017)

## 2. The economic impact of a disaster

The earthquake disasters affect not only the people; they also set back the overall economic development of the country. Financial losses estimated at \$ 7 billion, or a massive one-third of the country's GDP has worsened the stability of the country. The physical damage caused by the disaster was estimated at \$ 5.2 billion and economic losses of \$1.9 billion. (Sood, 2016). The Gorkha Earthquake 2015 will have a long-term effect on Nepal's economy and development efforts for several years. Additionally, the tourism sector is one of the state revenues as Nepal is well known for its rich cultural heritage has been disturbed by the earthquake. Many historical temples and building collapsed as the result of the quake. Another sector such as agriculture also severely affected. Terraced farms and cattle were swept out by the quake and landslides, destroying people's entire livelihoods. This is a significant setback to Nepal's socio-economic condition and will take many years to revive.

## 3. Psychological effects

The earthquake disaster does not only affected the victims physically but also mentally. The impact of disaster also leaves them to greater vulnerability and insecurity as it felt by almost all people, especially children. Based on the Nepal Children Consultation Report, children in 67 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) referred explicitly to feeling sadness and traumatized as a result of the earthquake. They found that the Nepalese children experienced increased stress because their daily lives are disrupted, and their school is suspended due to infrastructure damage. Moreover, the subsequent aftershocks, loss of homes and damage to their educational buildings led to increasing fear, anxiety and level of trauma in children. (WV Nepal Earthquake Response Team, 2017)

## **B. International Response after the Earthquake Disaster 2015**

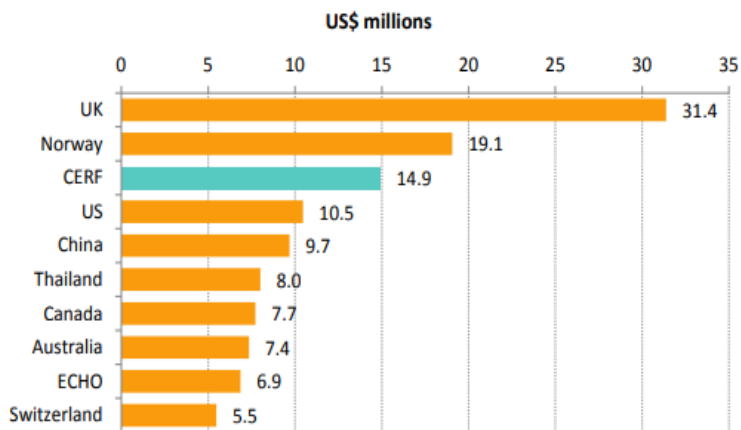
With a large number of casualties and damage to buildings and infrastructure as well as various impacts of the Gorkha earthquake that occurred in the country, the government of Nepal does not have proper preparation to deal with disasters. In the immediate after the quake, Government of Nepal launched a large-scale relief operation to help the victims with support from many humanitarian partners. Since the disaster-affected areas are mostly in remote villages, thus it was hard for Nepal to handle the aid distribution on its own. Furthermore, the government of Nepal declared the emergency area in the day to 14 profoundly affected districts and appealed to International assistance. (Nepal M. o., 2015)

The international response began to provide humanitarian assistance from all levels of government. They offered immediate search and rescue personnel, disaster response team, medical aid, emergency relief items, as well as goods and services towards the victims in every worst-affected area. The aid support was dispatched through the foreign military in the form of aircraft to the worst affected areas. Nonetheless, the distribution of aid was hampered due to extreme terrain, and many roads were damaged making to remote communities difficult. Floods and landslides by the annual monsoon raincontinue to hinder the access for the humanitarian situation. However, international humanitarian actors from military and non-militaries agencies keep coming to assist and distribute the aid to the victims.

In addition, several international humanitarian communities also contributed to the relief operation which consists of volunteer groups, local people, youths, civil societies, media and political parties. According to data from the UN Chronicle, humanitarian actors which aided affected communities in the following days after the earthquake exceed

thousands of volunteers and over 450 humanitarian agencies. Some of the international organizations such as the United Nations, international NGOs and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies immediately mobilized resources and delivered critical life-saving assistance to the affected areas. (Ovesen, 2016)

From the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the humanitarian aid was deployed with a total of 30-member United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team. They were quickly establishing an OCHA country office to help the distribution of aid in three most affected areas which are the Dolakha, Gorkha, and Sindhupalchowk districts (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2016)



**Figure 3.1: Top 10 Humanitarian Donors to Nepal**

*Source: (Sarah Dalrymple and Cat Langton, 2015)*

Furthermore, the international response also came in the form of the financial donor to support the humanitarian crisis in Nepal. Based on the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Financial Tracking Service, as of May 2015, a total of US\$156 million of humanitarian funding has been pledged to Nepal since the beginning of the crisis on 25 April 2015. The largest international donor to the crisis held by United Kingdom (UK) US\$31,4 million, followed by the Norway US\$19,1 million. Central Emergency Response Fund contributed US\$14,9 million and followed by the United States (US) US\$10,5 million. China as one of the neighboring countries of Nepal provided US\$9,7 million. The top five donors have given 53% of total funding. The importance of donors from the region in the response, mainly those outside of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), is particularly notable. China and Thailand are within the top 10 donors. China, Thailand, and India have mutually provided 14% of funding thus far. (Sarah Dalrymple and Cat Langton, 2015)

### **C. The dilemma of Humanitarian Assistance**

The international community continually has been encountered various kinds of extreme situations such as wars, conflicts, and natural catastrophes that affect and threaten the lives, dignity, and existence of the millions population in the world. Throughout history, such life-endangering events have prompted the international community to provide humanitarian assistance endeavor to relieve human distress and make the suffering less severe. In the post of the Cold War, there has been a changing in the internal climate that contributed to significant changes in humanitarian and emergency operations.

The humanitarian assistance has an ethical basis called as the humanitarian imperative. This principle states that helping

is an unconditional obligation, wherever and whenever support is needed. However, Fiona Terry, an author of *Condemned to Repeat: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*, points out that the main responsibility for the safety and well-being of their citizens belongs to the government and that "humanitarian assistance" is necessary only when government or combatant unwilling or unable to shoulder their responsibilities. (Terry, 2002)

Current development of humanitarian aid, however, is no longer seen as the pure endeavor. It is no longer accepted without question as a universal right and a good thing. Instead, the positive value of humanitarian assistance depends on its outcomes and whether it does not harm, as the aid once becomes a mechanism for leveraging political support and achieving a political purpose. It contrasts with classic humanitarianism, which tended to ignore political contexts. This new conception emerged by a much more political dimension of humanitarian assistance that was no longer aimed at responding above all to the victim's needs and suffering, but instead to stimulate more political and social processes. For that, even humanitarian aid provided within this frame should be politically intelligent and conscious of the contexts in which it is used to contribute to such objectives (Nascimento, 2015)

Since in contemporary issues, humanitarian assistance is increasingly tied to political interests, effective humanitarian action requires broader goals, not only limited by one benefit to be achieved. These objectives are addressed by the consequences that may occur and with consideration of the level of cooperation between the donor and recipient countries. Furthermore, the classic principle of 'humanitarian imperative' as the fundamental basis for responding to human suffering provides a place for consequentialist logic which stated that humanitarian assistance must depend on achieving the long-term goals.



The dilemma of humanitarian assistance could not be understood or evaluated without analyzing the global politics surrounding the disaster. The idea that humanitarian assistance ought to be unconditional has been further faced by the sets of political conditions. That is where the dilemma appears surrounding the disaster-related activity. The decision to provide or to accept assistance have negative consequences. It would harm, and the decision not to give aid would not harm. In some cases, humanitarian aid has also been accused of prolonging conflict by assisting, directly or indirectly, to combatants and their military operations. (Schweizer, 2004)

Furthermore, there are some deciding factors in the humanitarian assistance such as consideration for origin, race, political or religious belief. These factors cause the emergence of a dilemma in humanitarian activity. In some cases, the humanitarian aid provided by a certain party might end to build a closer connection between those in need. However, it also somehow unable the parties to develop effective relationships with all parties who are in need. (Schweizer, 2004)

In the case of Nepal, after a magnitude 7.8 earthquake devastated the Himalayan country in 2015, international humanitarian assistance was allowed to operate the rescue and relief effort, except Taiwan. The humanitarian aid offered by Taiwan unclearly declined by Nepal while the offer from various countries was accepted. Here, however, this refusal indicates that there are factors to be considered in humanitarian assistance activity. As mentioned above that humanitarian aid is closely linked to internal politics. Therefore, the decision to accept or reject humanitarian aid will depend on the political relations of both countries. Whether the country has a problem or not with the country, who is in need of humanitarian assistance.

## 1. Problematic states

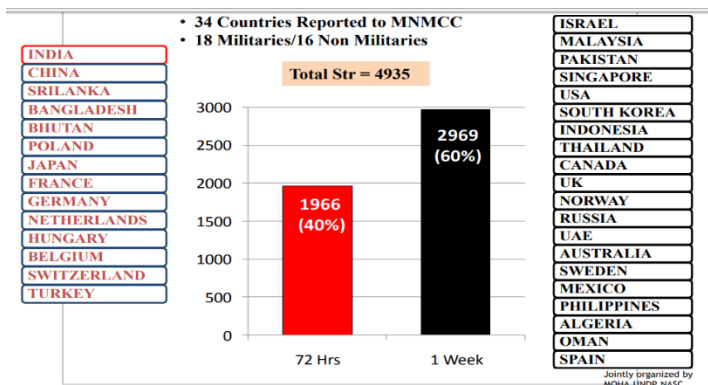
Taiwan is a country that is not recognized by Nepal. The relationship between the two countries has never been established because of Taiwan's political and legal status. It becomes one of the significant factors in humanitarian assistance that was carried out in the case of the earthquake disaster. The offer of aid consisted of a 20-man rescue team that has been dispatched to the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu was declined by Nepal. In fact, the country was in need of substantial humanitarian assistance to millions of affected citizens. Moreover, Taiwan has well-trained emergency response personnel and resources to deal with the devastating earthquake as the country also experienced frequently a similar disaster. (Nepal Turns Down Offer of Help, 2015)

Based on the New York Times, Nepal officials confirmed that the country so far has only need for assistance in search and rescue efforts from neighboring countries like China, India, and Pakistan. They added that the long distance and the lack of direct flights and diplomatic relations is the reason behind. Nevertheless, many observers speculate that there was a political motive behind the rejection of assistance. (Ramzy, Updates on Earthquake in Nepal, 2015)

Nonetheless, while its offer to provide a rescue team was declined, Taiwan offered other alternative aid to Nepal. According to Taipei Times, the country would provide an emergency humanitarian medical aid. In addition, the government of Taiwan would donate a total of US\$300,000 as the financial assistance to Nepal. (Nepal Turns Down Offer of Help, 2015)

## 2. Non-problematic state

While Taiwan was failed to send their rescue team because of the reasons of country's priority, other countries that were indeed far from the country succeeded in carrying out humanitarian assistance in Nepal. Several countries came in the first day, while the rest followed.



**Figure 3.2: Countries participated in Humanitarian Assistance**

*Source: (College, 2015)*

According to Multi-National Military Coordination Centre, a total of 34 countries reported participating in the immediate humanitarian aid operation. The first international team to respond came from neighboring countries such as India, China, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. The response from Nepal's neighbors with its teams arrived within the first 12 hours. Other teams from 14 countries such as Bhutan, Poland, Japan, France, Germany, Netherlands and so forth with a total of 1966 personnel arrived in Nepal within the first 72 hours. Additionally, further, remaining countries such as Australia, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Pakistan,

Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, UK, USA, and others international aid also came to provide humanitarian assistance. A total number of 2696 of personnel was added during the first week of the disaster. (College, 2015)

Those countries have successfully carried out humanitarian assistance activities to Nepal immediately after the earthquake on April 25, which killed nearly 9,000 lives. Nepal considers that the humanitarian action from the 34 countries does not threaten the political interests of Nepal. Thus Nepal has been willing to accept humanitarian assistance in the disaster situation.