



Adaptive management in a post-disaster context

Market-based capacity building in Nepal

Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program, jointly operated by World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation), and funded by Global Affairs Canada. The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Working with multi-sector partners, Uniterra facilitates growth and change in markets that impact marginalized populations. Uniterra Nepal supports youth entrepreneurship in agri-business in partnership with education and skill development organizations.

On April 24, 2015, the Uniterra team in Nepal was busy preparing for a first cohort of Canadian volunteers to arrive, marking the start of the third phase of the Uniterra program. Hours later, on Saturday, April 25, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Barpak, approximately 76 km northwest of Kathmandu, soon followed by hundreds of aftershocks. More than 8,790 people lost their lives and 22,300 people sustained injuries. An estimated eight million people were impacted by these earthquakes.

The Uniterra Nepal team, reeling from trauma and devastation in their own lives, were also faced with important questions for the program: How could Uniterra best support relief efforts to contribute to the economic recovery phase? How relevant was our original programming in the aftermath of this catastrophe?

Adaptive management

To answer these questions, the Uniterra Nepal team drew from the principles of adaptive management, an iterative approach that encourages a continuous flow of information gathered through a process of enquiry and learning and incorporated into planning and implementation¹.

Adaptive management is an integral feature of Uniterra's market-based approach to capacity building. Therefore, the Uniterra Nepal team and partners were already familiar with and deeply committed to continuous assessment, the need to understand local context, and adjusting to inform planning and implementation.

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We now consider resilience and disaster preparedness in all that we do and make sure there is some dimension of these in all of our volunteer assignments here in Nepal.

Mr. Keshava Koirala, Country Representative, UNITERRA - CECI Nepal

1. USAID Learning Lab's description of adaptive management as an approach that "...seeks to better achieve desired results and impacts through the systematic, iterative, and planned use of emergent knowledge and learning throughout the implementation of strategies, programs, and projects." (<https://usaidearninglab.org/learning-guide/adaptive-management>)

Adapting programming to coordinate relief and reconstruction efforts

When the earthquake struck, there were very few Canadian volunteers present and the new Canadian Uniterra volunteers had not yet arrived in the country. This allowed the Uniterra team to focus initial efforts exclusively on the immediate response. They began by reaching out to local partners in the dairy and agriculture sectors in the two highly affected districts of Lalitpur and Kavrepalanchok. The Uniterra team was also able to leverage CECI's humanitarian programming. This enabled coordination between both short term relief and long term capacity development programming through volunteer support.

Adapting programming to meet original objectives in a changed context

To better understand how each partner had been impacted by the earthquake, the Uniterra Nepal team met with each organization to conduct an assessment using a "situation report" tool. This visit included documenting organizational losses and the recovery and reconstruction strategies already in place, and assessing human resource needs.

Through this process, partners were supported to identify the specific impacts the earthquake had on their organization, establish new and changed priorities, and work with the Uniterra team to assess which human resource needs Canadian and national volunteers could meet. Many volunteer assignments were redeveloped to reflect these changes within partner organizations.



Key Learnings

The aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal reaffirmed to the Uniterra team the importance of having flexible and adaptive processes in place. We are integrating lessons learned from our experience in post-disaster Nepal into our programming in other countries of intervention.

Recovery Needs to Foster Future Resilience

The humanitarian response provided additional inputs for economic recovery that the Uniterra program did not have the scope or mandate to supply, enabling Uniterra partners to access immediate and critical recovery support. Meanwhile, continued capacity building efforts by Uniterra further developed partners' resiliency, mitigating the impacts of future natural disasters and reducing the need for future humanitarian assistance. Through this initiative, it became clear that Uniterra's overall capacity building and resilience strengthening efforts would need to include elements of disaster preparedness and risk mitigation more broadly.

Context Matters

During the assessment of impact, it was discovered that the emerging needs and priorities differed greatly among partners. Those working in the dairy sector suffered huge infrastructure damage. Capacity building efforts needed to include technical support from volunteers to establish earthquake-resistant structures and equipment. Meanwhile, those working in the herb and non-timber forest products sectors were keen to jump right back into income generating activities. Capacity building efforts included supporting partners to market their products to key stakeholders in the

value-chain, especially buyers, to avoid the potential negative impacts of the supply chain not being remobilized quickly enough. Prioritizing these initial, comprehensive assessments enabled us to quickly develop a strong and rapid response.

Safety and Security is Critical

Through the initial process of coordinating travel to reach out to partners in the aftermath of the earthquake, a great deal was learned in terms of safety and security. Security protocols for Nepal now include ensuring the provision of emergency barrels and earthquake alarms for each staff member and volunteer; the provision of satellite phones for team members travelling and working in remote mountainous areas; strengthened communications protocols; and revisions of target regions of interventions.

Lessons learned around security and safety had implications for staff, volunteers, and partners in other countries where WUSC and CECI operate as well. As a result of the earthquake in Nepal and recent events in other countries, WUSC and CECI have undertaken a review of safety and security protocols and planning to include more comprehensive annual disaster preparedness planning for each country of intervention.