

Nepal Australia Friendship Association Qld (NAFA)
President's Report for 2015
This report was submitted at the AGM held on 5 April 2016

The Big Picture: Nepal earthquakes, NAFA's focus and guarantee to donors

On Saturday 25 April 2015 a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal. The epi-center was in Gorkha, just west of Ri VDC, Dhading district, where NAFA and other small, like-minded INGO partners have worked together for over 15 years to support a group of villages in health, education and other community infrastructure projects e.g. water, micro-hydro, improved cooking stoves. Three weeks later, on 12 May, two more large earthquakes struck eastern Nepal, badly affecting villages in three other districts which NAFA has supported: Dolakha, Okhaldhunga and the lower Solu Khumbu. In mid-May, official Government figures put the death toll at 8,700, with more than 17,000 injured.

The earthquakes dominated NAFA activities in 2015, with plans for new projects put aside so we could focus on helping villages past supported by NAFA rebuild infrastructure destroyed or badly damaged by the earthquakes. NAFA did continue though to support 10 ongoing health and education programs.

In June 2015, with the help of the Nepalese Association of Queensland (NAQ) and other like-minded NGOs NAFA responded to the intermediate needs of earthquake victims by providing roofing tin to over 1,200 households in the Dhading (plus rice), as well as to approximately 100 families in NAFA supported villages located in Solu Khumbu and Okhaldhunga districts. Assistance was also provided to the 30 families of sponsored students in Thimi, near Kathmandu. Since then NAFA has been raising funds (including a generous donation from NAQ) and planning for the rebuilding phase in accordance with requirements from the Nepalese Government.

In 2015 NAFA allocated **\$206,581** to 9 one-off health, education and other community-based projects, 10 ongoing programs and 4 other projects that responded to the intermediate needs of earthquake victims. This is the **eighth year in a row** that NAFA has **allocated over \$100,000 to projects in Nepal, a wonderful record for this small, volunteer run development aid organisation.** NAFA allocations spanned the priorities of education, health/disability, child care and support provided to earthquake victims.

NAFA's donors opened up their hearts in 2015 in response to the earthquake. Just over \$400,000 was donated for earthquake responses to household victims and to rebuild village infrastructure. This included substantial donations from NAQ, Auto and General; Sunny Queen Eggs, Queensford College, Brisbane Sikh Temple Gurdwara, Rotary Narrabri and Rotary Armidale. Other individuals, including Ray Baker (Backtrack), Gill Grolimund and Suresh Shrestha, and many others coordinated earthquake appeals whose collective efforts have placed NAFA in a good position to not only respond to the immediate needs of earthquake victims but to support the rebuilding of remote community infrastructure in 2016 in villages previously supported by NAFA..

NAFA has been working with engineers and local community representatives in meeting Nepali government requirements and approvals to commence rebuilding schools. Guidelines and government restrictions relate to geotechnical integrity of building sites, earthquake resistant design, size and number of classrooms, submission of individual school building plans and training of local builders. Further details are outlined below under Challenges facing rebuilding. Most of these issues have been resolved and rebuilding will commence soon.

In 2016 and no doubt the next few years the rebuilding of village infrastructure will be our priority.

We are therefore focusing on specific villages in the **remote districts of** Dhading, Solu Khumbu, Okhaldhunga and Dolakha, as well as villages in Sindulpulchowk that can be accessed within one day's bus travel from Kathmandu.

I travelled to Nepal a month after the earthquake to help organise the uplift of roofing tin and rice to the Ri VDC in the Dhading district by UN World Food Program leased helicopters. I accompanied the first uplift and was able to witness first-hand the enormous devastation wrought by the first major earthquake in April. Roofing tin has been widely adopted by local Nepali communities as an intermediate measure in earthquake affected areas. The roofing tin, together with salvage materials from destroyed buildings have provided more effective cover and protection particularly through the 2015 monsoon season.

Later in the year Deborah and I joined Ross and Brenda Hazelwood, Russ Waller and Kalpana Kaphle to focus on the rebuilding phase and to monitor ongoing NAFA programs. We all travel **at our own expense** to ensure funds allocated are used in accordance with the approved purpose and that the project has been successfully completed. NAFA also guarantees that **100% of donations to NAFA go directly to Nepal, without any administration expense deducted.**

NAFA project highlights in 2015:

- \$95,500 allocated to 4 intermediate responses to the earthquake, including the provision of medical supplies, roofing tin, rice and tents for earthquake victims.
- \$18,300 allocated to 6 health and disability projects and programs, including salaries for 3 health workers in a remote health clinic, primary hearing care, repairs to a residential centre for people with a disability and equipment for a disability employment support project.
- \$15,400 allocated to teacher salaries in two remote villages and \$11,281 allocated to support three child care centres for poor families.
- \$23,000 allocated as education sponsorship of approximately 65 children up to Grade 10.
- \$27,900 allocated in sponsorships of 27 students for college (Grades 11 and 12) or Bachelor level study.

A closer look at NAFA's ongoing programs in Nepal

Education

NAFA has two child sponsorship programs at **Prisoners Assistance (PA) Nepal** in Sankhu and **Vinayak Shiksha Niketan (VSN) School** in Thimi, with the **number of children sponsored** for education by NAFA up to Grade 10 now totalling **approximately 65 children**. Most of the children in PA Nepal have parents who are in prison or are orphans. In the case of VSN Thimi, sponsored children are from poor families in this pottery/farming town, with many of the sponsored children's families working and living in a local carpet factory. Both these programs are now capped due to their multi-year administration and impact on NAFA's financial commitments.

NAFA also supports students post grade 10 through its **FEAT program**. **FEAT** aims to partner with child sponsors and families to provide opportunities for young people involved in NAFA supported education programs to undertake vocational training or post Grade 10 (college years 11 and 12) and Grade 12 (Bachelor) study to improve their employment chances. In 2015, **funds were allocated to support 27 students in post Grade 10 study**. NAFA is now supporting young people from VSN, PA Nepal or Tawal to study **public health, fashion design, nursing, education, rural health, computer engineering, management and civil engineering**.

In 2015, NAFA **sponsored three teachers at the school in Tawal, which enables that area school servicing 6 local villages to go to Grade 10, as well as a teacher in the village of Gamauli**. All these teachers are funded via earmarked donations by generous NAFA supporters who value the role of education, especially in remote areas of Nepal.

NAFA received **32 mini laptops** from **St Andrew's Catholic Primary School in Ferny Grove**, which were taken over by members and trekkers. Due to the earthquake and power problems only **6 were delivered to schools in Kophu and Patle**, another **2 were given to NAFA supported FEAT students** to assist in their Bachelor level studies and one was given to Kanchha Tamang, President of Tawal village HRDC. **More computers are expected to be distributed in 2016** as classroom rebuilding starts in earnest.

Child care

NAFA continued its **financial support to two child care centres operated by the Butterfly Foundation in Pokhara**. These centres support low-caste families who have moved to Pokhara from villages in search of casual day labour. In addition, after funding its establishment in 2011, NAFA also continued to support the operation of a **child care crèche for carpet factory families in Thimi** as a response to an evaluation of the health clinic and child sponsorship programs in Thimi in 2010.

Health and disability

Since co-funding (with AusAid) the construction of the health clinic in 2000, NAFA continues to **subsidise the salaries of three health workers** at the **Tawal health centre**, which provides primary health care to over 3,000 people living in Tawal and 4 other nearby villages. **Following the Gorkha earthquake the health workers saved the lives of a number of injured earthquake victims.** Unfortunately the health clinic at Tawal was completely destroyed by the earthquake and will have to be rebuilt on land away from the landslide prone area on which it was located.

Since 2010, NAFA has been a proud supporter of the **Himalayan Health & Hearing (HH&H)**, developed and conducted through the dedicated volunteer work and financial generosity of **Lew and Sue Tuck from Whitsunday Hearing**. Lew and Sue work in partnership with Keshab Dangol from the **Nepalese Association of Hard of Hearing (NAHOH)**, which is also supported by NAFA, to provide hearing as well as generalist and specialist health care in outreach camps in the Kathmandu Valley and beyond in remote areas of Nepal. HH&H stepped up to help with other earthquake responses in addition to its primary hearing services in Nepal's time of great need.

NAFA had another active year supporting people with a disability. At **Khagendra New life Home in Jorpati**, NAFA provided funds to construct a new stand-alone roof over the home, protecting residents from the rain as well as making the home cooler in the hot monsoon season. Another uplifting disability project supported the employment of people in wheelchairs through funding of the **Differently Able Youth Organisation (DAYO) in Jorpati** to purchase an electricity inverter and a photo copying machine equipment for their mobile phone repair/photocopying service shop. The young people in wheelchairs who operate the shop make enough profit to pay their wages and enable them to live independently in the community.

Other infrastructure and economic development projects

Finally, it was **another busy year for distributing jumpers and beanies knitted by approximately 80 women in Brisbane**. 200 jumpers and beanies were distributed to school children in Dhurpisorke in Okhaldhunga district and Shyama in Dolakha district. 330 jumpers and beanies were distributed to school children at Tawal, Kichet and Dusheni in the Dhading district. 210 jumpers were handed out to a badly damaged area school in Nuwakot village and 300 were distributed to children from EQ destroyed villages near Thimi and Bhaktapur. A total of **over 1,000 jumpers and beanies were distributed** to children in earthquake affected areas.

Challenges faced in rebuilding efforts, progress made to date and a look ahead to 2016

The Government of Nepal requires international NGOs to register their offer to support the rebuilding of school classrooms with the Department of Education (DoE) through a local NGO. With extensive support from NAFA executive officers Ross Hazelwood and Rod Setterlund, an **MOU with DoE was signed on 15 December 2015** to rebuild a total of **48 classrooms** in the following villages:

Dhading district: Ladap (8); Tawal (15); Kutal (8); and Riche (6)

Solu Khumbu: Kophu (3)

Okhaldhunga: Patle (3);

Dolakha : Shyama (5)

NAFA has also committed to fund the **repair of classrooms and/or toilet blocks** in the following villages:

Okhaldhunga: Dhupersurke and Patle

Dolakha: Shyama

Sindulpulchowk: Kodari and Jalkeni

Significant bureaucratic challenges and a fuel crisis in Nepal has delayed the start of rebuilding, though we are told by DoE officials that **NAFA is ahead of other INGOs in progressing rebuild plans** in accordance with new government rules and regulations evolving after the earthquake. **Earthquake resistant classroom designs and site plans have to be approved by the DoE and the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC)**. This has proved very challenging due to changing government building codes, limitations in the land space available in some villages and government requirements regarding numbers and sizes of classrooms required for primary and secondary schools.

In at least three villages in the Dhading District, additional **private land will need to be purchased** as the current school sites are inadequate for the number of classrooms and classroom sizes now mandated by the government. The government has not given any indication that it can assist with any funds to help with either the purchase of additional land or the rebuilding of classrooms in any of the villages in which NAFA has offered to help with rebuilding.

In Ri VDC (Nepali term for local government area), NAFA had to organise a geotechnical engineer (Professor **Megh Dhital** from Tribhuvan University) to travel to the area to undertake a “**rapid assessment for landslide risk**” of 25 villages in the VDC to provide advice on where it is safe to rebuild and where it isn't safe. A **comprehensive report was provided to NAFA** on 24 December by Professor Dhital and recommendations included the construction of a **5 metre high by 50 metre long gabion wall to protect the area school at Tawal** from risk of landslide. The gabion wall will need to be built before classroom construction can commence.

Local builders in villages where schools will be rebuilt need to be **trained in earthquake resistant building techniques**. Inspired by an earthquake response workshop organised by NAQ in July 2015, **Rara K.C. and Marie Penny**, two Brisbane-based architects, in conjunction with a Kathmandu based architect, **Sabin Shrestha**, developed a **Guidebook** aimed at helping local villagers rebuild community infrastructure **using earthquake resistant design and construction techniques**. Sabin also developed a 3D visual and a one page summary in Nepalese of the main aspects of earthquake resistant stone construction. Uttam Shrestha in Joy Foundation then kindly translated 30 pages of the Guidebook into Nepali. Sabin needed structural engineering support for the drawings and referrals from **Partha Parajuli** and **Hari Khadka** led us to an engineer who provided that support.

In my third visit to Nepal since the earthquake **I met with three prospective trainers** (Engineers) in Kathmandu and **seven day training programs are planned** in two locations (Shyama in Dolakha district and Tawal in the Dhading district) for builders from the seven villages being supported by NAFA for rebuilds.

On top of all the bureaucratic challenges faced, Nepal also experienced **fuel, gas and other essential goods shortages** for six months in the latter half of 2015, **caused by an ongoing blockade by the Madeshi regional political parties** unhappy with key aspects of the new constitution for Nepal. Although finished, the blockade inflated prices of petrol, gas, kerosene and supplies, including building materials. **NAFA's rebuilding phase can only commence when both supply and prices are normalised**, though it has been predicted that prices will not return to pre-earthquake levels.

The current **estimated cost of rebuilding and repairing** the above schools (classrooms and toilet blocks) is over **AUD \$600,000**. Additionally an estimated **\$90,000** will be needed to rebuild **other destroyed community infrastructure eg micro-hydro system, health clinic, gabion wall and cooperative infrastructure** in the Tawal area. This rebuilding/repair **excludes any land** that will need to be purchased to meet the new government requirements for building design.

Currently, NAFA has approximately **\$400,000, including \$18,000 provided by NAQ, for the rebuilding phase**. Funds are still coming in from generous NAFA supporters and we are also seeking like-minded funding partners such as Smile Back to Me Spain and Nepaleducaid (Austria) to meet the current shortfall in funds needed to help Nepalese people rebuild their community infrastructure.

NAFA supporters can be assured that **rebuilding will commence as soon as possible, following final DoE and DUDBC approvals, and the completion of the earthquake resistant training programs for local builders**. Again we thank NAFA and NAQ supporters for helping us obtain the resources to start the first phase. Working together with our Nepali friends and partners and with ongoing support from donors, **NAFA is determined to fulfil our commitment to the people in rural areas** who have stoically endured great hardship since the earthquakes.

Thank you for supporting NAFA

I would like to extend some specific heart-felt thank you's in what was an exceptional "earthquake" year.

In Australia, I would first like to thank **NAQ and members of the Nepalese community for their steadfast support for NAFA this past year**. This support was both financial and advisory on a range of earthquake related matters. In the early days after the earthquake, members of the Nepalese community, including **Nirmala Pandeya, Mana Ranjit, Ujjwal Gautam and Manoj Khanal** (NAQ President in 2015) were a tower of strength to me on the NAFA management committee, providing advice and support when NAFA was deciding how to respond early on to requests for immediate assistance coming from Nepal. **NAQ then followed that up by providing financial support to both our intermediate and rebuilding phases. NAFA did the right thing in deciding to support early survival needs and longer term rebuilding assistance.**

I would like to offer a **special thanks to Ujjwal Gautam**. He does what needs to be done in NAFA, that is ensure the financial records are accurate. He successfully integrated NAFA's general accounting system and tax receipts system from 1 January 2015, issuing electronic tax receipts from that date. It was a very big task both to establish the system and then maintain it throughout the year. In 2015 Ujjwal issued hundreds of tax receipts and processed probably 400% more transactions than in previous years. It took a lot of time from his fledging small migration and accounting business and I will be forever grateful for his professionalism and consistent support to NAFA. Thank you Ujjwal. You are a **great Treasurer** and NAFA committee member.

I would also like to thank **Rara K.C. and Marie Penny, who as previously mentioned**, developed a **Guidebook on Earthquake Resistant Stone Construction of Non-engineered Buildings** in remote villages. NAFA is indebted to Rara and Marie for their professionalism and commitment to people living in remote communities so badly affected by the earthquakes. NAFA would also like to acknowledge useful feedback from **Bhishna Bajracharya and Narayan Pokharel** on earlier drafts of the Guidebook.

I would also like to thank **Kalpana Kaphle**, a Brisbane based social worker, who took her annual leave to join us in Nepal in November to conduct, an **evidence based, post-trauma recovery program to students in VSN Thimi and then in Tawal**. In Tawal, a total of 343 students in Nursery, Grade 1 and Grades 6-10 participated in Kalpana's program with Deborah's assistance. I would like to thank Kalpana for her professionalism, empathy and enthusiasm in implementing this important initiative.

In Nepal, there are many to thank. First and foremost I would like to thank **Sabin Shrestha**, a former work colleague of **Rara KC**, for his contributions to the Earthquake Guidebook and the professional work and patience he has provided in the past six months in supporting NAFA in its efforts to get DoE and DUDBC approval of classroom designs and site plans. He also prepared the materials list for budgets that need to be prepared by village schools for consideration by NAFA. He did all that mostly in hours outside his architect work responsibilities.

Similarly, **Manish Bhadra**, HOD Administration of the Speedway Foundation who, under the direction of Mr **Raju Shrestha**, has also provided invaluable support in helping guide NAFA through the DoE/DUDBC bureaucracy. A special thanks to Raju for allowing us to use Speedway Foundation as the host local NGO, firstly for the UN uplift of rice and roofing tin to Ri VDC and then to administer the rebuild program in Shyama, Kophu and Patle.

Sometimes when faced with multiple barriers, outstanding individuals cross NAFA's path at a critical stage and help us take a huge leap forward. Sabin and Manish are two such people. Another is **Professor Megh Dhital**, a geotechnical engineer from Tribhuvan University. His visit to the Ri VDC to undertake a rapid assessment for landslide risk was a **major breakthrough** for which I know the people of that area and I will be forever grateful. I would also like to thank **Deepak Adhikary, Dipak Paudyal** and other engineers in Brisbane for their referrals which eventually led us to Professor Dhital.

Another huge barrier, the sourcing of suitably qualified engineers who could conduct earthquake resistant training to remote builders, was finally overcome with the help of **Mohan Sharma, Partha Parajuli** and others, who made the effort to forward a NAFA brief I prepared for the training to prospective trainers. Mohan also subsequently provided invaluable advice as we assessed submissions received to conduct the training.

In Nepal, our Project Coordinators volunteer their time to help their communities. It was a particularly stressful year for them, especially **Phurba Sherpa** for the Solu Khumbu/Okhaldunga/Dolakha districts; **Chandra Tamang and Kanchha Tamang** for NAFA supported villages in the Dhading district; and **Surendra Prajjapati** in Thimi. **Govinda Pahari** also provided support to earthquake victims who ended up in Pokhara hospitals and **Pradip Shrestha** provided administrative and field officer support to Joy Foundation Nepal's earthquake response activities. NAFA's success in Nepal relies on the commitment and wisdom of these Coordinators and this was especially the case in 2015. **Uttam Shrestha**, IT adviser to JOY, also provided invaluable support to NAFA in translating the Earthquake Resistant Guidebook to Nepali and making donated laptops ready for distribution to remote schools and NAFA supported FEAT students in Nepal.

A **special thanks goes to villagers** who in many cases lost loved ones and everything they owned, but who throughout the year continued to work so hard in partnership with NAFA, acting with stoicism and dignity during a time of high distress.

I would also like to make special mention of a few other NAFA committee members this year. **Ross and Brenda Hazelwood** spend five months each year in Nepal, at their own expense, and this year was a particularly challenging year for them. The fuel crisis, including a shortage in cooking gas, made daily living difficult for them and in a trek to Shyama in October, Brenda broke her arm. She soldiered on regardless. Ross then used all of his persistence and commitment to guide NAFA's process for obtaining DoE and DUDBC approval of the MOU with DoE, Sabin's classroom designs and site plans. Again, NAFA could not do its rebuilding earthquake responses in Nepal without Ross and Brenda.

On 1 August 2015, Stewart Jones was awarded NRNA Friend of Nepal 2015 for his contribution to NAFA's management committee. It was well deserved. I congratulate Stewart on receiving the award and for his unwavering support to NAFA and me personally throughout 2015.

2015 was a difficult year at times for NAFA's Management Committee and for me personally. I would like to thank **Peter Brockett** for his support in helping the committee deal with the internal challenges that often occur at a time of high stress. 2015 was such a year. Thanks also to all those committee members not mentioned above who supported NAFA and me so strongly in such a difficult year.

Finally, I would like to publicly thank **Deborah** for being such a wonderful partner and adviser this past year. I constantly draw on her strength and wisdom, especially when things get tough and she is always there. That was particularly the case in 2015.

Being President of NAFA has always been an honour. It is immensely satisfying and up until 2015 was manageable and fun. In 2015 the experience was quite different. I felt a strong sense of responsibility for NAFA to respond effectively to the extraordinary hardships felt by villagers in Nepal. NAFA continues to carry a big responsibility to help a large number of villagers rebuild their community infrastructure at a time when their own government has at least to this stage let them down. I believe we have the commitment, the passion and goodwill to achieve these rebuilding goals.

I am completing my **ninth year as President** of NAFA. I would like to stay in the position until the rebuilding phase is over, but then it will be time for someone else to step up to lead a very special organisation, which hopefully will continue to make a real difference to people's lives in Nepal for many years to come.

Rod Setterlund OAM
President
5 April 2016