

10th June, 2015 - Namaskar Nepal - Information / Newsletter No. 8

After seven Newsletters under the title "Earthquake in Nepal", the latest news and information from Nepal now has the title "Namaskar Nepal".

Namaskar is the 'polite' form for the more general Nepalese greeting "Namaste" and means: "I greet the divine in you", thereby expressing hope and a new beginning.

Even though there is still frequent talk of the 'Buichalo' (pronounced: Buizallo, Nepalese for earthquake) and Bukambar (pronounced: Bukamber, Nepalese for the shaking earth), and the cell phone app and the earthquake telephone number with information on the individual after shocks are often being used ... calm is slowly returning and the everyday routine is back in the families again.

Meanwhile, most of the schools in Kathmandu and the villages that are affected, have resumed school life. Since many of the school buildings have been devastated, the children are now sitting under provisionally built shelters made of plastic tarpaulins or corrugated sheet metal, which is unbearable under the present heat. We also feel crippled by this extreme heat and it is only possible to get things done if we go at a slower pace. We are waiting for the longed-for monsoon rain to cool everything down, but at the same time we are worried about landslides and other disasters occurring.

On Thursday, 28.5.2015 we were able to set off as planned on our tour to the Langtang region in the Rasuwa District, for 7 days in all. On the day before our departure we were fully occupied with our preparation for the trip, and shopping. Together with Dr. Rishi and Badri, from the Ayurveda Health Home, we bought some fleece blankets at an 'outdoor' shop in Kathmandu. We were given 100 blankets as a donation from the Ayurveda Health Home. In addition, we (Sunaulo Sansar NGO) bought another 100 blankets.

We handed 30 blankets over to our trekking/climbing guide, Mingmar Sherpa, and our porter, Pemba Gelu Sherpa, for their home villages in Okhaldunga and Solukhumbu. We took 170 blankets with us to the Langtang region for distribution in the village of Thulo Shafu. In the evening we pooled our efforts and loaded all the aid supplies onto one of the typical 4-ton, brightly painted, Nepalese trucks.

Early in the morning we set off on our way from Kathmandu to Thulo Bharku with the jeep and truck. We took the route in the direction of Pokhara taking the turning off in Galji. We were already able to see some devastated and badly damaged houses in the local areas of Kalimati, Naikap and Thangkot on the outskirts of Kathmandu. Some of the houses had simply collapsed between the rows. Next to them were some

makeshift emergency shelters of wooden beams, corrugated steel and plastic tarpaulins. The large plastic tarpaulins from UK Aid and US Aid had sometimes been used for other purposes and hung in front of the shops as protection against the sun. This is also a way of using aid supplies, or rather misusing them?!

The further we went in the direction of the River Trisuli, the more dreadful were the sights that awaited us. Stones, rubble, debris and dust. The houses had collapsed like a house of cards, and there were heaps of stones along the roadside, one pile after the other, and makeshift shelters out of plastic tarpaulins, bamboo sticks and corrugated steel.

As regards aspects such as hygiene, and the fact that the monsoon would soon be here, we were wondering what the 'toilet' situation looks like in the villages. We subsequently bought some spades in Trisuli so that we could dig some makeshift toilets if necessary. In addition we loaded two huge boxes of soap on the roof of our jeep.

The drive from Trisuli to Thulo Bharku was no longer adventurous, or should I say, it was less adventurous than usual. There still had not been any landslides on the stretch that winds along the mountain slopes, contrary to the regions on the other side of the valley. There the earthquake had triggered numerous landslides and the villages of Danga, Hakubesi and Mailung had to be evacuated. The people found refuge near Trisuli and during the monsoon they will be living in tents and huts of corrugated sheet for the time being. Whether the villages will ever be able to be inhabited again is doubtful. On the way we frequently saw fully-loaded trucks with rice and other aid supplies for the inhabitants of the Langtang region. After 6 hours' drive we eventually reached our destination, Thulo Bharku (1,800 m).

First of all we went to look at the devastated and badly damaged homes of our team members, Lakpa (porter), Pema (porter) and Nima (guide), and we took photos and documented this. After this we still had a trek of two and a half hours to the village of Brabal (2,300 m). Our aid supplies were transported uphill by mules and porters. We sent some tarpaulins directly by jeep to Shafru Bensi. If the monsoon does not devastate everything and we are lucky, we will be able to use the newly made, gravel road from Sano Bharku to Brabal on our next visit.

When we arrived in Brabal it was already pitch dark. Nevertheless, we were able to appreciate the good quality of the shelters (refuges) that had been built. We had not expected this. Wood-fired stoves, beds and cooking utensils that had been salvaged from the rubble, contributed towards making the temporary housing feel a little bit

more cosy. The talent for improvisation of the Nepalese people is simply unbeatable. Thomas, our friend, spent the night at the refuge hut of Temba's niece, Bibi. Temba and I pitched our tent next to the temporary hut of Temba's parents.

The next day (29.05.2015) we made a tour of the village in order to look at and document the homes that were damage/devastated. In Brabal (VDC Shafru, Ward No. 2, Rasuwa District, in the Langtang region) there is a total of 31 homesteads with 117 residents (53 of them children and 11 seniors) and 3 communal buildings. Our survey of the individual homes showed that 87% of all the houses are completely devastated and uninhabitable. The remaining homes are so badly damaged, that it was impossible to occupy the rooms. The houses are 20 years old, on average. The Buddhist monastery that was decorated inside with new paintings a short while ago, has completely collapsed. This is similarly the case for the former school building which was no longer used. Only the communal shower house built by Sunaulo Sansar in 2014 as part of the village development project, has remained undamaged.

In the mountainous regions, the houses are typically built of stones. Cement from Kathmandu has to be transported laboriously by truck and porters to the villages. Very often there is not enough money for this. Subsequently, the stones are simply placed one on top of the other or bonded together with mud. Wood is expensive and in Langtang National Park it cannot be obtained without permission. When building the emergency shelters the village inhabitants helped each other. This is evident from the good condition and quality of these refuges. In addition, most of the families also had temporary toilets next to their huts. We found this most impressive.

At the end of our tour we noticed, with concern, the long, deep cracks in the ground below the village. We also saw other deep, long cracks in the ground on our way from Brabal to Thulo Shafru. The paths from Brabal to Shafru Bensi and from Shafru Bensi to Thulo Shafru are also covered with cracks and crevices.

In the evening, all the village dwellers had gathered together and we were able to distribute the blankets that had travelled a long way from Germany, and the soaps. Our aid supplies were very gratefully received.

In the meantime, we have established contact to the geologist Lea, via our voluntary helper, Janine. As a result, we had a better possibility of assessing the situation with the cracks and crevices. Lea has already shown us some possibilities for daily observation of the cracks during the monsoon season. We shall be training some of the village dwellers so that they are prepared in the case of an emergency.

In order to make the information in this Newsletter easier to follow, we shall be reporting on the days that follow and the distribution of the aid supplies in the villages of Thulo Shafru and Shafru Bensi in our next Newsletter.

Namaste,

Temba & Sabine