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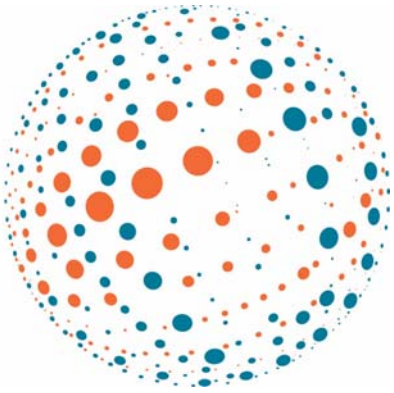
COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE HUMAN CONDITION



Nepal Earthquake 2015

Emergency Telecommunications Connectivity to Early Operations

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Overview

- The Earthquake
- NetHope's Role
- Getting there
- Why communication maters
- Information as Aid
- The communication need in Nepal
- Initial Response
- Lessons learned
- Suggestions for moving forward
- Questions

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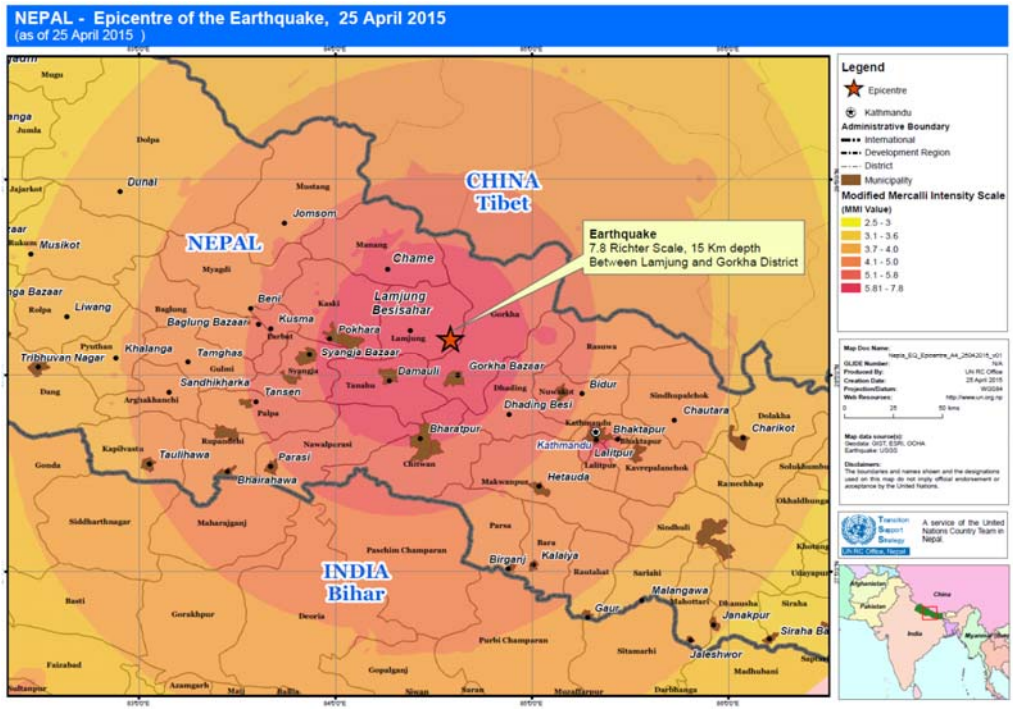
The Earthquake



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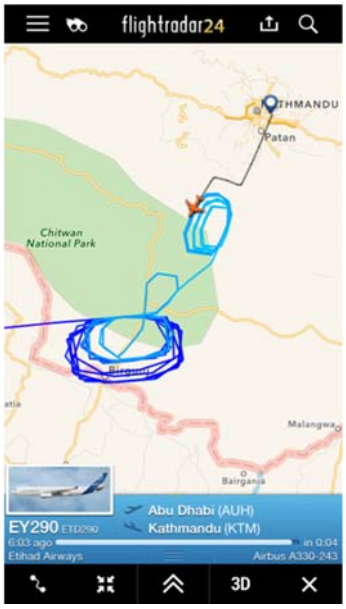
NetHope's Role

- We work within the UN Cluster System – in the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC) to support our 43 INGO members
- The ETC coordinates all Information and Communication Technology related aspects of the response
- We work with the lead agency for the ETC – World Food Program (WFP), and other ETC members, emergency.lu, Ericsson Response, and MSB.
- One team, one set of equipment, one goal.
- My role was coordinating all NGO related activities within the ETC

Getting there



- The main bottleneck in getting there was Kathmandu airport
- It could only handle six planes on the tarmac at once
- Only one forklift available to unload planes
- My plane got there about 24 hours after the earthquake after circling for 5 hours over Kathmandu

Why communication matters?

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Information is aid

- Without access to information we will not be able to send aid where it is most needed
- Without access to information we will duplicate efforts
- Without access to information coordination will not be effective
- UN has stated that information is as crucial as food, water, and shelter
- Yet the enablers of information access – communication equipment often gets blocked or de-prioritized by governments

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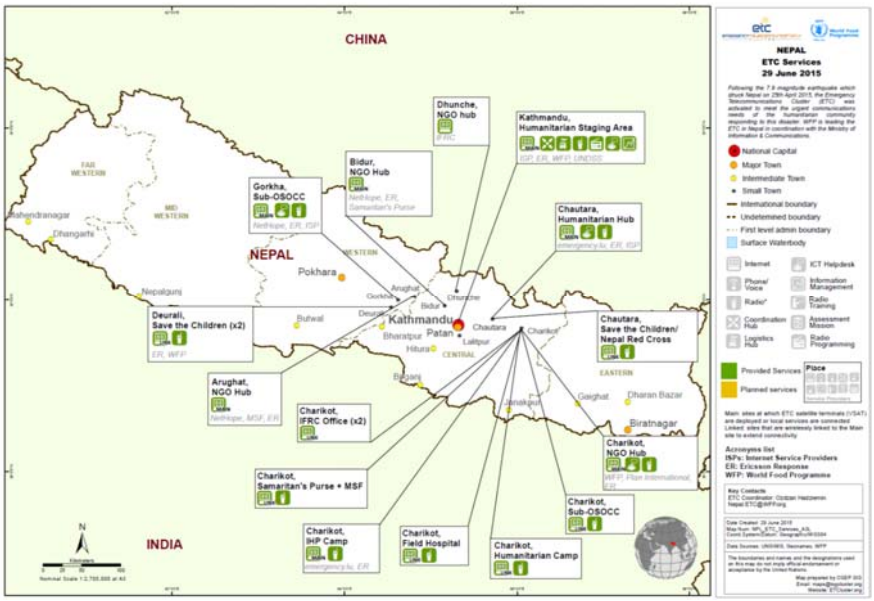
The communication needs in Nepal



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Initial response – first 72 hours

- Our team hand-carried in mobile equipment
  - BGANs – mobile satellite internet terminals
  - Satellite phones
- Provision of connectivity at key coordination hubs in Kathmandu
  - Humanitarian Staging Area
  - USAR Staging Area & Coordination Hub
  - OSOCC
  - Foreign Medical Team Coordination Hub

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Initial Response – First week

- Establishment of connectivity at key coordination hubs outside of Kathmandu
  - Utilizing fiber from local ISP
  - Utilizing rapidly deployable VSAT technology
  - Utilizing pre-positioned VSATs
- Assessment of connectivity situation in worst affected areas

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Initial Response – Second Week

- Installation of satellite terminals at key coordination hubs across the affected areas
- Work with local providers on re-establishing more permanent services
- Equipment started getting stuck in customs…

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Lessons learned

- Positive
  - Great collaboration with the government and local private sector is key
  - Leverage ETC for stop-gap before permanent solutions are restored
  - Pre-positioning of equipment enables rapid response
  - Working as "one team" was crucial to a rapid response
  - Tampere convention works the first 10 days
- Negative
  - Communication equipment de-prioritized on flights
  - Equipment not brought in during the first 10 days is still stuck in customs
  - Disconnect between those handling ICT in government and those handling disaster response

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Suggestions moving forward

- Make ICT part of your disaster response plans
- Sign and follow the Tampere convention
  - Put the framework in place for granting temporary exceptions to import rules
- Pre-position communication equipment
- Work with ETC on preparing the ICT aspects of future response
  - Establish contacts before the emergency hits
  - Include ETC and ICT aspects in exercises
- Include the local private sector in your plans
  - Mobile Network Operators
  - Internet Service Providers

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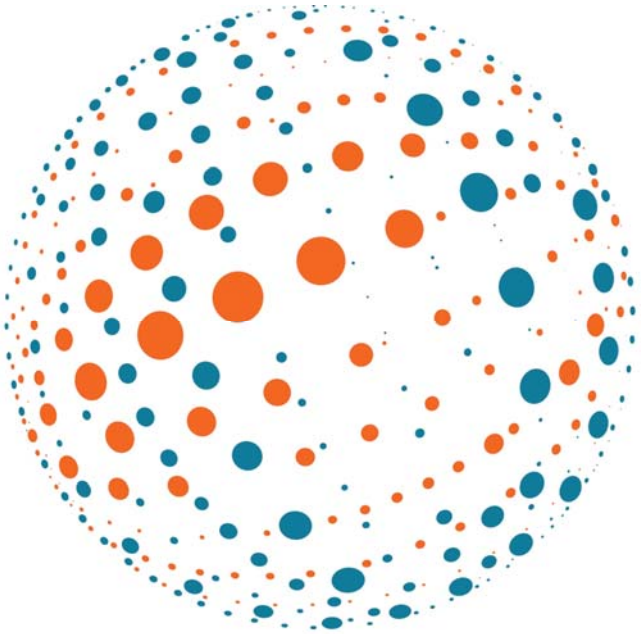

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