

Latest Assessment Report
Visit of Earthquake Affected Areas
6-8 Nov 2005

Background

1. A three member team of KLWT volunteers comprising of Dr Ayaz Khan, Dr Khan Nawab and Jawad Khan visited Bagh, Sudhan Gali, Jhelum Valley, Muzaffarabad and Mansehra from 6 -8 Nov 2005.

Purpose

2. The purpose of the visit was to get the pulse of the situation in order to assess the requirement of relief goods in the affected areas after a month of the earthquake.

Observations

3. **Weather**. The temperatures have started to plummet. Woollies are being worn by women, children and elderly people even during the day hours. Working men are however seen in shirts who too wear chadars (shawls) or jumpers at dusk. The rains on 9 Nov have brought in snow to the surrounding mountains. This has necessitated the use of warm quilts and blankets for those living under canvas. Although tents are still liveable in many parts but with more rains and snow even on the surrounding mountains will bring about an uncomfortable drop in temperatures. The use of naked fire in tents is another linked fatal menace that the locals have suffered from.

4. **Roads and Routes**. All major roads and routes in the area have been opened less the road leading into Neelum Valley. However, aftershocks and rains, trigger land slides which result in blocking the routes every now and then. Army Engineers have placed dozers all along the main routes to reduce the time of opening in case of any closure. Neelum Valley is the only inaccessible area so far. This route has been totally destroyed and practically a new one is being constructed by Army Engineers. Till 9 Nov, this road was opened till Ghorri Bridge for light traffic only and no accurate assessment was available about the time frame when it will be fully opened. The overall security of routes has improved as no untoward incident of looting etc was reported from any of the area visited. The main improvement has come about due to the presence of soldiers in

vulnerable areas and more so due to the fact that the locals have moved out of the 'desperation' mode signifying easy and ready availability of relief goods to majority.

5. **Behaviour of Locals**

a. **Psychological / Mental.** Fortunately majority of locals were found in good mental health with an overall positive demeanour. They were seen more active and out of the initial shock and pain of the calamity. Women were into their domestic routine, men were seen salvaging belongings and construction material from their fallen houses whilst children, in good health and spirits, were seen either playing on their own or the older ones taking care of the younger ones to spare their parents with the routine chores. The disruption in school going routine of the children was definitely found amiss as they found the ongoing holidays out of context. Majority of schools in the area do close for two to three months for winters in Dec but the unfortunate present closure was not leaving good memories for them which may necessitate restarting the routine before these close for long vacations. With teachers busy with their personal tragedies, collapsed buildings and images of passed away school mates, a need of great effort was felt in this area.

b. **Reconstruction.** The locals, after salvaging construction material from their fallen houses, were now seen re-using it to erect an improvised shelter for the oncoming winters. Wooden logs and corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheets were proving to be the main stay for the reconstruction process. Although many have been given tents but these will not be adequate for the winters, therefore the availability of a proper shelter is a MUST! As all are busy reconstructing their houses so the non availability of skilled labour including mason, carpenter etc was also felt in the area. This problem further got aggravated with the lack of basic tools like hammer, saw, crow bar etc as many locals were seen with bandaged fingers who were struggling to use either self improvised tools or with all that was available.

c. **Tent Villages.** Two tent villages were visited- Balakot and Jabba. Army Headquarters coordinating the tent villages was also visited in order to gain

information about the future plans. All plans being drawn up by the coordinating Headquarters were based on the assumption that people still living in the high and snow bound areas will ultimately move down as the weather gets more severe. This assumption got a mixed response once the views of the locals were attained. Their reasons for not moving vary from having personal belongings under the rubble, fear of losing the compensation money if away from the site to emotional and cultural ones like privacy or having women amongst strangers and last but not the least- the ‘Uncertain Future of Tent Villages’. These feelings persisted despite the fact that all tent villages were very well organized and catered for everything including protection, food, sanitation, water and medical facilities. Unfortunately, a political angle to the uncertainty of tent villages could also be felt after the team interacted with local elders, politicians and coordinators. Ironically, the picture is likely to get clearer as the winters get severe! On the other hand, the overall situation in those tent villages which mushroomed on their own (Jalalabad, Muzaffarabad) was very dismal. The lack of sanitation and proper layout of the camp is likely to result in many medical and social problems.

Conclusions

6. **Requirement of Relief Goods**. The overall requirement of basic relief goods like food, woollies, quilts and blankets may remain the same but it does undergo some changes also. The requirement of **working tools** for reconstructing houses in one such example. This could only be identified after having detailed interaction with the locals. Additionally, it was felt that the provision of tent catered only for an immediate short term requirement and the construction of an improvised shelter for sustaining the harsh winters is a necessity. Therefore, supply of **CGI sheets** or **corrugated fibre glass sheets** must be explored. Additionally, the doctors and medical camps operating in the area confirmed that the thrust of need for emergency medicines as required during the initial days had diminished. The main requirement of medicines now remain limited to main hospitals to which all the seriously injured have already been evacuated like District Hospital Rawalpindi, PIMS and Rawalpindi General Hospital. This requirement may

change if , God forbid, any epidemic breaks out in the affected areas like diarrhoea etc the reports of which have already started coming in.

7. **Provision of Tents**. The importance of **tents** cannot be ruled out. These form the first port in storm and provide the initial psychological and moral support for the homeless. Therefore, it was felt that the demand of tents is still there in all areas and this demand is likely to increase as Kaghan and Neelum Valleys open fully. Here the question of the success of tent villages in low lying areas does arise, but if necessary preparations are not done for establishing tent villages and the exodus of people from higher grounds to tent villages start then it will not only be too late but will further complicate issues. Meanwhile, the best course is to provide tents to the **farthest of tent villages** to ensure a nearby availability of a shelter as high as possible.

8. **Rehabilitation**. This process is an ongoing one which will take a considerable time before it gets completed. Presently, the **opening of schools** can help all, especially children, in getting back to normal life and expedite the rehabilitation process for the whole family. This entails detailed and concerted effort encompassing psychological education for both teachers and students, rebuilding school buildings including furniture etc and above all the will to restart the whole process.