

Post EQ Update - Our Situation/Work on the Ground - 20 15 November, 2015 (bi-monthly)

General:

The unofficial India embargo is ongoing following the promulgation of the new Constitution on 20th September – almost 2 months! This is now having very critical



negative implications on hospitals, medicine supply, people's health; schools and education; businesses; and all offices. Likewise day-to-day life is grinding to a halt. Everyone is finishing off any reserves of gas, petrol, kerosene they had. Most of us have resorted to cooking with firewood – but even that is hard to come by at exorbitant rates. But look at the poinsettia and marigolds at Tewa, and farmers have just about finished harvesting rice in the adjoining Tewa fields! Government is expanding its jumbo cabinet and already mud-slinging at each other – help us all! Also leadership no longer nowhere knows how to be civil and use compassionate wisdom, rather they are enticing and provoking along with yellow journalism – this may not do good to anyone!

Nepalis at large stoically celebrated their second biggest and the most favoured festival Tihar during 11 – 14th. The festival entails cooking the best meals one can, celebrating/worshipping brothers and sisters, the ma-puja or worshipping of the self in Newar communities, singing "deusi/bhailo" (traditional songs where groups of singers go blessing house to house and in return received goodies and money), and of course worshipping Goddess Laxmi, crows, dogs, and cows/dung. This is also a festival of lights! Following this soon is the equally major festival of the Tarai/Madhes – the Chhath! At this rate it is going to be very, very difficult.

Today at 6pm, the Nepali Prime Minister gave an address to the Nation. The following were the highlights: unprecedented national challenges seriously affecting education, health, industries, and day to day lives; bigger psychological setbacks than the EQ owing to the blockade; requesting the Indian Government not to further damage relationships; asking the Madhesi leaders to mutually help bring an end to their protests that have most negatively setback the Madhesi people; accepting emergency support from China no indication of harming relationships with India;

opening of other entry points along the northern borders; and working/preparing towards more self reliance in the coming days through an end to load shedding within a year and the popularization use of solar energy. From today the Nepal government has even begun to officially sell firewood.



Tewa/NA:

Both organizations feel stretched but continue doing what is required: Annual General Meetings, renewals of organizations with the Nepal Government/s, and audits. The Tewa Center is lucky to have some visitors during these days – a small group of Russians via an

activist friend Rina stayed for 4 nights, and the TC could also host a workshop for Tewa/NA staff on sexuality and reproductive rights conducted by **TARSHI/India**.

A visit of **Professor Han Verschure** and **Marleen Iterbeke** (renowned planning engineer/architect) from Leuven, Belgium (who helped literally save/salvage Aanandi three years back), agreed to support Tewa by designing/planning the new building and landscaping on the new annexed land that Tewa has now bought. Han's student here, Joint Secretary Mr. Padma Mainali at the Ministry of Urban Development kindly assisted with helping Tewa by providing the services of architect Srijana Das Chaudhary – who is translating the design carefully thought out by Han and Marleen (please see picture above). Considering that completing the blue prints and all this work, as well as getting legal approval will take some time, it is good that we are preparing now. We need bigger discussions within our team, but this was not to be missed opportunity! Once we have a design and a good estimated of the necessary construction work, it will enable Tewa to additionally fund raise for the residential building yet to begin.

There was no choice for Tewa, but to buy this little piece of land adjoining the Tewa compound on the western side (to ensure no high-rise overshadowed the TC), and also partially use a portion of it to build **Aanandi 3** to ensure we have enough residential spaces especially since we lost the residential Annex we had created in the Aadhar building which was affected by the earthquake. Once more an unexpected opportunity arose – and it had to be taken-up! The challenge for Tewa now is going to be ensuring funding for developing the new piece of land. All of these will of course enable the sustainability of Tewa and its main work of grant making to women's groups all over Nepal, as well as model an environmentally sustainable space. Grantee representatives who visit are already inspired to raise their own bar when considering building/spaces.

Case Study:

1. NA weekly peace kitchen is now increasingly difficult to maintain. As desperation grows, about 8 to 10 dedicated NA youth volunteers find it hard to sustain the on-going peace kitchen – the workload involved in cooking over



firewood and cleaning up is too much. Yet this past week again over 150 people were fed, but the Tihar holidays stopped one of the peace kitchen.

Renu Yadav arrived with her children, but is not willing to take any other support than financial. She is confident that she will be able to support herself when the baby grows-up a little. But as a little more than a child herself at having just touched 18 years, little does she now comprehend that raising two little babies and giving them a good education and being self reliant herself in an alien city may be more challenging than what she can now comprehend. Nagarik Aawaz will be vigilant with her and keep a watch so that there is always a safety net for her.

Conclusions:

How vulnerable the world is today and how we are all at high risk/s. Even the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon has spoken regarding the unacceptable officially unannounced embargo on Nepal, as have other world leaders. Yet when some Government leaders become like ruthless bullies, what can be done! At the other spectrum the horrific Paris bombings! Any small group of people in official or unofficial capacity can cause unprecedented suffering to large numbers of innocent people. We pray for Nepalis – may they have fortitude/courage and we pray for the French people who are directly affected or not – may they have courage and the ability to heal. Where has love gone!

Finally, both organizations, Tewa and NA are meeting on the 19th to assess the PEQ work, and see how it can be strengthened in the given context.

