



Koshi River Floods in Sunsari and Saptari

OCHA Situation Report No.7

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This situation report is based on information received from the OCHA Office in Biratnagar, OCHA staff in Sunsari and Saptari Districts, UN Agencies and humanitarian partner organisations.

I. Situation in Sunsari and Saptari Districts, Eastern Nepal

- 1) **Flooding:** Fifteen days after the initial breach in its eastern embankment the Koshi River in South Eastern Nepal continues to flow along its new course, thus inundating four Village Development Committee areas in Sunsari District, and heavily affecting hundreds of villages south of the border in Bihar, India. Although the water level in the river has gone down somewhat in recent days, it still discharges the majority of its waters through the gap in the sand-ridge forming its embankment, and meanders in an uncontrolled manner southwards.
- 2) In Nepal, the VDCs Hariपुर and Shripur are still almost entirely under water, as are the Western wards of the Kushaha Paschim and Laukahi VDCs. The East West highway remains impassable, thus cutting off Koshi and Mechi Zones from the rest of Nepal. The damage to infrastructure has been significant, and some of the damaged facilities (eg. power lines and transmitters) in India have had an adverse affect on Nepal.
- 3) Technical assessments and repair efforts are being conducted by both the Government of Nepal and various Indian governmental bodies. The Government of Bihar as the lessee of the Koshi barrage installations is cooperating with the Nepal authorities in view of repairing the damage in the embankment. As this essentially means to redirect the river into its previous riverbed, the challenge is enormous and initial attempts to close the gap have been unsuccessful so far.
- 4) The Chief of the Water-Induced-Disaster Control Office in Biratnagar was quoted as saying that the embankment has collapsed not due to the high water level but because it had become fragile. The gap in the crumbling embankment has since widened to 1,600m, which rules out the possibility of 'plugging' the embankment in the immediate future. Instead, repair works now focus on preventing any further collapse of the breached banks.
- 5) At the same time, efforts are underway to find a temporary alternative route for the East-West Highway, possibly bridging the Koshi River further north from the breach. Current estimates project that a significant reduction of the flood waters cannot be expected before the beginning of the dry season towards the end of the year.
- 6) **Displacement:** The Government (Ministry of Home Affairs - MoHA) currently estimates that the number of people displaced by the flood has reached 50,000.
- 7) In Sunsari district (east of the new river course), 31,000 displaced people are in identified camps and another 14,000 displaced are with host families in areas assessed. It is estimated that there could be an additional 15,000 with host families in areas not yet assessed.



IDPs setting up a temporary shelter with donated sheet and bamboo along the highway in Saptari district. Photo: OCHA

- 8) A significant portion of the displaced population are persons displaced by the flood from their homes in India. In southern VDCs, it could be as much as 75%. Overall, it is estimated that 30-40% of displaced people in Sunsari are from India. More than 10,000 people are believed to have entered from India.
- 9) It should be noted that many people have trans-border family ties. The influx of Indians may be that for many flood affected Indians, the closest high ground lies on Nepali territory, as well as an expectation that relief assistance may be within closer reach on this side of the border.
- 10) In India, reports of displaced and affected persons has reached several millions. Relief and assistance efforts are underway, and shelter camps have been set up for the flood victims.
- 11) Additional flooding, on a much smaller scale, occurred during the past days at Sunsari River, a smaller tributary of the Koshi. On 29 August, floods were reported in VDCs Dhuskighat, Bashntapur and Kaptangunj VDCs in Southern Sunsari, which caused additional people to be displaced. Many of them are now sheltered in secondary schools and community halls in Dewangunj, Kaptangunj and Dhuskighat.

II. Humanitarian Response

- 12) **Ongoing and completed assessments:** Initial assessments by the Government and aid agencies have been completed, and the relief operation is in full swing. All available assessments are being shared with relevant counterparts and are posted on the UN Information Platform designated floods website. There is, however, still a shortage of assessments on outlying areas, which includes islands in flooded VDCs as well as areas outside shelter camps.

- 13) **Actors on the ground:** The Government continues to take the lead in coordinating the relief efforts. The District Disaster Relief Committees (DDRC) of Sunsari and Saptari are operational. A regional disaster coordination committee has been set up in Biratnagar, which is led by the Joint Secretary of the MoHA responsible for disaster relief to reinforce the government's response on the ground. At central level, the Government coordinates through the Central Disaster Relief Committee, chaired by the Minister of Home Affairs.
- 14) UN agencies as well as humanitarian organizations have followed developments closely from the outset and have mobilized a full-fledged coordinated relief effort on the ground. (See the Press Release of the RC/HC of 29 August.) Working through a cluster system and coordinated, with the help of OCHA's presence in both districts, in daily contact group meetings, services continue to be extended to the flood affected population with a focus on shelter, food, water and sanitation, as well as health services.
- 15) UNICEF, WHO, WFP, UNFPA, OHCHR and UNHCR continue to deploy staff to the affected areas. OCHA has set up a temporary presence in both Saptari (Rajbiraj) and Sunsari (Inaruwa). The Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator is planning to visit the area in support of the relief efforts on Friday, 5 September.
- 16) The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) has taken a lead role in the mobilization of volunteers, collection of data, registration, provision of relief efforts, coordination among agencies and provision of first aid services for displaced persons, among other things. Its reports on shelter population are posted on the UN Nepal Information Platform.
- 17) Coordination meetings take place regularly at district level in various formats. In Sunsari, coordination meetings are held daily at the OCHA Satellite Office in Inaruwa with a wide range of participants including the LDO, UN, I/NGOs, NRCS and government line agencies. The agenda includes a situation update, update from the taskforce/cluster leads (including gaps), cross-cutting issues and next steps. Specific or technical issues are referred to the taskforces/clusters. In Saptari, the DDRC convened on 1 September with UN participation. For 2 September, the DDRC is planning for a much wider meeting of government line agencies, relief agencies, political parties, and media to provide updates, review progress and discuss further plans. Separate cluster meetings (for protection, health, education and WASH) have been held.
- 18) On 29 August, the LDO of Sunsari endorsed eight taskforces/clusters (food; nutrition; health; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; protection and child protection; shelter; site planning) each with a focal point from the line agencies, which enhances the technical coordination and coverage of each specific sector. All organizations providing relief support are expected to coordinate through this mechanism, which reduces the number of coordination meetings. The Taskforce leads are expected to report through to the LDO daily at the contact group meeting. The LDO clarified that the task forces are created not only to assist with the new resettlement site but also for the overall coordination of the relief operation in Sunsari.
- 19) **Emergency Shelter and NFIs:** The NRCS Sunsari District Chapter reports that a total of 26,733 displaced people of 4,513 families (13,484 male and 13,249 female including 11,691 child of under the age of 14) have been counted and are taking shelter in the 28 temporary shelters in Sunsari District.
- 20) In Saptari, a total of 22,751 affected people of 3,365 displaced families (NRCS) are taking shelter at Bhardaha, Portaha, Joginiya-2 and Hanumannagar VDCs. In addition, displaced persons remain on the high ground areas along the Koshi dam and the highway which are accessible only from Saptari over the barrage. Altogether in Saptari and West of the breach, 1,800 families are at the Eastern embankment, 617 families in 4 newly established camps, 500 families with host families and 1,800 people are in 7 schools (Oxfam).
- 21) The government has decided to vacate the temporary settlements along the highway and on the embankments in Sunsari district (East of Koshi barrage) in order to get better access to the site of the breach. As some of the displaced people living in these areas were unwilling to relocate to Saptari as proposed, the authorities have organized 8 new shelter sites just off the embankment (approx 100-200m apart - essentially one long continuous settlement). Some of these areas are waterlogged, and it has been uncertain whether the area is suitable for settlement. At present, it appears unlikely to flood.
- 22) Of the three sites identified so far in Sunsari for the interim resettlement of flood displaced people only one has received the authorities' approval and works have begun. Due to local residents' objections the two other sites suggested earlier are being reevaluated. In the meantime, with the assistance of an IOM expert, a third site has been identified. That facility is a government-owned prison in Jhumka on the road between Inaruwa and Itahari) which is also known locally as the "Chinese camp". The site has been approved as the first relocation site for flood victims.
- 23) The LDO has formally requested all the cluster members to start the interim work in the new site immediately. Humanitarian agencies reiterated the need to have minimal required facilities in place before initiating any movement to the site. The WASH cluster will oversee the construction of 200 toilets targeting 4,000 people. The food cluster is ready to distribute relief materials in close coordination with the government authorities from 3 September.
- 24) A single resettlement site is not sufficient, however, and an additional site needs to be identified. Agencies have suggested that some of the idle facilities in the Biratnagar Industrial area might be appropriate and proposed to explore the feasibility of those options.
- 25) A proposal to provide a cash package of Rs. 15,000 for people displaced who wish to leave the shelter camps on a voluntary basis was discussed but not approved at the central level.
- 26) **Food:** Most of the local social organizations/agencies that were providing mass cooked food in different shelter camps have started to leave. In the coming days, people in camps will be encouraged to prepare food on their own. NRCS still has have 35 metric tons of foods in storage. However, according to WFP reports there is a lack of cooking utensils in most of the shelter camps.
- 27) **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH):** The LDO of Sunsari has raised concerns on sanitation problems in all the existing camps and requested everyone to help on

this issue while monitoring camps on a regular basis. Even though several agencies have constructed toilets, they are not sufficient to meet the need. In order to prevent outbreaks of disease, there is an urgent need to enhance sanitation facilities and raise hygiene awareness in the camps.

- 28) Almost all toilets in the shelter camps have now filled up with human waste. The Sunsari authorities have requested additional assistance from neighbouring municipalities and 2 garbage collection trucks have been mobilized as of 1 September.
- 29) In Saptari, some hygiene kits including water purification drops/tablets have been provided but distribution is incomplete. Furthermore, awareness raising on how to use the water purification items is required. Open defecation is increasing with delay in latrine construction.
- 30) **Health:** In particular in Saptari, public health problems have been increasing due to unavailability of medical facilities in the camps and on the embankment. Since 25 August, MSF has been providing basic health services in temporary shelters in Saptari. MSF is currently looking for a site to establish a health camp/cholera treatment shelter.
- 31) It has been pointed out that ambulance services are available only during day time, creating a problem for evening or late hour emergencies. NRCS has been providing such services but lacks the funds for ambulance services around the clock.
- 32) The lack of adequate care for pregnant women in some shelter camps continues to be of concern.
- 33) **Nutrition:** WVI has begun to provide children's food ("*Leeto*") across all camps. As of 1 September, it covered 25 shelter camps in Sunsari. WVI also requested that all malnutrition cases be referred to it. Save the Children US has distributed ready to eat meals to 2,433 children under five years of age in Sunsari.
- 34) **Education:** It has been suggested that classes for children from grade 10 need to start in the camps and that teachers from the government should be mobilized. Save the Children has completed a "safe and child friendly space training". Additional 3 days training of trainers (ToT) is underway at the District Education Office (DEO). Five child friendly spaces and stress management have been set up in shelter camps.
- 35) **Protection/child protection:** The cluster has provided child protection orientation in all the camps in Sunsari. Two members from each camp (one flood victim, one camp management committee member) will also be trained. UNICEF has provided four community-based psychosocial workers for camps.
- 36) The Protection cluster has expressed that the Code of conduct on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) needs to be disseminated, awareness needs to be raised and a reporting mechanism for violations established. The document is posted on the UN Nepal Information Platform and is being distributed in the field by OCHA and protection cluster members.
- 37) The cluster in Sunsari has also discussed the issue of missing/unaccompanied children, an area NRCS in which NRCS is also a key actor. As of now 18 such cases have been reported. Whether these children are missing or unaccompanied is not always immediately clear.

- 38) **Logistics:** NRCS is registering the beneficiaries in both Saptari and Sunsari and continues to distribute beneficiary cards to the affected families.
- 39) **Security:** Security is urgently required at shelter construction sites, during registration and relief distribution. There are reported cases of looting in Sripur and Haripur. A number of security incidents have been reported in recent days, which negatively affected the relief operation. On 29 August, members of the WFP relief team were assaulted in one of the school shelters in Bhardaha, Saptari. WFP has said that it would require the government to provide 30 security personnel if relief work was to continue. The CDO subsequently agreed to provide necessary security during relief distribution. In another incident in Saptari, Oxfam staff witnessed looting which was not prevented by security forces and raised the issue with the authorities.

III. Appeals and Additional Funding Needs (Short Term Relief Requirements)

- 40) The Government is preparing a 9-month relief programme and assessing recovery and rehabilitation needs this week.
- 41) Based on initial assessments, WFP estimates that it will need an additional US\$ 3 - 5 million in contributions to support short to medium-term food needs and recovery support for flood victims.
- 42) According to the initial estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, more than 390 animals have died due to the floods and a further 30,000 have been affected. FAO is appealing for US\$ 1.8 million to buy fodder, concentrates, deworming medicines, and to carry out carcass disposal activities in support of the flood affected farming families.
- 43) UNICEF is appealing for US\$ 1.7 million to provide shelter, safe water, sanitation facilities, hygiene kits, school and student kits, emergency health messages and psychosocial support for flood affected families.
- 44) WHO is appealing for US\$ 853,150 to procure essential emergency/outbreak response medicines for Saptari and Sunsari districts, buffer stocks for Kathmandu and pre-positioning of international emergency health kits in all the regions.
- 45) In order to provide rapid and flexible funding to local actors, primarily NGOs, in times of emergencies and disasters, OCHA appeals for US\$ 600,000 for an emergency response fund.
- 46) OXFAM is appealing for US\$ 35, 270 for procuring shelter items, fuel wood, and to cover transportation costs of both IDPs and shelter kits in Saptari.
- 47) IFRC has issued an appeal for 1,361,802 Swiss Francs (approx. US\$ 1.23 million) for shelter kits and non-food relief items for 5,000 affected families.

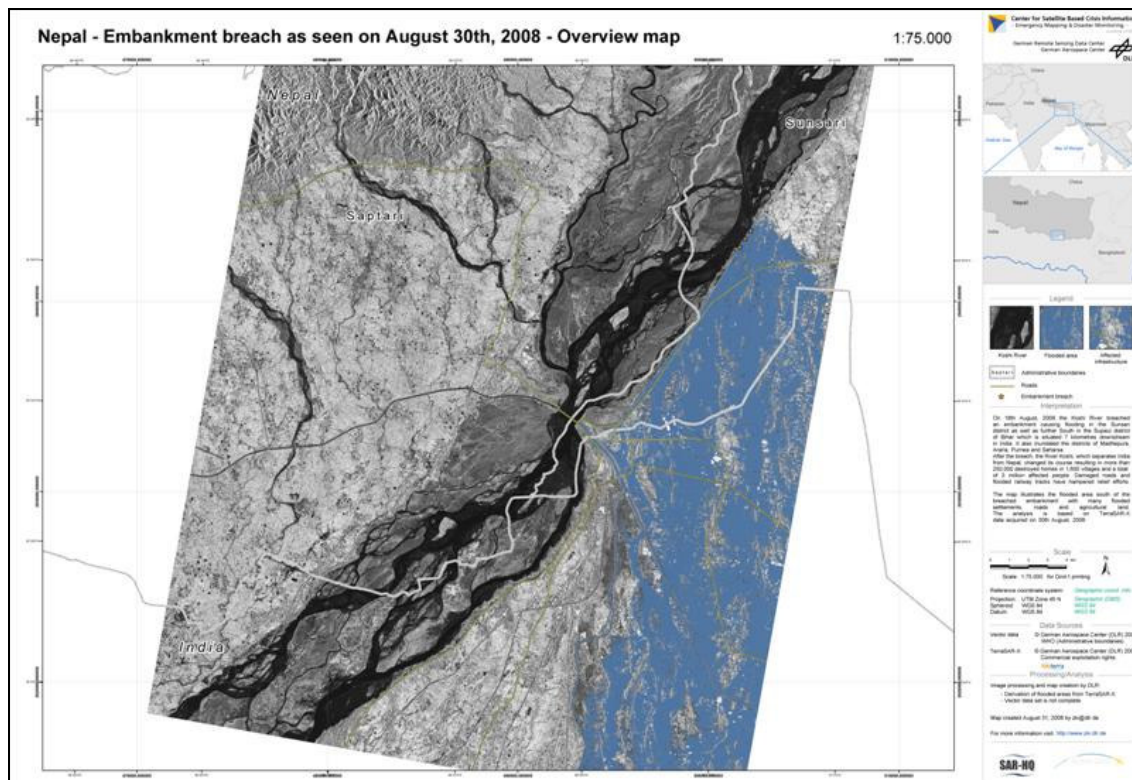
V. Coordination

- 48) An operational floods coordination meeting is planned for Thursday, 4 September, 9.00am, OCHA Kathmandu.

- 49) Due to the on-going relief operation, it has been decided to postpone by one week the Strategic Planning session on disaster preparedness and risk reduction (originally scheduled for 4 September) to Thursday, 11 September. The agenda and format remain the same, with an additional focus on transferring capacity to national actors. Location has been changed to the UN conference room.
- 50) The next meeting of the Protection Cluster is scheduled for 4 September, 1530 hrs, at OCHA Kathmandu.
- 51) At the request of OCHA and UN ESCAP the Charter Space and Major Disasters¹ has been activated through the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs in Vienna to support the emergency response efforts of the flooding of

the Koshi river in Nepal. The European Space Agency is the Project Manager for this activation. Map products as produced will be available on the Charter website http://www.disasterscharter.org/disasters/CALLID_218_e.html

- 52) All available assessments, reports, photos and tools (including the IRA toolkit) can be accessed at the FLOODS section on the Nepal Information Platform <http://www.un.org.np/floods/index.php>
- 1) *Charter on Cooperation To Achieve The Coordinated Use Of Space Facilities In The Event Of Natural Or Technological Disasters Rev.3 (25/4/2000).*



Satellite image of the flooded areas in Sunsari and neighboring Bihar of 30 August. This and other recent satellite images are available on http://www.zki.caf.dlr.de/applications/2008/nepal/156_en.html. Credit: German Aerospace Center.

For more detailed and updated information please visit the Nepal Information Platform (<http://www.un.org.np>) or contact:

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