

By

Darshana Tuladhar

It happened again—my phone started buzzing, nudging me out of slumber. In a sleepy haze I looked down and read, “Another 7.4 Earthquake hit Nepal.” I was awake.

I Googled “Nepal earthquake” for confirmation and there it was: USGS reported that a 7.4 magnitude earthquake occurred in Nepal, 50 kilometers outside of Kathmandu. I did the rounds checking in with family. It’s another night out in the tents for my family and thousands of others across Nepal. I did the rounds on social media and news sources attempting to get a clearer picture of the events that had unfolded.

Is this déjà vu? Not too long ago I experienced a familiar scenario. My friends and I were enjoying a night out when many of us were bombarded with messages on our phones simultaneously. “Guys, call your families, there has been a huge earthquake in Nepal.” Our carefree smiles melted away and transformed into looks of concern. The rest of the night was spent contacting family members and combing through Twitter and Facebook trying to get the latest updates. That was the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck on April 25, 2015; the epicenter was 48 kilometers northwest of Kathmandu.

How can I help?

After processing the flood of emotions I felt after hearing such news, my visceral reaction was “What next? How can I help?” Providing relief to those who lost basic yet vital living conditions was an immediate goal. But once those basic needs are met, Nepal will face a future of rebuilding both physically and emotionally. I am not a disaster expert, and as a second-

generation Nepali living in the United States, I do not possess deep knowledge of Nepal's political terrain to navigate such territory. So how can second-generation Nepalis, or anyone for that matter, contribute and help to Nepal's recovery?

There are many ways to solve a problem. After the first earthquake hit I observed my family and friends contribute in a number of different ways, from providing material goods such as tarps and tents to distributing loaves of bread in the streets of Kathmandu. The way I chose to help was through funding and creating awareness. Blink UX graciously agreed to host a successful fundraising campaign for Nepal through Mercy Corps.

Nepal

Swaymbhu, a holy site in Nepal.

Having been so close to a cause that literally hits home and going through the fundraising process myself, I gathered a few insights that, in my opinion, are essential to successfully raising funds for disaster relief:

1. Fostering trust
2. Strengthening community and extending ties
3. Raising awareness

Fostering trust

Creating trust is a crucial element that permeates multiple facets of fundraising. It is not uncommon for people to be wary of fundraising campaigns for disaster relief. I was skeptical, confused, and overwhelmed navigating through the plethora of relief and fundraising options. As a fundraising host I wanted to encourage potential donors to contribute by eliminating these perplexing feelings and by establishing trust. In order to accomplish this I had to provide a fund that reassured patrons that their money and efforts were going to be used properly and as intended. To establish this reassurance an organization must have credibility. Credibility can come in different forms, such as being a well-established organization like Mercy Corps, being endorsed and vetted by well-respected publications like *The New York Times*, and through personal connections from friends or colleagues.

A personal connection to a cause, which often times can be a relative, friend, or colleague endorsing an organization, can heavily influence whether one gives to a particular cause. The donor believes a significant amount of trust that the endorser has done their due diligence in researching a sound and trustworthy organization or fund. Blink UX and I decided on Mercy Corps after some research as it met the aforementioned qualities of decreasing feelings of uncertainty by being a trusted, credible, and well-vetted organization. Another factor that influenced our decision was that Mercy Corps had already established itself in Nepal and was one of the few organizations that were already providing relief on the ground the first few days after the initial earthquake struck. I felt confident with our decision to support Mercy Corps after seeing that multiple publications had listed it as a reliable disaster relief organization. Mercy Corps followed up with Blink UX through personal phone calls and emails that updated us about its progress in Nepal further strengthening our trust and connection.

Strengthening community and extending ties

During times of hardship, tragedy, and adversity drawing strength and forging bonds from and across social networks is essential to heal a community reeling from a disaster. The Nepali diaspora across the United States has come together in a unified effort to provide relief and

rebuild Nepal. In Seattle the Nepali community has banded together and has helped raise thousands of dollars in funds for the earthquake survivors. There have been numerous events in the Seattle area that have brought awareness, support, and fund relief for Nepal. Recently I went to a fundraising event at Rain City Burgers where the owner generously donated all of his proceeds from that day. He successfully raised over \$10,000. It is not enough to solely rely on fellow ex-patriots that live outside of Nepal to help with funding efforts. As social creatures, humans do not belong to one singular community but multiple networks. It is during times of hardship that humans are able to connect our communities and strengthen ties toward a single effort.

I not only belong to a Nepali American community but I am fortunate enough to be part of Blink UX, where we are family. We are a close-knit group that encourages and supports one another in all aspects of life. When the Blink UX campaign was created a goal was set to raise a certain amount of funds in two weeks. Not only were we able to reach our goal in a week, we were able to exceed it. Because Blink UX has a culture that nurtures creating strong relationships, empathy, and understanding, we were able to have a successful outcome. My fellow Blinkers and Nepali families continue to be supportive and generous in their donations.

Raising awareness

A significant amount of fundraising occurs immediately after an event and while it is still prominent in the media. Unfortunately, we live in an age where if something is not trending it is not relevant. Providing food, water, and shelter to the earthquake survivors will be needed in the upcoming weeks. Therefore it is imperative to raise awareness to keep the momentum of aid funds flowing. Nepali groups across the world have been achieving this through street rallies that march through major cities, candlelight vigils, and leveraging the power of social media.

As time passes the memory of the earthquakes' destruction diminishes. But as Nepal embarks on a long journey toward recovery it is important to keep these events relevant. I ask that you increase awareness and Nepal's visibility by extending the happenings in Nepal to your different social networks and communities. It is crucial that we all band together and continue to raise awareness, funds, and efforts toward the recovery of Nepal and its people.

At Blink UX we have reopened our Mercy Corps campaign, a trusted partner for raising funds, to raise money for Nepal. Please consider donating and helping rebuilding a nation that is in ruins.

Nepal continues to feel the aftershocks of the earthquakes as residents begin to regroup and rebuild. The people of Nepal are shaken, but they are strong and I have no doubt that they will have the resolve to see through this and rebuild not only a nation, but their spirit. Human beings are incredibly strong and resilient. We are able to experience the most tragic events yet we rise time and time again. I have faith that the people of Nepal will do the same.

Darshana Tuladhar, when not observing and analyzing human behavior and interactions, enjoys birds, playing the violin, drinking root beer, and salsa dancing, preferably simultaneously.