

# VISIT REPORT TO GORKHA DISTRICT

## Kathmandu



-----Around 140 KM blacktopped road towards west

## Gorkha Bazar (district headquarter of Gorkha district)



-----55 KM gravel road to the North

## Aarughat (second biggest market of Gorkha district)



-----15 KM gravel road to the North

**Sotikhola** (usually say **Soti**. It's the last stop of vehicles. Here the equine are loaded with the commodities required for the people residing in 16 Village Development Committee of the districts. This is the place from where the main trekking trail of very famous Manaslu Conservation Area starts along the riverbank of Budigandaki River.)



**Hawadanda** (around 1 and half hour walking to the North, from that place we found impossible for us to move forward because of land slide and falling of the stones from hills)

There are 1650 equines owned by 125 equine owners and around 190 handlers. AHTCS-Brooke has been implementing equine welfare project in this district since 2008 with extensive services. The epicenter of 7.9 magnitude earthquake of 25 April 2015 was in this district.

We attempted many times to visit the district but we could not manage it because of the security reasons. Continuous aftershocks with the epicenter in and around the district, land slide and stone falling from the cliff of the hills were major hindering factors for our visit. We visited the site on 14th day of the earthquake. We (Lekh Nath, Nabin and Buddhalaxmi) just returned from visit to the equine populated area of Gorkha district. We had not ever seen such a devastating natural calamity in Nepal. We shocked with everything caused by the tremor over there.

We reached to Arkhet met Aaita Ram Gurung, the treasurer of the equine owners' committee. He was the key person providing detail information about the condition of the animals and the rescue attempts done by the committee. After a conversation about an hour he guided us to Soti and Hawadanda.

Almost all equine owners completely lost their houses except a few of them having strong enough to withstand the tremor. At the time of tremor Aaitaram and his many friends were one and half days walking distance far from Soti. He returned to Soti on 27 April from the same trail with full of risk because aftershocks were continuously coming and stones were falling from the sharply steep hills and the trail was damaged due to landslides. It took two and half days to him to reach Soti. During his difficult journey he saw and counted dead bodies of 203 mules, 54 people (including 5 foreigners, 2 equine owners and 5 equine handlers). He also mentioned that many people and equines were struggling with life with their some parts of body crushed by huge stones. Till now (09 May) most of the dead bodies of people and animals are not disposed because no one is able to get there. Even the helicopter cannot pick up the bodies because there is no place for landing. Just one day before (08 May) police with support from local people reached to the place where we reach to see the decaying body of a mule. They buried the dead body of the handler (12-13 years old boy) of the same mule (photo attached herewith). All dead bodies of people, equines and their handlers near to the villages were disposed when they start decaying with the fear of human health concerns and disease outbreaks.

As I already shared in my previous emails that there are many equines entrapped in between the huge landslides. Initially, we had assumed that they are getting at least grass to graze but as per him the animals cannot move down or up from the road because they are trapped in the steep hill. Many of them are still having the loads of the good that they had carried. The equine owners' committee members and the labors hired by the committee have started rescue operations. As per him they already rescued 6 groups of animals (55 equines). There are 16 groups of animals still waiting to get out of the trap. He also mentioned that tomorrow the committee members/equine owners with hired labors will move towards the upper hills to release the trapped animals.

After a fortnight of the devastating earthquake various organization and government started to distribute tarpaulin (tents), blankets and foods. There is no one to care about the animals except the owners whose equines are in trouble. But the committee is fully supporting their members to rescue the animals from trap.

We felt extremely sorry to hear about the deaths of our beneficiaries and so many animals. We were totally disturbed when we saw many spots where we lost the animals/equine owners/handlers struck by huge stones. Tears started rolling down of the eyes when we saw a mule decaying with his load still in his back (see attached photo). We disposed the carcass properly. The equine owners guiding us to that place suggested to return to Soti. We could not manage to move forward because of personal safety.

We discussed this situation with Dr. Bidur and found no other way of instant support rather than financial support for managing the rescue of the entrapped animals. We decided to provide them NRs. 100,000 (around 1000 USD). This amount will be mobilized by the equine owners' committee and handover during general assembly which is going to be organized in near future after collecting all the animals. Because of the summer season and hot weather even the grasses are very scanty. Every day the number of the animals coming from the upper hills is increasing so there is chance of feed scarcity for the animals after a few days/weeks. We also handover some emergency medicines (pain killers and dressing kit) to Aaita Ram to use whenever required.

Currently we have been contacting equine owners' committee members and gathering the information. We are in regular contact with Dr. Bidur and updating about situation. We would be pleased if you and other concerned personnel manage to have early meeting with Dr. Bidur for making decision about our further support to the animals and their owners/handlers.

Dr. Lekh Nath Adhikari

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