

# And the Walls Came Tumbling Down

BY TAMARA BHANDARI, N-194

Just before noon on Saturday, April 25th, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck in Gorkha district, about 50 miles to the northwest of Kathmandu. Although much of the international attention has focused on Kathmandu and Mt. Everest, where the earthquake triggered an avalanche, the rural districts of Gorkha, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Dhading, and Rasuwa were harder hit. Hundreds of aftershocks, including dozens of magnitude greater than 6, kept millions of people from sheltering indoors for days. Now, more than a week after the quake, those whose homes are still standing have returned. Others are still waiting for help, as the Nepali government helicopters aid into rural villages at a painfully slow pace. And millions do not have homes to return to at all.

All Peace Corps Nepal staff and Volunteers survived the quake, although the homes of some were destroyed. After sheltering at the US embassy for a few days, those who could not go home were found hotel rooms. PC-Nepal is sending all current Volunteers back to the United States while the staff restarts operations. With luck, the Volunteers will be back in country within a few months.

Friends of Nepal responded to the quake by launching a short-term campaign to raise money for hospitals in the Kathmandu valley. We chose Patan Hospital, a private hospital which was working around the clock to provide medical care to all comers free of charge. Five days after the quake, we received an email from the surgical director, Dr. Jay Shah, saying that the situation had finally stabilized to the point that they were able to send some of their doctors and nurses home, to tend to their families and get some



Destruction in the Kathmandu valley. Credit: Hilmi Hacaloğlu via Wikimedia Commons.

rest. These dedicated professionals had been living at the hospital for days, treating the injured and feeding the hungry, all without asking for a paisa. We felt strongly that supporting this hospital was one of the best ways we could make a positive impact, so we appealed for help, and you came through for us. We raised over \$60,000 in five days, which we are sending to Patan Hospital less than two weeks after the quake hit. This is what getting aid to the people who need it really means. Patan Hospital is not set up to receive individual foreign donations, so they had no reason to think that hundreds of people from the other side of the world would help them treat the injured. They just did their job, thinking they would save lives now and figure out how to pay for it later.

Now we turn to ways to help the recovery effort. International interest in the earthquake is already waning. There are not likely

to be any more miraculous rescues of people trapped for days and days without food and water. Now people whose homes are ruined, animals are killed, and fields have been damaged must figure out what to do next. Those of us who know and love Nepal must stand ready to provide support for local, Nepali-led efforts to rebuild. Friends of Nepal has been in contact with our Nepali partner organizations, discussing projects and determining where we can have the most impact. We are still accepting donations (click on Donate at [www.friendsofnepal.com](http://www.friendsofnepal.com)), which we will put towards recovery efforts in Nepal.

In addition, the larger Peace Corps Nepal community has also stepped up to raise money for their communities and affiliated organizations. The following PC-affiliated groups would welcome any support you can provide.

**LEARN ABOUT EARTHQUAKE  
RELIEF EFFORTS ON PAGE 7**

# Imagining Nepal

## REVIEW BY KATE TRAN, N-194

When Peace Corps left Nepal in September 2004, many of us wondered if and when Peace Corps would return. While we were speculating, Martin David Hughes was creating an imaginary group of Peace Corps volunteers, a fictional N/199, for his debut novel *Jaya Nepal*. The story follows Benjamin Creed, a member of the first group of volunteers to return to Nepal following Peace Corps' departure. Creed, a 25-year old Berkeley grad and son of Peace Corps volunteers is a nurse assigned to work at a hospital in Pepsicola Townplanning on the outskirts of Kathmandu. (Yes, there really is a place called Pepsicola Townplanning; I found myself googling it to find out if it existed. Likewise, the yeti stew and Sagarmatha roast pork mentioned in the book really are recipes found in *The Himalayan Gourmet*.)

Benjamin's devotion to his work as a Peace Corps volunteer is frequently distracted by thoughts of what might have been with Adriana, a student he met while operating the campus shuttle service. This fixation on the past is revealed through flashbacks that serve to open most chapters of the novel. Benjamin's love for Adriana comes across as

obsessive and even stalkerish, as he decides to locate her in India without giving any advance notice. I had to wonder: Is this an intentional metaphor, the giant India overshadowing and diverting attention away from its smaller neighbor Nepal?

Despite Benjamin's impressive accomplishments as a Peace Corps volunteer, much of the text is devoted to his excursions around Nepal, including a hot air-balloon ride with his counterpart doctor, watching Nepali Underground Wrestling Foundation matches, and trekking and whitewater rafting with his fellow Peace Corps volunteers. So if you're looking for any hints on how he got his community to convert from white rice to brown rice, you won't find it here. You also won't get any details of Benjamin's mother's Peace Corps experience in Nepal in the 1970s, which could have been a very interesting then-and-now comparison and added to the depth of the story.

However, what you will find is a collection of fascinating characters who aren't always who they seem to be. These characters include a British expatriate called Nepali Pete who mines for treasures off the corpses floating in the Bagmati River, a sadhu known as the Milk Baba, a cake-shop

**JAYA NEPAL** by Martin David Hughes, Simi Books, 2014.

owner whose private lounge hosts notorious criminals, and other members of N/199 with some larger than life personalities. The book's focus centers on Benjamin's relationships with people in his community and those he encounters. In doing so, he illuminates the lives of Nepali porters and highlights the work of Maiti Nepal, a real NGO which provides support for Nepali women and girls rescued from sex slavery.

For never having been a Peace Corps volunteer, Hughes does a remarkable job of depicting what life is really like for PCVs. Each chapter contains multiple potential discussion points and conversation starters. Some examples: Is it less intimidating to dance in the U.S. or in Nepal? How prepared did you feel following PST? Did being a PCV confer rock star status in Nepal? Would you splurge 5,000 rupees on everyday shoes when chapals would suffice? What motivated you to join Peace Corps and how did it change your life? I highly recommend this book to Nepal PCVs, and anyone who would like to better understand life as an expatriate in Nepal.

### CONTACT US

Please check our website for updates and an electronic version of this newsletter at: [www.friendsofnepal.com](http://www.friendsofnepal.com). To get involved in any of our programs email [info@friendsofnepal.com](mailto:info@friendsofnepal.com).

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### CONTRIBUTE

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. Pictures from Nepal can be used to illustrate stories and interesting stories from your Peace Corps days may be written up in Memories from Nepal. Updates on your own life, your Peace Corps friends, or Nepali staff members will be included in the Group Notes and Staff Notes sections, and contact information for Nepali staff is always needed.

Send any submissions to [nepal.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:nepal.newsletter@gmail.com).

To advertise in this newsletter visit [www.FriendsofNepal.com/Info/Advertise.cfm](http://www.FriendsofNepal.com/Info/Advertise.cfm).

### MEMBERSHIP

Our small organization relies on membership dues for most of our operating budget. There are two ways to join: 1) Renew your membership to the National Peace Corps Association ([www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)) and choose Friends of Nepal as your "Affiliate Group." 2) Join Friends of Nepal directly ([www.friendsofnepal.com](http://www.friendsofnepal.com)). You can join on the website or use the form below. Basic membership to Friends of Nepal is \$15. If your membership is not current please renew today. Your support goes a long way.

Please make your check out to Friends of Nepal and mail to: Suzie Schneider, 181 Mary Jo Lane, Sequim, WA 98382. You can also use a credit card on the website: [www.friendsofnepal.com](http://www.friendsofnepal.com).

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ PCV Group Number: \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBERSHIP ONLY: ☐ \$15

MEMBERSHIP PLUS DONATION: ☐ \$50 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$100 ☐ other \$\_\_\_\_

VOLUNTEER: ☐ Newsletter ☐ Grants Committee ☐ Fundraising

☐ Blog ☐ Other



# A Moment of Encouragement

BY LAURIE VASILY, N-170



I'm pretty sure it was in October of 1990 when our group of Peace Corps Trainees was scheduled to do our post visits. We had chosen our posts ourselves and I was excited that my friend Shanan would be my nearest PCV neighbor, although I was most definitely nervous about the relative remoteness of my post in Sermakot Village in Dailekh district.

We were a decent sized group as we headed west on the night bus to Narayanghat, as there were also friends with us who were headed toward Dang. It's hard for me to remember all of the details now, but I think we parted ways in Narayanghat and our numbers

dwindled to three PCTs headed to Surkhet and Dailekh with the two language trainers who accompanied us.

In Surkhet, our numbers dwindled even more when we parted ways with Elaine and Shashi and Shanan, Daulat and I headed out early in the morning along the trail leading to Dailekh. Having grown up in the suburbs of Boston, I had never really experienced hiking and camping beyond some 'camping light' experiences as a young Camp Fire Girl.

I was excited as we headed out on the trail and Surkhet disappeared into the distance. The trail started uphill through the most incredible rhododendron forest that I had ever seen in life, but I very soon realized that Shanan's marathon-running and dancing background allowed her to hoof it up the hill at a much more fast pace than I could endure.

Soon, I was huffing and puffing. Red-faced and frustrated, it seemed that I wouldn't be able to go any further even as I knew very well that at last check, it was still another three hour walk to the ridge. I plopped myself down on the side of the road, perched on a knotted tree root protruding into the path and my thoughts wandered to speculation of how many days it would actually take me to reach my home in Melrose, Massachusetts from this apparently godfor-

saken tree root in the middle of nowhere, on the way to the back of the beyond.

I could no longer see Shanan along the trail as she had made such quick progress up the hill, but Daulat ji had seen me sit down and came back along the road to check on me. 'Sabai thik chha?' he asked with a worried look. Over the course of our training period thus far, I had grown to respect this gentleman immensely. In that moment that I construed as my complete failure, he met me and spoke kindly. He provided just what I needed to get back up and keep moving.

And now, even 24 years later, when I feel overwhelmed or unable, or when I feel that I just can't go on, I remember that moment and that kind and gentle man, and just enough faith is restored so that I can get back up and keep moving. I will be forever grateful for the million kindnesses that have been extended to me here in Nepal and forever grateful that there is a program called the US Peace Corps which brought a suburban girl like me to a place like this. I can't imagine what my life would have been had Daulat not helped me on that day.

*Laurie Vasily is an RPCV (N-170) who still currently resides in Nepal, working as the Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission.*



Top: Daulat Karki and Laurie Vasily, 1990. Above: N-170 swearing-in ceremony, 1990. Right: N-170 volunteers Laurie Vasily, Elaine Lander and Shanan Fitts during post visit with Daulat Karki in Surkhet, 1990. All photos courtesy Laurie Vasily.

# You Can Still Go Home Again

BY JIM PESOUT, N-71

“Someday I’d like to go back to Nepal.” How many RPCVs have had that thought, said those words out loud to their wives or husbands or children or friends? Ann and I used to say that all the time. Thirty-five years ago we met in Nepal, married when we returned, got jobs, raised a family, watched ourselves grow old—old-er we’d like to think—and then one day that spirit of adventure and purpose that had carried us to Nepal in our youth, repossessed us, and we did it: we decided to go back. I retired from teaching, she took two months of vacation, and we bought a round-trip ticket to Kathmandu. I’d like to say it was just that simple, but you know it wasn’t. It was, though, once again in our lives, the hardest endeavor we’d ever love.

What made it hard is that Nepal has changed: trails have become roads, villages have become towns, towns have become cities, whole regions have been electrified out of their old existence, familiar haunts are gone, people carry their goods on buses instead of their backs, mobile phones are ubiquitous, porters listen to music as they travel, tea shops are now restaurants, and that cot you used to sleep on on the trail is now a two-story hotel. Things have changed. Why did we not realize that over a decade or a lifetime this would happen? Maybe Thomas Wolfe was right and, in truth, you can’t go home again.

In a series of Friends of Nepal newsletter articles I’m going to tell you about Mahabir Pun, Dr. Saroj Dital, Kovid Nepal, the Community Development Eco-trail, the Legacy Project, and the Rural Surgery Project. Let me tell you why. It’s because these people and these endeavors are trying to preserve, protect, and enhance rural life in Nepal and need our support in the form of financial assistance, networking, communication, and, yes, our bodies to see that they accomplish these goals. They need us in all the ways we can help them. And, if I might be so bold, we need them, too. We need them because

they are continuing the work that we started a decade ago—or two or three or four. And, they are supporting and preserving the Nepal that you remember, the Nepal with trails and villages and water buffalo roaming the land. So, it turns out that Wolfe was wrong after all. You can go back home—in spirit, in support, and in person. I don’t think of this just in terms of what you can do for Nepal but also what Nepal can still do for you—once again give you a sense of purpose and an adventure to go along with it.

Let’s begin with Mahabir Pun because a lot of things get start with him. If you join us in these endeavors, you’ll meet Mahabir at some point whether at his social awareness restaurant in Kathmandu or at your home when he asks if he can sleep on your couch to save some money while he’s the keynote speaker at a community development conference in your home town. When you first meet him you’ll probably have the same reaction Ann and I did: this is as uninspiring and uncharismatic a person as we’ve ever met. Then you’ll get to know him and find out that he is a visionary of humble background undaunted by political revolution, government bureaucracy, rough terrain, bad weather, illness, and inertia. He is the kind of person Nepal needs to take them back to their future. His vision is of a Nepal where villagers—not just Kathmandu *wallahs*, not just tourism entrepreneurs—are empowered by technology, organization, effort, and spirit, to build their lives around their village, to create employment opportunities beyond growing rice, to keep their children from scampering off to the closest town in search of work, and to maintain their cultural identity while they integrate themselves into the twenty-first century. In other words, he wants, in many ways, the same things that we want for Nepal—to thrive with peaceful simplicity in a changing world. Mahabir has already begun to accomplish that for his home village and a dozen villages in the surrounding area. But it takes effort. Fortunately, no one works harder and



longer than he does. I want you to trust me and Ann on this. Mahabir is the answer to the question ‘How do I support this country I love?’ and be assured that my efforts and financial support will reach fruition. Supporting Mahabir’s work is how.

Nepal has few accessible resources to draw upon for national development. And quite a few hindrances, the dysfunctional government being the major one. There’s plenty of hydroelectric potential and as you travel in Nepal you’ll see that lots of communities have taken advantage of that and built mini hydroelectric power stations to improve but not drastically over-modernize their quality of life in the village. There’s tourism which, in certain areas where trekking is a spectacular experience, has brought in much needed foreign capital. Other than that, what does Nepal have except hills, mountains, trails, villages, farming, and a deeply-rooted, peaceful culture. These are the raw materials that Mahabir had to start with so that’s where he began. To us it may have looked bleak; to Mahabir, it was a gold mine.

Here’s what he did. He started by recreat-



ing the map. Literally. He took the traditional trekking map that displays a well-traveled route from Pokhara to Gorehpani to Tatopani to Jomsom and redrew it to show a new route through places most of us have never heard of: Khopra, Mohare, Nangi, Tikot, and Shikha. These are villages and none of them has a dozen privately owned hotels and restaurants with profit as their bottom line. These villages have community dining halls that the villagers built with their own hands and funds from any number of international organizations that believe in Mahabir's vision for Nepal, have confidence in his unrelenting drive, and help fund his projects. Mahabir also convinced villagers that if they are going to go into the hospitality business, they'll need accommodations for the travelers so they'll need to convert a room here or there into sleeping quarters or build a small structure to house the travelers. That was also accomplished. Now there are a dozen villages in the Parbat district that can accommodate tourists without commandeering their culture. Mahabir knew that change was going to happen so he wanted to find a way to manage it to the advantage of the rural communities. The villages were in place, the map was drawn, and the word was out. Would people come? Yes, they would. Not in the anthill droves that you witness along the established trekking routes where there's a biscuit *pasal* and a fancy noodle shop every five minutes down the trail. But they are coming. And, even better, these travelers are seeing the real Nepal that we remember from our experience.

At around \$40 per day per person for guide services—only two-thirds of what trekking agencies charge a client for a trek on the *mul baato*—young couples from Denmark, middle-aged men from Australia, groups of women from France are learning about Nepal from local Nepalis rather than hired tour guides. When Ann and I walked these trails we even ran into a man from Texas. You could see that cowboy hat bobbing along the trail from the next ridge over. They're coming and they're coming back. And here's the best news. Part of that \$40 goes toward the schools, the health clinics, and the community's development needs. Part of it also goes toward maintaining the dining halls and

rooms. The toes these villagers have dipped into the waters of tourism is helping to build and sustain the village. Instead of building a hotel so they can send their kids off to private school in Kathmandu, they're building an infrastructure so that all the kids in the village can get a great education right there in the village. This was part of Mahabir's vision and in the midst of a revolution, he made it happen. Now with the country's politics more stable, the vision is becoming reality.

What can you do? Two things. First, stay informed about ways that you can support the rural people of Nepal. Friends of Nepal is a great way to do that because they are connected there. This organization is dedicated to helping people realize that, small as it is, seemingly insignificant as it may appear, Nepal is a country with 28 million people, most of them still rural, and they have needs and their children have needs. And people can help. You can help and in so doing, you'll

extend your term of Peace Corps service to a lifetime. Suzie Schneider will accept your contribution and make sure it gets to the people who are making good things happen for the people of Nepal. And I give you my word that if you donate it to Mahabir's Community-Managed Ecotrail Project—one of a number of project you'll hear about in the coming months—100% of it will get to the people who will benefit from it. The second thing is for you: do whatever you need to do to get back to Nepal sometime in your life. Travel these trails, volunteer along the way, help spread the word about what's happening there. Remember the Peace Corps's third goal: To promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. You can do that by staying informed and spreading the word or, you can bring it back home by going to Nepal and seeing it again for yourself. You can go home again. Let's make sure you always can.



All photos courtesy Ann and Jim Pesout.

## Learn More

For more information about Mahabir Pun and his various projects in Nepal, visit:

[www.himanchal.org](http://www.himanchal.org)

[www.internethalloffame.org/inductees/mahabir-pun](http://www.internethalloffame.org/inductees/mahabir-pun)

[www.nepalwireless.net/](http://www.nepalwireless.net/)

[www.facebook.com/pages/Mahabir-Pun/43662749774](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Mahabir-Pun/43662749774)

[www.internetsociety.org/news/mahabir-pun-receives-2014-jonathan-b-postel-service-award](http://www.internetsociety.org/news/mahabir-pun-receives-2014-jonathan-b-postel-service-award)

[www.rmaf.org.ph/newrmaf/main/awardees/awardee/profile/145](http://www.rmaf.org.ph/newrmaf/main/awardees/awardee/profile/145)

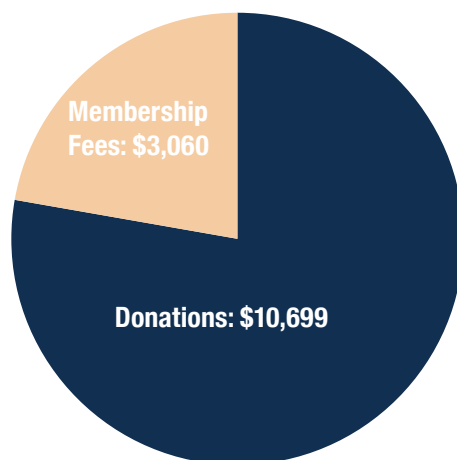
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# Annual Report 2014

In 2014, Friends of Nepal was proud to support three organizations with a long track record of successful development projects in Nepal: the Phul Maya foundation, for a project involving the restoration of a school in Hongong village; the Nepal Medical Clinic Supply Project, as part of our ongoing efforts to provide medical care to remote villages; and the Jana Sewa Community Hospital in Khotang, recently opened and run by a local NGO with a long history in Khotang district. In addition, we sent \$3000 to Peace Corps Nepal to support development projects designed and led by current Peace Corps volunteers.

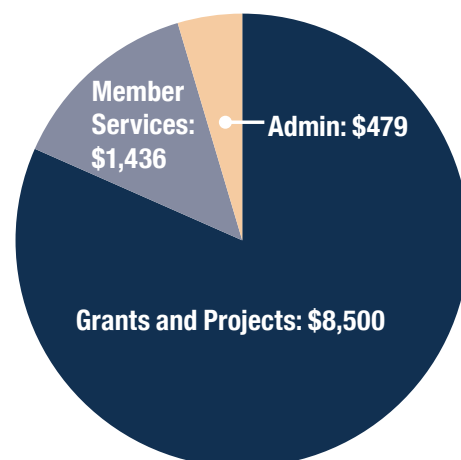
Our income in 2014 was a bit over \$13,700, with about \$10,700 from donations and \$3000 in membership fees from over 200 members. We spent a total of \$10,400, of which \$8500 went to projects and grants, about \$1400 to member services, and about \$500 in administrative costs. This leaves what looks like a net increase of just over

## 2014 Income



\$3000, but in reality it just represents a timing problem. We barely missed sending funding to Jana Sewa Community Hospital before the end of 2014; their \$3000 grant was sent in early 2015.

## 2014 Expenses



Our membership, through fees and donations, provides the resources that allows us to continuously support effective, small-scale projects in the areas which large INGOs often don't get to. Thank you for your support.

# Waiting for a Constitution

BY SHIVAJI UPADHYAYA

A year and a half ago, the Nepalese people voted in the second constituent assembly election. All the major parties promised that they would give us a constitution by January 22, 2015.

They didn't.

One of the major bones of contention was the number, geography, and names of federal states. The United Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN) and the Madhesi Front wanted federalism based on ethnicity and one Madhesh state, whereas the Tharus of the west want to have their own state. The Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxists Leninists (CPN-UML) say they are flexible on the number of states, but they dis-

agree on the names of the federal states based on ethnicity.

As the deadline approached, there was no unanimous decision. The ruling parties decided to put the question to the constituent assembly, assuming that when the small parties weighed in, the constitution would pass with two-thirds majority. On January 19, 2015, when the Speaker of the House requested a vote, the UCPN and Madhesi Front constitution assembly members stormed the rostrum and resorted to vandalism! The CA meeting had to be adjourned, and millions of rupees of damage was done. Not to mention the damage to our reputation! What a shame!

So, for Nepalese it is, "*Haatti aayo... haatti aayo phussaa*" and no constitution.

What does this do to the Nepali popula-

tion? This economic suffering, sense of helplessness and uncertainty, increasing mistrust of the party leaders and the government, seeing the public money misused and exploited, feeling like they are living in a demoralized society and a failed state?

This reminds me of the latest report of the Swiss National Bank, the deposits of Nepalese citizens in Swiss Banks stood at 84.85 million Swiss francs (Rs. 9.15 billion) in 2013. Black money stashed in there? Could we know the names of these account holders? Look at these politicians what they were 15 years ago and what they are now. Are they really for us? We are secondary after the votes that we cast. If we can live like this for so many years, why do we even need a constitution?



# PCVs and PC Staff Aid Nepali Villages

## CHAUTARA, SINDHUPALCHOK DISTRICT

RPCVs are raising money of the town of Chautara, badly damaged by the earthquake. Peace Corps trainees of groups 199 and 200 lived with families in Chautara while in training. Many of them have banded together to raise funds to support their host families and the bigger Chautara community. On their fund-raising page, you can see a 10 minute TV news video of Chautara and its environs. Two of the RPCVs are already in Chautara: <https://life.indiegogo.com/fundraisers/nepal-village-earthquake-recovery-fund-by-rpcvs>.

## BANDIPUR, TANAHU DISTRICT:

Chij Shrestha, a long-time PC staff member, has been living in Bandipur. He has posted messages and photos on his Facebook page about the fact that homes of many Dalit families there have been completely destroyed.

RPCVs Bill Hanson and John Schneider are heading to Bandipur in the next few days. Chij is accepting donations to help provide needed supplies and materials to the families there. Read Chij's posts and see photos at: <https://www.facebook.com/chij.shrestha1>

Donate money for Chij's earthquake relief project in Bandipur by sending donations to: World Education Inc., 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210, Attention: Emma Tobin for Bandipur Project/Chij Shrestha.

## GORKHA DISTRICT

RPCV Don Messerschmidt is on the Board of the Gorkha Foundation. That foundation is working in many villages in Gorkha district, one of the most hard-hit during the earthquake. Read the blog about what they have been doing on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gorkha-Foundation/191426006477>.

Money can be donated directly to the organization. Go to their web page at <http://gorkhafoundation.org/> and click on the "Donate Now" button.

## DOLAKHA DISTRICT

Educate the Children International is a small organization that has been working in Dolakha district, another hard-hit district. RPCVs Mel Goldman and Barb Butterworth are on its Board of Directors. You can donate to their relief fund for use in Dolakha by PayPal at their website: [http://www.etc-nepal.org/earthquake\\_relief.php](http://www.etc-nepal.org/earthquake_relief.php).

## KEEP US INFORMED

If you know of any other PC-affiliated groups raising funds for earthquake relief, let us know at [nepal.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:nepal.newsletter@gmail.com)



Stadium in Kathmandu. Credit: Nirjal Stha via Wikimedia Commons



Kathmandu. Credit: Krish Dulal via Wikimedia Commons





Kathmandu. Credit: Krish Dulal via Wikimedia Commons.



Tripureshwar in Kathmandu. Credit: Nirjal Stha via Wikimedia Commons.



Dharahara tower. Credit: Nirjal Stha via Wikimedia Commons.



Kathmandu. Credit: Krish Dulal via Wikimedia Commons.



British search-and-rescue team in Chautara, Sindhupalchok. Credit: UK Dept. for Int'l Dev't.



Mangal Bazaar, Patan. Credit: Simoshace via Wikimedia Commons.