

This report is issued by the UN RCHCO with inputs from its UN Field Coordination Offices and other partners and sources. The report covers December 2011. The next report will be issued the first week of February 2012.

CONTEXT

Political Update

Inter-party discussions have slowed down the pace of activity on peace process, power sharing and constitution drafting priorities. These were overshadowed by controversies regarding the Government's decision to create separate units within the Nepal Army for Madheshi, Dalit and other disadvantaged groups and to recruit an initial 3,000 soldiers from these groups. The government decided to petition the Supreme Court to review its 26 November ruling against any further extension of the Constituent Assembly, a request that the Court refused to register. Both actions caused further controversy. The dispute resolution subcommittee of the constitution committee reached understanding on a few of the contentious issues but the Constitutional Committee has submitted a proposal for more time to address the remaining ones, without a requesting an amendment to the 28 May deadline for promulgating the new constitution.

Operational Space

The month of December saw an increase in incidents affecting the operational space of Nepal's development and humanitarian partners. Although most *bandh* organizers allowed the movement of blue-plated vehicles, INGOs were often affected by the *bandhs*. Other BOGs signatories imposed self-restrictions on their movement during *bandhs* and protests.

The *bandhs* that mostly affected BOGs signatories were the nation-wide *bandh* called by the Nepali Congress and its sister organizations protesting the killing of the Chitwan Tarun Dal Chairperson; the five regional *bandhs* called by the Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLRs) between 29 December-2 January (a nation-wide *bandh* has been announced for 5 January); and the *bandhs* called by Dalit organizations during the second half of December to protest the caste-based murder of a Dalit youth in Kalikot (see below).

EMERGING ISSUES AFFECTING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Increase in IEDs noted

The number of Improvised Explosive Device (IED) incidents increased during the month of December. In the Eastern region, one person was killed when a socket bomb exploded in Sankhuwasabha on 26 December and five people, including the Superintendent of Police, were injured by an IED planted by the Khumbuwan Liberation Front (United) in Sunsari on 3 December. The increase in IEDs noted in the Far-West during 2011 continued in December with two IED incidents in Kanchanpur, bringing the total number of incidents in the region during the year to ten. Although no one claimed responsibility for planting most IEDs, the general perception is that a majority of them are linked to extortion attempts. In the Mid-Western region, two people were injured when an IED exploded in Bardiya on 12 December, allegedly planted by the Jantantrik *Tarai* Madhesh Mukti (JTMM). JTMM leaflets were found at the sites of two other IEDs in Bardiya on 23 December. IEDs were found and detonated in Banke during December, leading the newly arrived Superintendent of Police to initiate 'Operation Hunt' to improve security in the district.

Widespread protest against the caste-related murder of a Dalit youth

The caste-related murder of a Dalit youth in Kalikot triggered protests and *bandhs* by Dalit groups and organisations across the country. Observers noted that there has been a new sense of anger amongst the Dalit community and that the spontaneous participation in protests and *bandhs* seen

following the murder is a somewhat new phenomenon. Unless timely action is taken to ensure justice in cases of caste-based discrimination and violence, confrontation between the traditionally privileged caste groups and those discriminated against may become more common as well as serious in character.

VMLR protests

A Central Struggle Committee of the ‘Discharged People’s Liberation Army’, consisting of Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLRs), set forth a series of demands during the month of December. These included the removal of the term ‘disqualified’ to describe them, the timely drafting of the ‘pro-people constitution’, the ending of unemployment in the country, the assurance of proper management of the martyrs, PLA fighters who were injured or disabled during the conflict as well as making public the status of disappeared PLA fighters and the provision of relief package to their families.

The VMLRs also announced a nation-wide protest programmes, including calling for regional *bandhs* in all five regions between 29 December-2 January¹. Similarly, a nation-wide *bandh* has been called by the group for 5 January. In the Far-West the protest turned violent when agitating groups vandalized a number of public vehicles in Kailali as well as a public bus in Achham.

Although most of the group’s grievances are against the Government and their own party leadership, it cannot be ruled out that they may turn against the UN and other development partners (who are sometime seen as having provided them with inadequate rehabilitation packages and having labeled them as ‘disqualified’) if their demands are not met. In addition some demands have been made to make public the amount spent on the VMLR rehabilitation packages by the UN.

Little movement in the return of seized land and some re-seizure of land returned

Despite the formation in November of a “Land Return Facilitation Task Force” in Bardiya, and the December initiative taken by the District Administration Office (DAO) in Banke to update the status of seized land in the district, little progress has been made on the issue of land return. Land that was announced as returned by the Bardiya “Task Force” is in fact still being used by the same individuals, for whom nothing has changed. On 8 December the ‘Peasants Struggle Committee’ affiliated to the Baidhya-faction of the UCPN-M staged a demonstration against the return process and submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister requesting an end to it.

Divisions and tensions within UCPN-M district chapters in the Mid-Western region, which despite divisions at the national level had not been obvious at the district level, surfaced notably after the Prime Minister’s announcement on land return. This divide has been especially noteworthy in Bardiya and Dang with the Baidhya-faction reportedly having met with YCL cadres in Bardiya on 5 December to discuss how to stop the land return process. Similarly, the ‘establishment-faction’ of the UCPN-M was reported to have organized a meeting in Dang on 14 December to discuss strategy on how to address the Baidhya-faction opposition to land returns. Meanwhile, cadres from both factions of the UCPN-M have reportedly launched donation drives collecting money and paddy from farmers as seasonal donations to the party. Although generally an annual occurrence, the fact that people are being approached by both factions means they this year often have to pay twice.

The Baidya-faction of the UCPN-M announced that they re-captured land in Baglung, Bara, and Dhanusa districts during the month of December. On 18 December the All Nepal Peasant’s Association–Revolutionary (ANPA-R) organized a press conference in Baglung district and announced that the historical Galkot Durbar and around 80 *ropani*² of land in Baglung district had been recaptured. Although the land re-seizure statistics were questioned it was confirmed that the group has threatened to recapture land. In Dhanusa the UCPN-M Baidya faction re-captured 12

¹ The ‘Discharged People’s Liberation Army’ called for regional *bandhs* in the Far West on 29 Dec 2011, in the Mid-West on 30 Dec 2011, in the West on 31 Dec 2011, in the Central region on 1 Jan 2012 and in the East on 2 Jan 2012.

² 1 *Ropani* is equal to about 508.72 m² or 5476 sq. ft

*kattha*³ of land and in Bara 22 *bigha*⁴ a few days after the land was returned by the UCPN-M. The cadres involved in land seizure claimed to have re-captured land to pressure political parties to reach a consensus on land reform. However, local analysts point to the internal conflict within UCPN-M as the responsible factor for the slow return of seized land and its re-seizure.

The lack of successful return of seized land, as well as the re-capturing of land which is returned, continue to be a challenge for the authorities. The likelihood of increased tensions surrounding the issue remains and should be taken into consideration by development and humanitarian actors working in areas where land remains seized but also where land is returned.

Identity politics continues to intensify in many parts of Nepal

A number of groups increased their activities during the month of December, including making aggressive demands and threatening to launch armed struggles. It has been noted that as the peace process and constitution writing gains momentum, groups with weak (or no) representation in the Constituent Assembly (CA) or in Government are taking aggressive stands as a way of seeking attention, rather than as a genuine threat of widespread violence. However, such threats cannot be totally dismissed.

As noted in November, Limbuwan groups continued to increase their activities in the Eastern region towards the end of 2011. On 11-14 December the Federal Limbuwan State Council (Palungwa) (FLSC-Palungwa) organized a general strike in nine Eastern districts demanding to be represented in the State Restructuring Commission, as per an agreement signed by the Government in March 2008. According to a FLSC-Palungwa central committee member, the group considered taking the case to court to ensure the implementation of the agreement. However, he noted that they opted for a general strike because of a lack of trust in the judicial system by indigenous groups. The strike was called off after the group was invited for talks by the Government on 14 December. However, the FLSC-Palungwa remains unconvinced that the talks will lead to a positive outcome and are therefore preparing further protest programmes for January.

The Limbuwan Liberation Front (LLF) marked the 25th anniversary of its establishment on 20 December by making public its strategy to launch an armed movement if a Limbuwan autonomous state comprising the nine districts east of the Arun River is not achieved through peaceful means. The LLF published a 24-point programme on how a Limbuwan state would be run as well as a 25-point concept paper highlighting the Limbuwan's historical background and the logic behind the claim for an autonomous state. The Communist Party of Nepal-Unified (CPN-U) held a press conference in Dharan on 20 December where they also threatened to launch an 'armed people-centred revolution to bring drastic change in the country'. The General Secretary of the party stated that if the Baidya faction of the UCPN-M would split from the party then they would be ready to join them. CPN-U has two members in the CA.

Identity groups in the Far-West also stepped up their level of activities during the month of December, with the Chhetri Samaj organizing a mass meeting in Kanchanpur on 23 December and a district meeting the following day. A Chhetri Samaj representative noted that district committees have been formed in all nine districts of the Far-West and that they are extending their presence through these committees. The Chhetri Samaj is demanding that Chhetris be listed as an indigenous caste group. In November, the Government formed a nine-member task force to provide suggestions on the demand within two months. A Chhetri Samaj representative noted that they will develop the strategy after the task force's tenure ends and will intensify the protest programme if their demands are not addressed.

As previously noted, attempts by identity groups to demonstrate their strength and reach is likely to continue over the coming months as the discussions on federalism continue along with the work of the State Restructuring Commission.

³ 1 *Kattha* is equal to about 338.63 m² or 3,645 sq. ft

⁴ 1 *Bigha* is equal to about 6,772.63 m² or 72,900 sq. ft

Voter registration obstruction comes to an end in Banke

After months of obstruction and numerous meetings between the Nepal Election Commission and Madheshi leaders in Banke district, the Madheshi leaders agreed on 18 December to endorse the voter registration process. According to the District Election Office the process may last until mid-March 2012 and he noted that a record will be maintained of those trying to register but who lack citizenship certificates.

HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

A joint mission of Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), OCHA HSU, UNFCO, UNDP, UN Habitat, IOM, UNICEF, NRCS and Save the Children and led by MoHA conducted the visit to the 18 September earthquake affected districts (Taplejung, Pachthar and Ilam) during 16-24 December. The mission objectives were to assess the extent of damage and losses, response, get feedback from affected families and lesson learned regarding the disaster preparedness planning processes. The mission members compiled information from the national authorities, visited few affected sites and also conducted workshops in all three districts HQs to get ground realities. The detailed report has been prepared and already shared with all partners. The key recommendations of the mission's report are:

- There are some residual humanitarian needs of blankets and warm clothes to children and old people of the families who are staying under tarpaulin.
- The recovery needs of the most affected families are reconstruction of damaged houses using the categorization suggested by the DUDBC/MoPPW earlier. The reconstruction should be a part of a package program with mason training and awareness on the earthquake safety measures. The reconstruction work is suggested using soft loans from Government and linked with income generation activities. The soft loan program can be tied up with Food for Work or Cash for Work activities.
- The mission urges central authorities to incorporate the recommendations into national policies for an effective preparedness and response. For example, developing and agreeing on the common template for rapid assessment, developing Quick Response Team (QRT) at central level, re-standardization of the relief package, exploring a mechanism to establish District Emergency Relief Fund (ERF), downward and upward linkages of DPR plans and the involvement of VDC secretaries in the process of DPR Planning.

Cold wave: People from the Eastern and Central *Tarai* suffered from a cold wave during the month of December. At least 38 deaths reportedly occurred mainly in Dhanusha, Mahottari, Rautahat, Sarlahi districts during this period. Most of the affected are children and elderly from dalit and poor communities. Patients with colds, coughs and pneumonia increased in the local hospitals and private clinics. In response to the cold wave, the government has instructed the local authorities to launch an information campaign to spread awareness about the effect of cold wave and arrange bonfires in various strategic locations. NRCS has distributed blankets to affected communities. Most of the public and private schools were closed for a week as a preventive measure to the cold wave.

Accidental fire: There were some incidents of accidental fires reported during the month of December in various parts of the country. On 21 December, an accidental fire destroyed 17 thatched huts in Beldangi Refugee Camp in Jhapa district. Local security forces, refugee communities and locals helped to extinguish the fire and NRCS Jhapa as well as local clubs supported with NFIs to the fire affected people. A five-year-old boy of Mirul VDC of Rolpa district was reportedly killed inside a house when a fire broke out on 17 December.

Status of District Disaster Preparedness and Response (DPR) Planning: A total of 62 districts have completed their DPR Planning throughout the country by the end of December and the rest are finalizing the process. In the context of limited presence of humanitarian agencies and high vulnerability to disaster in some of the remote districts of mid and far-west region, DDRCs are reportedly seeking further support from District Lead Support Agencies (DLSA) in future. As per the Guidance Note 2011, the DPR Plan must be endorsed by the DDC Council.

Capacity Building: UNDP organized “Sahana” training in Dadeldhura covering three district Emergency Operational Centres (Dadeldhura, Kailali and Achham) in December. “Sahana” is an effective disaster information management tool that has been formally endorsed by the Government. In addition OXFAM organized a three-day workshop on Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Response Planning in Bharatpur targeting its implementing partners in the central Terai in December.

A briefing was made on the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) and issues of climate change to the Humanitarian and Development Partners of Rautahat, Bara and Parsa during a Contact Group Meeting in Central Terai. Also, CARE Nepal organized HFA sensitization workshops in Dadeldhura and Kailali districts in December.

Cluster Updates:

- Health: District Health Offices in Doti, Achham, Darchula, Bajhang and Bajura districts with support from UNFPA have prepared their health cluster contingency plans in December.
- Nutrition: The meeting of the Emergency Nutrition Cluster agreed to strengthen coordination mechanism between national and district level partners; strengthening preparedness and response capacity; update initial rapid assessment (IRA) tools for earthquake scenarios; and revise cluster contingency plan.
- Education: The education cluster organized the review meeting among the humanitarian partners and authorities on 14 December at the Department of Education in Kathmandu. The main objective of the meeting was to provide an update on the 18 September earthquake response and provide support for further planning. Save the Children and UNICEF jointly supported District Education Offices to build Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) and completed more than 463 out of a planned 687 TLCs (as of 14 December).

UPCOMING EVENTS/MEETINGS

For more details, please visit the UN Nepal Information Platform (<http://www.un.org.np/calendar/2011-10>):

3 February, Contact Group Meeting, UN Conference Room, Kathmandu (10:30-11:30)

RECENT MAPS AVAILABLE

The RCHCO IMU produced a number of mapping products, some of which are listed below and also available on the Nepal Information Platform (NIP) (<http://www.un.org.np/resources/maps>)

Nepal: Reports of Bandhs / Strike, 1 -30 Nov 2011

<http://un.org.np/maps/nepal-reports-bandhs-strike-1-30-november-2011>

Nepal: Report of Security Incidents, 1-30 Nov, 2011

<http://un.org.np/maps/nepal-report-security-incidents-1-30-november-2011>

RECENT REPORTS AVAILABLE

Some of the recent reports available on UN Nepal Information Platform are listed below.

Handover of fire safety equipment to 5 Municipalities of Kathmandu Valley

<http://un.org.np/headlines/handover-fire-safety-equipments>

Speech by Robert Piper UN Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal On behalf of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on his receipt of the Dilli Raman Regmi Peace Award

<http://un.org.np/headlines/speech-robert-piper-un-resident-humanitarian-coordinator-nepal-behalf-un-secretary-general>

Statement by Robert Piper UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator On the occasion of the handover of fire-fighting equipment and Launch of the Needs and capacity assessment of fire preparedness in the municipalities in Nepal

<http://un.org.np/HC-remarks-at-handover-of-FirefightingEquipment>

RCHCO Field Bulletin: Muslim Youths in Banke and Kapilvastu, Issue #29

<http://un.org.np/headlines/rchco-field-bulletin-issue-29>

RCHCO Field Bulletin: Insecure land tenure in Nawalparasi and Rupandehi, Issue #28

<http://un.org.np/headlines/rchco-field-bulletin-issue-28>

RCHCO Field Bulletin: Conversations about the Constitution: Views from the Far West, Issue #27

<http://un.org.np/headlines/rchco-field-bulletin-issue-27>

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