

November 2021
**Project Report: Fire Emergency relief and Response-
2021, Gamgadhi, Mugu, Nepal**



Submitted to: **Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China**
Submitted by: **Volunteer Corps Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal**

From the President

Volunteer Corps Nepal has always been faithful it's "Act First Strategy". And, we are capable to stay our word, and respond to disaster as soon as possible only due to the support of benefactor such as you – Sowers Action – Hong Kong, China. Thus, we wish to extend our sincere gratitude to Sowers Action for your contribution in support of our response to Fire affected families in Gamgadhi, Mugu district of Nepal. Your financial contribution has backed us to continue our mission of serving communities in times of need through Emergency Relief services. With the quantity we were successful in offering basic food and non-food necessities to satisfy the immediate needs of 20 fire affected families in Gamgadhi. People were delighted to experience this generosity, and to receive the support from you.

23 years old Sonam Lama lost his home due to the fire and was anxious about what to do next. He was feeling helpless due to the neglect by the authorities. When they received relief, he said "We have got no help till now. We thank you for this support. There is scarcity of drinking water also. I want to appeal for help through you."

The distribution of relief has been completed on 21st November, 2021, responding as soon as possible to the havoc caused by the fire. The residents Gamgadhi, Mugu were eminently grateful for your assistance.

Thank you Sowers Action once again to put your support in to highlights in responding to disaster.

With all our gratitude,
Volunteer Corps Nepal

PROJECT SUMMARY

PROJECT TITLE: Emergency Fire Response, Gamgadhi, Mugu, Nepal

DONOR: Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China

TARGET AREA: Gamghadi, Mugu District, Nepal

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER: Volunteer Corps Nepal

PROJECT PERIOD: 1 Month (20th November – 19th December, 2021)

TOTAL BENEFICIARIES: 20 Households

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET: NPR. 349,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year about 50 people in Nepal die of fire. Wildfire during the dry seasons and household fires are common in Nepal. A total of 12,694 fire events have been recorded between 1971 and 2018, killing 1,755 people and injuring 2,176 others, affecting 265,962 families and destroying 90,044 homes in Nepal.

A similar dreadful fire occurred in Gamgadhi, headquarter of Mugu district in Karnali Province of Nepal. The fire started from one house and caught others, which completely destroyed 20 houses in the bazar (market) area. The fire had started in Monday midnight, 15th November 2021 and it took 5 hours to Nepal Army, Nepal Police and other fire fighters to put out the fire. Mugu is one of the least developed districts in Nepal and there is no fire brigade unit in Mugu. Also, not a single fire engine is present in Mugu. No casualties were recorded however. The estimated loss is told to be 1 Billion as per the local government.

Considering the graveness of disaster and the impact of this event, Volunteer Corps Nepal together with the financial support of Sowers Action, formulated a project to support the emergency necessities of the damaged households. Emergency Fire Response-Gamgadhi, Mugu, Nepal was then implemented. The basic necessities of the displaced population was assessed in coordination with Chief District Officer (CDO), Armed Police Force (APF) and other local authorities in Gamgadhi.

The overall funding for the project was NRs. 349,000, which was contributed to VCN as an implementing partner in Nepal by Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China. The project was started straightaway in order to respond to the disaster as soon as possible.

The households were provided with the relief packages on 21st November 2021. They were supported with cash, food items and non-food items. The distribution was carried out from District Administration Office, Gamgadhi. It was conducted in the presence of CDO, Representatives from APF and National Investigation Center and community members. All 20 affected households were supported through this project.

1. Project Background:

Fire is a common occurrence in Nepal, taking a terrible toll in terms of lives and property. People frequently fall into poverty when they lose their homes, their primary assets, and the precious items contained within. Fires have the greatest potential to become hazards in urban environments. However, the occurrence of fire in rural environment is increasing recently. According to data from the Ministry of Home Affairs, there have been a total of 12,694 fire events between 1971 and 2018, killing 1,755 people and injuring 2,176 others, affecting 265,962 families and destroying 90,044 homes. In 2018, 2,478 fires claimed the lives of 87 people and wounded 342 others. In addition, 1,857 homes were destroyed and 291 were damaged, resulting in a 3.96 billion USD loss. The estimated property loss due to climate-related disasters was NPR 6.84 billion, with fire incidences accounting for almost 94 % of total cost.

A huge fire was reported in Gamgadhi bazar, headquarter of Mugu district of Nepal on the Midnight of 15th November Monday. 20 households were completely destroyed and it took about 5 hours to Nepal Police and Army to control the fire. Though there were no casualties, the total loss is estimated to be NPR 1 billion. About 70 families were displaced with nowhere to go and nothing to eat. There were 2-3 families staying in rent in those houses. Among 70 displaced families, 20 were house owners and the remaining were staying there in rent.

The incident started from a house of Lama Priest in the community. During the prayer time, he lightened the oil lamp and incense sticks. Just above the oil lamp, there was a khatak hanging – Buddhist prayer shawl. After finishing the prayer, the priest went to sleep and suddenly, the khatak was caught up by the fire from the same oil lamp and the fire spread. The houses in Mugu are usually made up of pine woods, which is highly flammable thus, it easily caught fire. Also the damaged houses were very close to the house where the fire started. So, it became easy for fire to spread from one house to another. The fire became bigger after it reached to cooking gas. Almost each houses had the cooking gas cylinder, and those burst after getting caught by fire. Those cylinders became the main reasons after the huge fire and collapse of all damaged houses.

An immediate need of humanitarian response for those displaced by fire was realized by Volunteer Corps Nepal, and thus with the support of Sowers Action, Hong Kong, China, the project “Fire Emergency Relief and Response -2021” was formulated. The fund of NPR. 349,000 was released by Sowers Action for direct cash support, food and non-food items support to the damaged and displaced households members of Gamgadhi, Mugu. The relief support was carried out on 21st November 2021. This relief distribution was for the house owners of the burnt houses.

2. Mugu District Profile and Situation Update:

Mugu is a rural district of Nepal, located in Karnali Province of Nepal. A major tourist attraction of the country, Mugu, harbors the largest and magnificent lake of Nepal called Rara Lake. It is also popular for its landscape and Rara National Park. However, these things have not yet aided Mugu in development. Hundreds of domestic and international tourists visit Mugu annually, but about 46.5% of people residing in Mugu are still under the poverty line. Mugu has 1 Municipality and 3 Rural Municipalities. The total population of Mugu is 55,286 comprising 27,261 female (49%) and 28,025 male (51%) residing in 9,619 households. Mugu has an average population density of around 18 people per square km. The average family size is 6.1. Majority of the population don't have education. The average literacy rate is about 49% (38% female and 60% male are literate). Mugu has a multi ethnic composition with Chhetri, Thakuri, Brahman, Tamang Sherpa Bhote Lama, Damai, Kami, Newar, Kumal, Sunar, Bitalu and Yogi.

Only 5 % of total areas are cultivable in Mugu. Due to low level of agricultural production, the majority of the households face acute food shortages for a large part of the year. Most agriculture is moreover rain-dependent and has low productivity. Major crops grown in the project area are paddy, millet, wheat, Barley, potato, Buckwheat and beans. 42.3% of the surveyed households have food shortages, due to limited availability of cultivable land and low productivity. Mugu ranked among the lowest in the poverty ranking i.e. 75th out of 77 districts in Nepal. Mugu is also the least connected district of Nepal.

Only 14 households have internet in the district, and 34% have mobile phones. Child marriage is common in Mugu. Among those aged 10 and older, 2% of men and 8% of women first married before they were 15 years, and 40% of men and 64% of women first

married between 15 and 19 years. There is only one hospital in the district at headquarter Gamgadhi. The hospital often lack human resources. Thus the health status of population is precarious. Common cold, pneumonia, diarrhea and dysentery are recurring epidemics in the district. The district is among those with highest prevalence of stunting (60%) and severe underweight (20%) among children under five years of age.

According to the District Natural Disaster and Rescue Committee, 12 villages in Mugu district are at high risk of landslides namely Righa, Kamfa, Charap, Kalapalta, Rawalbada, Bhiyalbada, Magri, Gamgadhi, Godekhola and Bhatdadi, among other villages, are at high risk of landslides. Mugu is also one of those districts in Nepal without a fire brigade and fire engine. That is why it took almost 5 hours to put out the fire in Gamgadhi on 16th November 2021, and 20 houses were completely destroyed. No major efforts have been taken by the government to provide relief to the members of damaged houses in Gamgadhi. Very few number of local groups and organizations had reached the event area to help the victims. People are dilemma of how to get back to their normal life. They were searching for the remains of their properties, in a hope of find their lost assets. There is scarcity of drinking water. The remoteness of the district has added to the suffering to the people.

3. Social Impact of Disaster:

The effect of fire depends on the extent of fire. Fires not only impact on people, property, but also the environment we reside in. In some cases, the resulting losses are extraordinary, causing hundreds of deaths, widespread damage to property and contents and significant impacts on the environment. More often, fires may cause a single casualty or affect a single home, though the effects are still highly significant to those affected and collectively are substantial.

Both household fire and wildfire have become a common occurrence in Nepal. 41,000 fire hotspots were identified in Nepal between January and April 2021. This was due to really dry weather. 5 people succumbed to fire while trying to put it out. Household fires are also increasing in numbers. 2,505 houses are damaged and properties worth NPR

8.5 Billion are lost in past three years from 2018. 50 people die every year due to fire in Nepal.

The fire in Gamgadhi, Mugu started from a house and caught other 19 houses, causing complete annihilation of those 20 households. Though there were no casualties, belongings of those families couldn't be saved. The impact of this fire was huge, some of them are:

1. **Loss of property:** The immediate impacts of fire included damage to property, destruction of crops, non-functioning of infrastructure facilities and deterioration of health condition by physical, mental health impacts. Property worth around NPR 1 Billion was lost to fire in Gamgadhi.

2. **Psychosocial effects:** The huge psycho-social effects on fire victim, their families and children can traumatize them for long periods of time. Displacement from one's home, loss of property and disruption to business and social affairs have caused continuing stress. Most of the fire affected families lost their retail stores and small rented hotels.

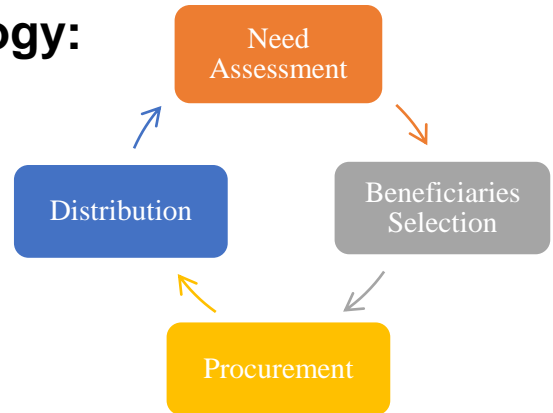
3. **Political implications:** Ineffective response to relief operations during major fire events have led to public discontent or loss of trust in the authorities or the state and national governments. Lack of development in fire-prone areas may cause social inequity and even social unrest posing threat to peace and stability in the region.

4. Project Goal:

People in Mugu are already leading a precarious, subsistence lives, but this disaster has added a social and economic disadvantage to them, as they have lost everything.

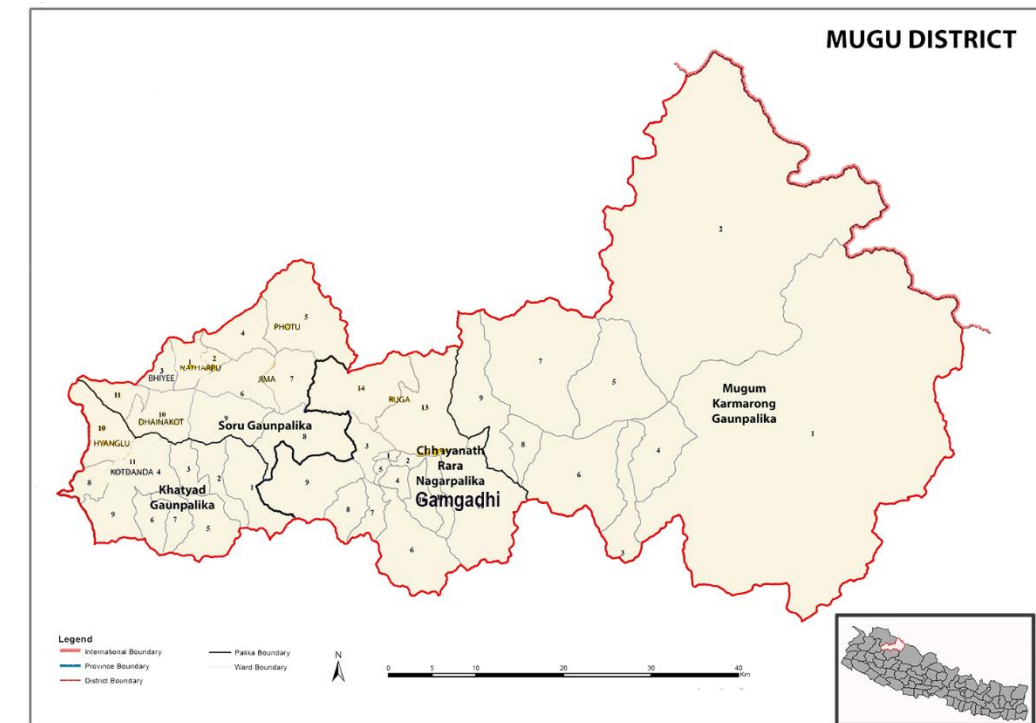
The goal of this project was to support displaced people with cash support, food items, and non-food items to reduce the risk of famine and malnutrition in destructed households, population, and help them in this time of suffering.

5. Relief Distribution Methodology:



A. Need Assessment

As fire had affected households in Gamgadhi bazar in Mugu district, the site selection was directly done. A team from Nepalgunj was deployed as soon as possible after the news of fire broke. In coordination with Chief District Officer, Mr. Rom Bahadur Mahat, the impact of fire was assessed. The team also visited the site affected by fire, and carried out the conversation with displaced families. Based on the same, the team came out with specific needs and emergency relief plans for the victims.



Map showing Gamgadhi, Mugu district of Nepal

B. Beneficiaries Selection

The list of beneficiaries was provided by CDO Mr. Rom Bahadur Mahat himself. Earlier 21 household damage was reported in the Medias. Later, it was found out that one of the house was recorded twice. Thus, the exact number of destroyed houses were 20. We followed the same list of recipients, after cross checking, and verifying the victims through field assessment. The owners of burnt houses were our beneficiaries.

To guarantee that real victims were getting the support, CDO Mr. Rom Bahadur Mahat, APF - DSP Mr. Khum KC, representative from National Investigation Department Mr. Dil Bahadur Chaudhary, community members and volunteers were present during the distribution of the relief. Local people gave us ample cooperation in this regard.

C. Procurement

For the procurement of relief items, government food warehouse was contacted first, but the price of needed items was very high. Thus, because we work during emergency and humanitarian crisis, APF stepped up to provide us with the relief materials from their stock in price lower than normal retail stores in Mugu. The reason things are expensive in Mugu is because, the products are supplied there via air and will take 4-5 days to transport the materials from road ways.

Armed Police Force is the first responder mobilized by the government in case of disaster. So, we tied up with APF for the procurement of relief items. Though purchasing materials from APF is not authorized, it had to be carried out for our response. They provided us the invoice from a local retailer. Thus, procurement was carried out with complete coordination with APF.

D. Distribution

Because of the urgency of the crisis, getting the relief materials to the people who needed them was our top priority. So, the items were brought directly to the distribution location

in Gamgadhi, and the distribution took place in the morning of 21st November 2021. Relief materials were distributed from District Administration Office in Gamgadhi bazar, Mugu.

The food and non-food items in the package were chosen to meet the immediate requirements of the impacted community. It included goods that would allow a family of five to rely on it for at least for a month. The following items were included in a relief package:

1. **Cash Support:** NPR. 2,000

2. **Food Items:**

- Rice: 25 Kg
- Lentil: 2 Kg
- Cooking Oil: 2 Liter
- Salt: 1 Kg

3. **Non-Food Items:**

- Blanket: 1 unit

4. **Hygiene Kit:**

- Soap: 2 units
- Toothbrushes: 5 units
- Toothpaste: 1 unit
- Towel: 1unit

Tarpaulins were considered as the first choice for the relief during our response in Gamgadhi, Mugu. However, after the approval of Sowers Action and upon the suggestion from beneficiaries and CDO, blankets were purchased from APF. As all relief materials were purchased from APF, there was surplus in our fund. The decision of providing cash support was then made as per the request of CDO Mr. Rom Bahadur Mahat. Approval was taken from Sowers Action to imply cash support. The cash assistance was provided to help the displaced families, so that they could afford to rent a place to stay for a month. During distribution, packages were displayed with donor and partner logos.

6. Challenges:

There lied few hurdles through the implementation of the project. Some of the challenges we faced are pointed out below:

1. **Transportation and Mobility**: Mugu is at a distance of 900 Km approx. by road from the capital of the country, Kathmandu. One can use the bus for transportation which will take about 4/5 days to reach Gamgadhi, Mugu, or they can travel by air. Only three flights are functional from Nepalgunj airport per day with only 18 passengers per flight. The price of air ticket is fairly high. However, the roads are treacherous. A road accident killed 32 passengers riding a bus in a road to Mugu in October 2021. Thus, flights are more preferred, and it very difficult to get the tickets. Due to the precarious conditions of road, local transportation is also difficult. It was really a hard task for us to reach the disaster affected area due to such challenge.
2. **High Market Price**: The goods and materials in Mugu are transported via air. Road transportation takes about 4 to 5 days to get the items of basic necessities to the district. Thus, the price of basic items are also very high compared to other parts of the country.
3. **Resources**: It was hard for us to pin down the resources due to irregularity of transportation mode and high market price.
4. **Weather**: Mugu is a Himalayan district. It was challenging for us to stay at Mugu due to its cold temperature. With the start of winter, temperature in Mugu has started going downhill. The average temperature is around 8⁰ C at day and around -2⁰ C at night in November.

7. Learnings:

1. **Significance of Coordination**: The most important lesson learned through this project is the significance of coordination with local authorities. Because of our direct coordination with District Administration Office and Armed Police force, the

implementation of the project was smoother. The support of locals and communities was also a prime factor for the success of this project.

- 2. Cash Support:** Cash support offers a new hope to life, when disaster strikes. Through this project we have learned the implication of cash support to the impacted families during disaster. Cash Assistance allows the beneficiaries to identify, prioritize, and buy the items that meet their family's most pressing needs. Cash assistance also kick starts local markets and supply chains. Recipients purchase supplies in nearby markets, giving struggling economies a boost they wouldn't receive from aid items shipped in bulk from far away.

8. Story:

Sonam Lama

Mr. Sonam Lama is a 23 years old male from Gamgadhi bazar, whose house was destroyed by fire. The fire was started at midnight. 20 houses were completely demolished, and the families are now displaced. Nothing in Sonam Lama's house is remaining now. He could not take out anything with him, while escaping from fire. The food, utensils, clothes, money and their other possessions perished with fire. He saw the devastation of his community in front of his eyes and could do nothing. As there is no fire engine in Mugu, it took them around five hours to put out the fire.



Sonam Lama while talking to our team said, "Everything turned to ashes in front of our eyes, and we were helpless. Everyone was trying, but it was hard for us to control that. It been about one week of the fire event, but we have got no relief from anyone, especially the government. We haven't received even a tarpaulin. There is no food to eat and no place for us to live. We get only two 5 liter gallons of drinking water per day. So, when there is no water to even drink, how could we put out the fire? We are totally neglected in

such time of suffering. I appeal for help through this conversation with. Please help us to lessen this pain.”

Sonam Lama was hopeful with our arrival and thanked Sowers Action for their kind support. He also shared that, they saved one house from burning. If that house would have caught fire, the whole market would have burnt down.

9. Project Budget Overview:

The utilization of budget made available by the Sowers Action as a contribution to the project reached 100%. The total budget of the project was NPR. 349,000 and the total expenses came out to equate total budget. The organization’s funds were used wholly for procurement of goods, packing, logistics costs and transportation costs. The detailed breakdown of expenses born during the project implementation is provided in the table below:

Particulars	Quantity per Package	Total Quantity	Unit	Sum (NPR.)
Cash Support	NPR. 2000	20	2000	40,000
Food Package				
Rice	25 Kg	20	5,125	102,500
Daal	2 Kg	20	340	13,600
Sunflower Oil	2 Liter	20	370	14,800
Salt	1 Kg	20	25	500
Non-food Items				
Blanket	1 Unit	20	5500	110,000
Hygiene				
Soap	2 Units	40	50	2,000
Toothbrush	5 Units	100	50	5,000
Toothpaste	1 Unit	20	180	3,600
Towel	1 Unit	20	1,000	20,000
Sub-Total				272,000
Transportation				37,000
Total				349,000

- **Financial Summary:**

Total Fund Received: NPR. 349,000

Total Expenses: NPR. 349,000

(Note: The transportation cost as per the agreement was NPR. 34,000 but the cost of airfare is NPR. 3000 more than mentioned in the proposal. So, the cost of transportation has reached to 37,000.)

10. Way Forward:

After about a week of devastating fire and its destruction, the exact amount of loss is still not being able to pin down Gamgadhi, Mugu. The estimates however is the loss of NPR. 1 Billion. About 70 families in Gamgadhi are in serious need of recovery. From this relief project, we could only support 20 families. The remaining 50 are still in need of some kind of aid. Also, the rehabilitation of displaced population is the matter of significant concern for now. Thus, recovery projects aimed at helping the community restore their lifestyle and growth can be implemented next. A comprehensive focus in different areas can be executed to recover from the devastation:

- a. Resettlement of the displaced population
- b. Preparedness of the district authorities for fire emergencies
- c. Economic empowerment of affected people
- d. Support to the government for disaster management

Disasters do disrupt the whole process of living but during recovery we must focus on converting adversity into opportunity. The emphasis must be given to pro-poor recovery. Multi-stakeholder commitment, involvement of volunteers, considering sustainability, environmental concerns as well as socio-cultural context can make the recovery a transparent and an effortless process.

ANNEX 1. Beneficiaries Name List

ANNEX 2. Letter from Rural Municipality

(Note: Pictures of the distribution will be attached separately in final report)