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SUCCESS STORY

Enhancing Seismic Safety in Nepal

USAID is working with municipalities in Nepal to reduce vulnerability to earthquakes.



John Arnold, USAID

Masons construct a new primary school in Dharan Municipality using seismically safe techniques imparted by USAID implementing partner NSET.

Through NERMP, USAID is increasing seismic safety awareness among Nepal's citizenry, particularly in the highly vulnerable Kathmandu Valley.

Every year on August 20, the anniversary of the 1998 magnitude 6.8 earthquake that killed more than 700 people and destroyed nearly 65,000 buildings in Nepal, government officials in eastern Nepal's Dharan Municipality mark the importance of local masons who are certified in seismically safe building construction techniques. Government officials and residents of Dharan, the municipality most affected by the 1998 earthquake, rely on these masons to build houses, schools, and other structures in a seismically safe manner, with the goal of mitigating the impact of future earthquakes.

Such safe construction by trained masons would not be possible without USAID's ongoing Nepal Earthquake Risk Management Program (NERMP). Implemented by USAID partner the National Society for Earthquake Technology–Nepal (NSET) from 2005 to 2010, the first phase of NERMP was a multifaceted disaster risk reduction program through which USAID trained more than 1,200 masons, retrofitted public buildings using seismically safe building techniques, conducted earthquake preparedness training and drills in nearly 80 schools, and provided building code implementation assistance to municipalities, among other activities, throughout Nepal. In 2010, USAID extended NERMP for three additional years, continuing initiatives already underway and expanding the program to reach more of Nepal's citizenry. New programs include a safe home campaign that aims to raise earthquake safety awareness among all entities involved in Nepal's building production process, including homeowners, masons, construction material suppliers and producers, contractors, municipal engineers, and government officials. Through these programs, USAID and NSET expect to directly reach approximately 168,000 Nepalese citizens and indirectly benefit more than 2 million others.

With the help of NERMP, Dharan, once indistinguishable from other municipalities in eastern Nepal for its seismic safety, now serves as a regional disaster risk reduction hub for 14 other municipalities. Even more importantly, Dharan's citizens now recognize that they can play a critical role in mitigating the impact of future earthquakes.