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From Rubble to Recovery

For three UC Santa Barbara students, the magnitude 7.8 earthquake that rumbled through Nepal a week ago hit close to home — literally. For them, the temblor wasn't some faraway event, but a force that wrought devastation on their homeland — the country where they were born and raised.

In response to the natural disaster, the students have initiated a fundraising campaign to support ongoing relief and recovery efforts. Monetary donations are being solicited via the fundraising site Crowdrise, with 100 percent of all proceeds going to Shikshya Foundation Nepal. The local nonprofit organization based in Nepal's Lalitpur district not only provides immediate relief assistance to earthquake victims but also supports long-term sustainable rebuilding efforts.

"Thousands of people have lost their lives, tens of thousands have been injured and over a million have been rendered homeless," said Pawana Shrestha, a doctoral student in UCSB's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. Shrestha is from the capital city of Kathmandu, where her family currently resides.

"The situation of many far-flung villages is still unknown," she continued. "There is urgent need of food, water, tents and medical attention in the affected areas. In the long run, massive amounts of financial and human resources will be required for the reconstruction of damaged infrastructures. The road to recovery for Nepal will be a long and difficult one."

The need for long-term assistance impelled the students to choose the Shikshya Foundation as the object of their fundraising efforts. “Past experiences of relief efforts, such as during the Haiti [earthquake] relief, have shown that the long-term relief and recovery efforts are more effective when local organizations are empowered instead of international charity brands,” said Dhilung Kirat, a doctoral student in computer science at UCSB.

“I grew up in one of those remote villages in Nepal,” he continued. “I have experienced the remoteness and the disconnect from the outer world while growing up, and I can only imagine the devastated community after such a massive earthquake. I hope our fundraising effort will help ease the current relief efforts and long-term recovery efforts of those remote communities.”

The Crowdrise campaign is designed to raise not only dollars, but also awareness of the plight of the 8 million people impacted by the earthquake. “We want to show capable people what they can do to help,” explained Shekhar Paudel, an undergraduate student in physics who considers himself a Nepali-American. Paudel moved to the U.S. with his immediate family a few years ago. His extended family remains in Nepal. “With a collaboration with the UCSB community we want to be able to channel what already exists — people’s compassion — to something meaningful for those in need,” Paudel said.

Noted Carol Genetti, dean of UCSB’s Graduate Division and a professor of linguistics whose research focuses primarily on Nepal, “The efforts of these three Nepalese students in the face of the momentous challenges in Nepal are truly impressive. Like so many other UCSB students, they have a strong ethos of service and a deep commitment to their home country.

“I am impressed that they have also used their research skills in selecting a highly regarded Nepalese foundation to receive the funds that are raised,” Genetti added. “People donating can know that their money will be directed by local people to where it is needed most. I know that many want to help but don’t know how to do it or how to choose which organizations to send money to. I’m thankful to our students for making a clear avenue for people that want to do this.”

More information about the Shikshya Foundation can be found at http://shikshyafoundationnepal.org.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.