

NEPAL EMERGENCY RELIEF AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT



Issue 3 | September 6, 2026

On the Ground. In the Moment. For the People of Nepal.

DAY 3 FIELD REPORT | FLORINA XAVIER | KATHMANDU, NEPAL | PUBLISHED 6 SEPTEMBER 2026 | NEXT UPDATE 7 SEPTEMBER 2026

Holding Space: Day Three in Kathmandu

A psychosocial support workshop for the volunteers who have carried the relief effort for a week, a visit to a monastery sheltering families from Timure, and a chance reunion with an old friend now doing the same work for UNICEF.

SECTION 1

Back Into the Field

Yesterday was a field day, and it was exhausting — by the time the report was written up, it was late, and this morning it was a little harder to wake up. Still, we started the day the way we start every day here, with a quick omelette and toast, because today we had to be in the field for a workshop on psychosocial support, and it was due to start at eight.

The workshop was jointly organized by Dalit Life Matters and Arpita, a volunteer and counselor also working on this emergency response; the contact had come through Sushma, a friend of Charles'. The evening before, we had gone to Devighat Bazar, where I picked up a handful of stones and some corn that had grown back after being dispersed by the flood. They were ordinary objects, but I thought the workshop's counselors and psychologists — most of whom had not yet visited the affected areas themselves — could hold them as a tangible connection to the field.

SECTION 2

Stones and Corn

We arrived at eight. The space had been set up beautifully — tables arranged for the group, with the stones and the corn placed off to the side. Twenty-four participants were there: psychologists, field workers, volunteers, and young college graduates, all of whom had already spent the last five days working with people affected by the floods. Arpita welcomed everyone, Pradip said a few words, and the workshop began with self-care — a moment of silence, and some mindful breathing in and out, to help the group ground themselves before anything else.



Stones collected from Devighat Bajar — a flood-affected market area visited the previous evening — alongside a young corn plant used as a symbol of hope. These grounding objects anchored the morning's psychosocial workshop.

Then we passed the stones around. We told the group that each one had come from a place where people had been affected by the flood.

“The stones were passed around to remember that these stones also represent people we are holding space for. We are holding people in our hands, in our heart.”

— Introduced at the start of the psychosocial support workshop

As each person held the stone, we asked them to breathe in, meditatively, and remember what it represented:

1. Themselves.
2. The affected population.
3. The families and friends of those affected. Some of them lost family and friends of their own.
4. The larger community around them — their team, their companions and colleagues, everyone they are working with.
5. Their own families, including the families of the volunteers, who are also worried for them out in the field.
6. The wider community still: the organizations, the government, the bureaucracy — everybody working to make life better for the people affected.

The corn was introduced in the same spirit, as a symbol of hope: though it had been uprooted, battered, and carried by the flood, it had still found a way to grow again, a quiet reminder that life continues. This was the representation of it all — a reminder that we are holding all of these people in our hands, in our hearts. We closed that opening with a moment of gratitude — for the chance to serve, because not everyone has the time, the means, or the opportunity to be here at all.

SECTION 3

Concept of Displacement

From there, the workshop moved into the harder material: temporary, medium-term, and long-term displacement, and the uncomfortable fact that we sometimes have to help decide, on people's behalf, how long they will be away from home.

Category	Detail
Temporary Displacement	2 to 5 years
Medium-Term Displacement	5 to 10 years
Long-Term Displacement	10 years or more

We also talked about Parkinson's Law — the idea that when there is more time, we find fewer things to do, and when there is less time, we find more — and pointed the group toward Peter Schwartz and Peter Levine's work on recognizing what has actually happened: the disconnection of body and mind that trauma causes, and the role community plays in putting people back together, mentally, physically, and socially.

Realizing the loss is one of the first steps — knowing what has been lost, and allowing the desire to mourn it, purposefully, while also recognizing that life has to go on. Part of that is helping people return to their memories, especially the good ones, from before the flood. Dignified return matters too: people want to go back to their own spaces, even when that isn't possible, and the question we kept coming back to was whether, wherever they end up, a dignified return is even on the table.

A Guiding Principle

Go to the communities able to work with people — without promising anything, and without telling them that things will be fine. Let them go with what actually needs to happen, not with false comfort.

SECTION 4

Whose Plan Is It?

We asked the group to write down, individually, what they thought a reintegration plan for the community should look like. A few asked if they could work in groups; we said no, this had to be individual. Afterward, a few shared what they'd written. One had planned a full camp — housing, toilets, health facilities, schools. Another had drawn a picture of people from the community, simply standing together, happy.



Participants working individually on their reintegration plans — each asked to write down, alone, what they thought the community actually needed.



One participant shares her sketch of a reintegration plan — houses, safety notes, and a reminder to "do no harm."

"This is our plan for them — but what is their plan for themselves?"

— The debrief question posed to the workshop

That was the point of the exercise: each of us carries our own idea of what a community needs, but the community has to be asked what it actually wants. Reintegration also means rebuilding routine — helping people keep doing one small thing they'd do back home, even from inside a temporary camp, so that the eventual return doesn't feel overwhelming all at once.

The concerns the room raised were real and specific: safety and security in the holdings, especially for young people, women, and children; the need for healthcare and for child-friendly spaces or schools; how long people can reasonably be asked to wait; whether it's safe to return to a riverside site at all, or whether higher ground means starting over somewhere new; and what happens to the most vulnerable — single-headed households, people who have lost a spouse or children and have to figure out how to continue.

SECTION 5

Resilient By Choice, Or Because They Have To

We came back, as we often do, to the idea of resilience — and to the uncomfortable question of whether the people we call resilient are resilient by choice, or simply because they have no other option. It's worth reminding ourselves, constantly, which one it actually is.

“People may not be resilient because they are resilient — but because they don't have another choice.”

— A recurring theme of the workshop

We also talked about a rights-based approach: after a disaster, and really at any time, it is the government's responsibility to take care of its citizens, and people have a right to be restored to their communities, not simply left to manage. We closed by asking the group to build a checklist for reintegration.

Infrastructure

Water, sanitation, lighting, electricity, toilets — and alcohol outlets, which are freely available here, kept at least 100 meters from schools and habitation.

Protection

Identifying specific women to receive any money transfers, and making sure caregivers work in pairs and in community, never alone.

The Reminder

Resilience is not something people choose. Sometimes they are forced into it — and the connections we make with people matter no matter where they end up.

We ended the session the way we began it: with breathing, passing the same circle of energy around the room one more time, sharing whatever goodness and sense of community was left in the space.

SECTION 6

Arriving at the Mustang Gumpa

From the workshop we went on to the Mustang gumpa, where families from Timure had been given shelter. We didn't have an exact count, but it looked like somewhere between 100 and 200 people, including 20 to 30 young adults and children between 10 and 15 years. The space itself is a monastery — downstairs given over to rest and shelter, upstairs kept as a meditative centre — and it made sense as a shelter, since most of the Timure community is Tibetan Buddhist.

Not everyone in the camp had come directly from the affected areas — some were Kathmandu-based family members of people from Timure and Rasuwa whose homes had been hit, staying alongside those who had seen the flood first hand. There were doctors on site, a medical unit, and different kinds of therapy already underway.

SECTION 7

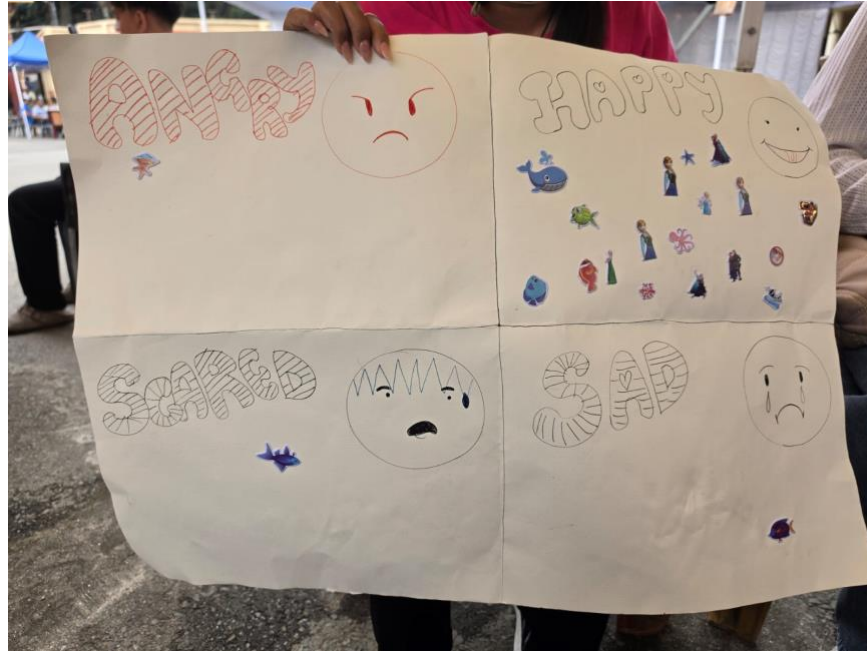
Feelings That Don't Get Named

We started with a group of volunteers who had already been working at the camp, some of whom had also sat in on our morning session. One of them told us something that stuck with all of us: that suppressing emotion just delays it, and it comes out eventually, whether we like it or not.

“As we suppress our emotions, it takes time, and then suddenly it bursts. It's almost like global warming — people kept talking about it, nobody bothered, and now it's here in front of us.”

— A volunteer at the Mustang Gumpa

She had made a chart for the children in the camp — happy, sad, scared, angry — and asked them to point to how they felt. Almost all of them pointed to "happy," because in that moment, they were. She saw it as part of something larger, not unique to these children: a culture, hers included, that doesn't always have room to say "this isn't okay, this isn't good, I'm not fine."



The feelings chart one volunteer made for the children at the camp — most of them, asked how they felt, pointed to "happy."

"I Know Things Won't Change Overnight"

One volunteer, who had been at the camp for 6 or 7 days, told us she hadn't known what to say to the people she met until our session. She said she still didn't have answers, but felt steadier — ready to keep showing up, keep talking, keep listening, even without a fix. It was a two-hour session; she was grateful for all of it.

SECTION 8

The Weight of What They Saw

We sat next with the men's group. Many had worked the China–Nepal border, running shops or trading goods through the customs area. There had been no warning — just a loud noise, and then the water was already in the basin. Some ran for the mountains and that was the only reason they survived. Several had lost a spouse or a child, and most seemed numb more than anything, sitting in near-silence as they told us what happened. They'd already been in the camp ten days, airlifted out after a night on higher ground, and they were anxious to leave — "we are already a burden on the government," more than one of them said, "and we don't want to keep living here."

The women's group carried a similar weight. One told us she hadn't lost anyone in her family, but had lost her entire business and, with it, everything she'd saved — she has two sons, and has to start over from nothing. Another woman, who had kept a shop near the border crossing, described the morning the water came: twelve buses lined up to cross at nine o'clock, and only the passengers who had already stepped off to go through customs made it to higher ground. The other ten buses were gone in front of her.



The woman who watched ten of the twelve buses vanish in the flood, in a quiet moment with others at the camp before she shared her account.



A woman addresses the group during the session with the camp's women.

“Yes, I saw twelve buses, and ten just vanished. In front of my eyes, I could just see them, just washed away.”

— A woman who witnessed the crossing, Mustang Gumpa

When she realized I was Indian, she told me that a lot of people like me had been on those buses too. I knew, from home, of a group of about 46 people on a pilgrimage trek in Nepal who were still unaccounted for, and hearing her account — even without answers — felt like a strange, painful kind of closure.

SECTION 9

Holding Her Hand

Another woman pulled me aside, visibly troubled. She told me she felt guilty for accepting the government's support while staying at the camp — guilty for the food, the shelter, all of the charity that had come her way, because she didn't know how she would ever repay it.

"I just feel guilty for using the government's money for staying in this place, where the government has the support for all the charity I'm receiving. I don't need it. How will I repay the people who are giving me this charity?"

— A woman sheltering at the Mustang Gumpa



People queuing up for lunch — a small, ordinary moment of routine in the middle of a long day.



A moment of reassurance — telling her she owed no one a debt for what she had received.

It struck me because it ran the opposite direction of what we usually hear after a disaster, which is frustration at everything the government hasn't done. I held her hand and told her she didn't need to carry guilt for what she'd been given — that giving to the community is a responsibility we all share, because all of us have received from somewhere, and that her chance to give back, to someone else, would come. It felt like a small moment of reconciliation, and I think she let some of that guilt go.

SECTION 10

Thali, Prayer Wheels, and an Old Friend

With that, we called it a day at the camp and moved to our next appointment — but not before a very good, very elaborate thali for lunch, rice and vegetables the way it's meant to be done.



A cup of field tea — milky, warm and salt — during a brief pause in the day. Small comforts mark the rhythm of long days in the field.

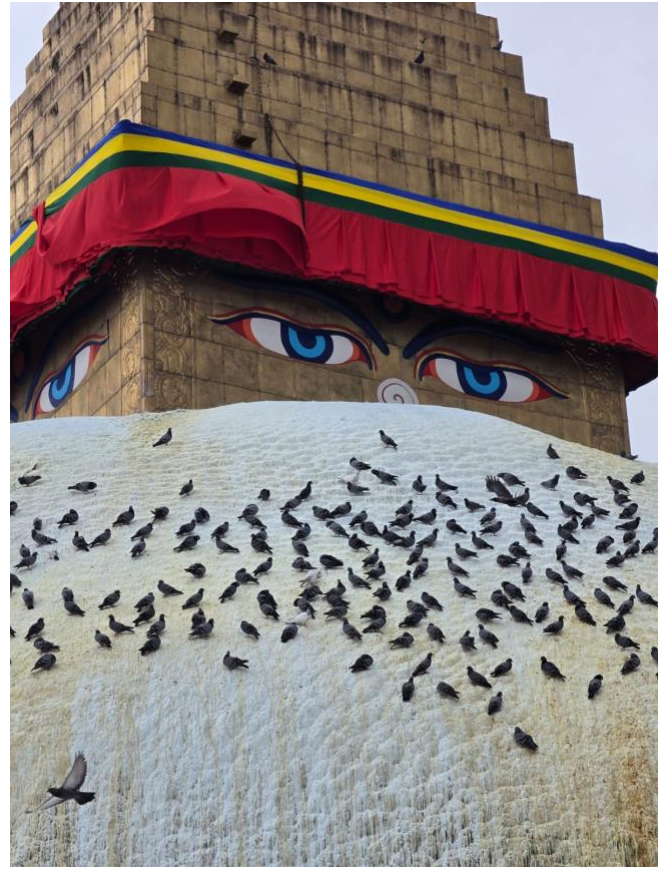


A traditional Nepali thali — rice, lentils, vegetables, meat curry, and papadum — served as a nourishing lunch between the morning workshop and the afternoon field meetings.

Our next meeting wasn't until four, so instead of resting we walked around the city for a while. We made our way to the great stupa — Boudha, which I think we'd visited once before — turned the prayer wheels, and prayed for a few things.



Life continues in Kathmandu's old city — a woman in pink walks past an ancient stone temple. The city holds both the weight of the disaster and the pulse of everyday existence.



The all-seeing eyes of Boudhanath Stupa, one of Kathmandu's most sacred Buddhist landmarks, with pigeons resting on its white dome — a moment of reflection amid the intensity of relief work.

From there we went to meet Sunder Lama, one of Ashok's former students. I'd met him almost 27 years ago, in 1999, and hadn't seen him since — he looked exactly the same, and it was good to catch up. He used to work with World Vision and is now with UNICEF, leading some of their emergency deployment. He talked about the child-friendly spaces UNICEF is planning to set up wherever children have been displaced — something I'd worked on myself in Afghanistan, and a real need here, since schools won't reopen for these children right away. He also spoke about the health and psychosocial support UNICEF is committing to, and the partners they've already brought on board.



Florina Xavier and Ashish, outside a Kathmandu landmark ahead of the afternoon's meetings — collaboration between local and international responders was a defining theme of the entire day.

After that I met with Dr.Gopal, who is always deeply insightful. He walked us through the current situation and how psychosocial support is now being emphasized even at the ministry level, and the different ways our work here might connect with theirs going forward.

A Long Way to Go

The day looked relaxed from the outside, but it wasn't — the morning workshop alone was a full day's work, before the camp visit even started. If three days in the field leaves me this tired, I can only imagine what it's like for the volunteers who've been here six or seven days already: young people, mostly untrained, giving their time simply because they're willing to. What they've built, and how well they've organized it, is genuinely remarkable.



Prayer flags catch the last light over Kathmandu.

I feel refreshed thinking about all of it — and I also know there's a long way still to go. We need a lot of support for the people out in the field, but also for a great many others who haven't been reached yet.

About This Dispatch

Compiled daily from field notes sent home during a ten-day psychosocial support mission to Nepal, following the floods and landslides of late August 2026 the visit was coordinated by Pradip Pariyar, Dalit Lives Matter Global Alliance.

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“We need a lot of support for the people who are in the field, but also for several others.”

— Florina Xavier, Day 3 report, Kathmandu, 6 September 2026

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