

Country profile: Nepal

Geography

Nepal is a small, landlocked country. It is located between the southern slopes of the Himalayas and the north of India. Nepal is home to most of the world's highest mountains, including Mt. Everest. The Himalayan Mountains cover 15 percent of Nepal and most of the land in the Himalayas is permanently frozen. By contrast, the flat plains or Terai regions close to India have a hot, humid climate and make up 18 percent of Nepal. In between, the Hills make up 67 percent of the country. Nepal is prone to annual floods and landslides.

Kathmandu is the capital city and lies in the Hills of Nepal. The city has a population of approximately one million people.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries,
The University of Texas at Austin

On April 25th 2015, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, with a series of strong aftershocks including one of 6.7 magnitude, and triggering avalanches in the mountains. It was the worst earthquake to hit Nepal in 80 years. Estimates indicated more than 8000 people died and many more were injured. On May 12th 2015, a second, 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, again with strong aftershocks. The United Nations estimated that approximately eight million people had been affected by the earthquakes. Destruction of buildings, roads and other infrastructure will make re-building a long-term challenge.

People

Religion is important in Nepal. Until Nepal became a secular republic in May 2008, the country was unique as the only official Hindu state in the world. Just over 81 per cent of its population is Hindu, with 9 percent Buddhist and 4.4 percent Muslim. Buddhist and Hindu shrines and festivals are respected and celebrated by members of both of these faiths.

Nepali is the official language of Nepal but many government officials also speak English. The 2011 census reported 126 caste/ethnic groups living in Nepal.

History

Modern Nepal was created in the second half of the 1700s when a unified country was formed from a number of independent states. In the mid-19th century Nepal's government ministers took control of the country and royal power was limited. In 1990, King Birendra introduced a multiparty parliamentary democracy in Nepal. This period also saw the emergence of a revolutionary force, the Maoists, and ten years of internal conflict with the government led to the loss of 15,000 lives. In 2001, during this period, Nepal also lost a much respected royal family in a massacre. The only survivor in line to the throne, the late king's brother, King Gyanendra, was unable to replace his brother's popularity. He took absolute power in 2005. After massive pro-democracy protests in April 2006, King Gyanendra gave up direct rule and reinstated parliament, which then quickly moved to diminish his powers. In May 2008, the monarchy was formally abolished and the country officially became a secular republic, with the President as the head of state.

Economy

Nepal is one of the poorest and least developed countries in Asia, with almost one-quarter of its population living below the international poverty line. Agriculture provides a livelihood for 75 percent of the work force. Industrial activity mainly involves the processing of agricultural produce including jute (a natural fibre), sugar, tobacco, and grains. Other industries

include tourism, clothing and textiles, and cement and brick production. Money sent back from Nepali people working overseas (remittances) is also important for Nepal's economy.

Nepal has been assessed as having scope for exploiting its potential in hydropower and tourism, areas of recent foreign investment interest. Prospects for foreign investment in other sectors are likely to remain low, however, because of the small size of the economy, infrastructure challenges, and its remote and landlocked geographic location.

Living Conditions

Most Nepali people live in mud bonded brick houses with a roof of either galvanized sheet or tile/slate. Nearly two-thirds of households use firewood as their main source of fuel for cooking. While 87.6 percent of people have access to an improved source of drinking water (for example piped/tap water, tube well or covered well), only 35.4 percent have access to adequate sanitation facilities.

The government has been improving health services in Nepal. The under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births) has fallen from 142 in 1990 to 42, and the maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births) has reduced from 790 in 1990 to 170. There are still, however, issues with illnesses associated with poverty. 40.5 percent of children under 5 years old experience moderate or severe stunting – a sign of chronic malnutrition. Respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases and tuberculosis are major causes of death.

Nepalese soil and forests are being exploited at unsustainable levels. This, combined with Nepal's growing population, has meant that life has become increasingly difficult for people in rural villages. Many poor families are leaving their land in search of better conditions in Nepalese and Indian cities.

Education

While school enrolments have improved, 38 percent of children who start primary school leave before finishing their education. Adult illiteracy rates remain high – only 57.4 percent of people aged 15 or older are assessed as being literate.

World Vision Australia's work in Nepal

- Helps increase rural access to better and more food through improved agricultural techniques
- Helps people access small loans to encourage the development of small enterprises
- Aims to ensure people have access to safe water and sanitation
- Includes projects that focus on improved maternal and child health care
- Emergency relief activities

Indicator	Nepal	Australia
Population (millions)	27.8 million	23.3 million
Urban population (% of total)	17.7%	89.5%
Gross National Income per capita (US\$ PPP)	\$2,194	\$41,524
Population living on less than US\$1.25 (PPP) a day	24.82%	No data
Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	57.4%	No data
Internet users (% of population)	11.1%	82.3%
Population using improved water source (% of total) ²	87.6%	100%
Doctors per 10,000 people	2.1	38.5
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	42	5
Life expectancy at birth	68.4 years	82.5 years
Human Development Index rank (out of 187)	145 th	2 nd

Sources: UNDP Human Development Report 2014; ² UNICEF www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ [accessed April 2015]; CIA The World Factbook www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html [accessed April 2015]; Government of Nepal National Population and Housing Census 2011; WHO Nepal Country Health Profile www.who.int/countries/npl/en/ [accessed April 2015]