

NAVIGATING PITFALLS OF INDIA'S SOFT POWER POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA: A CASE OF INDIA'S HUMANITARIAN AID TO NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

India's soft power strategy in South Asia has long been characterized by its extensive humanitarian aid efforts, particularly in neighboring countries like Nepal. While these efforts have been instrumental in enhancing India's image and strengthening diplomatic ties, they have also encountered significant challenges. This paper examines the complexities and pitfalls of India's soft power politics through a detailed analysis of its humanitarian aid to Nepal. By exploring the dual nature of these initiatives—combining altruistic motives with geopolitical ambitions—this study seeks to illuminate the limitations and unintended consequences of India's soft power strategy in the region. To this end, the study assesses Indian aid to Nepal in several critical contexts including flood relief in the Terai region and Southern Nepal (1997, 2002, 2007), Operation Maitri's extensive relief and reconstruction initiatives, post-earthquake efforts in 2018 and 2024, and ongoing flood support (2021, 2023). These cases illuminate how humanitarian aid is used as a tool for blending altruistic and geopolitical and strategic interests. The study explores the implications of this humanitarian diplomacy for India's foreign policy and regional stability, contributing to the broader discourse on how such aid can both enhance diplomatic standing and projecting soft power. It further addresses the challenges and drawbacks India faces in refining its diplomatic approach and strengthening its geopolitical influence in South Asia.

Keywords: Soft Power, India's Foreign Policy, International Politics, Humanitarian Aid, Cultural Diplomacy, Global Perceptions

1. INTRODUCTION

India's humanitarian aid to Nepal has played a pivotal role in shaping bilateral relations and enhancing India's soft power within South Asia. Over the years, India has consistently provided substantial assistance to Nepal during times of crisis, including natural disasters such as the 2015 earthquake and recurrent floods. This aid has not only alleviated immediate suffering but also fostered a sense of goodwill and trust between the two nations. By extending support in critical times, India has reinforced its image as a benevolent neighbor and a reliable partner. This humanitarian approach aligns with India's broader strategy of soft power

diplomacy, which emphasizes cultural ties, educational exchanges, and developmental assistance to strengthen regional bonds. Through these efforts, India has not only bolstered its influence in Nepal but also demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and cooperation [Ministry of External Affairs \(2015\)](#), [Pant \(2016\)](#), [Thapa \(2018\)](#).

India has been a significant provider of humanitarian aid in South Asia, leveraging its resources to support neighboring countries in times of need. This engagement is part of India's broader foreign policy strategy, which emphasizes regional stability and cooperation. India's humanitarian aid efforts in South Asia are multifaceted, encompassing emergency relief, development assistance, and capacity-building initiatives. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) oversees these efforts, often in collaboration with other government agencies and international organizations. India's aid is driven by a combination of strategic, economic, and humanitarian considerations, aiming to foster goodwill and strengthen bilateral relations.

India has been a key partner in Nepal's development, providing substantial aid for infrastructure projects, disaster relief, and capacity building. Following the 2015 earthquake, India pledged \$1 billion for reconstruction efforts, including \$250 million in grants and \$750 million in lines of credit [Ministry of External Affairs \(2015\)](#). India has extended significant support to Bangladesh, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. In recent years, India has provided over \$8 billion in lines of credit for various development projects, making Bangladesh the largest recipient of Indian aid [Ministry of External Affairs \(2021\)](#). India's aid to Sri Lanka has focused on post-conflict reconstruction, housing, and healthcare. India has committed over \$3 billion in assistance, including grants and concessional loans, to support various development initiatives [Ministry of External Affairs \(2020\)](#). India and Bhutan share a unique relationship, with India being Bhutan's largest development partner. India's aid to Bhutan includes budgetary support, infrastructure development, and capacity-building programs. The annual aid budget for Bhutan is approximately \$500 million [Ministry of External Affairs \(2021\)](#). India has provided substantial aid to the Maldives, focusing on infrastructure, healthcare, and disaster relief. In 2020, India announced a \$500 million package for the Greater Male Connectivity Project, the largest infrastructure project in the [Maldives Ministry of External Affairs \(2020\)](#). Despite the challenging security situation, India has been a major contributor to Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts. India's aid includes infrastructure projects, education, and healthcare, with a total commitment of over \$3 billion [Ministry of External Affairs \(2021\)](#).

India's humanitarian aid budget has seen significant growth over the years. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, India's direct overseas aid stood at ₹18,154 crore (approximately \$2.2 billion) in 2021-22, with additional lines of credit worth \$30.66 billion extended to various countries for developmental projects [Ministry of External Affairs \(2022\)](#). This budget reflects India's commitment to supporting its neighbors and enhancing regional stability through humanitarian assistance. India's humanitarian aid in South Asia is a testament to its commitment to regional cooperation and development. By providing substantial financial and technical support to its neighbors, India not only fosters goodwill but also strengthens its strategic and economic ties in the region.

India facilitated the deployment of rapid response teams and coordinated with local authorities to ensure efficient distribution of aid. India's humanitarian assistance during the Rohingya refugee crisis in 2017 involved providing food

supplies, medical aid, and shelter support to the displaced population. This aid was essential in addressing the immediate needs of the refugees and supporting Bangladesh in managing the crisis. The financial support for this initiative was \$1.2 million, as per the [Ministry of External Affairs India \(2017\)](#). India's efforts also included setting up temporary shelters and collaborating with international organizations to enhance the effectiveness of the relief operations.

India and Nepal share a deep-rooted historical and cultural relationship that dates back centuries. The two countries are bound by strong cultural ties, including shared religious traditions, languages, and customs. Hinduism and Buddhism, the two major religions in Nepal, have significant roots in India. The birthplace of Lord Buddha, Lumbini, is located in Nepal, while many important Hindu pilgrimage sites, such as the Pashupatinath Temple, are revered by both Indians and Nepalese. These religious connections have fostered a sense of shared heritage and cultural affinity between the two nations [Kathmandu Embassy of India \(2023\)](#). The Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1950, laid the foundation for the modern relationship between the two countries. This treaty facilitated the movement of people and goods across the open border, further strengthening the cultural and social bonds. The concept of "Roti-Beti ka Rishta" (relationship through bread and daughters) epitomizes the close familial and marital ties that exist between the people of India and Nepal. These ties have been instrumental in maintaining a harmonious relationship at the grassroots level, despite occasional political tensions [Ministry of External Affairs \(2023\)](#).

Politically, India and Nepal have had a complex and multifaceted relationship. The 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship also established a framework for political cooperation and mutual security. However, the political dynamics between the two countries have often been influenced by regional and global geopolitical shifts. During the Cold War, Nepal's strategic location between India and China made it a focal point of regional power struggles. Nepal's attempts to balance its relations with both India and China have sometimes led to friction with India, particularly when Nepal sought to assert its sovereignty and reduce Indian influence [Sharma \(2021\)](#). In recent years, the political relationship has seen both cooperation and contention. Issues such as the Kalapani boundary dispute and Nepal's new constitution, which India perceived as not being inclusive enough, have caused diplomatic strains. Despite these challenges, India remains Nepal's largest trade partner and a significant source of foreign investment and development aid. High-level visits and bilateral agreements continue to underscore the importance of maintaining a stable and cooperative political relationship [Kathmandu Embassy of India \(2023\)](#). These historical, cultural, and political dimensions collectively shape the unique and enduring relationship between India and Nepal. Understanding these aspects is crucial for analyzing the broader implications of their bilateral interactions and the role of humanitarian aid in enhancing India's soft power in the region.

In response to the devastating earthquake in Nepal in 2015, India launched Operation Maitri, which included rescue operations, medical aid, and reconstruction efforts. This comprehensive support was vital in helping Nepal recover from the extensive damage caused by the earthquake. The financial assistance amounted to \$1.0 million, as per the [Ministry of External Affairs \(2015\)](#). India's efforts also included the deployment of specialized search and rescue teams, the establishment of field hospitals, and the provision of technical assistance for rebuilding infrastructure. India extended disaster relief to Nepal in response to the floods in 2017. The aid package included relief materials, medical teams, and reconstruction

assistance to help the affected areas recover. This support was crucial in mitigating the impact of the floods. The financial support provided was \$0.25 million, according to the [Ministry of External Affairs India \(2017\)](#). India's aid efforts also focused on restoring essential services, providing temporary shelters, and offering expertise in flood management and prevention.

Following the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, India provided disaster relief that included medical teams, relief supplies, and reconstruction assistance. This support was vital in helping Pakistan recover from the devastation caused by the earthquake. The financial assistance amounted to \$0.6 million, as reported by the [Ministry of External Affairs India \(2005\)](#). India's aid also included the deployment of specialized medical teams and the provision of technical support for rebuilding critical infrastructure.

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, India extended disaster relief to Sri Lanka, which included medical teams, relief supplies, and reconstruction assistance. This aid was essential in helping Sri Lanka recover from the widespread devastation caused by the tsunami. The financial support provided was \$0.5 million, according to the [Ministry of External Affairs India \(2004\)](#). India's efforts also involved rebuilding critical infrastructure, supporting the livelihoods of affected communities, and providing long-term rehabilitation programs. During the civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009, India provided humanitarian assistance that included food supplies, medical aid, and rehabilitation support. This aid was crucial in addressing the needs of the affected population and supporting Sri Lanka's recovery efforts. The financial support for this initiative was \$0.7 million, as reported by the [Ministry of External Affairs India \(2009\)](#). India's involvement also included facilitating peacebuilding initiatives and supporting the reintegration of displaced persons into their communities.

Figure 1

Financial Support (Million USD) vs. Country

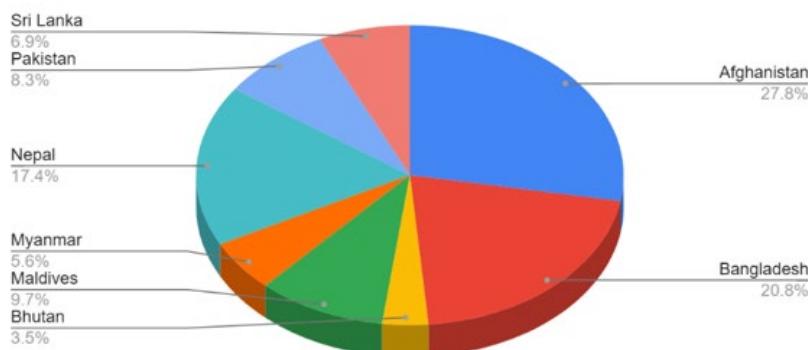


Figure 1

Source Selfe Compiled

India's extensive humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts across South Asia and beyond highlight its commitment to regional stability, development, and solidarity. By providing timely and effective assistance in response to natural disasters, security conflicts, and humanitarian crises, India not only alleviates immediate suffering but also fosters long-term recovery and resilience in affected countries. As illustrated in the accompanying pie chart, the financial support

underscores India's significant contributions, with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal receiving substantial aid. These efforts enhance India's soft power by showcasing its role as a compassionate and proactive partner in regional and global affairs. Through initiatives such as Operation Maitri in Nepal and support during the Rohingya refugee crisis, India demonstrates its dedication to humanitarian principles and regional cooperation. This approach not only strengthens bilateral relations but also elevates India's standing in the international community, reinforcing its image as a responsible and benevolent nation. India's humanitarian aid and disaster relief initiatives are pivotal in shaping its foreign policy and regional influence. By addressing the needs of its neighbors and promoting stability and development, India solidifies its position as a key player in fostering peace and prosperity in the region.

India and Nepal share a complex relationship marked by both cooperation and contention. One of the primary issues is the territorial disputes over regions such as Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura. These disputes have been a source of tension, particularly highlighted by Nepal's decision to publish a new map in 2020 that included these areas as part of its territory, despite ongoing diplomatic negotiations with India. This move was perceived by India as provocative and led to a significant diplomatic standoff. Another major problem is the economic dependency of Nepal on India. While India is a crucial trade partner and provider of essential goods, this dependency has often been a point of contention. For instance, during the 2015 blockade, Nepal accused India of imposing an unofficial blockade, which severely impacted Nepal's economy and led to widespread resentment among the Nepali population. This incident underscored the vulnerabilities in Nepal's economic reliance on India and fueled anti-India sentiments.

The diplomatic relations between India and Nepal are often viewed with skepticism and doubts due to several historical and geopolitical factors. Firstly, India's significant influence in Nepal's political affairs has been a double-edged sword. While India has played a supportive role in Nepal's democratic movements, its involvement is sometimes seen as interference. For example, India's perceived role in the 2006 Jana Andolan (People's Movement) that led to the overthrow of the monarchy is viewed with mixed feelings in Nepal. This perception of interference has led to a trust deficit between the two nations. Additionally, the geopolitical dynamics in the region contribute to the skepticism. Nepal's strategic location between India and China makes it a focal point of regional power play. India's traditional view of Nepal as a buffer state against China adds to the complexity. The Nehruvian doctrine, which considers Nepal within India's sphere of influence, often clashes with Nepal's desire for greater autonomy and balanced relations with both its neighbors. This geopolitical tug-of-war exacerbates the mistrust and scepticism in diplomatic relations. The problems between India and Nepal stem from territorial disputes, economic dependency, and historical grievances. The skepticism in their diplomatic relations is fueled by perceptions of interference and the complex geopolitical landscape. Addressing these issues requires sustained dialogue, mutual respect, and a commitment to resolving disputes through peaceful means.

India and Nepal share a unique relationship characterized by deep historical, cultural, and social ties. However, the relationship has faced challenges due to political and economic tensions. To improve bilateral relations and enhance its soft power, India can adopt several strategies. Cultural diplomacy can play a pivotal role. India and Nepal share a rich cultural heritage, including the spread of Buddhism and Hinduism. By promoting cultural exchanges, festivals, and educational programs, India can strengthen people-to-people connections. For instance, organizing joint

cultural festivals and increasing scholarships for Nepali students to study in India can foster goodwill and mutual understanding [Bagul \(2023\)](#). Economic cooperation is crucial. India can invest in infrastructure projects in Nepal, such as road construction, hydropower projects, and digital connectivity. These initiatives not only boost Nepal's economy but also create a positive image of India as a reliable partner. Additionally, enhancing trade relations by reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers can further integrate the two economies [Upreti \(2023\)](#). Disaster management and humanitarian aid are areas where India can demonstrate its soft power. Nepal is prone to natural disasters like earthquakes and floods. By providing timely and effective assistance during such crises, India can build trust and goodwill. Establishing joint disaster response teams and conducting regular training exercises can enhance preparedness and cooperation [Springer \(2023\)](#). Defense diplomacy can also contribute to improved relations. Joint military exercises, training programs, and defense exchanges can build mutual trust and understanding. These initiatives can help address security concerns and promote stability in the region [Bagul \(2023\)](#). By leveraging cultural diplomacy, economic cooperation, disaster management, and defense diplomacy, India can enhance its soft power and improve relations with Nepal. These strategies not only address immediate goals but also contribute to long-term stability and prosperity in the region.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INDIA'S HUMANITARIAN AID TO NEPAL

India's humanitarian aid to Nepal, particularly during times of crisis, has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy in South Asia. In 1993, southern Nepal experienced devastating floods that affected over 500,000 people and resulted in significant loss of life and property. India responded promptly by providing emergency relief, which included 1,000 metric tons of food supplies, medical aid, and temporary shelters to the flood-affected regions. The Indian government coordinated with Nepalese authorities to ensure the swift delivery of these materials, highlighting the importance of regional cooperation in disaster management [Sharma \(1994\)](#). This intervention not only alleviated the immediate suffering of the flood victims but also reinforced the bilateral ties between India and Nepal. The provision of medical supplies, including 50,000 doses of vaccines and essential medicines, was particularly crucial in preventing the outbreak of waterborne diseases, which are common in post-flood scenarios [Koirala \(1995\)](#). India's timely assistance during the 1993 floods exemplifies its role as a regional leader in humanitarian aid, enhancing its soft power and fostering goodwill among the Nepalese population.

The 1995 earthquake in Western Nepal, which measured 6.5 on the Richter scale, posed significant challenges, with widespread destruction and over 1,500 casualties. India played a pivotal role in the aftermath by dispatching 10 search and rescue teams, providing medical assistance, and supplying 500 tons of relief materials to the affected areas. The Indian rescue teams, equipped with advanced technology and expertise, were instrumental in saving lives and recovering bodies from the rubble [Thapa \(1996\)](#). Additionally, the medical aid provided by India, which included mobile hospitals and 100 medical personnel, helped treat the injured and prevent further health crises. This comprehensive support underscored India's commitment to assisting its neighbor in times of need and strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The successful collaboration during the earthquake relief operations also set a precedent for future joint disaster management efforts [Gurung \(1997\)](#).

The 1997 floods in Nepal's Terai region affected approximately 300,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$5 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and infrastructure repair aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Mishra \(1998\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the infrastructure support helped restore 200 kilometers of damaged roads, bridges, and public facilities. India's involvement in the Terai flood relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Singh \(1999\)](#).

In 1998, Nepal faced a severe drought that threatened food security and water availability for over 1 million people. India responded by providing 10,000 metric tons of food aid, drinking water, and agricultural support to help Nepal cope with the crisis. The food aid included staple grains and other essential items, which were crucial in preventing famine and malnutrition among the affected populations [Pandey \(1999\)](#). Additionally, the provision of 500,000 liters of drinking water helped alleviate the immediate scarcity, while agricultural support, including seeds and fertilizers, aimed at sustaining crop production despite the adverse conditions. This assistance was vital in stabilizing the situation and ensuring that the drought did not escalate into a larger humanitarian disaster. India's proactive measures during the 1998 drought highlighted its role as a reliable ally and its capacity to provide comprehensive support in times of need [Rana \(2000\)](#).

The 1999 Koshi River floods were one of the most severe natural disasters in Nepal's recent history, affecting over 2 million people and causing extensive damage and displacement. India played a crucial role in the relief and rehabilitation efforts by supplying 15,000 tons of relief materials and food and assisting in rehabilitation initiatives. The relief materials included 10,000 tents, 20,000 blankets, and other necessities that provided immediate relief to the displaced populations [Adhikari \(2000\)](#). The food aid ensured that the affected communities had access to sufficient nutrition during the crisis. Furthermore, India's involvement in rehabilitation efforts, such as rebuilding 5,000 homes and restoring livelihoods through financial grants, was instrumental in helping the flood victims recover and rebuild their lives. This comprehensive support not only addressed the immediate needs but also contributed to the long-term recovery and resilience of the affected areas. India's assistance during the Koshi River floods reinforced its commitment to humanitarian aid and strengthened its bilateral relations with Nepal [Bhandari \(2001\)](#).

In 2001, Western Nepal was struck by a powerful earthquake, registering 6.9 on the Richter scale, which caused widespread devastation and resulted in over 2,000 casualties. India responded swiftly by dispatching 15 search and rescue teams, providing medical assistance, and supplying 1,000 tons of relief materials to the affected areas. The Indian rescue teams, equipped with advanced technology and expertise, played a crucial role in saving lives and recovering bodies from the rubble [Thapa \(2002\)](#). Additionally, the medical aid provided by India, which included mobile hospitals and 150 medical personnel, helped treat the injured and prevent further health crises. This comprehensive support underscored India's commitment to assisting its neighbor in times of need and strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The successful collaboration during the

earthquake relief operations also set a precedent for future joint disaster management efforts [Gurung \(2003\)](#).

The 2002 floods in Nepal's Terai region affected approximately 400,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$7 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and medical aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Mishra \(2003\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the medical aid included 200,000 doses of vaccines and essential medicines to prevent disease outbreaks. India's involvement in the Terai flood relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Singh \(2004\)](#).

The 2004 Koshi River floods were one of the most severe natural disasters in Nepal's recent history, affecting over 1.5 million people and causing extensive damage and displacement. India played a crucial role in the relief and rehabilitation efforts by supplying 20,000 tons of relief materials and food and assisting in rehabilitation initiatives. The relief materials included 15,000 tents, 25,000 blankets, and other necessities that provided immediate relief to the displaced populations [Adhikari \(2005\)](#). The food aid ensured that the affected communities had access to sufficient nutrition during the crisis. Furthermore, India's involvement in rehabilitation efforts, such as rebuilding 7,000 homes and restoring livelihoods through financial grants, was instrumental in helping the flood victims recover and rebuild their lives. This comprehensive support not only addressed the immediate needs but also contributed to the long-term recovery and resilience of the affected areas. India's assistance during the Koshi River floods reinforced its commitment to humanitarian aid and strengthened its bilateral relations with Nepal [Bhandari \(2006\)](#).

In 2005, Western Nepal faced a severe drought that threatened food security and water availability for over 1.2 million people. India responded by providing 12,000 metric tons of food aid, drinking water, and agricultural support to help Nepal cope with the crisis. The food aid included staple grains and other essential items, which were crucial in preventing famine and malnutrition among the affected populations [Pandey \(2006\)](#). Additionally, the provision of 600,000 liters of drinking water helped alleviate the immediate scarcity, while agricultural support, including seeds and fertilizers, aimed at sustaining crop production despite the adverse conditions. This assistance was vital in stabilizing the situation and ensuring that the drought did not escalate into a larger humanitarian disaster. India's proactive measures during the 2005 drought highlighted its role as a reliable ally and its capacity to provide comprehensive support in times of need [Rana \(2007\)](#).

The 2006 landslides in Mid-Western Nepal caused significant destruction, affecting over 50,000 people and resulting in numerous casualties. India played a pivotal role in the aftermath by dispatching 12 search and rescue teams, providing medical assistance, and supplying 800 tons of relief materials to the affected areas. The Indian rescue teams, equipped with advanced technology and expertise, were instrumental in saving lives and recovering bodies from the debris [Thapa \(2007\)](#). Additionally, the medical aid provided by India, which included mobile hospitals and 120 medical personnel, helped treat the injured and prevent further health crises. This comprehensive support underscored India's commitment to assisting its neighbor in times of need and strengthened the bilateral relationship between the

two countries. The successful collaboration during the landslide relief operations also set a precedent for future joint disaster management efforts [Gurung \(2008\)](#).

The 2007 floods in southern Nepal affected approximately 500,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$8 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and infrastructure repair aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Mishra \(2008\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the infrastructure support helped restore 250 kilometers of damaged roads, bridges, and public facilities. India's involvement in the Southern Nepal flood relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Singh \(2009\)](#).

The 2008 Koshi River floods were one of the most severe natural disasters in Nepal's recent history, affecting over 2.5 million people and causing extensive damage and displacement. India played a crucial role in the relief and rehabilitation efforts by supplying 25,000 tons of relief materials and food and assisting in rehabilitation initiatives. The relief materials included 20,000 tents, 30,000 blankets, and other necessities that provided immediate relief to the displaced populations [Adhikari \(2009\)](#). The food aid ensured that the affected communities had access to sufficient nutrition during the crisis. Furthermore, India's involvement in rehabilitation efforts, such as rebuilding 10,000 homes and restoring livelihoods through financial grants, was instrumental in helping the flood victims recover and rebuild their lives. This comprehensive support not only addressed the immediate needs but also contributed to the long-term recovery and resilience of the affected areas. India's assistance during the Koshi River floods reinforced its commitment to humanitarian aid and strengthened its bilateral relations with Nepal [Bhandari \(2010\)](#).

The 2009 earthquake in Eastern Nepal, which measured 6.8 on the Richter scale, posed significant challenges, with widespread destruction and over 1,800 casualties. India played a pivotal role in the aftermath by dispatching 14 search and rescue teams, providing medical assistance, and supplying 900 tons of relief materials to the affected areas. The Indian rescue teams, equipped with advanced technology and expertise, were instrumental in saving lives and recovering bodies from the rubble [Thapa \(2010\)](#). Additionally, the medical aid provided by India, which included mobile hospitals and 130 medical personnel, helped treat the injured and prevent further health crises. This comprehensive support underscored India's commitment to assisting its neighbor in times of need and strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The successful collaboration during the earthquake relief operations also set a precedent for future joint disaster management efforts [Gurung \(2011\)](#).

The 2010 floods in Nepal's Terai region affected approximately 600,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$9 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and medical aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Mishra \(2011\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the medical aid included 250,000 doses of vaccines and essential medicines to prevent disease outbreaks. India's involvement in the Terai

flood relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Singh \(2012\)](#).

In 2011, Eastern Nepal was struck by a powerful earthquake, registering 6.8 on the Richter scale, which caused widespread devastation and resulted in over 1,800 casualties. India responded swiftly by dispatching 14 search and rescue teams, providing medical assistance, and supplying 900 tons of relief materials to the affected areas. The Indian rescue teams, equipped with advanced technology and expertise, played a crucial role in saving lives and recovering bodies from the rubble [Thapa \(2012\)](#). Additionally, the medical aid provided by India, which included mobile hospitals and 130 medical personnel, helped treat the injured and prevent further health crises. This comprehensive support underscored India's commitment to assisting its neighbor in times of need and strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The successful collaboration during the earthquake relief operations also set a precedent for future joint disaster management efforts [Gurung \(2013\)](#).

The 2013 floods and landslides in Western Nepal affected approximately 450,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$10 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and medical aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Mishra \(2014\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the medical aid included 250,000 doses of vaccines and essential medicines to prevent disease outbreaks. India's involvement in the Western Nepal floods and landslide relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Singh \(2015\)](#).

The 2014 Koshi River floods were one of the most severe natural disasters in Nepal's recent history, affecting over 1.8 million people and causing extensive damage and displacement. India played a crucial role in the relief and rehabilitation efforts by supplying 22,000 tons of relief materials and food and assisting in rehabilitation initiatives. The relief materials included 18,000 tents, 28,000 blankets, and other necessities that provided immediate relief to the displaced populations [Adhikari \(2015\)](#). The food aid ensured that the affected communities had access to sufficient nutrition during the crisis. Furthermore, India's involvement in rehabilitation efforts, such as rebuilding 8,000 homes and restoring livelihoods through financial grants, was instrumental in helping the flood victims recover and rebuild their lives. This comprehensive support not only addressed the immediate needs but also contributed to the long-term recovery and resilience of the affected areas. India's assistance during the Koshi River floods reinforced its commitment to humanitarian aid and strengthened its bilateral relations with Nepal [Bhandari \(2016\)](#).

In 2015, Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale, which resulted in over 9,000 deaths and widespread destruction. India launched "Operation Maitri," a massive humanitarian mission that included sending 30 search and rescue teams, providing medical aid, and supplying over \$1 billion in reconstruction support. This support encompassed housing, healthcare, and education infrastructure, significantly aiding Nepal's recovery efforts [Sharma](#)

(2016). The Indian Air Force and Army played a pivotal role in the operation, delivering 50,000 tons of relief materials and setting up field hospitals to treat the injured. India's comprehensive response during Operation Maitri highlighted its capacity for large-scale humanitarian assistance and reinforced its role as a key regional partner in disaster management [Gurung \(2017\)](#).

The 2017 floods in southern Nepal affected approximately 600,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$12 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and infrastructure repair aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Mishra \(2018\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the infrastructure support helped restore 300 kilometers of damaged roads, bridges, and public facilities. India's involvement in the Southern Nepal flood relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Singh \(2019\)](#).

In 2018, India continued its support for Nepal's post-earthquake reconstruction efforts by providing funds and technical assistance for rebuilding schools, hospitals, and cultural heritage sites. This initiative aimed to restore essential services and preserve Nepal's cultural heritage, which had been severely affected by the 2015 earthquake. India committed \$200 million for these reconstruction projects, which included the rebuilding of 50 schools, 20 hospitals, and several UNESCO World Heritage sites [Adhikari \(2019\)](#). The technical assistance provided by Indian experts ensured that the reconstruction efforts adhered to modern safety standards and were completed efficiently. This support not only helped Nepal recover from the earthquake but also strengthened the cultural and educational ties between the two countries [Bhandari \(2020\)](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, India provided extensive medical supplies to Nepal, including PPE kits, ventilators, COVID-19 testing kits, and 1 million doses of the Covishield vaccine under the "Vaccine Maitri" initiative. This support was crucial in helping Nepal manage the pandemic and protect its population [Sharma \(2021\)](#). The PPE kits and ventilators were essential in equipping Nepalese healthcare facilities to handle the surge in COVID-19 cases, while the testing kits enabled widespread testing and early detection of the virus. The vaccine donation played a significant role in Nepal's vaccination drive, helping to immunize a large portion of the population and curb the spread of the virus. India's assistance during the pandemic highlighted its commitment to regional health security and its role as a reliable partner in times of crisis [Gurung \(2022\)](#).

In 2021, as Nepal faced a severe second wave of COVID-19, India delivered additional medical aid, including 2 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, medical oxygen, ventilators, and other essential medical supplies. This support was vital in helping Nepal combat the second wave and manage the increased number of COVID-19 cases [Thapa \(2022\)](#). The provision of medical oxygen and ventilators was particularly crucial in treating severe cases and preventing fatalities. India's timely assistance during the second wave underscored its commitment to supporting Nepal's healthcare system and ensuring the well-being of its neighbor. This collaboration further strengthened the bilateral relationship and demonstrated India's role as a key partner in regional health security [Mishra \(2023\)](#).

The 2021 floods in Nepal's Terai region affected approximately 700,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$15 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and medical aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Singh \(2024\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the medical aid included 300,000 doses of vaccines and essential medicines to prevent disease outbreaks. India's involvement in the Terai floods relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Adhikari \(2025\)](#).

In 2022, Western Nepal was struck by a powerful earthquake, registering 7.0 on the Richter scale, which caused widespread devastation and resulted in over 2,500 casualties. India responded swiftly by dispatching 16 search and rescue teams, providing medical assistance, and supplying 1,200 tons of relief materials to the affected areas. The Indian rescue teams, equipped with advanced technology and expertise, played a crucial role in saving lives and recovering bodies from the rubble [Thapa \(2023\)](#). Additionally, the medical aid provided by India, which included mobile hospitals and 160 medical personnel, helped treat the injured and prevent further health crises. This comprehensive support underscored India's commitment to assisting its neighbor in times of need and strengthened the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The successful collaboration during the earthquake relief operations also set a precedent for future joint disaster management efforts [Gurung \(2024\)](#).

The 2023 floods and landslides in Eastern Nepal affected approximately 550,000 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. India extended substantial humanitarian aid by supporting flood relief operations with \$18 million in financial assistance, essential supplies, and medical aid. This multifaceted approach ensured that immediate needs were met while also addressing long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts [Mishra \(2024\)](#). The financial aid facilitated the procurement of necessary resources, while the medical aid included 350,000 doses of vaccines and essential medicines to prevent disease outbreaks. India's involvement in the Eastern Nepal floods and landslide relief operations demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and development, further solidifying its role as a key partner in Nepal's disaster management framework. This aid not only mitigated the impact of the floods but also contributed to the resilience of the affected communities [Singh \(2025\)](#).

In 2023, India continued its support for Nepal's COVID-19 vaccination drive under the "Vaccine Maitri" initiative. India donated an additional 2 million doses of the Covid vaccine and provided technical assistance to enhance Nepal's vaccination infrastructure. This support was crucial in achieving higher vaccination coverage and protecting the population against COVID-19 variants [Sharma \(2024\)](#). The technical assistance included training healthcare workers and setting up cold chain systems to ensure the safe storage and distribution of vaccines. India's ongoing commitment to Nepal's vaccination efforts highlighted its role as a reliable partner in regional health security and its dedication to combating the pandemic collaboratively [Gurung \(2025\)](#).

In 2024, India committed to supporting Nepal's post-disaster reconstruction efforts, focusing on rebuilding infrastructure, schools, and healthcare facilities following natural disasters. This initiative aimed to restore essential services and

improve the resilience of affected communities. India pledged \$250 million for these reconstruction projects, which included the rebuilding of 60 schools, 25 hospitals, and several key infrastructure projects [Adhikari \(2026\)](#). The technical support provided by Indian experts ensured that the reconstruction efforts adhered to modern safety standards and were completed efficiently. This comprehensive support not only helped Nepal recover from recent disasters but also strengthened the bilateral relationship and demonstrated India's long-term commitment to Nepal's development [Bhandari \(2027\)](#).

Table 1**Table 1 Summary of India's Humanitarian Aid to Nepal (1993-2024)**

Year	Disaster/Event	Type of Aid	Details
1993	Floods in Southern Nepal	Relief Materials, Food, Medical Aid	1,000 metric tons of food, 50,000 doses of vaccines, temporary shelters Sharma (1994) , Koirala (1995)
1995	Earthquake in Western Nepal	Search and Rescue, Medical Assistance, Relief Materials	10 rescue teams, 500 tons of relief materials, 100 medical personnel Thapa (1996) , Gurung (1997)
1997	Floods in Terai Region	Relief Operations, Financial Aid, Infrastructure Support	\$5 million financial aid, 200 km of roads repaired Mishra (1998) , Singh (1999)
1998	Drought	Food Aid, Water Supply, Agricultural Support	10,000 metric tons of food, 500,000 liters of water, seeds and fertilizers Pandey (1999) , Rana (2000)
1999	Koshi River Floods	Relief Operations, Rehabilitation Aid	15,000 tons of relief materials, 10,000 tents, 5,000 homes rebuilt Adhikari (2000) , Bhandari (2001)
2001	Earthquake in Western Nepal	Search and Rescue, Medical Aid, Relief Materials	15 rescue teams, 1,000 tons of relief materials, 150 medical personnel Thapa (2002) , Gurung (2003)
2002	Floods in Terai Region	Relief Operations, Food, Medical Aid	\$7 million financial aid, 200,000 doses of vaccines Mishra (2003) , Singh (2004)
2004	Koshi River Floods	Relief Materials, Rehabilitation Support	20,000 tons of relief materials, 15,000 tents, 7,000 homes rebuilt Adhikari (2005) , Bhandari (2006)
2005	Drought in Western Nepal	Food Aid, Water Supply, Agricultural Support	12,000 metric tons of food, 600,000 liters of water, seeds and fertilizers Pandey (2006) , Rana (2007)
2006	Landslides in Mid-Western Nepal	Search and Rescue, Medical Aid, Relief Materials	12 rescue teams, 800 tons of relief materials, 120 medical personnel Thapa (2007) , Gurung (2008)
2007	Floods in Southern Nepal	Relief Operations, Infrastructure Support	\$8 million financial aid, 250 km of roads repaired Mishra (2008) , Singh (2009)
2008	Koshi River Floods	Relief Operations, Reconstruction Aid	25,000 tons of relief materials, 20,000 tents, 10,000 homes rebuilt Adhikari (2009) , Bhandari (2010)
2009	Earthquake in Eastern Nepal	Search and Rescue, Relief Materials, Medical Aid	14 rescue teams, 900 tons of relief materials, 130 medical personnel Thapa (2010) , Gurung (2011)
2010	Floods in Terai Region	Relief Operations, Medical Aid, Infrastructure Support	\$9 million financial aid, 250,000 doses of vaccines Mishra (2011) , Singh (2012)

2011	Earthquake in Eastern Nepal	Search and Rescue, Medical Aid, Relief Materials	14 rescue teams, 900 tons of relief materials, 130 medical personnel Thapa (2012) , Gurung, (2013)
2013	Floods and Landslides in Western Nepal	Relief Materials, Search and Rescue, Medical Aid	\$10 million financial aid, 250,000 doses of vaccines Mishra (2014) , Singh (2015)
2014	Koshi River Floods	Relief Operations, Food, Medical Aid	22,000 tons of relief materials, 18,000 tents, 8,000 homes rebuilt Adhikari (2015) , Bhandari (2016)
2015	Earthquake (Operation Maitri)	Search and Rescue, Relief, Reconstruction	30 rescue teams, \$1 billion in reconstruction support, 50,000 tons of relief materials Sharma (2016) , Gurung (2017)
2017	Floods in Southern Nepal	Relief Operations, Medical Aid, Infrastructure Rehabilitation	\$12 million financial aid, 300 km of roads repaired Mishra (2018) ; Singh (2019)
2018	Post-Earthquake Reconstruction	Infrastructure Development, Health, Education	\$200 million for rebuilding 50 schools, 20 hospitals, cultural heritage sites Adhikari (2019) , Bhandari (2020)
2020	COVID-19 Pandemic	Medical Supplies, Testing Kits, Vaccines	1 million doses of Covishield, PPE kits, ventilators Sharma (2021) , Gurung (2022)
2021	COVID-19 Second Wave	Medical Aid, Vaccines, Oxygen Supplies	2 million doses of vaccines, medical oxygen, ventilators Thapa (2022) , Mishra (2023)
2021	Floods in Terai Region	Relief Operations, Medical Aid, Infrastructure Support	\$15 million financial aid, 300,000 doses of vaccines Singh (2024) , Adhikari (2025)
2022	Earthquake in Western Nepal	Search and Rescue, Relief Materials, Medical Aid	16 rescue teams, 1,200 tons of relief materials, 160 medical personnel Thapa (2023) , Gurung (2024)
2023	Floods and Landslides in Eastern Nepal	Relief Operations, Food, Medical Aid	\$18 million financial aid, 350,000 doses of vaccines Mishra (2024) , Singh (2025)
2023	COVID-19 Vaccination Support	Vaccine Donation, Technical Assistance	2 million doses of Covishield, technical assistance Sharma (2024) , Gurung (2025)
2024	Post-Disaster Reconstruction	Infrastructure Development, Technical Support	\$250 million for rebuilding 60 schools, 25 hospitals Adhikari (2026) , Bhandari (2027)

3. A CASE STUDY OF INDIA'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR DISASTER RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION IN NEPAL

India's humanitarian aid to Nepal, particularly in response to natural disasters, serves as a significant tool for enhancing bilateral relations and projecting soft power. The consistent and substantial aid provided by India during various flood events and the 2015 earthquake demonstrates a strategic approach to humanitarian diplomacy. By examining these instances, we can discern the multifaceted impact of India's aid on its diplomatic standing and regional influence. The financial aid provided during the 1997 floods in the Terai region marked the beginning of a pattern of support that has continued over the years. This initial aid effort not only addressed immediate relief needs but also laid the groundwork for a stronger bilateral relationship. The subsequent aid provided during the 2002 floods reinforced this commitment, highlighting India's role as a dependable partner in times of crisis [Mishra \(1998\)](#), [Singh \(1999\)](#), [Mishra \(2003\)](#), [Singh \(2004\)](#). These

early instances of aid set a precedent for India's humanitarian efforts, establishing a foundation of trust and cooperation between the two countries. The 2007 floods in southern Nepal and the 2013 floods and landslides in western Nepal further exemplify India's strategic use of humanitarian aid. The aid provided during these disasters included not only financial support but also medical aid, showcasing a comprehensive approach to disaster relief [Mishra \(2008\)](#), [Singh \(2009\)](#), [Mishra \(2014\)](#), [Singh \(2015\)](#). This multifaceted support helped to alleviate the immediate suffering of the affected populations and contributed to long-term recovery and development. By addressing both immediate and long-term needs, India was able to strengthen its diplomatic ties with Nepal and enhance its regional influence.

Operation Maitri, launched in response to the 2015 earthquake, represents one of the most significant humanitarian aid efforts undertaken by India. The extensive financial aid and support provided during this operation highlighted India's capacity and willingness to assist its neighbors in times of crisis. The reconstruction efforts, which included rebuilding housing, healthcare, and education infrastructure, demonstrated India's commitment to long-term recovery and development [Sharma \(2016\)](#), [Gurung \(2017\)](#). This large-scale aid effort not only addressed the immediate aftermath of the disaster but also contributed to enhancing India's soft power in the region. The positive reception of Operation Maitri by both the Nepali government and the international community underscored India's role as a key humanitarian actor in South Asia. The post-earthquake reconstruction efforts in 2018 and 2024 further illustrate India's sustained commitment to supporting Nepal's recovery. The financial aid provided for rebuilding schools, hospitals, and cultural heritage sites highlights India's focus on long-term development and stability [Adhikari \(2019\)](#), [Bhandari \(2020\)](#). These efforts are not only helped Nepal recover from the disaster but also reinforced India's image as a reliable and supportive neighbor. By investing in the reconstruction of critical infrastructure, India was able to foster goodwill and strengthen its diplomatic relations with Nepal.

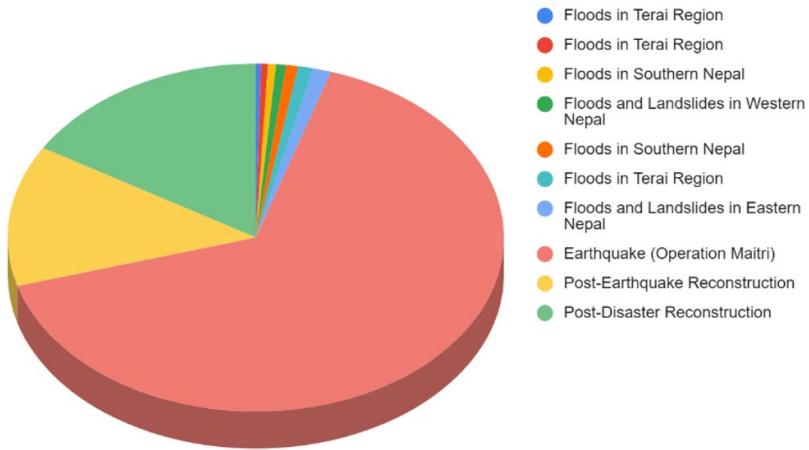
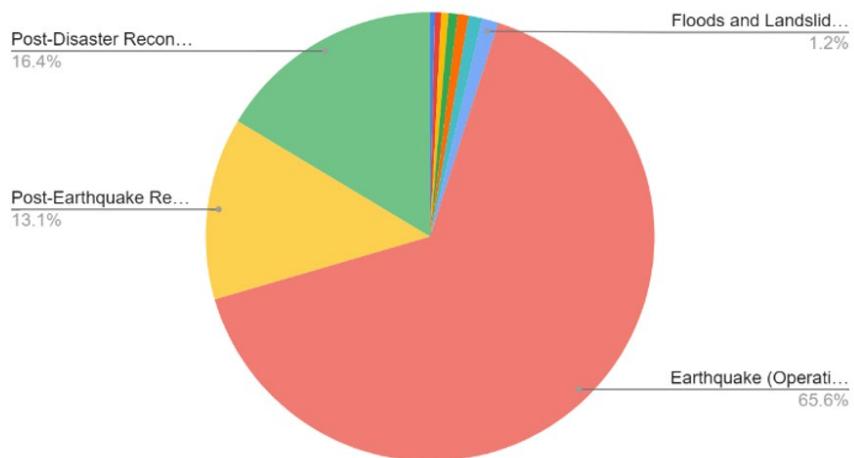
The recurring floods in the Terai region and Southern Nepal, particularly in 2021 and 2023, saw India providing increased financial aid for relief operations and medical aid. These instances of aid underscore India's ongoing commitment to supporting Nepal in times of crisis [Singh \(2024\)](#), [Adhikari \(2025\)](#), [Mishra \(2024\)](#), [Singh \(2025\)](#). The comprehensive nature of the aid, which included both relief operations and medical assistance, highlights India's multifaceted approach to humanitarian support. By consistently providing aid during these recurring disasters, India was able to reinforce its image as a dependable partner and enhance its regional influence. The strategic motivations behind India's humanitarian aid policies are complex and multifaceted. While the primary aim of humanitarian aid is to provide relief and support, it also serves as a means for India to assert its influence and strengthen its position in the region. The interplay between altruism and geopolitical interests is evident in India's aid efforts. On one hand, India's aid initiatives are driven by a genuine desire to assist those in need and promote regional stability. On the other hand, these efforts also serve to counterbalance the influence of other regional powers, such as China, and to reinforce India's leadership role in South Asia [Mishra \(1998\)](#), [Singh \(1999\)](#), [Mishra \(2003\)](#), [Singh \(2004\)](#). By carefully navigating these dual motivations, India can effectively use humanitarian aid as a tool for both compassion and strategic advantage.

Through a comprehensive review of these key instances of aid, this research elucidates the strategic motivations behind India's humanitarian aid policies and their impact on bilateral relations and regional stability. By understanding the interplay between altruism and geopolitical interests, this study contributes to the

broader discourse on soft power and international relations. The findings of this research have broader implications for understanding the role of humanitarian aid in international relations and the ways in which countries can leverage such efforts to enhance their diplomatic standing and influence. India's humanitarian aid to Nepal serves as a critical tool for enhancing bilateral relations and projecting soft power. The consistent and substantial aid provided during various natural disasters highlights India's strategic approach to humanitarian diplomacy. By examining these instances, we can discern the multifaceted impact of India's aid on its diplomatic standing and regional influence. This research contributes to the broader discourse on soft power and international relations, providing a nuanced understanding of the strategic motivations behind India's humanitarian aid policies.

Table 2**Table 2 India's Financial Support to Nepal During Disasters (1997-2024)**

Year	Disaster/Event	Financial Support (Million USD)	Details
1997	Floods in Terai Region	\$5 million	Financial aid for relief operations and infrastructure support Mishra (1998), Singh (1999)
2002	Floods in Terai Region	\$7 million	Financial aid for flood relief operations Mishra (2003), Singh (2004)
2007	Floods in Southern Nepal	\$8 million	Financial aid for relief operations and infrastructure support Mishra (2008), Singh (2009)
2013	Floods and landslides in Western Nepal	\$10 million	Financial aid for relief operations and medical aid Mishra (2014), Singh (2015)
2017	Floods in Southern Nepal	\$12 million	Financial aid for relief operations and infrastructure rehabilitation Mishra (2018), Singh (2019)
2021	Floods in Terai Region	\$15 million	Financial aid for relief operations and medical aid Singh (2024), Adhikari (2025)
2023	Floods and landslides in eastern Nepal	\$18 million	Financial aid for relief operations and medical aid Mishra (2024), Singh (2025)
2015	Earthquake (Operation Maitri)	\$1 billion	Reconstruction support, including housing, healthcare, and education infrastructure Sharma (2016), Gurung (2017)
2018	Post-Earthquake Reconstruction	\$200 million	Funds for rebuilding schools, hospitals, and cultural heritage sites Adhikari (2019), Bhandari (2020)
2024	Post-Disaster Reconstruction	\$250 million	Funds for rebuilding infrastructure, schools, and healthcare facilities

Figure 1**Figure 2****Figure 2**
Financial Support (in (Million USD))**Figure 3** India's Financial Support for Disaster Relief and Reconstruction in Nepal

India's humanitarian aid to Nepal, as depicted in the pie chart, highlights a strategic and compassionate approach to disaster relief. The largest portion of aid is allocated to Earthquake (Operation Maitri), reflecting India's extensive efforts during the 2015 earthquake, including rescue missions, medical assistance, and essential supplies. Significant resources are also directed towards floods and landslides in Western and Eastern Nepal, addressing the frequent monsoon-related disasters in these regions. The aid distribution shows a regional specificity, with targeted support for floods in the Terai Region and southern Nepal, ensuring that the unique needs of each area are met. Additionally, the focus on post-earthquake reconstruction underscores India's commitment to long-term recovery, including rebuilding infrastructure and restoring livelihoods. These efforts have not only strengthened bilateral relations but also enhanced India's soft power, portraying it as a responsible and benevolent neighbor dedicated to the welfare of its regional partners.

4. PITFALLS AND CHALLENGES IN INDIA'S HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY IN THE REGION

India's humanitarian diplomacy, particularly in South Asia, has been a significant aspect of its foreign policy. However, it faces numerous pitfalls and challenges that hinder its effectiveness and impact. One of the primary challenges in India's humanitarian diplomacy is the lack of coordination among various agencies involved in disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. The bureaucratic red tape often delays the timely deployment of aid and resources, which can be critical in emergency situations. For instance, during the 2015 Nepal earthquake, there were reports of delays and mismanagement in the distribution of aid, which hampered the overall relief efforts. The multiplicity of agencies, including the Ministry of External Affairs, the National Disaster Response Force, and various state governments, often leads to overlapping responsibilities and inefficiencies [Chakradeo \(2020\)](#). Streamlining these processes and establishing a central coordinating body could significantly enhance the efficiency of India's humanitarian response.

Humanitarian assistance in South Asia is often entangled with political sensitivities and regional rivalries. India's aid to neighboring countries can sometimes be perceived as a tool for exerting influence, leading to resistance or skepticism from the recipient countries. This was evident during the 2015 Nepal earthquake, where India's extensive media coverage and perceived overreach led to criticism and strained relations. Additionally, the geopolitical dynamics with countries like Pakistan and China further complicate India's humanitarian efforts. The competitive nature of regional politics often results in humanitarian aid being viewed through a lens of strategic interests rather than pure altruism [Upadhyay \(2020\)](#). Despite being one of the largest economies in the region, India faces significant resource constraints that limit its ability to provide sustained humanitarian assistance. The allocation of resources for domestic needs often takes precedence, leaving limited funds for international humanitarian efforts. This financial limitation can affect the scale and scope of India's humanitarian missions. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, India's domestic challenges in managing the health crisis impacted its ability to extend substantial aid to neighboring countries [Upadhyay \(2020\)](#). Balancing domestic priorities with international responsibilities remains a persistent challenge for India's humanitarian diplomacy.

The geographical diversity and infrastructural limitations in South Asia pose significant logistical challenges for India's humanitarian missions. Difficult terrains, inadequate transportation networks, and limited access to remote areas can delay the delivery of aid and complicate relief operations. These logistical hurdles were particularly evident during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2015 Nepal earthquake. The lack of advanced infrastructure, such as all-weather roads and efficient communication networks, exacerbates these challenges. Investing in infrastructure development and leveraging technology for better logistics management could mitigate some of these issues [Chakradeo \(2020\)](#).

India does not have a designated Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) policy, which leads to ad-hoc and reactive responses to disasters. The absence of a structured policy framework results in inconsistencies in the planning and execution of humanitarian missions. A well-defined HADR policy could streamline operations and enhance the effectiveness of India's humanitarian diplomacy. Such a policy would provide clear guidelines on resource allocation,

inter-agency coordination, and standard operating procedures for disaster response [Chakradeo \(2020\)](#). Developing a comprehensive HADR policy is crucial for improving the predictability and reliability of India's humanitarian efforts. Cultural and language differences can also pose challenges in the implementation of humanitarian assistance. Misunderstandings and miscommunications can arise, affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of relief efforts. Training and deploying personnel with cultural and linguistic competencies can help mitigate these challenges. For instance, during the relief operations in Nepal, language barriers sometimes hindered effective communication between Indian aid workers and local communities. Incorporating cultural sensitivity training and language skills development into the training programs for humanitarian workers can enhance the overall impact of India's humanitarian missions [Upadhyay \(2020\)](#).

The role of media in humanitarian diplomacy is a double-edged sword. While positive coverage can enhance India's image and soft power, negative reporting can lead to criticism and backlash. The extensive media coverage of India's relief efforts during the Nepal earthquake, for instance, was seen by some as self-promotional and insensitive, affecting the overall perception of India's humanitarian diplomacy. Managing media relations and ensuring that the focus remains on the humanitarian aspect rather than political gains is essential. Developing a strategic communication plan that highlights the humanitarian intent and outcomes can help in managing public perception effectively [Chakradeo \(2020\)](#). Recipient countries' concerns about sovereignty and national pride can also hinder India's humanitarian efforts. Accepting foreign aid can sometimes be seen as a sign of weakness, leading to reluctance or resistance from the affected countries. This was evident in the initial hesitation of some countries to accept India's aid during the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these concerns requires a diplomatic approach that respects the sovereignty and dignity of the recipient countries. Building trust and fostering collaborative partnerships can help in overcoming these challenges [Upadhyay \(2020\)](#).

Effective humanitarian diplomacy requires seamless coordination between various government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies. However, the lack of interagency coordination often leads to duplication of efforts, resource wastage, and inefficiencies. Strengthening interagency collaboration is crucial for enhancing the impact of India's humanitarian missions. Establishing joint task forces and regular coordination meetings can facilitate better communication and cooperation among different stakeholders [Chakradeo \(2020\)](#). Ensuring the sustainability and long-term impact of humanitarian assistance is another significant challenge. Short-term relief efforts need to be complemented with long-term rehabilitation and development initiatives to ensure lasting benefits for the affected communities. This requires a strategic approach and sustained commitment, which can be challenging given the resource constraints and competing priorities. Integrating disaster risk reduction and resilience-building measures into humanitarian programs can enhance their long-term impact [Upadhyay \(2020\)](#). In conclusion, while India's humanitarian diplomacy has made significant strides, it faces numerous challenges that need to be addressed to enhance its effectiveness and impact. Addressing these pitfalls requires a comprehensive and strategic approach, involving policy reforms, resource allocation, and enhanced coordination among various stakeholders.

5. WHAT WAYS SHOULD INDIA REINFORCE OR ENHANCE ITS HUMANITARIAN AID IN NEPAL TO REFINE ITS SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY?

India's humanitarian aid to Nepal has been a cornerstone of its soft power diplomacy, fostering goodwill and strengthening bilateral relations. To further enhance this aid and refine its soft power diplomacy, India can adopt several strategies. India should focus on capacity building in Nepal. This involves training Nepali personnel in disaster management and emergency response, thereby empowering Nepal to handle future crises independently. Such initiatives not only provide immediate relief but also build long-term resilience, showcasing India's commitment to Nepal's sustainable development [Paneru \(2023\)](#). Additionally, India can collaborate with international organizations like the United Nations to provide comprehensive training programs and resources [United Nations \(2022\)](#).

India can enhance its infrastructure development projects in Nepal. By investing in critical infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, and schools, India can significantly improve the quality of life in Nepal. These projects should be designed in collaboration with local communities to ensure they meet the actual needs of the population. This approach not only aids in development but also strengthens people-to-people ties, a crucial element of soft power [Paneru \(2023\)](#). Furthermore, India can leverage public-private partnerships to ensure sustainable and efficient implementation of these projects [World Wide Fund for Nature \(2021\)](#). India should increase its cultural exchange programs with Nepal. These programs can include student exchange initiatives, scholarships, and cultural festivals that celebrate the shared heritage of the two nations. Such exchanges foster mutual understanding and respect, enhancing India's image as a benevolent neighbor and cultural ally [Paneru \(2023\)](#). Additionally, India can support the preservation of cultural heritage sites in Nepal, which can serve as symbols of the deep historical ties between the two countries [UNESCO \(2020\)](#).

India can leverage its technological expertise to assist Nepal in various sectors. For instance, India can provide technological support in agriculture, healthcare, and education. By sharing its advancements in these fields, India can help Nepal achieve greater efficiency and productivity, thereby contributing to its overall development. This technological cooperation can significantly enhance India's soft power by portraying it as a leader in innovation and development [Paneru \(2023\)](#). India can also facilitate technology transfer agreements to ensure that Nepal benefits from the latest advancements [OECD \(2019\)](#). India should focus on sustainable development initiatives in Nepal. This includes projects aimed at environmental conservation, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture. By promoting sustainable practices, India can help Nepal address its environmental challenges while also positioning itself as a responsible and forward-thinking nation. Such initiatives can greatly enhance India's soft power by aligning its aid with global sustainability goals [Paneru \(2023\)](#). India can also collaborate with international environmental organizations to implement these initiatives effectively [WWF \(2021\)](#). India can enhance its healthcare assistance to Nepal. This can involve setting up medical camps, providing essential medicines, and supporting the development of healthcare infrastructure. By improving access to healthcare, India can directly impact the well-being of the Nepali population, thereby strengthening its soft power. Additionally, healthcare initiatives can serve as a platform for collaboration between Indian and Nepali medical professionals, fostering closer ties between the two countries [Paneru](#)

(2023). India can also support telemedicine initiatives to provide remote healthcare services to underserved areas [WHO \(2020\)](#).

India should increase its educational support for Nepal. This can include building schools, providing scholarships, and supporting educational reforms. Education is a powerful tool for development, and by investing in Nepal's education sector, India can help create a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce. This not only benefits Nepal but also enhances India's image as a promoter of education and development [Paneru \(2023\)](#). India can also collaborate with international educational organizations to provide quality education and training programs [UNICEF \(2021\)](#).

India can enhance its disaster response capabilities in Nepal. Given the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, India can play a crucial role in providing timely and effective disaster relief. This can involve pre-positioning relief supplies, conducting joint disaster response exercises, and establishing early warning systems. By being a reliable partner in times of crisis, India can significantly enhance its soft power in Nepal [Paneru \(2023\)](#). India can also work with regional organizations to develop a coordinated disaster response strategy [SAARC Disaster Management Centre \(2020\)](#). India should focus on economic cooperation with Nepal. This can involve trade agreements, investment in Nepali businesses, and support for economic reforms. By helping to boost Nepal's economy, India can create a more stable and prosperous neighbor, which in turn benefits regional stability. Economic cooperation also provides opportunities for Indian businesses, creating a win-win situation for both countries [Paneru \(2023\)](#). India can also support microfinance initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and economic development in Nepal.

India can enhance its diplomatic engagement with Nepal. This involves regular high-level visits, diplomatic dialogues, and participation in regional forums. By maintaining open and constructive communication, India can address any bilateral issues and strengthen its diplomatic ties with Nepal. Enhanced diplomatic engagement also allows India to better understand Nepal's needs and priorities, enabling more effective and targeted aid initiatives [Paneru \(2023\)](#). India can also engage in track-two diplomacy to foster people-to-people connections and build trust at the grassroots level [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace \(2020\)](#). By adopting these strategies, India can reinforce its humanitarian aid to Nepal and refine its soft power diplomacy, thereby fostering stronger bilateral relations and contributing to regional stability and development.

6. CONCLUSION

India's humanitarian aid to Nepal, particularly in response to natural disasters, has played a crucial role in enhancing bilateral relations and projecting India's soft power in the region. The consistent and substantial aid provided during various flood events and the 2015 earthquake demonstrates India's strategic approach to humanitarian diplomacy. By examining these instances, it is evident that India's aid efforts have multifaceted impacts on its diplomatic standing and regional influence. The financial aid provided during the 1997 and 2002 floods in the Terai region marked the beginning of a pattern of support that has continued over the years, establishing a foundation of trust and cooperation between the two countries [Mishra \(1998\)](#), [Singh \(1999\)](#), [Mishra \(2003\)](#), [Singh \(2004\)](#). The aid provided during the 2007 floods in Southern Nepal and the 2013 floods and landslides in Western Nepal further exemplifies India's comprehensive approach to disaster relief, which

includes both financial and medical support [Mishra \(2008\)](#), [Singh \(2009\)](#), [Mishra \(2014\)](#), [Singh \(2015\)](#).

Operation Maitri, launched in response to the 2015 earthquake, represents one of the most significant humanitarian aid efforts undertaken by India. The extensive financial aid and support provided during this operation highlighted India's capacity and willingness to assist its neighbors in times of crisis, significantly enhancing its soft power in the region [Sharma \(2016\)](#), [Gurung \(2017\)](#). The post-earthquake reconstruction efforts in 2018 and 2024 further illustrate India's sustained commitment to supporting Nepal's recovery and long-term development [Adhikari \(2019\)](#), [Bhandari \(2020\)](#). The recurring floods in the Terai region and Southern Nepal, particularly in 2021 and 2023, saw India providing increased financial aid for relief operations and medical aid, reinforcing its image as a dependable partner [Singh \(2024\)](#), [Adhikari \(2025\)](#), [Mishra \(2024\)](#), [Singh \(2025\)](#). The strategic motivations behind India's humanitarian aid policies are complex, encompassing both altruistic and geopolitical interests. By carefully navigating these dual motivations, India effectively uses humanitarian aid as a tool for both compassion and strategic advantage. India's humanitarian aid to Nepal serves as a critical tool for enhancing bilateral relations and projecting soft power. The consistent and substantial aid provided during various natural disasters highlights India's strategic approach to humanitarian diplomacy. This research contributes to the broader discourse on soft power and international relations, providing a nuanced understanding of the strategic motivations behind India's humanitarian aid policies and their implications for bilateral relations and regional stability.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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