

## Return to Great Love Villages in Nepal After 20 Years

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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“Taiwan! Taiwan!” Seeing again the blue and white uniform brought the memories of 20 years ago flooding back.

The residents of the Great Love Village in Nepal thought back to 1995 when they moved into the village. They had no water and no electricity; their life was extremely difficult. When they went to collect water, they were looked down on. But they did not fear hardship, because the volunteers of Tzu Chi reached out to them in their hour of need and gave them a secure home where they were safe from the buffeting of the wind and the rain. That feeling is engraved in their memory for ever.

It is a 20-minute journey by Buddha Air from Katmandu to Simara airport in southern Nepal; by road, the car journey takes five hours over mountain roads. Then volunteers went to Padam Pokhari village in Makwanpur county to see the life of the villagers after the earthquake.



It was the monsoon season of 1993. The rain fell hard and fast; it rained without cease in the southeast and the east of Nepal. The levels of the rivers rose rapidly, bringing disaster to the residents. In 23 counties, the death toll was more than 1,000, with over 32,000 homes completely or partially destroyed and 400,000 people left without homes.

Following an evaluation, Tzu Chi decided to construct 1,800 Great Love homes in four places in three counties – Sarlahi, Rauthat and Makwanpur. They were the areas worst affected by the flooding. The residents moved in in 1995.

Twenty years have passed since then. The Tzu Chi volunteers were deeply concerned about the residents in the 1,800 homes. After the earthquake of 7.8 on April 25, were they safe and well?

### **Rebuilding the monument shows the love of the villagers**

“Taiwan, Taiwan” was the cry of Achut Kunwar when he saw from afar the familiar uniform of blue and white. He shouted loudly and waved his arms.

As the volunteers entered Padam Pokhari, a commemorative monument that had been rebuilt was the first thing that caught their eyes. Many years ago, the monument had fallen down. Two of the villagers started to collect money through their own efforts and rebuilt it four years ago; on three sides are a record of Tzu Chi’s work in building the Great Love Village, in Nepali, Chinese and English.

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As she stood in front of the monument, Da Ai Television reporter Ren Jia-zhen said: “According to the residents of the Great Love village, this commemorative monument serious damaged four years ago. At that time, each villager and each household contributed a small amount of money and collected enough to rebuild the monument. The Chinese written there may not be so accurate but every character shows the deep feeling of the villagers.”

### Homes survived the earthquake



When they saw the Tzu Chi volunteers arriving, the villagers came out of their homes to welcome them. They had not seen them for a long time and knew that they had come from afar. The volunteers said these words, which they had long remembered: “these homes were given by you.” The older residents of the village all remember the story of how they were built. Among them was Site Devi, 59; she led volunteer Luo Mei-zhu by the hand and, without waiting an instant, took her to her home. Twenty years ago, Devi was 39 years old. Two decades later, she is a happy grandmother with three generations of her family living under the same roof. Each home in the Great Love Village has two rooms. After the two powerful earthquakes of the last month, the house has a few small cracks but no major damage.

A bird’s eye view shows the whole village, with the 400 homes. Each home has a garden of its own. The scale of the village is exactly as it was in the original plan 20 years ago. Two decades later, it has a total of 2,500-3,000 people.

### Poverty has not broken their spirit, Love remains



The terrible floods of that year did not break the spirit of the villagers. On the contrary, it made their hope and resolve stronger. One lady of nearly 60 moved into the villager with her husband and four children from an outlying area. There was no water nor electricity and life was very hard; they had to endure the suspicion of local people toward outsiders and did odd jobs in different places to make a living.

Despite that, the poverty of the family did not destroy the will of the children. Each took the opportunity to study and go up in the world; now each of them has his own success. One son is now 31 and is the manager of four television channels. When he saw the Tzu Chi volunteers coming, he immediately took out a tape recorder to interview them and preserve for ever the love of the volunteers for the villagers.

In 1993, the floods devastated Nepal. In 1995, Tzu Chi built the Great Love Village and handed it over. Twenty years later, when it seemed that the link had been broken, medical teams from

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the foundation returned to Nepal after the earthquake on April 25; and its people saw the strength of the love of Taiwan people. If you ask why we should build homes thousands of miles away? See the smiles of the faces of the children and the warmth of the old people – you do not need words to answer.

Report by Ren Jia-zhen, Lin Wei-de and Zhang Qing-wen in Nepal May 18, 2015