
Nepal: the miracle of Bogdaun, "a periphery turned a beacon of light" six years after the earthquake

Bodgaun is one of the poorest villages in Nepal. Located in Sindhupalchok district, on the slopes of Central Nepal's mountains, 70 km from the capital Kathmandu. It was hardly hit by the earthquake of April 25, 2015, which tore to the ground over 900 thousand homes and claimed more than ten thousand lives across Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The village is inhabited by the Majhis indigenous people with age-old roots and a recent past marked by marginalisation and persecution, as they are regarded as one of the lowest castes in Nepal. **Six years later...** Six years after the earthquake, Bodgaun was restored to new life thanks to the efforts of men and women who offered emergency relief and joined forces with the local inhabitants, no longer victims but protagonists, the true architects of a rebirth that feels like a miracle.



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[... founder of Jay Nepal NGO, who eventually decided to remain in the village, told SIR. Alberto's story is intimately connected with Nepal and the small village where he runs his projects. Alberto is a successful entrepreneur, a passionate traveller, skier and climber. He has turned his life around to dedicate himself to earthquake-ravaged Nepal. "My wish was to help Nepal with the same concern with which one helps a friend in need," Alberto said. "I managed to mobilise a large number of volunteers from all over the world, through friends and acquaintances. We started to make the areas worst hit by the earthquake safe by 'manually' tearing down unsafe buildings.](#)



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[Jay Nepal NGO was thus created amidst the rubble. I went from gemstones and mountain climbing to heaps of rubble", he said. It's an uninterrupted commitment which "has directly involved the earthquake victims who became the protagonists of reconstruction and rebirth", he pointed out. Ninety per cent of Jay Nepal's volunteers today are young Nepalese. Yet the initial response of the Majhi people of Bodgaun was not exactly encouraging: "Some of our volunteers had travelled to places outside Kathmandu to bring relief supplies after the second earthquake of May 10, 2015, when they were stopped on the road by a group of people who were forcefully and insistently asking for food and water. That's when we discovered that there was a small village of roughly 2000 inhabitants, including many children, razed to the ground by the earthquake, to whom no one had brought assistance... leaving the inhabitants at the mercy of continuous aftershocks. We returned to the village a few days later with more than 200 volunteers and embarked on a project that is still unfinished after six years.](#)

["We went to the village of Bodgaun to make a change and we returned transformed,"](#)

[Alberto repeats, almost like a mantra. "One of the first things we did when we arrived was to repair a 2 km-long water pipeline that provides the villagers with a small spring beneath the village, where they fill their jugs with water and bring them back, after standing on long lines, to their small dwellings most of which consist of a single room without a kitchen or bathroom, where the whole family lives.](#)

The inhabitants of this poor village surprised us with their humility: they asked us for mosquito nets, much needed by all those who were left homeless and were forced to sleep outdoors in an area filled with insects. We brought the material and involved women from Kathmandu so they could be taught how to sew these mosquito nets. This was how a small gesture sparked off an inspiration that has now become a consolidated practice. *Teaching and involvement have been our working methods, based on the saying: 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime'*. Day after day, Bodgaun went from being a remote periphery of Nepal, a discarded, forgotten and abandoned part of the world, to a "development site" where people are gradually recovering their human dignity and inspiring other villages in the area. Once a desolate place inhabited by the poorest among the poor, Bodgaun is now being transformed into a beacon of light that guides the rebirth of the entire area. **Six years of projects.** In just six years we set up the first medical clinic in the district - Luzzi remarked - offering services to an area with a population of approximately 12,000 people, complete with emergency room, PHC, maternity ward, radiology, clinical analysis laboratory and all the necessary medical equipment. We then set up the first sports centre in the area for youths, with a recreational area, a cafeteria and a cinema, a theatre, as well as football and volleyball pitches. We also set up a football team, dressmaking workshops for women, and an agricultural training programme in conjunction with one of Nepal's largest universities, with a view to helping farmers grow healthier and more sustainable crops. The purpose of these initiatives is to generate income for the local population, critical for leading a healthy life and for supporting all community projects. We are currently in the process of building the first aqueduct, which will eventually bring drinking water to all 400 homes in the village, and water to irrigate the crops. These projects were implemented with great sacrifice and with the help of many friends and benefactors, such as "Caritas Italy", "Senza Confini" NGO, the Rome Missionary Centre, inter alia. **After the earthquake, the COVID-19 pandemic.** With the raging Coronavirus pandemic, the Medical Centre became a containment and treatment centre for this deadly disease. A COVID medical unit with eight beds was set up for the most critical patients, while external medical teams performed Covid 19 tests at home, offering home treatment to dozens of infected people in the area. *We overcame the earthquake challenge - Alberto said - we will also defeat Covid. The Nepalese people have a big heart. This is the time to stand together.* The agreement signed in June 2019 between the Medicine and Surgery Faculty of Tor Vergata University (Rome) and Jay Nepal NGO for promoting cultural and scientific cooperation through the exchange of experiences of post-graduate students, teachers and researchers, with the ultimate goal of launching research projects on rural medicine, is also proving of great importance. A fundraising campaign has recently been started with the aim of supplying the Medical Centre with a jeep-ambulance, because, Alberto said, in an emergency, "minutes can make the difference between life and death." Today we travel by motorbike for emergency calls, but it's extremely dangerous and we are not equipped to transport critically ill patients. **Projects already in the pipeline.** A set of projects are already in the pipeline for the post-Coronavirus emergency, these include: a kindergarten for 80 children, the creation of a dance school, a theatre company, a scout group and a computer hub. Supported by the school, these projects will contribute to improved education and to combating illiteracy, which is still prevalent in the area. Six years on, Alberto is not yet ready to leave Bodgaun: "I will leave when the wounds of the local community, inflicted by decade-long extreme poverty, marginalisation, and by the earthquake, that deteriorated the existing precarious and unacceptable living conditions, will be healed. Indeed, this community is my family. Pope Francis' exhortation to serve the poor is always with me. Helping the poor requires living in their midst."

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