

Interview with Thame Family Affected by August 2024 Flood

Mingma Rita Sherpa and his family (sister and wife) were interviewed at Kopan Monastery, September 2024, while making prayers in front of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's holy body. Mingma Rita Sherpa answered some of these questions in English while the two women's responses were given through translation. As a result, their responses indicate the translator speaking on their behalf (she/they) while Mingma Rita Sherpa's responses are given in the first person (I/we). This transcript is lightly edited but kept it in the family's actual words as much as possible.

Question: Can you please describe what happened during the flood from your perspective?

Answer: The first time it came around 1:00 pm - 1:30 pm. At first there were some people seen that the flood is coming, and then they shouted, giving message there's water come and shouted, "run away, run away", just giving a signal there's, there's a flood coming.

Most of them are very confused and then just go out of home and run away to be safe, to be in a safe place in the hill.

At first, they saw that this flood is not that strong, that's not big one, so they thought they're safe, now it's not much damage in their village, but again, the unfortunate thing happened, again a second time this flood came, and this flood, the second time is the strongest, then the previous ones.

This time, most of the many houses have been damaged and they were unable to save their belongings, their properties, their ornaments things and there's many things unable to save, because they are so worried, and they're just trying to save themselves, and they run away especially in harsh condition, in their condition.

These unbelievable things, they never expected this. [The flood] again come to this side, and then again, the third time is the strongest, even in that times, from the top it slowly swept away the village and this is really a tragedy, and they cannot think, they just think it's a dream, that cannot believe it.

People are worried and crying, and so many problems they're facing difficulties. In the location where the Rinpoche's stupa is (Thametang Stupa), that location of Mani Prayer Wheel, that side was not much affected by the flood. And they believed that that's protected, protected some area because of this Mani Prayer [Wheel], as this area was not much affected.

But the other side, especially their house side, is most affected, and most of the people have lost everything's.

Question: And what immediate challenges do you face right after the floods?

Answer: As soon as this flood came, after that, they cannot believe, they cannot think, it was like a dream, it was like a cup that is scattered in hand and fall down and scattered, and in a second nothing is there. It felt like this.

All things have been destroyed within a few minutes, and they were not even able to save their shoes, even they just run away, and many have even left their own shoes and without shoes they have to run away.

They cannot believe, or they cannot accept, what to really believe at first. They have been rescued by the local governments, and they went, rescued by them and they stay there. Of course, all the people are crying, everyone is crying, everyone is crying, and everyone is not able to think about it. Whatever they have owned in their lifetime, everything's in trouble, everything they have has run away, all has been destroyed by floods.

Everyone still feels sad. The first day they are rescued by the local government, they have nothing to wear, and they're just there, and then the second day they came down again. The first day when they went up, that time there was not much, some area, but not much damage, some area.

But the second day even more area was damaged, all the lands and fields are cracked and because of that the water went down in the fields, in the seed level, went down and because of that it is starting to crack, break the lands in two different parts. All the lands became useless; they cannot reveal [means 'to find'] some things.

Unbelievable things happened, and of course we cannot imagine, and we cannot think of [this], and so they feel so sad just remembering these things.

Question: What are some of the most urgent needs or priorities for you and your community right now?

Answer: Now the place is completely destroyed, and it's kind of useless, even if you try to reveal [find] something - it won't happen, it's not going to work in that way.

So now even material things, these things will not work there because the land is totally unable to reveal the bases, it's unstable, totally kind of unusable.

So now they think what they can have, if they could have [support] or someone support them with the money, with cash, they think this is the best support, and with that money they can have some other place.

At the moment they can with that money they can use, and they can have other place, and that's what they think, the most priority is having money, rather than material things, neither trying to support to rebuild their house,

all this is not working. If someone helps, if they help with the cash, and that is most useful for them.

[FPMT's [Social Services Fund](#), is working with Kopan Helping Hands to offer support directly on the ground in Thame, where it is most needed now and in the future as the situation and urgent needs become clearer. To [offer support](#) at this critical time: <https://fpmt.org/support/socialservices/thame>]

Question: What are your hopes and plans for rebuilding or recovering from this disaster?

Mingma Rita Sherpa: Not at the moment, because still there are four or five lakes. They are not protected Also the global warming makes disasters this time, everywhere in the world. That day, I'm an electrician, I am in operation that's why I was in powerhouse.

She's my wife (point to the second lady), and she's my sister (point to lady next to him), and our house was on top of the village, that's where we got most disaster, that's the reason, we have a home on top of the village. First, we got the problem, and we were most disaster, problem, [they are the most affected ones].

Now the government wants to rebuild Thame, but not same places, and they are trying to move some places. Until now they have appointed the Hungo Tengma which means upper Hungo behind southern Thame, near the nice valley, and government wants to rebuild Thame on other side. That decision is not really fixed, but they are trying to rebuild Thame, but I don't know, if they will do or not. And also, ourselves we are not going to build at the moment because the route Namche to Thame is not quiet [stable].

Question: So as a community, have you come together and maybe start talking about moving to another place?

Mingma Rita Sherpa: Yeah, we are doing

Question: Like moving together as a community.

Mingma Rita Sherpa: Yeah, and some people are telling that it's better to move in a nearby Syangboche or Zorog, that is the most landscaped.

Question: Stable.

Mingma Rita Sherpa: it's stable place. But in Thame, half of the people are farming, they have yaks and Naaks (female yak), and others have many other cattle, all the valley, and from those people gets problem. If we moved to Zarog that's too far to get cattle and that's why some people telling that's bad idea, and best idea is upper Hungo, it's nearby, 15 minutes apart from Thame. But there is a problem with the drinking water. There's no drinking water, that's a problem, but otherwise the landscape is good really.

Question: There is no drinking water in upper Hungo?

Mingma Rita Sherpa: No, no. That is the problem.

Question: So, it's going to take some time, I guess, for you to decide where is the best place, right?

Mingma Rita Sherpa: Yeah.

Question: Is there anything you wish people outside your community knew about your experience?

Mingma Rita Sherpa: In my opinion that we know, everybody in the world knows, that [the issue is] global warming, climate change, it is continue to get warmer and warmer. Even in the winter we didn't get any snow this

winter, not only this winter, last two years we didn't get any snow in winter. And in summer it's a lot of rain, and sometimes so hot, sometimes too much rain, and that means we feel the climate change.

I want to request everywhere in the world, everybody has to protect the environment. There are many, many factories, many smoke [pollution], and the countries who are strong, they create a lot of pollution. And even in our country we have to protect the environment, we have to plant more trees, and we have to protect cultures, also our cultures in environment. That's why also we have to protect our natural culture like Choe (means Dharma) or language.

Now most of the people speaking Nepalese, English, and the Sherpa language is going down and down. Also, that is the same for our environment.

I think everybody, we all have to protect the environment. That's all.

Answer (translated): She doesn't know much about all the global warming things, but what she experiences is in her own place. They always think that Thame is the most precious place in the world.

Even they think that's the place where the most renowned people, like Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche were born there, and many other great mountaineers in the world were born in that place.

They think that this is the most beautiful place, by thinking that they don't expect to go anywhere, they just want to have whatever they want in their life, and this is all here, everything they put there [in Thame], they don't think to go anywhere.

Now everything they have is in Thame, they are proud to be themselves in a place like Thame, they are so proud that we have such a beautiful place

where the great mountaineers, great renowned people, great practitioners like Rinpoche was born in those places.

They always think and that place is the most beautiful and precious place, but when this happened, this kind of disaster happened, so they cannot imagine, and because from their perspective, global warming has mostly affected the area of Himalayan region, in the mountain regions, where they are staying, because of the other causes, because of the other activities they are facing the result of the global warming, and this is melting our mountains and all the difficulties they have to bear because of other misdeeds. They want all [people] to please think about global warming, and what we are facing is very difficult, we the Himalayan people, we are poor people, we're staying in the mountains, we are facing real difficulties. This is what I want to share and say to the world.

Question: How can others best support you and your community during this recovery period?

Mingma Rita Sherpa: I don't know, we don't know what to do.