

After the Study Tour :
Stories of Change



NSCFP (2009)



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project

inter
cooperation

Natural Resource Management
Rural Economy
Local Governance and Civil Society

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Forest Governance
Forest Rehabilitation and Soil Conservation

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Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organisations
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
DFO	District Forest Office
ECARDS	Ecology, Agriculture and Rural Development Society
LRP	Local Resource Person
MYRADA	Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NSCFP	Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project
PAF	Poverty Alleviation Fund
SHG	Self Help Group
SSMP	Sustainable Soil Management Program
VDC	Village Development Committee
VLDP	Village Level Development Planning

Glossary

Dalit : A term of self-designation used to describe people once called untouchables under the caste system. Belonging to occupational castes (such as blacksmiths, tailors and leather workers), such people were subject to very strong discrimination in earlier times – and remain disadvantaged in Nepali society today, despite the fact that discrimination on the basis of caste is illegal.

Janajati : A term of self-designation used by indigenous people of Nepal – those whose ethnic origins can be broadly traced to within Nepal's boundaries. They include Tamangs, Gurungs, Sherpas, Majhis and many others. The term is generally used to distinguish people from the more privileged Brahmin and Chhetri groups and the disadvantaged *dalits*.

Lokta : (*Daphne spp*) : A forest bush, the bark of which is used for traditional Nepali paper-making

Argeli (*Edgeworthia gardineri*) : A small shrub, the bark of which is used to make fine paper which has a particular market in Japan.

Ropani : A traditional unit of land comprising a square 74 feet by 74 feet. There are about 19.65 ropani to 1 hectare, and almost exactly 8 ropani to 1 acre.

Acknowledgements

The Manthali workshop that led to this publication, as well as the content itself, involved the contribution of many people. First and foremost are the participants themselves, who gave their time and thoughts so enthusiastically. Those who hosted them on their study tours in Bangladesh and in India should also not be forgotten; the Intercooperation Delegations India in Hyderabad and Bangladesh in Dhaka are warmly thanked in this respect.

The workshop was facilitated by Jane Carter and Brahma Dhoj Gurung, with general support being provided by Rudriksha Rai Parajuli and Anupama Mahat. Logistical arrangements were kindly and efficiently made by Anita Shrestha, Manamaya Moktan, Mitha Lamichane, Om Bahadur Karki, Kaji Thapa Magar and Dill Bahadur Hayu.

Sangita Pariyar and Anupama Mahat then shared the time-consuming task of transcribing the stories that had been recorded, with Anupama editing the Nepali versions, translating them into English, and formatting the final booklet. Jane Carter coordinated and edited the final English text, with Rudriksha Rai Parajuli providing helpful comments.

Anonymous Photographers other than mentioned in the book are also very much thanked for their contribution.

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Introduction

It was hot, dry and dehydrating; as the afternoon breeze gathered force down the valley, the group sitting in the open-walled meeting area was showered with a fine cloud of dust. We had come together in the district town of Manthali, Ramechhap to reflect upon journeys undertaken one year earlier, in May 2008. Through the facilitation of NSCFP and Intercooperation's delegations in Bangladesh and India, 22 of the persons gathered had travelled either to Bangladesh or to Southern India. There they had visited a number of Swiss-supported activities in community-based natural resource management, with the objective of learning and sharing experiences. Such study tours are quite commonly arranged through Swiss development assistance, although the number of persons involved and the scope of these particular study tours, both of which lasted 10 days, was somewhat exceptional. As required, the participants had filed a report on their return. Yet what had really stayed with them after their travels – what had they learned that they could put into practice on their return? Had anything that they saw genuinely inspired change?

Asking such questions to study tour participants one year after their tour is not a very common part of capacity building exercises, yet it should be. Despite the heat and dust of Manthali, the two days that the participants spent there together proved to be a time of rich exchanges and insights. This was the most important part of the exercise: the validation of what people had learned. The method of sharing that was chosen – story telling – also proved to be a valuable one for a number of reasons. In particular, telling a story focused each participant's mind on the particular message that s/he wished to convey – and brought in naturally emotional or attitudinal aspects, not only facts. People furthermore readily remembered each other's stories. It was decided that the stories could also be of interest to a wider audience in Nepal – and also to those involved in hosting the participants in Bangladesh and India. The final ones were therefore recorded and subsequently transcribed and translated into English – the workshop having been held in Nepali. (The Nepali versions of the stories are also available.)

Participants were encouraged to keep their stories short and concise; some

are indeed extremely short. The subject matter ranges quite considerably, but overall trends emerged. Those visiting the projects in Southern India had been particularly struck by the way that village-level accountability and transparency is ensured – through rotational leadership, proportional representation, and public meetings. They had also been inspired by the savings and credit schemes of women's self help groups (SHGs). Those visiting Bangladesh, by contrast, had above all been convinced of the benefits of commercialising local products, following a business plan and a value chain approach. Interestingly, some also found in this an opportunity to collaborate on their return with another Swiss-supported project, the Sustainable Soil Management Project (SSMP).

Four stories at the end of the booklet do not relate to the study tours, but to NSCFP activities more generally. They were told by participants in a “warm up” session, practising how to tell a good story. These particular ones were felt to be so memorable that they are included here.

A few notes on story telling as a methodology are provided in Annex B. In Annex A are listed the names of all the study tour participants who attended the Manthali workshop. Due to job changes, travel difficulties or other reasons, some of the original 31 were unable to attend, but the 22 present – whether they chose to tell a story themselves or collaborated in the crafting of one told by a colleague – provided a very substantive body of experience.

Jane Carter
Intercooperation, Bern,
July 2009.

Bangladesh Stories



Photo by : Anju Upadhaya

Skilled women of a village in Bangladesh
embroidering fabrics.

Maximising Market Opportunities



Bhuwan Shrestha

The people of Chisapani VDC, Ramechhap district – and especially the *dalits*, *janajatis* and the poor – have no other livelihood option than to practice subsistence level farming. Recognising this situation, a local NGO that had obtained support from the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) started identifying the poorest households so that income generation activities could be focused on them. The well being of the people has been categorized, and Community Based Organisations (CBO) comprising *dalits*, *janajatis* and poor women has been formed. At present there are five CBOs in Chisapani. These CBOs are planning to promote livestock rearing. As my work involves both livestock rearing and forestry, I

was chosen by the NSCFP to participate in a study tour to Bangladesh. During the trip I focused on how to manage organisations in a sustainable way. I also realised that without attention to markets, enterprises cannot become sustainable.

Once back in Nepal, I shared my experiences and learning with my team members. I told them about the business plans used in Bangladesh that have enhanced the livelihoods of people. We concluded that we can adopt a similar method in Nepal. We proposed this to the five CBOs. We encouraged farmers to think of the multiple benefits available from a single livestock activity. For example, a farmer who keeps a buffalo not only benefits from the sale of milk and butter, but can also

be encouraged to manage the manure for profit. We made plans for manure management by which it could be sold for vegetable farming on a large scale. This should further enhance both on and off-season vegetable farming. We submitted our proposal to SSMP, which agreed to it. Now with the input of SSMP and the funds of the CBOs, schemes such as enhanced production of cash crops, off-season vegetables and cultivation of major crops have been introduced. People have experienced

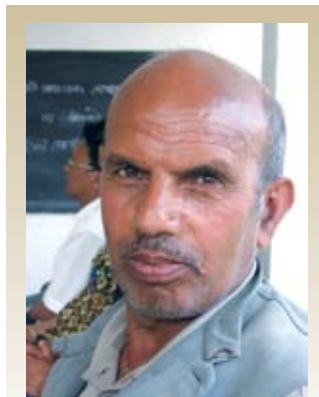
an improvement in their livelihoods. Now, even though they lack irrigation, they have been supplied with off-season vegetables and their seeds in the market. Farmers seem very excited with this programme. With the outcome, they have realised that with hard work, vegetables can be supplied all year round. Now, we also have a small building at Manthali (Headquarter of Ramechhap) where the vegetables are marketed. We are even thinking of supplying the surplus vegetables to Kathmandu in the future.



Photo by :
Mukesh Rijal

A woman in Okhaldhunga gathers
cow dung for manure in her land.

Hope in Sericulture



Indra Subedi

I am a member of Mathani CFUG in Dolakha. Earlier on, the hills of Dolakha were bare. We could even see foxes running around. We pressured the District Forest Office (DFO), Dolakha to hand over the management of the forests to the local communities, and eventually our proposal was accepted after being rejected twice. The region is very green and beautiful now. The CFUG is the group of an entire village with about 85 households. Our only motive then was to fetch firewood and other daily needs from the forest. We never thought of utilising the resources for enterprise development and income generation. In any case, the idea was not so easy to implement as the village has a majority

of (fairly strict) Brahmin households and very few *dalit* and *janajati* households. Thus, pig keeping, poultry and the cultivation of certain spices such as onions and garlic would have very little consumption in the village. We really lacked ideas for income generation opportunities in the village. As I worked in the forestry sector and had travelled much, people turned to me for ideas. I took this seriously, and in the meantime, I got the opportunity to visit Bangladesh on a study tour.

On returning, I shared my observations and learning with the CFUG members. Everyone liked the idea of sericulture in particular and I did my best to convey them all that I had learned from Bangladesh about this business. Of course the process is long. We have

to plant saplings, and let them grow. As the caterpillars develop the cocoon around their bodies, we should pluck them and then continue the process of extracting the thread. This seemed a long and expensive process but

looking at the market, the attempt seemed worthwhile. So we are starting the effort from this year onwards. I am also planning to start sericulture on my own land. Let us hope that our efforts will succeed.



Photo by :
Anju Upadhaya

Study tour participant learning
to weave silk thread.

From Jute Ropes to Lokta Paper



Kamal Neupane

This is a story of six very remote villages towards the north western belt of Okhaldhunga, lying some 19 miles away from the district head-quarter. In 2001, I and some other young people in Okhaldhunga registered the Likhudemba Community Development Forum. We established it to support and complement the initiatives of United Mission to Nepal for awareness raising on infrastructure development and income generation in the six VDCs. The Forum collaborates with other organisations and community based groups in the VDCs and at present works with 1,086 members of 73 groups.

We were thinking about how to enhance the livelihoods of the *janajatis*, *dalits*, women and other disadvantaged people of the region when I got the opportunity to visit Bangladesh on a

study tour organised by NSCFP. There I could observe various activities of projects implemented by Intercooperation Bangladesh. I learned a lot. I was especially impressed when I saw that people in Jarilla were making money by selling ropes made of jute. I asked them why they were making ropes instead of simply selling the raw jute. Why bother to make ropes? They replied that they could have sold unprocessed jute as well, but they get paid better when they sell ropes. With that reply, I thought of all the *argeli* and *lokta* that we have in every CFUG in Nepal. These resources are taken for granted. I felt that we can at least utilise these resources, selling them after processing to fetch a good profit.

So, on returning to Nepal, I shared the learning with my colleagues at the Likhudemba Community Development

Forum. They were also impressed and supported me in initiating the endeavour. Out of the six VDCs in which we work, seven community forests in three VDCs have plenty of *lokta* and *argeli*. These CFUG members agreed on starting up a Nepali paper factory. Two representatives from each CFUG came together to form an ad-hoc committee that would run the Gauri Bann Nepali Kagaj Udhyog (Gauri Forest Nepali Paper Factory) and Nepali Kagaj Udhyog Ragani, Okhaldhunga (Nepali Paper Factory, Ragani, Okhaldhunga).

To date we have prepared the business plan and the constitution, and are in the process of registering the factories. Some eight to ten people will be

directly employed through these factories. Appreciating the idea, NSCFP supported the Saunepakha CFUG through the training of six CFUG members in paper making. At the same time, we are facing various challenges. On one hand, we lack sufficient budget to initiate the operations of the two factories and on the other hand, according to the community forestry legislation, factories cannot operate within 1 km distance of the community forest. We are not yet sure how to overcome these challenges, but we are determined to run these factories as they promise to be a good source of employment and income for the disadvantaged people of the six VDCs.

Photo by : Anju Upadhaya



Study tour participants learning the process of jute making with local people of Zarilla

Money from Tomatoes



Nawaraj Khadka

Over the past three years, the Sustainable Soil Management Programme (SSMP) has been implementing programs in Dolakha through ECARDS. We wanted to introduce commercial farming in VDCs such as Chankhu and Marbu to help improve the livelihood of people above that of subsistence farming. However, we faced a number of problems. The farmers were interested in commercialisation whilst we supported them. Essential inputs such as fertilizers and seeds were not locally available, and it was very difficult to wean the local people off project support. They would call on our help to provide resources all the time. It was a real challenge to orient people towards commercial

vegetable production.

In the meantime, I had the opportunity to visit Bangladesh on a study tour hosted by the NSCFP. I wanted to focus on livelihood activities in communities, and how the value chain approach has been adopted in enterprise development. I observed that in Bogra, local service providers were actively involved in product marketing. They would collect whatever surplus these farmers produced and sell it on the market, giving the farmers the money after deducting their service charge. This mechanism seemed very effective for farmers who had very little surplus and thus could not bear all the transaction costs of taking their goods

to the market. Later in Dhaka, we had meeting with an NGO named CATALYST, which has already supported the commercialisation of farming activities in over 3,000 farmer households. I learned that the commercialisation of production should go hand in hand with the private sector, as otherwise farmers might produce large quantities but be unable to find the right market - and then have to sell their products at a low price. Local traders also said that if a product was not available when needed and as needed, they paid a lower price. I realised that this was the gap that we should seek to fill.

On my return I shared my learning with my ECARDS colleagues, especially Renje Sherpa who was responsible for SSMP activities and who had been struggling hard to move the programme forward. I told them about the gap – about the need to promote the local market, identifying the requirements and interest of potential buyers. We realised it was necessary to create a market for seeds, agricultural fertilizers and tools at the small market settlement of Singati in Lamidanda VDC, Dolakha - this would be convenient for the local farmers. ECARDS subsequently adopted this approach. In

2008, having researched quite rigorously, we decided to promote off-season tomato cultivation amongst the farmers. We selected nine poor farmer households who had less than 1 ropani land and who could not feed themselves from it for more than three months per year. However, we were quite apprehensive about the success of this initiative. We provided training in Charikot to two of the most experienced farmers of the village. We also encouraged the shopkeepers in Singati to supply tomato seeds, as these would have much demand in the future. We further surveyed the small teashops and hotels there about the kind of tomatoes they demand for their business. They confirmed that during the monsoon, when tomatoes from Kathmandu cannot be delivered to Singati by road (which is usually only passable in the dry season), they have to buy them at a high price. So if the local farmers could supply tomatoes during the monsoon, it could fetch them a very good profit. The two trained farmers then started setting up plastic tunnels in the lands of the nine farmer households. This programme became a huge success and the story was published in some newspapers with the headlines “tomato farming

beneath the mountains”. The farmers now need not worry about the market. We learned that any business can succeed when its market

is promoted first, and even a small amount of investment can lead to profit when farming is commercialized.



Photo by :
Jane Carter

Two women beneath a tunnel for off season tomatoes plantation in Suri VDC of Dolakha District.



Nawaraj Khadka

Six Steps to Success

The VDCs of Gauri Mudi and Mirgey in the North–Eastern part of Dolakha have a high population of *dalits*. For the past two years, ECARDS Dolakha has been working in these VDCs, supporting natural resource management and improved food security of particularly *janajati* people in our activities. The ECARDS team felt the need to address the problems of the *dalits* as well. In this context, I had the opportunity to participate in a study tour to Bangladesh, organised by the Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project. I learned many things during the seven day visit, but I was especially impressed by the six steps in the value chain process that some local enterprises adopted. This comprises the identification of opportunities, the se-

lection of the product on the basis of its market potential and cost analysis, the development of a marketing strategy, a production strategy and an action plan. These steps will lead any enterprise towards success. I also realised that micro-finance provision and skills in financial management are equally important in the sustainability of any enterprise.

On my return to Nepal, I shared what I had learned with my colleagues. They immediately realised the importance of the 6 steps of the value chain process, micro-finance management and the promotion of a local resource person. We sat together and developed an action plan for working with the *dalits* of Gauri Mudi and Mirgey VDCs. We started activities by establishing a

group of 35 *dalit* households. We asked them to think of potential enterprises that they could undertake. As a result of brainstorming and discussion, we concluded that four products including - nettle leaves, cardamom, ginger and turmeric - would be viable. We immediately started our research on resource availability, cost analysis and market survey. As a result, we concluded that we should start working first on the nettle leaf enterprise. We approached the Cottage and Small Industries Development Programme, which agreed to provide training to Local Resource Persons (LRPs). ECARDS Dolakha invested Rs. 50,000 on behalf of the identified poor; this comprised 70% of the shares. Of the balance, 20% was

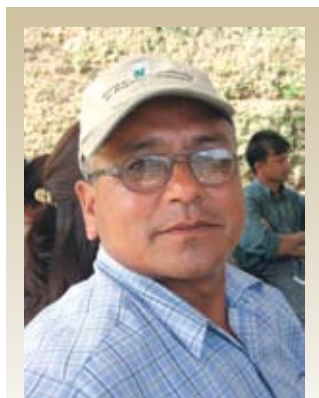
contributed by a local cooperative and 10% by the LRPs. A grinding machine was bought which has the capacity to grind 20 kilograms of nettle leaves per day. Two persons amongst the identified poor are directly involved in the nettle grinding process, whilst 25 such households are employed in nettle collection and production. A resource person is responsible for supplying the processed nettle powder to a gift shop in Charikot –District Headquarter of Dolakha through a collection centre. Looking back, we realise that the concept of the six steps of the value chain was the key to the success of the nettle processing enterprise. I am sure these steps are also the key to the success of any other enterprise.



Photo by :
Jane Carter

Singati Bazaar (Market place) is a close by market for local products of Mudi and Mirgey VDCs.

Money from Trees



Shyam Khadka

Dolakha district is well known as the district of community forestry. Over 352 community forests have been handed over to local communities to date. The operational plans of all these community forests have ample provision for timber commercialisation. I had the opportunity to visit Bangladesh as a team member to study tour organised by the Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project. As I am involved in the community forestry sector, I was very eager to learn about community forestry there. I observed that Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in Bangladesh have acquired 10 metre stretch of land on both sides of local roads on lease for 20-25 years. They have planted trees on these lands and earned money by selling the timber. Observing this, I real-

ized that community forestry in Nepal has plenty of opportunities for timber commercialization.

On returning from the seven day Bangladesh trip, all participants in the India and Bangladesh study tours sat together for exchanges and sharing of learning. We realised that nothing is impossible with positive thoughts. Now, as the project has adopted a cluster approach of working, there are three clusters in Dolakha district. We are working to promote timber commercialisation in some selected CFUGs of the clusters. To date about 10-15 CFUGs have started timber commercialisation. With the income they have gained, they have decided to invest 25% of the income on forest development, 35% on improving the livelihood of the poor and 40% on community development.



Photo by :
Jane Carter

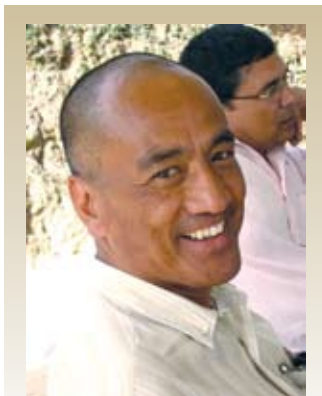
Pit-sawing timber at the side of the Dolakha – Singati road

India Stories



Photo by :
Devanshu Chakravarti

Self Help Group meeting



Brahma Dhoj Gurung

Increasing Efficiency in Social Mobilization

NSCFP operates in a multi-partnership approach. It works for the CFUGs through partnership with various government and non-government organisations, facilitators, consultants and social mobilisers. In this context, a working plan was prepared two years ago for the institutional development of a CFUG in Lapilang VDC of Dolakha and to provide livelihood and psycho-social support to identified poor members. We planned to train Local Resource Persons (LRP) from among the members of the same CFUG so that they could provide services effectively. We selected one LRP from each CFUG and all received training in service provision. An agreement was signed with each of them before they started work in the field. According to the agreement, they were to

accomplish given tasks within a given time frame, and they would only be paid upon the recommendation of the respective CFUG.

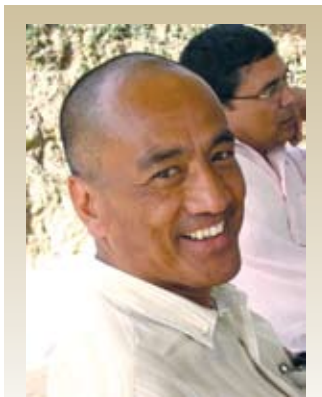
The LRPs then went to villages and started their work. After few days, project staff members - including myself - went to monitor their work. It was also the time to pay them for their work, which required the recommendation of the respective CFUGs. When the LRPs presented their worksheets, we realised that some of them had claimed for a greater number of days than they had actually worked. We discussed the issue with the respective CFUGs and the resource persons and sorted out the problem. However, this kind of problem has troubled us time and again.

Last year I had the opportunity to visit India as a participant of the study

tour organised by the NSCFP. During the trip I realised that development activities were focused in a cluster approach, based on area. A resource person was mobilized in each cluster. I found that they were very well organised in their working style. Every month they would visit CBOs of their respective cluster, and draw up an action plan for the month. The resource persons were mobilized through the NGOs, which monitored them according to their action plan. The projects also conducted monitoring on the same basis. I felt that the adoption of a similar process would ease our work in Dolakha. After my return to Nepal, NSCFP started adopting the cluster approach of working – something that had already been planned ahead. A resource person was mobilized in each VDC. They were recently involved in the planning of CFUG activities. I facilitated the incorporation of the action plan system into their work. Now, resource persons make their monthly action plan. I feel that this will ease my monitoring job and also simplify the work of NSCFP.



Microplanning at Kirgunwadi



Brahma Dhoj Gurung

An Unexpected Learning

Our study tour to India last year happened during the time when NSCFP was on the verge of starting its sixth phase. Up to this point, the project had been operating for 18 years in all the VDCs of the project districts. For the sixth phase, the project was planning to work in a cluster approach and not in all VDCs. This information was already in the air. However, even the project staff members were wondering whether this approach would be fruitful. The project partners were questioning the relevance of this approach when everything was going fine when operating in all the VDCs of the district. The political parties also asked our criteria for selecting VDCs. We were quite aware of the attempts of politicians to influence and attract project activities to their VDCs.

In this context, I got the opportu-

nity during the study tour to India to observe various activities implemented by Intercooperation in the State of Andhra Pradesh. I learnt that many programmes were conducted focusing on particular communities within a specific geographical area, and that as a result these programmes were particularly effective in supporting poor livelihoods. Besides, working in a cluster approach eased staff travelling and management and also reduced transaction costs. The surplus financial resources could be diverted to other specific programmes. We pretty much liked the way they worked in clusters and realised that it could work in our working area too. After returning to Nepal, we shared the benefits and effectiveness of the approach. This enhanced our confidence, as well as that of our partner organisations, in adopting it.

Putting Proportional Representation into Practice



Gopal Man Thapa

During my study tour to India, I visited the field sites of MYRADA. I learned that when working in any village, MYRADA first forms a Village Development Society (VDS). The VDS leads all the development activities of the village. I found the VDS to be a very inclusive body, with proportionate representation on the basis of caste, gender, geography and class. They have also developed a rotational system of chairing the VDS on the basis of caste and gender. Furthermore, the *Gram Panchayat* - which is the local administrative body there - also has the provision of a rotational system for the post of chairperson on the basis of caste and gender. The VDC officials were also elected in an inclusive and proportionate manner. I was surprised to learn that even po-

litical candidacy depended on caste proportionality.

I wanted to use this learning to our recently founded organisation for the rights of differently abled people. The organization is called Forum of the Differently Abled for Inclusive Development, of which I am the chairperson at present. However, there is rotational provision for chairpersonship on the basis of gender and caste. We have also decided on reservation for women in at least two out of the four key positions - namely chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and treasurer all of whom are differently able. Regarding general membership of the working committee, we have provision for giving membership to anyone keen on joining hands in the issues of dif-

ferently abled people. However, a majority of 51% of differently abled persons are required in the working committee. Their participation is necessary in the four key positions too. For general membership, we have the provision of 15 general members on an inclusive and proportionate basis.

However, inclusive practices of this kind do have challenges. As our organisation registration act did not distinctly mention the kind of proportionate representation required, the district administration office confused us with lots of discouraging questions over whether it

is possible to have such a sort of inclusion in our organisation. Still, the Forest Protection Committees in India have to follow a guideline that requires 50% representation of women in the committee. Their constitution will be approved only after meeting this criterion.

I have also learned that implementing the theory of good governance in any organisation is a daunting task. At present, we are working on data collection about the differently abled in the districts so that we can categorise and identify the genuinely needy ones who could receive the allowance granted by the government.



Photo by :
Devanshu Chakravarti

Gram Panchayat President Addressing Members.

Representational Leadership



Gopal Man Thapa

In order to widely disseminate the learning from community forestry, NSCFP and the VDC of Thulachhap in Okhaldhunga jointly initiated a Village Level Development Planning System (VLDPs). I was responsible for facilitating this process.

In the meantime, I also had the opportunity to visit India on a study tour organized by NSCFP. I observed that when starting activities in a village, the NGO MYRADA would first establish an inclusive body called Village Development Society, through which its development activities are implemented. Representation in the VDS is done proportionately, on the basis of caste, gender, class and geography. The VDS is one of the bodies to lead village development. Out of the 27 VDCs in this region, 25 base their election candidacy on caste. The system of rotational chairpersonship was very interesting; it is done taking into account gender and caste.

I realised that this system could be

implemented in many groups within the VLDP system. This has indeed been introduced – and there are now several thematic networks within the VLDP operating on the basis of proportional representation. These networks have the provision of 40% representation of women. The position of coordinator is rotated on the basis of gender and caste. Likewise, there are nine thematic committees which meet annually. They also have a Village Development Coordination Committee which comprises of 21 members. There is reservation for 50% women in the committee and proportionate representation of *dalits* and *janajatis*. They also have rotational leadership.

Looking at the result, we see that the people have themselves prepared a Village level Development Plan and a three year periodic plan. This system of leadership has initiated a representational process of planning VDC development. People now realise their rights and their power.



Ishwar Upadhaya

Multi-partnership : The Importance of Coordination

The NSCFP has been following a multi-partnership approach since 1997, working with the District Forest Offices, CFUGs and other groups, NGOs and the private sector. This approach has substantially benefitted the CFUGs.

Against this background, NSCFP organised a study trip to India for an exchange of experiences on good governance and livelihoods at the community level. I observed that most of the development projects operate through a multi-partnership approach. In particular, we were able to observe Indo-Swiss participatory activities in support of self management - working in partnership with various service providers such as MYRADA, Self Help Groups, the *Gram Pan-*

chayat, etc. I was impressed to see that the beneficiary groups implemented the programmes themselves. This ensured ownership and sustainability. Likewise, the executive committee members of the service providing organisations were involved in strategic planning of the organisation, whilst day to day functioning was handled by hired staff members. This eased the service providing mechanism and increased the effectiveness of the programme. Similarly, Community Resource Management Centres have been established to ensure the sustainability of the programmes. I also realised that there was effective coordination and good rapport between the local governments, community based organisations,

service providing non-government organisations and the beneficiary communities. This coordination is crucial. A dynamic and capable service providing organisation that can work in multiple sectors such as health, education, forestry, veterinary etc can easily earn public trust with their well trained social mobilisers.

NSCFP is currently in its sixth phase - which started soon after we

returned from India. Programmes in 36 Village Development Committees (VDCs) within the project districts are now implemented after agreement with the Village Forest Coordination Committee (VFCC). Representatives from various sectors such as CFUGs, local level organisations, political parties and other user groups come together in VFCC to coordinate the implementation of programs – as in India, this coordination is essential.



Keshav Paudel

Women's Initiative

I was one of the participants in the study tour to India last year. We visited various programmes that were implemented by Intercooperation. I was really impressed by the functioning of the Self Help Groups (SHG). SHG comprises a group of women from a hamlet. They have the provision that each member should save a certain amount every month and that the money saved is then collectively invested in providing loans at a very nominal rate to those in the hamlet with greatest need. They also have a working committee, the leadership of which changes on a rotational basis after every meeting. The group provides loans for income generation purposes. They also told us of success stories of people who have received loans. Then I realised

that such small efforts by a women's group have made a big impact. Even women from my locality in Kathmandu could become such examples.

On my return, I invited five women from my neighbourhood to my place in Kalanki, Kathmandu and told them the story of how successful women's initiatives have become in India. I encouraged them to form such groups, and I also indicated that I would be willing to support them in the endeavour. Impressed by the story, they immediately agreed to the idea. They then started circulating the information to a wider network in the neighbourhood. Women from all 35 households in my community came together. After several meetings, we decided to name their group Kalanki Mahila Jyoti Samuha – meaning the

Jyoti Group of the women from Kallanki. They began saving, and with the money saved they started giving loans at a very nominal interest rate to those interested in starting up some sort of income generating activity. This was especially for shop keeping. Then the women's group came up with a brilliant idea and organised a blood donation programme in collaboration with the blood bank.

They have also established a rule that one member from each of the 35 households in the community should be involved in a community clean-up on Saturdays. They have kept up this activity. They are also planning to organise blood donation campaigns on an annual basis. Recently the group has also decided to set up a children's club for the offspring of the 35 households.



Photo by :
Jane Carter

Self Help Group members



Om Bahadur Karki

Inspiration to Irrigate

Well, there are few things that I really learned from the study tour to India, and which I have also shared with my neighbours. Even before this, though, my experience of working as a driver for NSCFP had made me realise the importance of trees. Hence I planted trees in a field in which I used to grow maize.

During the India study tour, I was attracted by the irrigation system that was used. I realised that with a proper irrigation system, I

could opt for vegetable farming on a small plot of land that I own. So I bought a sprinkler and established water supply system to my vegetable farm. I have further plans for utilising the barren land in my village, experimenting with vegetable farming there. I know that I would need to access a market close by; otherwise I would opt for raising livestock. In that case I would need some fodder, which I could grow on this land if I had proper irrigation.

Loans for Bio-gas



Sita K.C.

FECOFUN is an umbrella organisation of all CFUGs of Nepal. In Dolakha district, it is working for the rights of CFUGs in coordination with NSCFP, the District Forest Office and other concerned agencies. In support of its members, FECOFUN has been providing collateral free loans in eight VDCs of Dolakha district.

Last year, during our study tour to India, I observed that banks are providing collateral free loans to improve the livelihood of group

members. This seemed pretty successful. I was quite impressed by the idea, and shared it with my FECOFUN colleagues. We thought of replicating the scheme in a suitable manner. So, as a joint effort of FECOFUN, the CFUGs and local cooperatives, we introduced a collateral free loan scheme for bio-gas plant installation in several VDCs of Dolakha district. There are now some 70 bio-gas plants in the district that have been supported in this manner.



Subash Prasad Niraula

Transparency in Practice

In the process of handing over responsibility for forest management to local communities, about 143,000 community forest user groups (CFUGs) have been formed in the country. CFUGs are autonomous organisations. There are basic rules and regulations guiding their operations, but they still need reforms in their system of governance in order to function effectively. Amongst the various components of good governance, transparency is very important - and applicable from planning to fund allocation to implementation. However, most of the CFUGs in Nepal do not practice transparency seriously. Group members complain frequently about corruption amongst committee members. People are not satisfied with the system of auditing that was introduced to check corruption, but has not been effective.

During my study visit to India, I observed that institutions conducted joint auditing in an organised manner. This was a demonstration of the good gov-

ernance practices of the groups. I was full of appreciation for this system. In the context of Nepal's CFUGs, a committee is formed for auditing, or the income and expenditure details are sanctioned during the general assembly. However, legally there is a clear provision for auditing to be done by a recognised, registered auditor. This system of auditing is necessary to get a permanent bank account number and to buy and sell shares. Anyway, auditing is one tool for transparency, but it is not the only thing that's necessary. Public hearings are also important in order to share group learning, practices and the status of funds with group members and stakeholders. It is also important because CFUGs can gain appropriate suggestions and guidance from the listeners. Thus, CFUGs and concerned local bodies are now supported to include mandatory provision of both public hearings and public auditing in their Operational Plan. We ensure that the groups follow this very strictly.

A Catalyst for Women's Savings and Credit



Toran Shahi

Last year we went on a study tour to Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka in India. We observed the work of an organisation called MYRADA. I was really impressed by how they worked and by their hospitality. I was also impressed by their approach to savings. Minutes taken by them were also impressive. I was really inspired by their activities, and hence made up my mind to convey their achievements to women in Nepal.

When I returned to Ramechhap, I gathered together 21 women and shared with them my experiences and observations from the India study tour. Those women were also inspired, and asked me to guide them. They formed a women's group with the provision that each member

had to save Rs. 20 per month. Within the next few months more members were added to the group. It became a group of 36. Gradually, the amount saved increased, and they were in a position to invest. So the group was formally registered as an organisation named Samaj Sewa Jagriti Mahila Rin Sahakari Sanatha - meaning women's cooperative to promote social welfare by providing loans. They decided to use these loans for livestock rearing and fruit farming. To date there are 245 general members and 11 committee members in the organisation. The organisation has allocated part of its budget for women's development and empowerment. Sujita Shrestha is the current chairperson of the organisation.

Warm up Session Stories



Photo by :
Jane Carter

Majhi woman displaying charcoal briquettes – an income-generation activity supported under NSCFP

Kalika : the Story of a Poor Household



Anju Upadhaya

This is a story of a household in Setidevi Muladyang CFUG, Jafey VDC. At the time the story begins, there are seven household members, notably the father, mother and their two daughters and three sons. Only one son and a daughter are living with them. The eldest son of the family is living in Kathmandu, earning his living there by manual labour. His father knows about this but his mother does not. They are very poor. They migrated to the village from elsewhere, so they are landless. They live in a hut which is in a fragile state. Even the land on which the hut stands was given to them by a kind local landlord. Every morning, the wife visits from house to house, hoping that she will be asked to do some work so that she can make a living for the day. Her husband is physically weak, so he is unable to do

heavy work although once in a while he performs as a priest during ceremonies and functions in the neighbourhood. Their sons and daughters who work in Kathmandu send them a very small amount of money once in a while. However, relations within the family are not good. The husband beats his wife, scolds her and tells her to leave the house. He is psychologically traumatised by the severe beatings that he received from his father during his childhood, and hence mistreats his own family. Kalika, his wife, suffers much pain.

NSCFP came to know that two households were missing from the membership of Setidevi Muladyang CFUG. So, we headed to the VDC with the objective of ensuring that these households obtained CFUG membership. During our talk with Kalika, she

explained that her household was not given CFUG membership because they were migrants from elsewhere. Hearing this, we held a number of discussions with the executive committee of the CFUG. We also brought both the parties together and facilitated discussions. We requested the executive committee to put themselves into the shoes of the poor family so that they could understand the pain and troubles they have been going through. Realising this, the committee decided to include them in the CFUG. However, they gave the condition that the household should provide voluntary services to the CFUG for six months before becoming eligible to utilise forest products in the same way as other members. We felt that this was too much for the poor household, given that Kalika had to go from household to household every day in any case, just to earn a day's living for her family. So we talked to the committee again, and now Kalika's family can use forest products just as other CFUG members do. After this, we frequently visited the household. Kalika would share with us her pain and sufferings. Our visits made her feel that there were people who were concerned about her. She revealed to us that she had thought of committing suicide many times when she got frustrated with the frequent quarrels at home, but the thought of her children

made her put aside the impulse. After gaining membership of the CFUG, she has been actively participating in their meetings and general assembly, something which has opened the horizon of learning for her. After many visits to Kalika, we saw some changes in her husband too. She also disclosed that gradually the quarrels were reducing. He was employed to look after the drinking water pipeline and would earn some two to three hundred rupees monthly. Most probably this was the reason for the change in the man.

Good days last very short. Kalika's husband was severely injured from a fall close by their hut, and he died due to lack of treatment. The neighbours proved to be very supportive during Kalika's miserable times. They helped her conduct his funeral and supplied the family with grains which lasted for about three months. Yet Kalika remained very depressed after the incident. She used to cry all the time. Then we increased our visits to her. The CFUG identified her as poor citing various criteria and provided livelihood support from the CFUG fund, which also included some contribution from NSCFP. Kalika bought some goats, which have become her main source of income. She has also started to work again for other households. She is now doing much better and is emotionally stronger.

Accounting and Accountability



Keshav Paudel, NSCFP

As finance manager to NSCFP, I accompanied the representatives of the project's audit firm during their field verification activities in Ramechhap. Having completed the audit and inventory verification at the project office in Ramechhap, our team headed to Lyang-lyang village of Ramechhap VDC to observe some CFUG activities. Coincidentally, FECOFUN had conducted a self-monitoring and coaching programme with financial support of NSCFP at the Golmataar paleko CFUG that very day. We saw that the executive committee officials and identified poor members had gathered for a meeting, and we joined them. The committee presented what it had accomplished that year, such as support to the poorest members

and details of the annual income and expenditures. After two hours of interaction on other issues, the committee presented its income and expenditure details. I realized that the group did not have much of a bank balance, and very little cash in hand. I also noticed that they had Rs. 10,000 invested in a loan. We tried to discuss this but the executive committee seemed uncomfortable. This raised our suspicions, so we wanted to explore the issue further. The audit firm representative Suresh Bhatta and I asked them how much interest they gained against the loan.

After much attempt from our side to explore the reality, the chairperson of the group eventually opened up to us. She told us the real story. About

five years ago, the then chairperson of the group had taken the amount of Rs. 10,000 for his personal use. Up until two years ago, none of the group members had said anything to him. Three chairpersons changed after him. The issue was raised in a CFUG general assembly two years ago, and after being heavily pressurized by the members, he agreed to return the money. However, until the time that he was able to pay the principle, he agreed to pay the interest. The general assembly assigned responsibility for collecting this payment to the executive committee. However, when the committee approached him, he remained silent about the payment. He did not even attend the general assembly that followed. The committee became tired of following up with him about the money. Whenever they approached him, he would say that he had no money at the time and could only pay when he had.

Having explained the situation, the chairperson and the secretary asked us to help. We were of the opinion that it was their responsibility to invest and collect the group's funds. They are the

ones who should pressurize the person into paying back the amount. However, we suggested that they hold an executive committee meeting and agree between them to write a letter to the DFO and FECOFUN seeking support in recovering the amount. We also suggested to them that they meet the officials of these organisations and talk to them face to face on the matter.

They followed our suggestions. The man was then called to the District Forest Office, where he was warned that legal action would be taken against him if he did not pay back the money. With that, he immediately paid back half the principle and also promised to pay the rest on an instalment basis within one year, along with interest

A few months after this, a member of the Tauke Danda CFUG visited the NSCFP office in Ramechhap. I asked him about the recovery of the money. He replied that it was almost fully returned, and that the man had been paying regular instalments. I was glad to hear that. I felt that our small intervention had helped to resolve a big problem that the CFUG had been facing.

Turning Problems into Solutions



Nawaraj Khadka

We have established a new community based Nepali paper factory in Bonch VDC with contribution from 12 CFUGs, identified poor and local entrepreneurs. This requires a large quantity of raw materials especially *lokta* and *argeli* but we did not know anything about cultivating them, and thus could only harvest and protect the naturally occurring plants. ECARDS Dolakha realised the potential of *argeli* farming, and, having first gained approval in 2003 from the CFUG general assembly and the working committee, started such a programme in Bhitari VDC using degraded land within the community forests. We planted about eight thousand saplings of *argeli* that year. However, as the place was close to the grazing area about 80% of the

plants were destroyed by livestock. Realising this, the CFUGs introduced a rule to fine anyone who grazed their livestock in the area. However, it was not possible to implement this rule as 35 households protested against it, saying that they would continue grazing their livestock in the area as they had been doing so since long ago. This incident almost led us to abandon the idea of *argeli* cultivation, but a few of our friends encouraged us and told us not to give up. They suggested that we could always talk to the dissenting households. So the ECARDS team and the CFUG committee leadership went for a talk with the households. We identified that their main concern was the opportunity cost of giving up their grazing area. They wanted an alternate.

Their concern was perfectly reasonable. We also found that 10 households out of the 35 were very poor. So we decided to offer the responsibility of *lokta* plantation and management to the 35 households, on the condition that 40% of the income was channelled to the 10 poor households, 5% to the CFUG and 55% to the remaining 25 households. As a result, they planted 9,000 saplings of *argeli* over 1.5 hectares of the area. As these saplings were well looked after, 90% of them survived. The villagers were pretty excited with the result.

On reflection, we found that this is a perfect working model. Failure could be turned into success by giving responsibility to the ones who created the problems. We shared this learning with 12 other CFUGs as a similar problem exists in other CFUGs as well. At present there are 40 subgroups in 25 CFUGs in Dolakha. As part of formalising these sub-groups, the CFUGs have handed over responsibilities to the sub-groups on a constitutional basis, allowing them to receive funds for their activities from the main CFUGs and from the district forest office as well.

Persisting in the Face of Adversity : the Story of Jhamkimaya



Sita K.C.

This is the story of Jhamkimaya - a user of Mayur Gaura Community Forest in Melung VDC, Dolakha. Ten years ago Jhamkimaya was the user of a protected forest, before it turned into Mayur Gaura CFUG. She was one of the active members during the formation of the CFUG, taking a lead role in preparing the operational plan and conducting the resource inventory. But her husband disliked her involvement in such activities. He accused her of being irresponsible towards their household and children by getting involved in community forestry activities. However, she did not give up and continued her efforts – indeed, she became a committee member of the CFUG.

Around the time that she became

a committee member, Jhamkimaya's husband got a visa to work abroad. After he left, she committed herself further to the community forestry activities. When her husband telephoned, he always warned her not to get involved in community forestry but to stay at home and do household chores. He also assured her that he would send her enough money. As Jhamkimaya was already the chairperson of the CFUG, she resisted his demands and said that she could not quit her responsibilities. Hearing her reply, her husband threatened her, saying that she had to choose between him and the CFUG. She replied that he could threaten her anyway he liked, but she would continue her endeavours in the CFUG.

After two years, Jhamkimaya's husband returned to Nepal. While on his way home from Kathmandu, he met her at Satdobato in Charikot. Jhamkimaya was talking to some FECOFUN members and staff from the district forest office. The sight was enough for him. That evening, he accused her of trying to cheat on him in his absence. She tried to convince him by saying that the men he saw are people with whom she has to work, and that they have done much for the betterment of Mayur Gaura CFUG. But her husband was not convinced and harshly told her that she had better live with those men and not with him. Tired, and offended by his accusations, she provoked him by challenging him to say the same to her in front of all those men. If those men

agreed, she would indeed go and live with them. The man was dumbstruck, and had no answer. They left for home together the next day.

On a subsequent occasion, Jhamkimaya had to come to Charikot for a meeting at the FECOFUN office. Due to his suspicious nature, her husband came along too. Jhamkimaya showed him around and explained that this is the place at which she meets other CFUG members and people concerned with community forestry. It is the place from which they get advice and assistance in promoting their forests. She also introduced him to all the FECOFUN staff. After that day, he became close to the FECOFUN staff. He now understands and supports his wife. He even admits to being proud of Jhamkimaya for her efficient chairing of the CFUG till date.

Annex A

Participants who undertook the study tour to Bangladesh

Anju Upadhaya	Forest Development Officer	NSCFP
Bhawana Shrestha	Vice Chairperson	Ford Nepal, Okhaldhunga
Bhuwan Shrestha	Secretary	Srijaansil Yuwa Samaj
Dhurba Man Pradhan	Administration Manager	NSCFP
Dil Bahadur Hayu	Support Staff	NSCFP
Indra Subedi	Forester	DFO, Dolakha
Kajiram Thapa Magar	Support Staff	NSCFP
Kamal Prasad Neupane	Program Officer	Likhudemba, Okhaldhunga
Mitha Ram Lamichhane	Driver	NSCFP
Nawaraj Khadka	Field Coordinator	ECARDS
Ram Ekwaal Jaiswaal	Assistant Forest Officer	DFO, Ramechhap
Shyam Khadka	Field Supervisor	NSCFP

Participants who undertook the study tour to India

Brahma Dhoj Gurung	Area Manager	NSCFP
Gopal Man Thapa	Secretary	FECOFUN, Okhaldhunga
Ishwar Prasad Upadhaya	Forest Development Officer	NSCFP
Keshav Raj Paudel	Finance Manager	NSCFP
Manamaya Moktan	Forest Development Officer	NSCFP
Om Bahadur Karki	Driver	NSCFP
Ram Kumar Shrestha	Secretary	Janakalyan Sewa Samiti, Ramechhap
Sita KC	Secretary	FECOFUN, Dolakha
Subash Niraula	Forester	DFO, Okhaldhunga
Toran Shahi	Forester	DFO, Ramechhap

Annex B : Story Telling

Story telling might seem to be very simple – too simple to require any description. It is also to some extent an art; some people are naturally better at telling stories than others. There are nevertheless clear techniques that can be learned for telling a good story, whether the intention is purely for entertainment or for professional purposes

As part of its support for knowledge management and sharing, SDC (in collaboration with field practitioners, including Intercooperation) has elaborated a story telling guide. This can be downloaded at:

http://www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_en_155620.pdf.

The workshop broadly followed the suggestions set out in this guide, adapted as necessary according to experience and the local context. Since it is far easier to tell stories in one's mother tongue, this was the practice followed, and one that is recommended unless there are strong reasons for using a different language - and the persons concerned are fluent in it.

A few of the advantages of using story telling for knowledge exchange are as follows:

- People are often more comfortable expressing themselves vocally than in written form; this was certainly true in this particular case
- The act of telling stories in a structured manner can serve to help the teller to reflect more deeply about what happened, and on change processes
- Stories often highlight changes in attitudes or behaviours
- Stories are often a good way of sharing experiences in a manner to which other can readily relate
- People tend to remember stories better than simple dry facts.

A number of important points to bear in mind when using story telling in a professional context are listed below.

- Truthfulness: Stories must be based on the truth, even if the telling of them has to be simplified to put across a message. It should be possible to verify the story through a field visit, or other means.

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- **Simplicity:** Narrators often provide too many details, especially when setting the context. Just enough should be said to permit the listener to imagine the situation without being over-loaded with unnecessary information.
 - **Clear, single message:** It is important to decide on the message of the story, and to tell it from this angle (even if the story can also be used to illustrate a variety of other points). Complexity reduces story impact.
 - **Concise:** Stories work best when kept quite short; the aim at this particular workshop was to speak for no more than 4 minutes (although this can be quite difficult)
 - **Gradual or sudden realisation of change:** The SDC guide emphasises the need to identify a “turning point” in the story – the point at which a change was made. However, some stories do not necessarily contain such a point - the realisation on the part of the narrator (and listener) can also be gradual.
 - **Title:** A good story title can intrigue, and help to focus the mind of the listener.

More detailed hints and suggestions can be found in the story telling guide.



A man in Bangladesh cuts bamboo for variety of products



lokta paper at Charikot Nepal



Carpentry- Bangladesh



Harvested rice-
Bangladesh



Microplanning at
Hangarga India



Newly nominated inclu-
sive executive committee
for a CFUG in Suri, Nepal



Villagers
-Bangladesh

Weaver women-
Bangladesh



Woman secretary of a CFUG
in Suri Nepal taking minutes
of General Assembly

Further information can be obtained from:

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