



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
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Discovering Peace through Livelihood

Human Stories from the Field



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November 2011



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Foreword

Recovery from conflict is essential to sustain peace in a country like Nepal that is passing through a historical transition. Experiences from around the world have shown that relapsing into conflict is more likely when peace dividends do not reach the people, especially those who are at the receiving end.

There is a promising sign that Nepal's peace process is making some headway at the center. There are some positive developments on the ground too where the marginalised communities are beginning to understand the historical causes of marginalization and organise themselves better to echo their priorities. These communities feel stronger today than they did before. Building peace from grassroots is possible when the marginalized communities benefit from some form of tangible peace dividends which could be their increased livelihood assets and opportunities for employment. UNDP's Livelihood Recovery for Peace (LRP) project has done exactly that in the three central Tarai districts of Mahottari, Sarlahi and Rautahat since late 2009.

As poverty, conflict and natural disasters have largely hindered the development of these districts, LRP's integrated approach to livelihood improvement with a focus on peace building and conflict prevention has indeed brought about remarkable changes to people's lives. The stories documented here are examples of these changes that have brought back hope and new energy to the communities. They could be of interest to development practitioners to cross-fertilise lessons learned for social and economic empowerment of women and marginalised groups through conflict-sensitive approaches.



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Acknowledgements

It is my pleasure to present this publication “Discovering Peace Through Livelihoods” that captures some of the success stories from the past two years of implementation of the Livelihood Recovery for Peace (LRP) Project. Despite the challenging context of Central Tarai, we believe that LRP has managed to bring peace and livelihood opportunities to the vulnerable, excluded and economically deprived communities. It is our conviction that the conflict-sensitive, gender and social inclusion responsive, and integrated approach to livelihood that LRP applies has led to social and economic empowerment of beneficiary households and communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who have contributed in bringing positive changes to the communities where LRP is working. The close partnership with the District Development Committees (DDCs) of all three programme districts—Mahottari, Sarlahi, and Rautahat—has been critical in providing technical and financial support especially in the areas of community infrastructure and energy services. I am particularly grateful to the Local Development officers of the three districts and colleagues in the Local Development Office and the District Energy and Environment Units. I am also grateful to the Women and Children Office (WCO) of all three districts for its technical support in implementing LRP’s activities in the area of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Guidance, advice, and support received from the Ministry of Local Development, Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, and Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation through their representation in LRP’s Project Board is highly appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of our NGO partners and youth clubs who have been delivering services in the areas of social mobilization, income generation, after-school tutorial classes, plantation, and social events. The Peace and Livelihood Facilitators, Income Improvement Facilitators of our NGO partners and members of local youth clubs have been working very hard to bring smiles on the faces of individuals of the target communities.

My LRP colleagues have been working in a very challenging context to realise the expected outputs of the project. It is their collective efforts that have led to the achievements LRP has made so far. I would like to acknowledge their hard work, dedication and commitment. Devendra Dhungana, Communications Officer, in particular, deserves special thanks and recognition for his hard work in writing and compiling the stories in this publication.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank UNDP Resident Representative Mr. Robert Piper, Country Director Ms. Shoko Noda, and Deputy Country Director (Programme) Mr. Jorn Sorensen for their constant support and guidance. I am particularly thankful to Dr. Lazima Onta-Bhatta, Assistant Country Director of Poverty and Inclusion Unit, for her guidance, advice, and untiring support for smooth implementation of LRP. Her technical guidance for conceptualizing this publication, for writing the Introduction and providing other substantial written inputs, and for extensive editorial support in preparing this collection has been critical. I would also like to acknowledge the support from Anjani Bhattarai, Social Development Officer, and Sangita Khadka, Development Communications Officer in the process of finalizing this document. My special thanks to Nirvana Pradhan, Livelihood and Recovery Advisor, for her overall guidance to the LRP team and special contribution to prepare the case stories for this publication. I also want to acknowledge the financial support from the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of UNDP and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to LRP.

Last but not the least, my sincere thanks to the people of the project districts, especially the men and women of the beneficiary communities, for their cooperation and for willingly sharing their experiences with us.



Prem Kant Jha
National Project Manager
UNDPLivelihood Recovery For Peace Project
November 2011

Acronyms

CG	-	Community Group
CI	-	Community Infrastructure
DDC	-	District Development Committee
DEEU	-	District Energy and Environment Unit
GBV	-	Gender Based Violence
GoN	-	Government of Nepal
HHs	-	Households
IGA	-	Income Generation Activity
IIF	-	Income Improving Facilitator
LDF	-	Local Development Fund
LRP	-	Livelihood Recovery for Peace
NGOs	-	Non-Governmental Organisations
NRs.	-	Nepalese Rupee
OBC	-	Other Backward Castes
PAL	-	Peace and Livelihood Facilitator
PLA	-	Participatory Learning and Action
PMU	-	Project Management Unit
PWDs	-	Persons Living with Disabilities
SMC	-	School Management Committee
UC	-	Users' Committee
UN	-	United Nations
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	-	Village Development Committee
VEED	-	Vulnerable, Excluded and Economically Deprived
WRF	-	Women Rights Forum

Introduction

This publication is a collection of human stories prepared as part of the experiences gained under the Livelihood Recovery for Peace (LRP) Project of UNDP in Nepal. This five-year project was launched in late 2009 and implementation started in early 2010. The stories presented here are, therefore, achievements of the past two years collected through individual interviews and focus group discussions with target beneficiaries, representatives from local civil society, and community leaders. The project is implemented in Mahottari, Sarlahi and Rautahat, the three Central Tarai (southern plains) districts of Nepal, where poverty, conflict and natural disasters have hindered development (see Map below). These districts have the lowest Human Development Index among the Tarai districts. The 2.1 million people who live in these districts have a mixed ethnic make up. The project is designed to be implemented in all 271 village development committees (VDCs) of the three districts through a cluster approach. To date, LRP has implemented its programmes in 176 VDCs covering all 76 VDCs in Mahottari, 67 VDCs in Sarlahi, and 33 VDCs in Rautahat.

Map of Nepal and Project Districts



According to the baseline survey LRP conducted using a sample of 1241 VEED households in its first cluster of 104 VDCs of Mahottari, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts it had mobilized in 2010, it was found that only 19% of men and women above 14 years of age were literate out of which women were only 10.5%, and only about 5% of the boys and girls above 5 years of age completed 5 years of schooling.

About one third of the households (i.e. 34%) had experienced flood in 3 or more years and 66% of the households had thatched roofs that pose high risk for fire. The average family size was 5.88 members as opposed to the national average of 4.9. It was also found that 97% of the households defecated in open spaces and 52% did not have private drinking water source and used public sources that are vulnerable to contamination. In addition, 60% of 15-29 year olds worked as agriculture wage labourers and the average per capita income was NRs. 4795 when the national poverty line was NRs. 19,261 for 2010/2011 according to the National Living Standard Survey. The baseline survey has also revealed that nearly 70% of households reported some level of discrimination while only 4.4% had some representation in various decision-making committees (e.g. User committees, school management committees, ward and VDC committees, etc.), and no more than 2% of VEEDs had been represented in VDC planning process. Overall, these data illustrate the status of vulnerability, exclusion and economic deprivation of the communities LRP is working with in the Central Tarai.

The project has five main objectives: (i) mobilise communities to improve social cohesion for peace building and to empower them socially; (ii) build new community infrastructure and rehabilitate damaged and degraded ones to benefit communities and create short-term jobs; (iii) facilitate the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and households to accrue improved livelihood assets; (iv) promote women's empowerment and gender equality; and (v) strengthen local government bodies and national institutions to respond to communities' livelihood needs.

In order to achieve these objectives, LRP applies an integrated approach to livelihood promotion and conflict prevention with a focus on building various assets at both household and community levels.

It prioritises promoting gender equality and social inclusion and also ensures that social harmony and community cohesion is promoted through LRP's interventions. The project's poverty pocket approach targets vulnerable, excluded and economically deprived (VEED) households within the programme VDCs. This approach takes into account locational factors (e.g. communities living in flood-prone areas), economic deprivation of the households, as well as social exclusion and historical marginalisation of the community groups. Coupled with this approach of focusing on the VEED households, LRP gives priority to empowering women, members of the excluded communities, and youth.

Intensive social mobilization with a weekly participatory learning session with the members of the community groups (CGs) is the foundation of this project. LRP has formed 630 community groups in 176 VDCs to date. It is through these weekly meetings that various kinds of information on citizens' rights and responsibilities, entitlements, and accessing basic services and other kinds of support from local governments are shared with the community group members for their social empowerment. The social mobilization process is how LRP has reached and empowered 18,248 community members in less than two years out of which 93% are women and 60% are Dalits.

Once individuals are organised into community groups, these groups become the entry point for LRP's integrated support for livelihood improvement and peace building. It is through these groups that LRP identifies communities' comprehensive livelihood needs and empowers them to address those needs themselves with support from LRP directly, local government, or LRP-supported NGOs, youth clubs, and Women's Rights Forums. It is the VEED households mobilized into community groups that benefit from LRP's support of micro-capital grants for income improvement, alternative energy services, and after-school tutorial classes for their children. The micro-capital grants to the members of the community groups have created income generating opportunities in agriculture, livestock and other small trading activities for 10,710 individuals to date. In addition, the settlements of the same VEED households benefit from LRP's support for community infrastructure like drinking water and culverts that help to reduce drudgery and

vulnerability but also create short-term employment. Community buildings have created physical space for the people to gather at one place to discuss and resolve community issues, and to take shelter during emergency situations like floods. Plantation of fruit and fodder trees in VEED settlements and other public lands in the programme VDCs through LRP-supported local youth clubs has contributed to greening the village to some extent.

In addition to this multi-dimensional approach to improving livelihood and reducing poverty, exclusion and vulnerability of the VEED households and communities, concerted efforts are also made to ensure that conflict-sensitive and socially inclusive approach is applied. Local partner NGOs are required to have inclusive staff composition so that the facilitators they recruit include women, Dalits and other marginalised groups significantly.

Also, local youth clubs are mobilised to engage youth in constructive activities such as providing after-school tutorial classes to the children of VEED households, doing plantation in the villages, and organising social and cultural events to bring community members together to celebrate festivals collectively. Youth groups have been active and innovative in tackling issues of caste-based discrimination and organising dialogues on peace building in programme VDCs. LRP's engagement with VDC level youth organizations has created an enabling local environment for the youth to work as a force for peace. They have been innovative in joining hands across ethnicity, caste, and gender to advocate against traditional discriminatory practices, exclusion, and lack of accountability.

Similarly, Women's Rights Forums (WRFs) have been created in every programme VDC. The capacity of the WRF members has been built on women's rights, gender equality, gender-based violence, and how legal and other services can be accessed at local and district levels. WRFs work very closely at the VEED settlements but also in other communities within the VDC.

While some of the LRP inputs such as micro-capital grants for income improvement are concentrated only on VEED households, other inputs are designed to benefit the greater community for social harmony. Also, LRP applies a participatory and community-driven approach to delivering its support so that community members themselves take the ownership of both the process and the outcome. To ensure a lasting shift towards economic recovery and peace, the project's key components are implemented through the local government and local NGOs.

The case stories documented here illustrate various activities LRP is doing with its different stakeholders as part of its integrated approach. While most stories are short, a couple of stories have been developed to exemplify the impact on VEED beneficiaries of LRP's integrated and multiple inputs. This collection is an effort to illustrate how LRP's stakeholders have "discovered peace through livelihood" in a relatively short period. It is hoped that development stakeholders at all levels will find this collection to be a useful illustration of ways in which peace can be brought to communities in tangible forms that are meaningful to Nepalis in their everyday lives in post-conflict Nepal.

From Nobody to Somebody

On the school ground there were two thousand people.
My candidacy for Chair of the School Management
Committee(SMC) created storm in village politics.

If there was no shelter building, the flood would have made us poorer. Though a few houses crumbled in our settlement, we were able to save our life and find protection which gave us the feeling of peace.

-Lalbabu Mandal

My name is Lalbabu Mandal and I am 36 years old. I live in Matihani village in Mahottari. My village is very near the Indian border. Talking of history, my village was once a vibrant hub for politics and business during the Rana and Panchayat era, may be for 60-70 years. I still hear stories from my father how 'big people' came to our village for important meetings and tiger hunting. Today there is no jungle and no glory of the past.

The road to the village is poor may be because many poor people live here. Though we work in the farms, we don't have our land. Much of the land in the village belongs to a Guthi (Public Trust) of Laxminarayan Temple and the rest belongs to landlords.

My wife and I have always worked in the farm and this is how we support our family. When we don't find work here, we go to India, just a kilometer away for seasonal work.

Our village was not much affected by the armed conflict. People used to talk about the killing in different parts but nothing big happened in Matihani. There was a bombing at police post but there were no other big incidents. We are more worried about our own work and feeding the family. I have three children and they go to a nearby school. I have a dream to see my children find jobs in government offices. I want them to be respected than I am today.

A team of UNDP-LRP and local NGO came to our village in early 2010 and organised a big meeting. Teachers, politicians, health workers, businessmen, farmers and even common

people like us participated. The meeting was about UNDP's new project and how it works for the poor.

Social mobilisation

Most of the people from our settlement were organised into community groups (CGs) of 28 to 32 members from different households. We formed the group and named it as Bhagawati Peace and Livelihood Group and the other group as Ram Janaki Peace and Livelihood Group. A total of four groups were formed in Matihani. The other two groups, mostly of Muslims, are a little far.

Most members in our group are women. We usually find Saturday mornings to learn from our mobiliser we call Peace and Livelihood Facilitator (PAL). It was from the PAL we first came to know about the government's scholarship to Dalit children. Earlier, we did not know about it and nobody told us. Today the number of children going to school from our community is very high. We also did not know about vital registration. But today we know its importance. Almost everyone has acquired a citizenship card and has completed birth registration in our group. We have also learnt about the VDC fund and that one third of the total is allocated for the marginalised like us who are Janajatis, Dalits, the disabled, and women.

The most interesting learning for me is to understand that the causes of poverty are more than one. I also know why skills, trainings, and representations are important for our empowerment.

We have learnt several things on health and hygiene. We have started inquiring the availability of 25 essential medicines that should be distributed free of charge by the health post. They usually don't have them. The weekly group meetings with the PAL are like going to a school and learning things for us.

Most importantly, we have learnt the power of being united. We are poor, but have started to realise that our strength lies in standing as one and our realities are similar. We are fighting less among ourselves these days. If there are disputes, we do our best to settle them within our community group. Women are more active in discussions.

Political empowerment

I got elected as the Chair of Janata Primary School of Matihani village in September 2011. The election was a matter of big prestige for us. Different political parties had backed up their candidates. On the school ground there were two thousand people. My candidacy for Chair of the School Management Committee(SMC) created storm in village politics.

It was seen as the end of our silence. I made a rallying call to the people to support me

because Dalits had never been represented in the SMC. Most children going to the primary school were from our settlement, but we did not have our representation in this decision making body.

I won the election. Two other members from the community, Raj Kumar Paswan and Pramila Mandal also got elected. The victory has given a message that we are no longer to be undermined. In a short period of being elected, I have experienced the meaning of representation. I urge other members of the community group to participate in weekly group meetings so that they can learn more and feel stronger.

Just last month, I was able to get NRs. 30,000 (approximately \$400) from the village block grant to build toilets for 250 children in our school. The work is still under construction and will largely improve the sanitation around the school. The school has long been neglected and there is not a single hand pump for 250 children. I hope to find the resources required from the local authority.





Door to door campaign

The Women Rights Forum (WRF) in our village is starting to be active. The Forum has 15 members and most of them have received training to conduct public awareness against domestic violence. Women Rights Activists go around the village carrying pamphlets and posters in their hand as part of their door to door campaign to help members of the community understand different forms of violence and make them respond to discrimination against women.

A few months ago they staged a rally that was participated in by most members of our groups. They chanted slogans to end child marriage, dowry practice and domestic violence. Boys and girls from our High School also joined the rally. Organising a rally by women was a new thing for the village.

Khushbu Mandal is the leader of WRF. Our community groups work closely with them to fight discrimination against women. The Forum has raised the alarm bell that incidents of violence must stop, and if necessary, reported to the police. With both men and women beginning to understand violence and its consequences, I am hopeful that coordination between the CGs and WRF will reduce violence against women.

Community infrastructure

A community building we renovated with the assistance of NRs. 469,287 from UNDP/ LRP project has been one of our great public assets. We are using the building for more than one purpose.



Relentless downpour for 21 hours on 25 September 2011 flooded Mahottari. The flooding severely affected more than 3,00,000 people in 40 villages. Journalists from my village said nearly 2000 houses had crumbled in the rain. The land turned into sea. Even the police and the army had to wait for several hours to come out of their camp to support the people. We saw them using rubber boats to ferry the sick. It was the worst flooding in 44 years that ravaged our hometowns for four days. We took shelter in the community building for a week.

Five houses had crumbled in our community. When the rain subsided, we helped these community members to construct the bamboo shed again. Men fetched bamboos and women helped to collect mud. The five houses were ready in three days. The habit of discussing our issues in our community group has developed a feeling of collective response to solve our problems.

As we live in tiny thatched mud houses we were all in water. The shelter building stood there as the symbol of protection for us. About 130 people took refuge in the shelter building. We stored our valuables in one corner.



We were able to save our ration, goat and chicken from being washed away. I can hardly express how useful the building turned out to be for our community, giving us respite and peace of mind in the most difficult situation.

Had there been no shelter building, the flood would have made us poorer. Though a few houses gave way to the flood, we were able to save our life and find protection. Finding protection in the building gave us the feeling of peace. We sincerely thanked UNDP for supporting the shelter home. Those living in concrete houses were less affected but passed on the remark, “UNDP le ta garibko matra matlab garcha” or “UNDP only cares for the poor”. No project had come to us to benefit our marginalised community in so many ways.

The renovation work with the shelter building provided us employment in winter. This is a hard time to find wage labour. I was the Chair of the Users’ Committee and maintained the daily wage record: 17 people got employment amounting to 412 person-days of work. I also worked as mason for three months and therefore did not go to India for work. This income complemented my family’s earnings.

Most of us have a single room house. Sometimes arrival of a guest also brings quarrel along in the poor settlements because family members have a problem over who would sleep where for both men and women. We are happy that the community building is also used to lodge our guests. It is also used for social functions like solemnising weddings and puja. The infrastructure has brought us peace for providing a common venue for meetings and gatherings and getting various services. Just last week there was an earthquake and we ran towards that building.

The building is also used by those who are not members of our community group. This is built on a public land and everybody sees it as theirs. Students who come from far and wide to take up their grade 10 final exam also used the building to prepare for examinations. There was no need to rent a room for that period.

Community infrastructures have brought security and protection to the beneficiaries and reduced their vulnerabilities in a unique way.

New source for income

The poor in our village largely live by their daily wage income. Poor but eager to do something of our own to improve our livelihoods, UNDP LRP extended grant assistance to each of the 65 households from Bhagwati Peace and Livelihood Group and Ram Janaki Peace and Livelihood Group worth NRs. 9000 in February 2011. We also received two days of orientation to develop our business plans.

Though I don’t have land of my own, I chose vegetable farming because the prospect



looked rosy. Moreover, we learnt that leasing land was much cheaper than sharing crops like wheat and rice with the landlord. The prospect of growing three or four products encouraged several members of our community groups. There is no problem of irrigation as the river is not far.

I grew lady's finger, gourd, long beans, pumpkin and brinjal in 0.3 hectares of land. The entire family worked hard. After school my children run to the river to fetch water to the vegetable farm. The weather was also favourable. It was the first time I was trying my luck with vegetable farming. One or the other vegetable was ready for sale. I made a net income of NRs. 20,000 (\$300) this season.

This year's September flood damaged my vegetable farming. I lost my produce but I am not so worried because I have acquired the knowledge and skill to produce vegetables.

A few members of our community group have bought a bicycle and are vending cosmetics, fruits and vegetables in the villages while others have opted for poultry, piggy, calf rearing and rickshaw pulling. Every week at the community group meeting, we discuss amongst ourselves which business activity is giving good profit. French beans I grow usually

fetches more profit. Because it is relatively expensive, I myself used to avoid buying it. Today I sell them.

For the poor and marginalised people like us, the new skills we have learnt for income generation has given us a new confidence to improve our livelihood assets and enhance our social status. What we have received in grant from UNDP LRP project is a form of good gesture and we are committed to sustaining it.

Change through education

The project has extended support to a local youth club in our village. The youth club provide tutorial classes to our children after school. The tutorial support has been helpful for the kids to improve their studies and for their parents to monitor their progress.

We have now understood that empowerment and improved livelihood is only possible through our children's education. In the capacity of newly elected Chair of the SMC, I am doing my best to make a difference by improving the learning environment in the school. I hope to find some resources to install a hand pump in the school, soon," said Lalbabu.



A woman wearing a purple sari with a gold nose ring and green bangles is smiling while holding a basket of green vegetables. To her left is a basket of purple eggplants. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Empowering Communities

An integrated approach of sustainable development implemented through UNDP's Livelihood Recovery for Peace Project has become a turning point for socio- economically and politically deprived communities in Nepal's Central Tarai.

Breaking the status-quo

A woman in brightly coloured saree was seen on school premises, inquiring teachers why the Principal was absent that day. Other teachers did not know either. Joined by more women the next day, she returned to question the principal of Janta Primary School why he had stayed away without any notice.

"The principal was stunned to find that the community group had come to challenge him. He admitted he was on the wrong side and promised to correct his carefree attitude. We took that occasion to urge the principal and other teachers to be sincere and regular. Today we don't hesitate to question the principal or the village secretary," said Jastaran Sahani, smiling.

Jastaran has understood the importance of education. At the age of 30 she is attending informal school for adults walking 3 miles every day to Barha Bigha. "Some thought I had gone crazy but I have learnt so much already. I am in grade two now," said Jastaran and playing with fingers, added "My eldest daughter is in grade 7. I have five more years to reach that level,"

She is one of the 18,248 household beneficiaries of UNDP's Livelihood Recovery for Peace Project (LRP) and belongs to

socio-economically and politically marginalised Dalit community. Jastaran is a member of Krishna Kanhaiya Peace and Livelihood Group in Janakinagar VDC of Sarlahi.

"Our Peace and Livelihood Facilitator (PAL) Indira Khadka has taught us many things. The weekly learning sessions have been very important to learn about the importance of vital registration, sanitation, health, government's scholarship scheme, education and our rights. She always motivates us to send our kids to school, no matter what difficulties we may have to undergo," said Jastaran.

In the past the community was not serious about education. Teachers were frequently irregular. There was a feeling that education was not so much needed for boys to be labourers and girls to be married off when they grow up. The PAL showed the link between education, health, employment, personal development and prestige.

Jastaran has a large chunk of papers to showcase the proof of their 'achievement' which are documents of vital registration like birth registration, death registration, migration and citizenship. "Almost everybody in our community has acquired citizenship cards from the local government. My children would not have had government scholarship if they did not have the birth registration," she said.





The community group was also able to receive the village block grant of NRs. 1,00,000 that the government had allocated under the heading Dalit and Women Development in 2011.

Power to decide

The project gave the beneficiary communities freedom to decide their infrastructure priority. Some wanted a culvert while others wanted to see canals built. However, there was consensus that a new school building was needed most.

The school building was in a dilapidated shape. Last year's storm had uprooted the tin roof and some children were forced to study outdoors. There were only three classrooms in the school for nearly 300 children. The community did not have the cash but labour to contribute to get a new building for the future of their children.

LRP was providing financing assistance for the construction of the school building and the

beneficiaries were excited over the prospect of a concrete school building in the village. The PAL facilitated the group meeting to form a Users Committee and explained its overall responsibility. The User Committee also decided who should be in other sub-committees for procurement and monitoring.

"We had never been to a bank before. In order to ensure group accountability, we opened our account and I can hardly explain that excitement," said Jastaran. More than excitement was the process of community mobilisation and empowerment through meaningful participation of the disadvantaged communities. The government's District Development Committee and UNDP LRP provided technical and monitoring support to the community.

When the project was completed in October 2010, beneficiary communities saw their common dream materialised. The school building received a blue coat of paint, symbolising peace it had brought through the collective efforts of community members.

Jastaran and fellow women and men found employment for six months. Both men and women from the community received 427 person-days' of employment. More than that they had built a secured hope for children. "Teachers will not be away from school citing an open tin roof as an excuse any more," she reiterated. The 60 households of Khatwe Tole in Janakinagar are happy they have a common asset that has brought them closer.

Community meetings are held in the same school building on Saturdays. The headteacher hands over the key to the community members on Fridays for their group meeting on Saturdays.

Economically empowered

Jastaran is one of the 10,710 beneficiaries who has received a micro-capital grant from LRP to create income generating opportunities for her family. Her husband is a migrant worker and she lives in the village with her three children. For ages, illiteracy and poverty, combined with traditional social customs had deprived Jastaran and fellow others from any opportunities to progress further. They also lacked skills and financial resources to start income generating activities.

"The community group I am in had started to treat me like the spokesperson but I felt restless to improve my livelihood. What my husband and I earned was hardly enough. Just then we got the news from UNDP-LRP that each of the 60 members in two groups would receive micro grant if we furnished a suitable business plan. I decided to grow vegetables because I have always worked in the farm and I was confident I would succeed," she said.

Planning was easy but finding land was difficult for the landless community. But Jastaran did not lose hope. After all she had developed some good skills of a communicator as a leader of the group. And she was not alone. The project had an NGO partner for IGA mobilisation with its Income Improving Facilitators(IIFs) on the ground to facilitate the process and provide them technical knowhow. Officials from

government's agriculture offices were invited to the field to train the beneficiaries for two days.

There was a good discussion with and amongst the beneficiaries as to which income generating activities were best suitable for them. They knew they should not be doing the same activity. While some members chose piggery, others chose goat keeping and calf rearing. A few decided to test their skills with vendor business. Jastaran and six others opted for vegetable farming and decided to lease a piece of land from a landlord for the purpose.

The past six months have been very productive for her. She earned a net income of NRs. 20, 625 (\$275) by selling vegetables in the local market. She need not buy vegetables from the market as well. "I am saving the money in a local cooperative. What I have earned through vegetable sale is actually more than what my husband used to bring home in six months."

The women led income generating activities have increased their livelihood assets and brought Jastaran's husband back to expand their vegetable farm further.

No to violence against women

Jastaran is also a member of Women Rights Forum(WRF), a network of women activists who are committed to raising awareness for women's empowerment and fighting against domestic violence at the community level. Women activists are capacitated with periodic trainings to help them better the nature and forms of gender-based violence in their communities and make coordinated efforts to prevent them through door to door public awakening.

These forums are backed up by UNDP-LRP in all programme VDCs to sensitize women and men to wage a war against domestic violence and other forms of discrimination. Traditional values of culture and religion, illiteracy, and less mobility have usually come at the cost of gender equality.



WRF brings some members from the VEED community groups and beyond to widen the impact of its preventive campaign. The forum takes up any issues of violence against women in their neighbourhood as theirs and brings in like-minded forums and organisations to take up the issue and respond to cases of domestic violence. Jastaran says sensitizing a traditional society against child marriage, witchcraft, dowry and other ill-practices is one of the challenging parts of her awareness mission she has accepted readily.

“The year 2011 was so special for us as we the members of WRF and community group jointly staged a rally in the village on International Women’s Day. This was my first experience of participating in such rallies. We went around the village carrying placards and banners and shouting at the top of the voice that violence against women in any form is unacceptable,” Jastaran recalled.

Earlier, such celebrations were limited to the district headquarters and rural VEED women’s participation was not likely. Slow but steady, WRFs are beginning to create ripples deep in their communities as more women have

increased their mobility and started joining discussions on issues of violence against women.

“I have benefitted in so many ways after UNDP LRP came to our village. I have become the leader of my community and the grant we received for income generation has created so many opportunities for our group members. The WRF has increased my link with other women in the village. We now have a concrete school building for our children to study. My children are doing well with studies after Saraswati Youth Club from our village provided tutorial support to our children last year. We heard UNDP helped that club too for these tutorial classes,” said Jastaran Devi.

Jastaran Devi Mandal is better informed and empowered today than she was two years ago in 2009. LRP’s integrated support for the social and economic empowerment of Jastaran and her community has led to the positive developments that have come in her to educate her children and herself, speak against dowry, child marriage, and violence against women, and to take up a leadership role for the greater good of the community.

A photograph of three people standing in a lush green field. On the left is a man in a striped shirt, in the center is a man in a yellow shirt, and on the right is a woman in a red sari. They are all smiling. The background is a vast green field under a cloudy sky.

Little Smiles that Tell a Story

Dipmala still lives in a one-room mud house which is roughly the size of a table tennis board. Nevertheless, she is beginning to feel the empowerment that her daily cash income can bring.

Conflict in the Tarai has emerged in Nepal mainly due to the region being marginalized from the mainstream development for several decades despite the fact that Tarai is rich in agricultural produce.

For generations, illiteracy and poverty, combined with traditional social customs, deprived Tarai women of development opportunities and exercising their rights and making their voices heard. The existing traditional “cohesive approach” women

practice in daily livelihood activities starting with fetching water and fodder together with other women of the neighborhood, collectively helping each other during paddy or vegetable plantation, cultivation and post-harvest activities, and during socio-cultural and religious activities have always been ignored by men—the decision makers of the communities. Instead, women’s mobility was controlled to the extent that their voices and capacity remained within themselves.



In 2010, Livelihood Recovery for Peace project facilitated Dipmala and other members of the Community Groups with grant assistance. The group was facilitated to identify possible income generation activity that can complement their households' supply of livelihood resources and options. The Group's selections of home-based agricultural income activities have motivated women to continuously realize their latent potential skills. Dipmala and other 8 women members have taken 2 bighas (1.35 hectares) of land

on lease in Ranigunj for vegetable cultivation. Today, the leased farm is lush green with vegetables like gourds, French beans, brinjals and chillies. The remaining 24 members are engaged in piggery, poultry, goat rearing, grocery and other small businesses.

Today, Dipmala and her fellow group members are planning to further explore several other feasible opportunities, and there seem to be no looking back for them!

“I am grateful to the LRP support. I have made a net income of NRs. 23,000/- in the past five months. I was able to pay back the rent of Rs. 8000 for this leased land as well.”

-Dipmala

The project has created many avenues for the communities so that they are able to choose for themselves the livelihood options as per their needs. One such avenue is for women to start home-based income generating activities and some new enterprises.

The Livelihood Recovery for Peace project has extended a direct grant support of Rupees 40 million to its beneficiaries to

create employment opportunities especially for women from VEED households. The partner NGOs contracted by UNDP LRP for the implementation are facilitating target communities to identify most potential income generating activities, formulate business plans, identify technology needed for greater efficiency and productivity, and conducting skill trainings.

Dipmala still lives in a one-room mud house which is roughly the size of a table tennis board. Nevertheless, she is beginning to feel the empowerment that her daily cash income can bring. She is fully engaged in vegetable cultivation as well as selling them twice a week in the local nearby markets.

Dipmala said, “I am grateful to the LRP support. I have made a net income of NRs. 23,000/- in the past five months. I was able to pay back the rent of Rs. 8000 for this leased land as well.”

Nearby, a Mushahar couple from a Dalit community has opened a small grocery shop and sells an average goods worth NRs. 1200 a day at Dhab of Pidari village in Sarlahi. Asha Devi Majhi, says that her husband has given up the idea of going to Qatar in search of work. The couple deposits NRs. 200/- a day in a local cooperative from the income they earn from their small grocery shop.

These little successes represent the stories of 10,710 VEED households that are currently assisted by LRP for income generation.



A photograph of a woman, Jipsi Devi, wearing a purple patterned sari, cooking outdoors. She is using a long-handled spoon to stir a large black pot over a fire. A young child with curly hair is in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background shows a rustic wooden structure and lush greenery.

When Small Means Big for Jipsi

Life took a new turn for Jipsi Devi when she joined Sunaulo Jibikoparjan Samuha community group formed by LRP in 2010.



Jipsi Devi Sah of Ranigunj in Sarlahi District of Nepal is no different from her neighbors who live in a single room house, the size of a table-tennis board. After the demise of her husband, the two sons of Jipsi took control of her little home and forced her to look for another shelter.

A small worm-eaten wooden hut left haphazardly by its owner in the village became her new home. The roof leaked, so she borrowed NRs.200/- from her son and purchased a plastic sheet to keep out the rain during monsoon. It was natural for her to feel hollow and deserted. Jipsi belongs to the Koiri ethnic group whose primary occupation is agriculture wage labor.

Life took a new turn for Jipsi Devi Shah when she joined Sunaulo Jibikoparjan Samuha community group formed by LRP in 2010. The 30 women members in the community group from the hamlet were identified as poorest of the poor in the village. The group was somewhat empowered but urgently needed assistance for livelihood recovery. The group received micro capital grant assistance of total of NRs. 270,000 with a business plan worth

NRs. 9000/- per member. Jipsi was one of the beneficiaries.

“When UNDP broke the news that we were getting the grant for livelihood activity, I felt that even the poor have their day,” exclaimed Jipsi, dipping potato into a cauldron with boiling oil to make potato chop (a spiced potato dish eaten as a snack). “Today I have a sale of NRs.1000-1200 (\$14) a day.” By now, the clients have surrounded her and she attends to their requests, selling potato chops to queuing customers.

Her primary customers are the college girls who often bring new friends with them to the shop. In one year’s time, the widow who was utterly helpless and destitute and left on the lurch by her sons has achieved so much to create her livelihood assets.

In addition to selling potato chops, Jipsi also keeps a stock of essential items for sale, such as candy, soap, biscuits, shampoo, noodles, edible oil and several other items as demanded by the customers. “Most of my income is made through the sale of fresh snacks like potato chop and fresh bread

“Most of my income is made through the sale of fresh snacks like potato chop and fresh bread that I prepare three times a day.”

-Jipsi Devi Sah

that I prepare three times a day,” she says turning towards the other side to attend to her customers’ requests. When the customers have left with her freshly prepared snacks, she shows documents related to her savings. One paper reads she saves NRs. 50/- a day and the other, NRs.300/- a day. In the community of landless people, the daily saving of NRs. 350/- or approximately US \$130 a month is an outstanding achievement.

“I have no words to say how much my life has changed with the UNDP assistance. Two years ago I was a destitute, without home or hopes. Today I have this little hut I have enlarged as my home, and hopes of prosperity,” says Jipsi. Other members of the group have stories as


encouraging as of Jipsi. Nine women from the same group have leased 1.35 hectares of land for vegetable farming and making a net profit of approximately NRs. 6000 a month.

Jipsi and many others in the group hope their future will be better when they are able to educate their children and further increase their livelihood assets. If the programme’s encouraging early results continue, it will have performed an important delivery: giving the most disadvantaged community the tools to make a sustainable living.



Fat Cash Income for Displaced Family

Lok Kumari's plan to expand her business and consequently improve her livelihood is not unfounded. Her love for the profession and commitment shown to the profession by selling her ear rings to buy three piglets is an example to that end.



“On the day we sold our four pigs I and my daughter counted the thousand rupee bank notes again and again.”

-Lok Kumari B.K.

Forty-one year old Lok Kumari and her 4 children below 12 years of age live in Setibhir Ward No. 2 of Pattarkot VDC in Sarlahi district. Her husband has not returned home for two years or, sent any money from India.

Her family moved to Pattharkot in Sarlahi from Makawanpur, a geographically volatile district in the Chure range, in 1992 after the landslide killed all their cattle and they had a narrow escape. A small thatched house in the rugged land of Pattarkot speaks volume of their poverty. Most of the migrants in Pattharkot come from different ethnic groups and share similar stories of hardships and being prone to different vulnerabilities.

The year 2011 came as one of the most memorable for Lok Kumari Ale Magar, as she could make the largest income of her lifetime; a net profit of NRs. 40,000/- or \$ 525 in the shortest period of time by selling her four pigs. The timing for selling her four pigs could not be better as it was the eve of Dashain, a major festival of Nepali Hindus who feast on meat during this 10-day festival.

How much it means for her to rear five pigs and sell four of them to plan her life ahead is well understood.

“I had the experience of selling one or two roosters a year and making an income of eight or nine hundred rupees or \$ 15 a

season. On the day we sold our four pigs I and my daughter counted the thousand rupee bank notes again and again” she said.

The new hope was instilled in Lok Kumari and 29 other members of the village who had formed Lali Gurans Peace and Livelihood Group in 2010 to organise themselves better and get empowered. The grant assistance extended by UNDP-LRP project was a big help for the community members to roll out their income generating activities.

Sharing the achievement she said, “I received two pigs in the form of income generating assistance from UNDP LRP and, I purchased three more by selling my gold ear rings. I have sold four of them and, the remaining one which is pregnant is going to give at least eight to ten piglets in the next two months. I will sell them only after they mature and the earning will be more.”

Lok Kumari’s plan to expand her business and consequently improve her livelihood is not unfounded. Her love for the profession and commitment shown to the profession by selling her ear rings to buy three piglets is an example to that end. Her income has grown, but she is still concerned as to when her husband will return home.

However, she has imbibed new hopes to her children and several friends in the community that change is possible when beneficiaries put one’s heart and head into multiplying the catalytic assistance received from the project.

The Joy of **Bina** and **Bishnu**



The new confidence I have seen in Bishnu and Bina Pariyar is worth replicating all over Nepal. There is new vigor and energy in their work and the business is growing every month.

“We had already decided what we’d do with the assistance from UNDP and purchased the machine the same day. My husband no longer has to work for others on a wage basis. We became the owners of our small tailoring shop.”

-Bina



“ My days have changed after I was able to buy this machine. Earlier, I was doing the same work but as a wage tailor for others. No matter how much I worked every day, my salary was fixed at NRs. 200/- a day which was barely enough. With no saving, I had no immediate plans. I always wished I owned a sewing machine to earn more money. Now I am able to realize my dream by saving NRs. 300/- a day (i.e. about \$115 a month). The business has grown and so has our happiness” said 22 year old Bishnu Pariyar.

Bishnu, 22 and BinaPariyar, 19 are newly married couple running a tailoring shop at ward no. 6 of Hariwan VDC in Sarlahi district. Their greatest joy came when Bishnu Pariyar was able to buy a new sewing machine with the grant assistance provided by LRP.

Both Bishnu and Bina belong to most the disadvantaged communities categorised as ‘Dalits.’With little or no land of their own, their traditional profession has been to work for others. However, the couple are making their best possible efforts to specialise in their profession to improve their status in a different way.

Bishnu is one of the 30 members of Chhahari Livelihood Group, representing the utterly poor communities. The group is benefitting from weekly participatory learning sessions on hygiene, how to access public goods and services, and how to have access and control over resources. Each member of this group has received an income generation grant of NRs. 9000/- per household. Therefore, the two decided to make the most of the assistance by buying a sewing machine and carve their niche in the community.

“We had already decided what we’d do with the assistance from UNDP and purchased the machine. My husband no longer has to work for others. We became the proprietor of our small tailoring shop. I assist my husband in ironing the clothes and in whatever way I can,” said Bina.

Social activist Bishnu Chalise noted, “the new confidence I have seen in Bishnu and Bina Pariyar is worth replicating all over Nepal. There is new vigor and energy in their work and the business is growing every month.”

Nasira's Coins and Confidence

Nasira was looking for ways to do something that would help her out of poverty but did not know how. Covering under the saree veil, she was confined to her household chores and isolated from the outside world.



“I am going to educate all my five daughters so that they will not face the problem of counting money and returning the balance to customers like the way I struggle every day.”

- Nasira Khatoon

Thirty-one year old Nasira Khatoon looks much older than her age. She lives with her husband and five small children in the village of Siswa Kataiya-3 in Mahottari. Coming from an absolutely poor Muslim community, most of her time was spent in fetching twigs and dry leaves for cooking or, finding menial work to stave off hunger.

In the absence of any opportunities her morale was low. Nasira was looking for ways to do something that would help her out of poverty but did not know how. Covering under the saree veil, she was confined to her household chores and isolated from the outside world. Representation or participation in any village level decision making process was far away.

Today, Nasira is earning NRs. 200 to 300 a day by selling cosmetic items and her husband has returned from India to help her improve the business. Nasira's joy has found a new height. The change came in 2010 after Nasira joined a community group called Nuri Shanti Samuha formed by LRP.

All 34 members of our group come from socio-economic but different religious backgrounds. The group received micro grant assistance from UNDP-LRP to improve their livelihood assets through income generation activities and establish community peace. “I could not believe that our group was receiving the grant and, it was true. We received NRs. 9000 as the seed capital to invest in income generating activities. Therefore, I decided to start the business of cosmetic items to improve my family's livelihood” said Nasira.

Drawing upon an interesting analogy of change in her life Nasira added, “The business of fetching twigs and dry leaves has now become like fetching home coins and banknotes after selling the cosmetics items. I and my husband compete who brings home more money as we do the count every evening.”

Nasira's four children go to school now which is a shift from her own earlier decision to keep one of the daughters at home to look after the youngest daughter.

One of the favourite topics for Nasira and her friends during their weekly meeting is how much profit they made over the week. Increased opportunity for livelihood has raised their income but what is more important is to see her morale and confidence enhanced. “I am going to educate all my five daughters so that they will not face the problem of counting money and returning the balance to customers like the way I struggle every day,” she says.

Income Improving Facilitator Sujit Pandey who is closely watching the change in the community said the beneficiaries are doing much better than expected and that he feels confident their business will sustain.

Neatly packing up her items for sale, Nasira said she has discovered her future in business and added, “We are illiterate but want to prove that we can make progress.”

Income through Delicacy

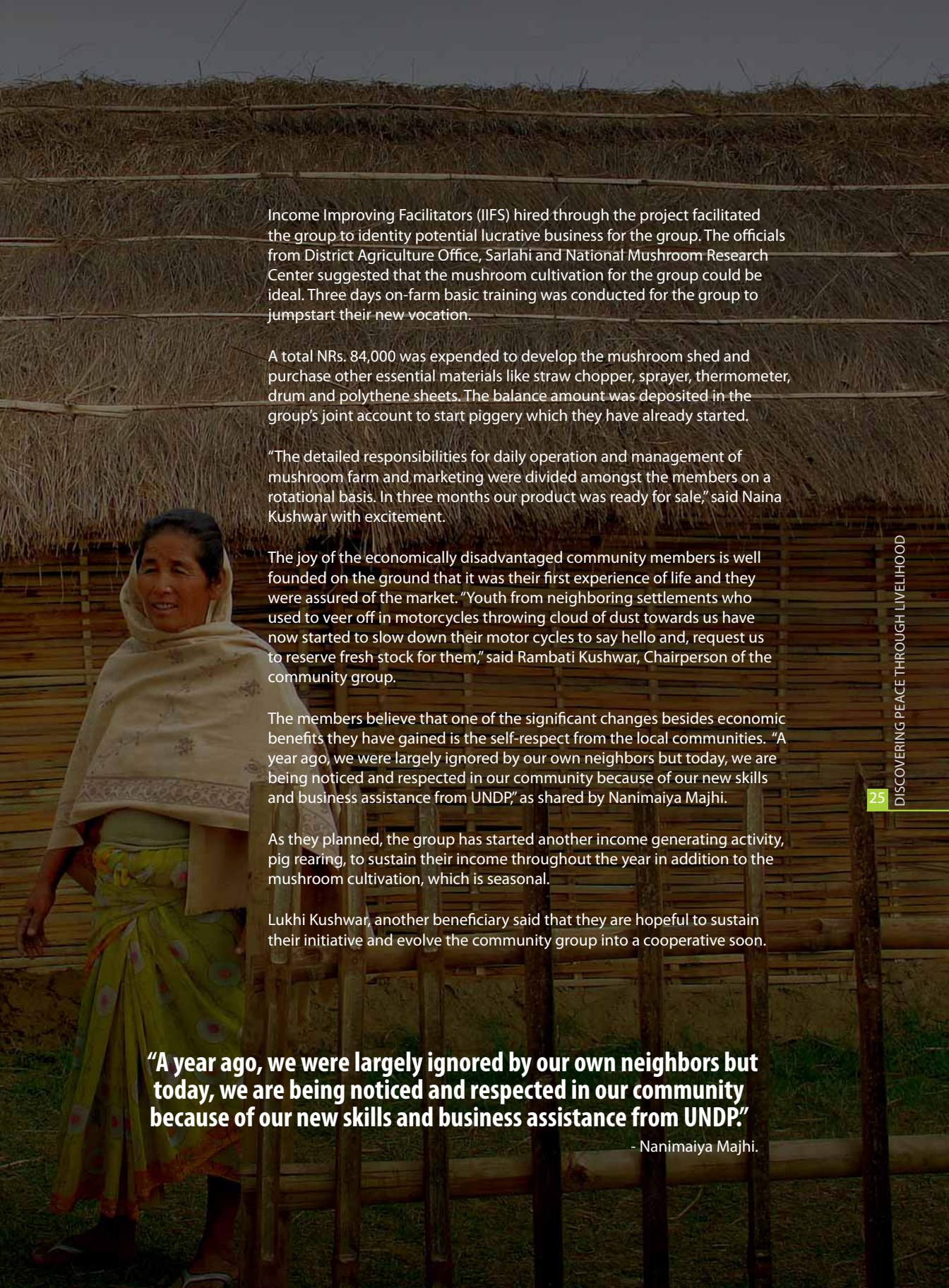
Youth from neighboring settlements who used to veer off in motorcycles throwing cloud of dust towards us have now started to slow down their motor cycles to say hello and, request us to reserve fresh stock for them.

How effective a small package of support can be with beneficiaries owning the programme is a case in point from Sukdev Tole of Karmaiya Village in Sarlahi district where the community group has taken to collective mushroom cultivation.

The hamlet of mostly hill-based Janajatis and a few Dalit households have reaped the fruit of their hard work and cultivated 1600 kgs of mushroom and made a gross income of NRs. 32,000 in 3 months. By investing NRs. 84,000 which was part of the total of NRs. 333000 rupees, they received for the group.

Members of Naya Srijana Livelihood and Peace Group formed by LRP are all women. The community group started mushroom farming after receiving the grant assistance.

The first challenge for the beneficiaries was the land. "We organised a group meeting and discussed how we could overcome this problem. Some of our friends even suggested that growing mushroom without owning a piece of land was unlikely. However we deliberated further and decided that we should start by leasing one katta of land from a local landlord," recalls Indramati Bote.



Income Improving Facilitators (IIFS) hired through the project facilitated the group to identify potential lucrative business for the group. The officials from District Agriculture Office, Sarlahi and National Mushroom Research Center suggested that the mushroom cultivation for the group could be ideal. Three days on-farm basic training was conducted for the group to jumpstart their new vocation.

A total NRs. 84,000 was expended to develop the mushroom shed and purchase other essential materials like straw chopper, sprayer, thermometer, drum and polythene sheets. The balance amount was deposited in the group's joint account to start piggery which they have already started.

"The detailed responsibilities for daily operation and management of mushroom farm and marketing were divided amongst the members on a rotational basis. In three months our product was ready for sale," said Naina Kushwar with excitement.

The joy of the economically disadvantaged community members is well founded on the ground that it was their first experience of life and they were assured of the market. "Youth from neighboring settlements who used to veer off in motorcycles throwing cloud of dust towards us have now started to slow down their motor cycles to say hello and, request us to reserve fresh stock for them," said Rambati Kushwar, Chairperson of the community group.

The members believe that one of the significant changes besides economic benefits they have gained is the self-respect from the local communities. "A year ago, we were largely ignored by our own neighbors but today, we are being noticed and respected in our community because of our new skills and business assistance from UNDP," as shared by Nanimaiya Majhi.

As they planned, the group has started another income generating activity, pig rearing, to sustain their income throughout the year in addition to the mushroom cultivation, which is seasonal.

Lukhi Kushwar, another beneficiary said that they are hopeful to sustain their initiative and evolve the community group into a cooperative soon.

"A year ago, we were largely ignored by our own neighbors but today, we are being noticed and respected in our community because of our new skills and business assistance from UNDP."

- Nanimaiya Majhi.

Way to Say No to Foreign Employment

I really feel proud that I am actually earning more than some of my friends abroad. You can see these papers pegged on the wall. I am saving as much as 250 rupees a day (US\$ 110 a month) in a local cooperative. All my children go to public school. I have savings to ensure their high school education.



"I wanted to test some other skills in my own country. My wife suggested we open a hair salon."

-Lalbabu Thakur

"

I really feel proud that I am actually earning more than some of my friends abroad. You can see these papers pegged on the wall. I am saving as much as 250 rupees a day (US\$ 110 a month) in a local cooperative. All my children go to public school. I have savings to ensure their high school education," said Lalbabu Thakur, a hair salon owner from Laxmipur village of Sarlahi district.

"I wanted to test some other skills in my own country. My wife suggested we open a hair salon". The idea could not be better for the grant support they received from LRP.

Lalbabu is one of the many recipients of Rupees 9000/- micro-capital grant assistance of UNDP's Livelihood Recovery for Peace Project. He is a member of Krishna Livelihood Group at Ward No. 3 in Laxmipur VDC.

Lalbabu is Hazam, a tribal community categorised as Other Backward Class (OBC) in the long list of ethnic categorisation in Nepal. He chose not to be a part of the youth population who are migrating for foreign employment even though he had witnessed his friends return home from abroad with a television set, fancy mobile sets and some cash.

Lighting Homes and Hopes

We saw the solar lamp as the symbol of our empowerment and means to end poverty.

There were neither cables nor transformers, but the bright milky light illuminated the dark Mushahar settlement. There could not be a bigger surprise for Gagani Devi Sada, 80, of Mushahar settlement of Bagada in Mahottari. Sleeping was not easy. She did not need the support of her grand-daughters as usual to go out.

She could read the faces of her neighbours husking paddy by the milky light. "You also could not sleep?" she questioned her neighbours, without waiting for their response, she added, "in the joy of the milky brightness, nobody has fallen asleep!" This was how Gagani Devi described her experience of a lifetime, when the newly installed 5 pick solar panels started to give out milky light.

Gagani Devi had spent her eight decades playing hide and seek with the dark. She and many other elderly from the poor Mushahar community would no longer have to spend the nights in the dark. Children were more excited. There were no cables or transformers but there was bright light from the solar panels. The HOW question was as strong as the excitement. Parents did not have the answer to the children's questions.

It was unusual for the Mushahar community of Bagada to feel honoured and respected.

The volume of happiness knew no bound for 59 vulnerable, excluded and economically deprived households of Mushahar community following the installation of solar tuki or, lamp by UNDP's Livelihood Recovery for Peace Project. It was a matter of pride for this Dalit community which has lived in humiliation as 'rodent eaters' dominated by better off communities.





"We saw the solar lamp as the symbol of our empowerment and means to end poverty. The solar lamp came as a form of peace dividend. We saw the immediate possibility of our children improving in their studies because of the light. It has been so easy for children to study by the solar lamp at night," said Suraj Sada in one breath, adding that burning of kerosene-fed light was cumbersome as it "belches out smoke."

Moreover, a small mischance could lead to the possibility of fire gutting the entire settlement of poorly thatched huts, a common occurrence in the Tarai.

"My children grew up in hardship and poverty since the day they were born. When I ran out of money or, had a hard choice to buy either food or fuel, kerosene was never a priority. Children used to cry saying they had exam or homework to finish and wanted to study at



night. Sometimes I had to beat them to force them to sleep," said Sukaratiya Devi Sada. The usefulness of solar lamp can be hardly exaggerated for her and her children.

In 2010 alone, UNDP-LRP installed 525 solar lamps in 12 villages of Mahottari, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts, bringing light and joy to more than 3000 people. LRP in collaboration with District Energy and Environment Unit (DEEU) of the local government is engaged in the promotion of alternative energy. The government's contribution is one-third of the total cost of a solar lamp which costs approximately \$80 each.

A total of 355 additional families are assisted with solar energy in 2011, reducing their vulnerability and bringing relief to the excluded communities that are not connected to the national electric grid.

With a good number of solar lamps being installed in the three project districts of LRP, a few youth in villages have started to learn basic mechanical course in the new hope that they will find some maintenance work with solar tuki as well. This has raised the possibility that solar lamps will last much longer than conventional lamps.

The solar energy support has done more than lighting homes. Confidence has replaced the low morale of the excluded communities in addition to the increased number of children attending school and performing better in their studies.



Empowerment through Information

Earlier we had to worry because there weren't enough students and today there are just too many. The student-teacher ratio is very big. When I return home from school, I feel exhausted.

“We used to instruct women to do this and that but these days, they advise us more assertively. My wife does not let me in if I return home drunk.”

- Ram Dayal Sada

Visit a high school in Ankar in Mahottari and one gets astonished to find 270 children crammed in grade one—all in one classroom. Grade teacher Sanjiv Kumar Jha says they have nothing to hide: “earlier we had to worry because there weren’t enough students and today there are just too many. The student-teacher ratio is very big. When I return home from school, I feel exhausted.”

How awkward and tiresome it must be in handling so many children in a single classroom is understandable. But more important is to see the craze for attending school, especially for the children of Dalit and other vulnerable groups living in the poorest pockets of the district.

“Too poor to fill our bellies, I was not sending my children to school because they need a uniform. We were made aware by PAL in one of the weekly learning sessions that the District Education Office provides cash assistance of NRs. 350/- for every Dalit children studying from grade one to eight. We all went to the school and claimed our share. These days both my children go to school wearing their uniform,” exclaimed Purani Devi Mallik. District Education Office, Mahottari, in 2011 allocated NRs. 11.31 million for 28,277 Dalit children under the Dalit Scholarship Programme. The office has the record of distribution worth only NRs. 4.57 million for 11,426 Dalit girls of public schools while many Dalit children continue to not get this scholarship.

In the absence of appropriate facilities the grade one teacher at a local High School surely has to grapple with the number of students,

but the new awakening that has come in the nearby Dom community to send their children to school speaks of the end of silence. The participatory learning and action sessions conducted for Community Groups formed by LRP have created new hopes and prompted parents of the community to send their kids to schools.

It’s a daily routine for the project supported Peace and Livelihood Facilitators to visit the most disadvantaged community groups and share their learning on promotion of social cohesion through various community based activities, basic facilitation and mediation skills, health and sanitation, education, youth mobilization, women’s rights, and information on public goods and services offered by the government and other agencies.

Community groups have played an influential role in bringing about awareness and understanding of peace within their hamlets. Women have been empowered through Women Rights Forums (WRFs) to fight against social malpractices like alcoholism. WRF is also a common platform to discuss gender based violence issues and to empower women from the very grassroots level.

To a question, what change have men noticed in their own community following the formation of community group and WRF, Ram Dayal Sada, whose wife and daughter-in-law are members of community groups said, “We used to instruct women to do this and that but these days, they advise us more assertively. My wife does not let me in if I return home drunk.”

Judging Social Changes

We never went to the market to buy anything before. It was always men. The experience of buying iron rods, and bricks in the bazaar was so different. Men have started calling us ‘new leaders.’

Nirmala Paswan says, “We never went to the market to buy anything before. It was always men. The experience of buying iron rods, and bricks in the bazaar was so different. Men have started calling us ‘new leaders’”.

A few kilometers away from Dhungrekhola is Katani Tole of Murtiya VDC of Sarlahi district where the vulnerable and excluded group of 31 women have formed Sagarmatha Livelihood group. The group supervised and

managed construction of a multi-purpose community building. With facilitation support from the Peace and Livelihood Facilitators, the group members are trying to make the best buy and maintain expenses records. Every single member of the community group knows about inflow and outflow of funds related to the construction of the community building including budget approved under various stages of installments. The practice of exercising transparency and accountability is seen in their action.

**“We have learnt to treat each other equally
and take decisions through consensus.”**

-Bishnumaya Bamjan

Today, 70 households from Dalit and non-Dalit families fill their water pitcher from the same public well. This has been made possible by Deurali Livelihood Women's Group of Siwir Tole at Ward No. 8 of Dhungrekhola VDC in Sarlahi district-- a poverty pocket area where majority of the households are re-settled

flood victims. The women in this settlement have used the group's strength to fight social discrimination. “We have learnt to treat each other equally and take decisions through consensus,” says Bishnumaya Bamjan, treasurer of the group. Based on their demand LRP is supporting them to construct two more public wells.



Good Water for Good Life

"I have discovered why the water from UNDP installed hand-pump tastes better. The water comes from deep within, 130 feet below the ground."

- Khusiram

“My children have not fallen ill since the new taps were installed. We have understood the importance of clean water for good health.”

-Kumari Devi Majhi

Men and women have assembled under a thatched roof to ask their neighbour how much money he made this time. Khusiram Majhi, 29, is back in the village after spending five months in neighboring India as a migrant worker. He looks humbled by his earning this time as he holds a few 500 Rupee bank notes to tell his neighbours how much money he brought this time.

Khusiram Majhi is ready to go anywhere and do any menial work to compliment his wife's earning, who also works on a daily wage to support their five children. It is a common phenomenon for many men to move out of the village for work and return home after a few months. When it is plantation or harvesting season, they are back in the village with the family as the work is available in plenty.

Khusiram said he is not concerned that the earning was not the same as last time. Showing the newly installed hand-pump, he said, “The water from that hand-pump tastes better. I could not think of installing one for

my home because what we earned went to buy food and clothes or medicine for the family. I had no saving.”

The 22 Mushahar households living in tiny little huts in the public land at ward number 9 of Hazminiya village in Rautahat have found their new happiness with the installation of hand pumps and construction of toilets in their settlement after UNDP LRP joined the District Development Committee of Rautahat to bring clean water and improve the sanitation. Local NGO called PRANN joined in to mobilise the community. The community was informed of a close linkage between water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and oriented to make the best utilisation of the newly installed services.

“I have discovered why the water from UNDP installed hand-pump tastes better. The water comes from deep within, 130 feet below the ground. The two hand pumps we had fetched water from were only 25 meters under the ground and it often smelled and gave bad colour,” exclaimed Khusiram.





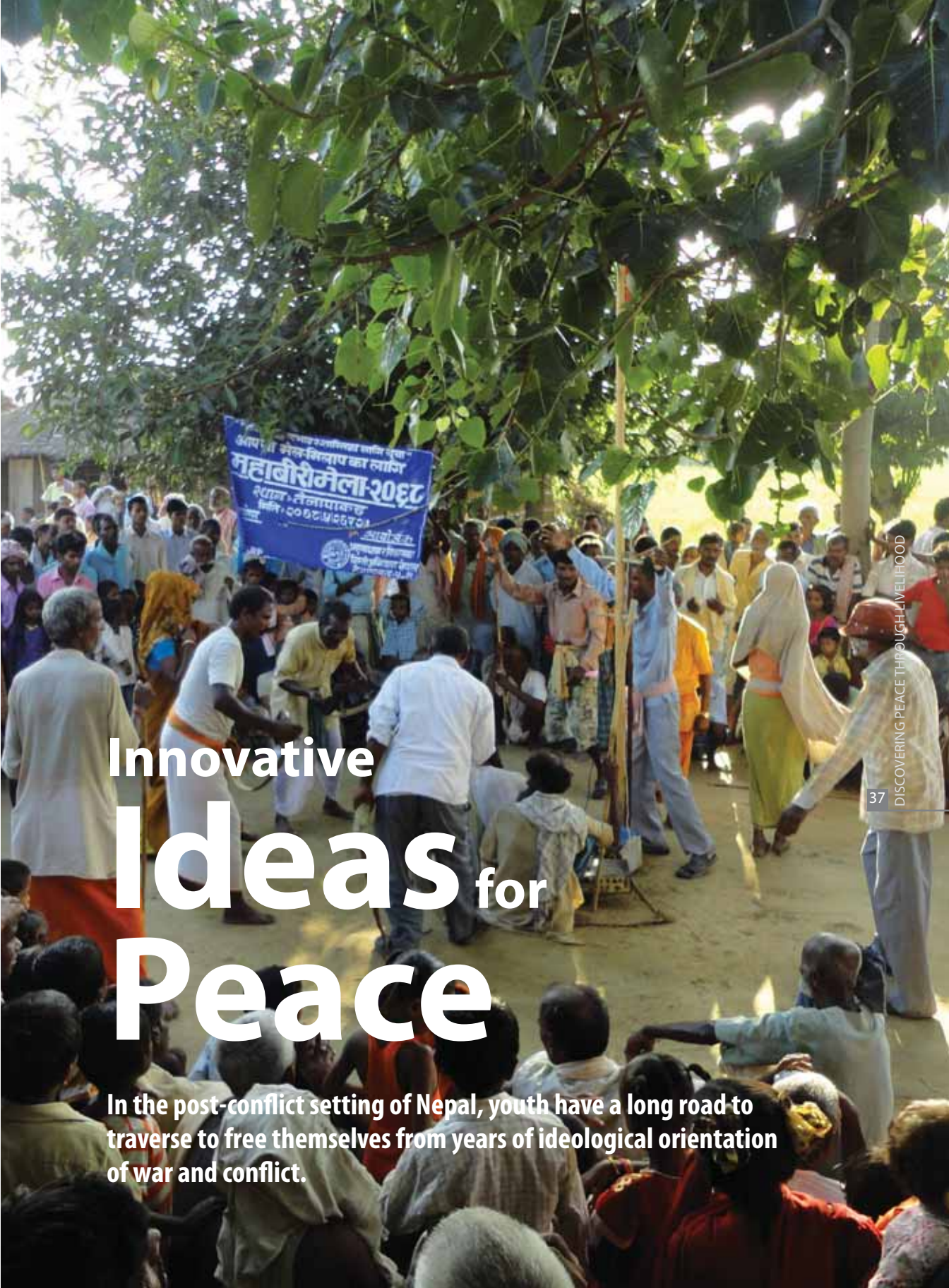
Rajkali Devi Majhi, who was the Chair of the User's Committee joins in to give a complete picture of how they went about the process of organising themselves to plan this project, procure the materials needed, and manage the construction part. "I had been to Gaur before but never been to the cement shop. Our mobiliser, PAL helped us to reduce the price and we bought the materials in a bullock cart," she said sharing her experience of going to the market to buy the hand pump and cement, tiles and other materials to construct toilets in the community. She knows exactly how much money was received in grant and how much was spent for hand-pump installation and toilet construction. "The total amount for our community was NRs. 275, 827" (or approximately \$3830) explained Rajkali.

Rajkali never went to school and does not know how to read or write. But she has learnt to put her signature and makes no mistakes in counting money. As the Chair of the Users' Committee she has won the consent from the community members to collect NRs. 10 a

month from each household for repair and maintenance purpose.

"I collect the money myself and share the information how much has been collected from the group for repair and maintenance. Everybody is happy to spare 10 rupees a month for the purpose. We ask Ramola Devi studying in grade six, to keep the account in the register."

Kumari Devi Majhi exclaimed her children have not fallen ill since the new taps were installed. The Mushahars have understood the importance of clean water for good health. The otherwise stinky roads leading to the Mushahar settlement are clean because the beneficiaries have started to use toilets. The small support for drinking water and sanitation is slowly bringing behavioural changes to this community.



Innovative Ideas for Peace

In the post-conflict setting of Nepal, youth have a long road to traverse to free themselves from years of ideological orientation of war and conflict.

“I would not have probably visited the poor settlements in my own village if we were not into contractual agreement with UNDP LRP. Today, I am championing the voices of the poor in village level meetings-a paradigm shift in my position and understanding.”

-Satrudhan Singh

It is a street drama where youths are shown being handcuffed and arrested. Series of events that follow tell the story of how youth can be a source of violence or a force for peace and social harmony. The plot moves from anti-climax to climax giving out the message that youth can contribute a lot to peace and development if they are allowed to exploit their energy to positive activities.

Carrying the message home

The main square of Teja Pakad village in Rautahat district saw a large congregation of people when a local NGO called ABHIYAN Nepal staged the street drama in October 2011 to aware the people about youth, violence and peace. A total of 85 youth clubs and local NGOs supported by UNDP LRP Project are using similar innovative approaches to relay the information on youth, gender equality, development and non-violence.

“This is the first time any such drama has been organised with a peace theme in the village and that is why we had such a huge participation. At other times, if there was a crowd, it was during political meetings,” said Satrudhan Singh, a youth leader who sees his peer group as potential ambassadors to promote peace and social harmony at the community level.

“We have used the cost-effective means of street drama to share the message to the young and the old that youth also need to be given space at the local level to use their creative minds and help build peace. The sad

part is that they are more made to serve the vendetta of politicians. Through the street drama we have found the right space to urge all quarters to understand youth feelings and involve them in the local decision making level and to help build public transparency and accountability,” said the youth leader.

“My daughter informed me there was a show in the bazaar and I did not know what it was. I came here to find that out. I was on the front row and enjoyed the drama,” said Patiya Devi Ram, who watched the street drama, walking three miles away from Tejapakad bazaar of Rautahat.”

Realising meaningful role

A large scale mobilisation of youth by UNDP-LRP is seen as a unique case to build community peace and social harmony from below. This comes on the backdrop that youths have been largely “misused to serve the interests of others” and not empowered to identify their meaningful role and space for peace building and decision making.

In the post-conflict setting of Nepal, youth have a long road to traverse to free themselves from years of ideological orientation of war and conflict. It is important that they see each other as a source to build peace and harmony amongst the people of diverse socio-cultural, economic and political backgrounds.

Youth leader Satrudhan said, “UNDP-LRP has opened our eyes to understand our vulnerabilities to violence and our potentials

to make the difference in the village. The grant has been of great help to organise events but moreover, send the public message that we are accountable and transparent in what we do.

People have started taking notice of how the block grant received by our village from the government will be used."

The domino effect of being transparent and accountable to the public is likely to gain roots as local organisations get institutionalised to exert pressure on the local administration to follow the good practice.

Learning from illiterates

Most of the youth club members are educated and do not come from the very poor and disadvantaged communities. They are relatively better off socially, politically and economically than the primary beneficiaries of LRP, who are the vulnerable, excluded and disadvantaged individuals, household and communities. However, their engagement with the key beneficiaries of LRP project is yielding some surprising results.

"I would not have probably visited the poor settlements in my own village if we were not into contractual agreement with UNDP LRP. As part of arranging tutorial classes in the poor settlements for the children of excluded communities, I have had so much of conversation with the people. I have begun to understand the causes of their vulnerabilities, exclusion, and what expectations they live

with. Today, I am championing the voices of the poor in village level meetings--a paradigm shift in my position and understanding," disclosed Satrudhan Singh.

The after school tutorial classes for primary school children in poor settlements have developed a new craze for education in the mindset of children and their guardians. The VEED households never expected their children would receive tutorial support.

Thirty-three year old Pachiya Devi Ram is a member of the Guardians' Committee responsible for the monitoring of children's attendance in the after-school tutorial class. Three of her children, all below 10 years of age, are beneficiaries of the tutorial support. Within three months of joining the tutorial classes supported by UNDP-LRP she has found the change, "My children have improved in studies because of tutorial classes and they don't complain of being beaten in the school for not having done their homework," she said.

The problem of school drop out is likely to reduce with children from the most disadvantaged communities doing well in schools and their parents being more responsive to understand the value of education.

Tutorial classes have provided short-term employment to the educated youth, mostly women in the project areas, and have created a common ground for the VEED and the non-VEED communities to understand each other better and act together for peace and social cohesion.



Declaration of Free Zone on UN Day

Today the effective mobilisation of the community has resulted in a different picture. The road is kept clean and people have given up their old habit of littering.



“ We have reminded people of our community about the diseases and illnesses that come with open defecation and the loss of respect and credibility for having dirty roads.”

The celebration of UN Day on 24 October 2011 took a new turn in the village of Barahathawa in Sarlahi district of Nepal with the local media making a scoop out of the event. The impact of the news was greater. After hearing news on the local radio station several community organisations replicated the new practice that was greeted with excitement.

Assisted by UNDP's Livelihood Recovery for Peace Project (LRP), youth organisation of Barahathawa brought together the young and the old to clean a 700 meter stretch of road at Mushari Tole and declared it as "open defecation free zone" effective from 24 October 2011.

The feeder road leading to the settlement of Mushahar (Dalit) community at ward no. 6 was infamous for being 'the dirtiest' in the district and lacked basic services. Locals said, even

“We have reminded the community about the diseases and illnesses that come with open defecation and the loss of respect and credibility for its dirty roads.”

-Badri Paswan

health volunteers used to decline to walk by to provide vaccination or, administering Vitamin A capsules or, polio drops for children, let alone provide them with other services.

Today the effective mobilisation of the community has resulted in a different picture. The road is kept clean and people have given up their old habit of littering it to this day. A youth organisation in partnership with UNDP-LRP took the initiative on 24 October 2011 to keep the village environment clean and healthy. The idea also won the support of Laxmi Jibikoparjan Samudayik Samuha, LRP supported community group.

Together they held a meeting in the shelter building which they constructed through the assistance from UNDP-LRP and unanimously agreed to form a 42 member patrolling team to make sure the road is not littered. Groups of six, on a rotational basis, remain vigilant on a daily basis and the plan has worked so far.

“We have reminded the community about the diseases and illnesses that come with open defecation and the loss of respect and

credibility for its dirty roads. Thanks to the joint effort, the road is clean and people’s mobility has increased in the village,” said Badri Paswan, Chair of the community group in Barahathwa.

Public toilets constructed in the village had not been used properly. Some people were using them for storing paddy and wheat. There aren’t enough toilets for all the people. Nevertheless, people have begun to understand the importance of basic sanitation and hygiene.

A member of the community group Mantoriya Ram said, “Since last week’s cleaning campaign, we have changed our old habit and started to use public toilets. They are limited in number but we don’t use the road any more.”

The new awakening in the community has raised hopes that open defecation, which remains one of the major problems of the region, will ultimately be addressed by the local people with a practice started for the good of the larger community.



Message Behind a Cup of Tea

As we say, 'need is the mother of invention', we thought of breaking this awkward situation by working together between the youth of hill and Tarai background.



The Janahit Sewa Samaj Nepal, a Youth Club of Barathawa Village in Sarlahi came up with an innovative idea to challenge the age-old practice of caste-based discrimination during the Chhath festival whose rituals are dedicated to the Hindu Sun God.

The non-Dalits had been using the Bagmati Irrigation Canal at Hathidanda of Barathawa VDC to take bath during the Chhath festival whereas, Chamaars (a Dalit group) were kept at bay from using it for the festival. The Dalit

communities collected water from their hand tube-wells to celebrate the festival.

"We thought of making the beginning of the end of caste-based discrimination in our area from the auspicious day of Chhath. We discussed the issue seriously and ultimately convinced the community members to welcome Dalits to use the canal to celebrate Chhath since we were all humans with red blood", recalled Rupesh Karna, Chairman of the club.



“Nobody objected to our idea. So much was our programme accepted that we served more than 1500 cups of tea.”

-Anita Devi Mijar Sarki

The youth club also involved Dalits in the decoration of the area where Chhath is celebrated. Instead of using festoons for decoration, they used several posters to generate popular awareness on fundamental human rights, such as, rights to be treated equally and live a dignified life. To further demonstrate their commitment against caste-based discriminations, the club also arranged for a free cup of tea for the devotees celebrating the festival and requested a Chamaar to serve tea to all including non-Dalits. “Nobody objected to our idea. So much was our programme accepted that we served more than 1500 cups of tea,” exclaimed Anita Devi Mijar Sarki.

“When several people are going hungry, I was very critical of UNDP that it was giving money to celebrate Chhath and organize sports events. After seeing the free tea stall programme and a Dalit brother serving tea to all, I understood the value of collective celebration of social and cultural events that bring people of different backgrounds together as a community and changing people's attitudes through a cup of tea!”, said Laxmi Mahato, Chair of District Irrigation Office, Sarlahi.

The club itself came into being after the social unrest of 2007 in the Tarai that almost divided the people along ethnic lines. It was established to calm down the increasing rivalries between the youth of hill and Tarai origin that had emerged during the Madhes Andolan of 2007.

“We started fearing our own friends and stopped going to the canteen together in college. The political movement almost separated us. As we say, ‘need is the mother of invention’, we thought of breaking this awkward situation by working together between the youth of hill and Tarai background,” the Club leader recalled.

What appears like casual youth-focused events are actually laden with specific goal to promote social harmony and peace. The message behind the tea cups has largely given the new learning of no discriminatory behavior to the community members.

Tribute to My Brother

The best tribute to my late brother would be to continue the work of social service he had initiated in the village. We renamed and reinvigorated the same youth club and started working. The catalytic grant from UNDP/LRP has come out like millions of rupees to mobilise our friends for peaceful activities.

Nepal's central Tarai districts of Mahottari, Sarlahi and Rautahat are witnessing a rapid mobilization of youth in the villages where their proactive role is sought to foster social cohesion and peace at the community level.

Chair of Shree Anand Samaj Kalyan, Shiv Shanker Ray from Halkhori ward no 5 of Mahottari district said he has a story to tell how he joined the youth club to live up to the dream of his brother who got killed in the course of armed conflict in 2001.

"The best tribute to my late brother would be to continue the work of social service he had initiated in the village. We renamed and reinvigorated the same youth club and started working. The catalytic grant from UNDP/

LRP has come out like millions of rupees to mobilise our friends for peaceful activities."

LRP has mobilized youth clubs and youth focused NGOs to carry out village greening programme, peace dialogues, dramas/street plays, sports events and debates at school level, and tutorial support to the children of VEED households.

Youth clubs have found new ways to bring together youth who are usually divided along the political lines to think out of the box and act together for the common good of their society.

Nagendra Paswan of Sri Krishna Youth Club in Suga said, "The selection of our youth club as UNDP-LRP partner has heightened our

“Girls are hardly encouraged to participate in extra curricular activities. The cycle rally organised for girls was catalytic to convince us that we should also be allowed to play in the school, like boys do.”

-Sabriti Sah

aspiration to organise meaningful activities for the community and contribute to social harmony and peace amongst the people from different socio political and religious backgrounds.”

“When we talk about youth, there is a tendency to think of boys only, which is not right. For this time we organised a cycle rally for girls in order to encourage their participation in sport events and at the same time give the message of incorporating girls and women when it comes to sports or any other activities done by youth,” said Nagendra.

Sabriti Sah who participated and won the cycle rally among girls echoed the youth club leader: “Girls are hardly encouraged

to participate in extra curricular activities. The rally organised for girls was catalytic to convince us that we should also be allowed to play in the school, like boys do.”

Earlier, there wasn't any programme to cater to the interests of youth. Even if youth wanted to do something, there was no zeal because most of the youth clubs were passive. Stimulating youth in creative activities has been a good way to encourage youth organisations to realise their role in the context of local development and peace building efforts. Assisting youths to organise such events has underscored their unique role to make the difference while also developing their individual and institutional capacities.



Changing the Past

We realised our traditional profession had come to our disadvantage. Our social dignity was lower than of dead animals. Dalit networks, backed up by various agencies, effectively launched the *No Carcass Campaign* and salvaged us from this discriminatory practice.



The village of Mudbalba in Rautahat presents two sharp contrasts: tall concrete buildings with spacious yards on one hand and tiny little huts of highly marginalised Chamaar community on the other. The co-existence of the two communities within the range of a kilometer does not prevent a visitor to reckon layers of socio-economic and political conflicts between them.

Father of five children, Rup Lal Ram, 40 lives with his wife and children at ward number 8 of Mudbalba. He is one of the few educated in his Chamaar community, often categorised as “the most” disadvantaged and oppressed Dalits whose traditional practice for generations had been to handle carcass.

“We realised our traditional profession had come to our disadvantage. Our social dignity was lower than of dead animals. Dalit networks, backed up by various agencies, effectively launched the *No Carcass Campaign* and salvaged us from this discriminatory practice. Those who had been forcing us to handle carcass started to put the carcass in the bullock cart and dispose themselves. But we perceived threats from dominant groups and this prompted me and my friends to better organise our oppressed community.”

Today he is the Chair of a local NGO called Dalit, Women and Children Development Centre founded in 2008 to exploit socio-economic and political ventures for his Chamaar community.

Establishing the NGO was easier for Ruplal than finding resources to start with. "We approached so many organisations but they wanted prior experience of work and we did not have that. We wanted to do something tangible but were not doing much. Just then in early 2011, I learnt from the local FM news that UNDP-LRP was seeking purely local organisations to implement several activities to promote social cohesion and peace. We instantly felt it was an opportunity for us, applied for it and got selected. This being our only time getting grant support, we have left no stones unturned to give out the best impact" exclaimed Ruplal.

Ruplal's and 84 other local youth clubs and NGOs who reached a contractual agreement with UNDP in 2011 have pegged hoarding boards in public places to show details of activities implemented against the grant. The practice is seen as a means to establish public accountability and transparency to the local stakeholders, which is not what is commonly practised by others.

"Thanks to the grant of \$2000 for each selected youth club and local NGO of Rautahat, peace related activities they implemented have created a momentum to a point of disbelief in the village," said Ruplal.

"People have started talking about the impact of our activities in the village and ask us what next we are doing. Some of them have even started coming to us to seek our mediation to settle their local conflicts relating to strained relations within the family or land use which we eagerly take up."

Bhikhari Prasad Yadav, a former Chair of the village administration on whose farm most of the Chamaars work, joins in to add his say: "There is 'talk' of restructuring the state in Kathmandu but the actual 'action' is going on in our community. Ruplal's organisation organised various events to promote social cohesion and understanding and I have extended my support."

The village leader does not want to be left behind in sharing the credit for social change that has emerged in Mudbalba. The interesting aspect is the realisation that the past did not do justice to all but the future should.

"Peace dialogues we organised in the village saw a massive turn out. The event created a much-needed physical space for the Chamaars to make our non-Dalit neighbours to make a pledge against caste-based discriminations," said Ruplal. Peace conversations at the village level have been organised in almost all project



“Thanks to the grant of \$2000 for each selected youth club and local NGO of Rautahat, peace related activities they implemented have created a momentum to a point of disbelief in the village.”

-Ruplal

VDCs of Rautahat, Sarlahi and Mahottari districts where LRP is working to exploit the vibrant youth energy to build social harmony for peace.

The activities implemented through UNDP grant have revived the youth clubs and local organisations to create a new wave for social change in the community. These organisations, who had remained passive in the absence of some seed incentives, have started to become active and interested to experiment their innovative ideas to build the foundation of social harmony and peace at the community level.

Roads leading to the village have saplings of trees planted by these local organisations. They have also arranged a schedule for monitoring the status of these saplings. “We want to plant more whereby they grow to become the assets of the community and replace the lost greenery in the village. These clubs are organising tutorial classes for children from poor settlements as part of the campaign to bring the awakening of education. They are also organising peace conversation at the village level and another at the settlement of the vulnerable, excluded and economically deprived communities to help people to understand local issues and concerns relating to peace.

“Dalits are no longer ready to tolerate injustice that was perpetrated in the past. We have seen enough of humiliation and we no longer want to be the subject to mercy. We have given up the practice of disposing carcass and our children are going to school. The public commitments of non-Dalits that they would not discriminate against us has

been documented as their evidence of social change,” said Ruplal with a sense of pride.

By this time Ruplal has unpacked some photographs carefully bundled in a plastic bag. Showing and describing them one by one carefully, he added, “We are not doing events for men only. This photo shows our neighbour Rekha Devi Ram receiving prize from a sport event we organised for women.” Rekha Devi, sitting next to him is a bit shy but says the shawl she is wrapping herself up was received as the prize.

Ruplal’s wife, Chandrakala Devi Ram, is also an outspoken woman as a member of LRP-supported Women Rights Forum, formed in the village. Her primary responsibility is to raise awareness against the dowry system, gender-based violence, witchcraft, child marriage and other social and cultural practices particularly harmful to women and children.

“Peace in the community is not possible until women are free from violence. Because of low education, there is a strong belief in witchcraft. Dowry and child marriage are other social evils that have made us weaker. This leaflet has advocacy information against these practices,” she said and explained to a group of women sitting on the floor what is the penalty for child marriage according to the Nepali law.

Looking at the growing confidence of Ruplal, Rekha Devi, Chandrakala Devi and others it is not difficult to understand that UNDP-LRP has put into test the efforts of building social cohesion and peace by reaching out to interior pockets in the Tarai stricken by poverty and exclusion with the message that harmony actually comes through inclusion.

Building Synergies for Peace

Youth for peace and social change

50

If parents have more daughters, the dowry issue keeps them worried for their whole life. As youth, we decided to take up this issue, child marriage and other local concerns that led to the establishment of our organisation.

"What we are hearing so far is that youth are the future of the nation. But equally true is that youth are excluded from the decision making processes and our mobilisation should change this scenario."

- Shyam Babu Sah

Wave of youth engagement in the three Central Tarai districts has enthused dozens of youth clubs and local NGOs to discover their innovative ideas and approaches to contribute to the promotion of social cohesion and peace at the local level.

A total of 85 organisations who are into contractual agreement with UNDP/LRP are beginning to learn the importance of building their institutional strength and create synergies in the form of youth networks to find their space and collectively say no to violence.



"One of the general paradoxes in the Tarai is to silently oppose the dowry system but demand it at the public level. And there are so many cases of abuse for not bringing 'enough' dowry. If parents have more daughters, the dowry issue keeps them worried for their whole life. As youth, we decided to take up this issue, child marriage and other local concerns that led to the establishment of our organisation," said 23 year old Dharmendra Sah of Shree Shanti Youth Club in Basatpur village of Sarlahi.

The organisation staged a street drama in the main square of Basatpur with the same thing, calling upon people to respect the law and provide good education to children, particularly girls, and help end the practice of "tagging price during marriage," referring to the dowry system.

What look like a one-time-event implemented with the grant from UNDP are actually intended to change the psychology of society. Village greenery programme, peace conversations, celebration of national/ international days, cultural programme with drama, tutorial classes and sports have their relevance to bring the people together and reflect their sharing with others.

"Peace conversation we had in the settlements of disadvantaged communities in Basatpur village helped us to discover that Dalits are still prevented from entering a local temple. We were taken by surprise by the finding. We know peace will not prevail until Dalits and non-Dalits come together to end discrimination," said Dharmendra and added "We have taken this issue as one of the most important to be addressed amicably.

We have planned to hammer out this issue during our annual meeting."

Another youth, sitting by his side, Ms Sati Kumari Pandit noted, "social harmony and community peace is not something that comes with a brand. As we are beginning to understand our own society better, we will be in a position to play a more pronounced role to make a difference."

"What we are hearing so far is that youth are the future of the nation. This is true. But equally true is that youth are excluded from the decision making processes and our mobilisation should change this scenario," said Shyam Babu Sah, founding member of the Club.

There are early signs the organisation is inching towards that goal. This year, the club members held several rounds of meetings with the Village Council and managed to find temporary space in the public office building to start their activities.

A public hoarding board shows the list of activities performed against the grant support from LRP. "We have started the good practice and tomorrow we are going to ask the village administration to replicate this and show public accountability by making public how the government's block grant has been spent," said Shyam Babu.

Looking at youths' self realisation of their potential and growing capacity to implement their innovative ideas successfully gives a reason to believe that the grant objectives will most hopefully sustain.



There are other successes in the neighbourhood. Four kilometers away is the village of Jhunkhunwa where a local NGO, Sahayog Nepal has shuffled its Executive committee to make it more inclusive. The eleven member committee has a balanced representation of women, Dalit, Muslim and Hindu groups.

"Public interest over our work has scaled after the Executive Committee was shuffled. There is a common feeling that our organisation is more representative and not tilted towards certain Yadavs or Muslims or Dalits. We have started to respond to small conflicts as well. We have tried our best to hold an independent identity and motivate the youth to give up playing cards and whiling away their time," said Mohamad Jahagir Raaki, Vice Chair of the organisation.

The third voice in the community also echoes the change that has come through youth mobilisation. Manoj Kumar Yadav is a Village Secretary who is busy with his administrative work. He said the proactive role of the NGO has helped to reduce domestic violence because local youths have coordinated with Women Rights Forum also supported by UNDP LRP to advocate against different forms of gender-based violence.

Local intellectual Islamiya Raaki summed up the change saying the tide is now favouring youth. He elaborated, "Earlier it was the politicians who called the youth to do this and that. Today it is the youth who are telling politicians what to do."





Delight of Representation

So shocked were non-Dalits of our village that the total votes had to be re- counted three times. District level politicians of major parties were invited as observers. Because Dalits had united and were determined to have their representation in the school management committee, it did not matter how many times the vote counting was done.

I enjoy the field work and have learnt that the peace will only be achieved and sustained when the poor households have smoke coming out from their chimney.

- Harinandan Kumar Ranjan

In the village of Murtiya of Sarlahi district Dalits swept the management committee election of 2010 at Katani, Lower Secondary High School.

"So shocked were non-Dalits of our village that the total votes had to be re-counted three times. District level politicians of major parties were invited as observers. Because Dalits had united and were determined to have their representation in the school management committee, it did not matter how many times the vote counting was done. Those who had served in the school management committee for several years failed to get elected this time," said Harinandan Kumar Ranjan, a charismatic 24 year old local youth hired as Peace and Livelihood Facilitator by one of the partner NGOs of LRP.

The news that Dalits, both women and men, had been elected in the school management committee rang loud in Sarlahi and neighbouring districts. Local FM radio stations made headlines. Dalit's victory was the pet issue for gossip in local tea stalls. Fellow Dalits in the village collected flowers and leaves to weave garlands for their representatives.

This emphatic change in the Dalit settlement did not come overnight.

"It is not that the other projects had not been implemented in Murtiya before but, did not reach Dalits and poor. Being very much target oriented and reaching out to the people who have been least privileged has made the difference within a short time," said Harinandan.

The village has many idols of deities and hence the village is called Murtiya for having

too many idols or Murtis in local temples. The temple of Mukteshwar Mahadev is a famous pilgrimage site. Influential non-Dalits in the village had not considered any need to have Dalit representatives in any village level committees, despite having 20% Dalits in its ten thousand population.

Merely 5% of children from Dalit and poor communities were attending schools in the past. With a wave of new awareness, the school enrollment of Dalit children has reached close to 100%. The poor and excluded have begun to participate in all meetings and echo their voices. "We never knew the health post in our village was supposed to provide us several medicines free of charge. But we have learnt through Harinandan that it is our right to ask for those medicines," said Dropadi Ram.

Dalits have succeeded in getting their full share of budget allocated by the government for their welfare. Women from the community group have a remarkable story to share. "We were able to claim Rupees 1,08,000 from the village fund and used some of the money for training and deposited the rest in our contingency fund," said Bachiya Paswan, Chairperson of Sagarmatha Livelihood Community Group in one breath.

There has been no elected local body representatives since 2002. Influential people from different political parties make decisions over the village fund of the VDC. The fund allocated by the government for Dalits and women's development had never reached the intended target population in the past. Women have come out of their saree veil and have started to question the authority. "Dalits decide for themselves how the government funds should be used for the larger community interest."



Narrow and muddy lanes leading to Dalit settlements have been face lifted. Nepal Electricity Authority has extended transmission lines to the settlement. Local politicians are closely observing the change that has come in the lives of marginalized women and Dalit population. "The level of awareness and empowerment this UNDP project has brought is fantastic," said local Nepali Congress leader Rambalak Chaudhary.

Two members of LRP formed Sagarmantha Livelihood community group, Parvati Pandit and Ram Chandra Ram were elected to local Irrigation Water Consumer Committee in February 2011. "If provided assistance and opportunity, we are capable of doing anything," cheered Parvati, in her mid-forties.

More Dalit women have succeeded to have their representation in the community forest users' committee and local NGOs. "We are now doing the preparatory work to form Rural Livelihood Saving and Credit Cooperative in our village," added Nirmala Ram, another group member.

A total of 64 women from two community groups of Murtiya VDC have received micro grant assistance from LRP to start income generating activities. Many of them have chosen vegetable gardening and selling, goat keeping, piggery, poultry, trading of ruminants, village grocery shop and to vendor other food and non-food items as their priority.

Showing the newly born piglets, Budhiya Devi Paswan from Sahid Ram Asher Livelihood Community Group shared her dream, "we are blessed with eight piglets and my entire family is taking good care of them so that we can sell them when they are one year old." Though Budhiya Devi's generations lived in dire poverty, they were bereft of any direct support for income generation either from the government or, non-government organizations until LRP project identified her family as one of the most deserving VEED households.

Manju Paswan has received micro grant to start a small cosmetics business. The income has helped her and the family to meet their basic expenses and make a small saving. "I had to beg my husband for a few rupees to buy essentials for my seven member family. Today, I am earning as much a NRs. 300/- a day," she smiles. All her children are in school. "All of them go to school in proper uniform," she adds. A uniform is still a luxury for many school going children in poor settlements.

Local youth Ram Naresh Ram said he has not seen another project like the LRP which is engaged in empowering the people and simultaneously assisting them to improve their livelihood.

Harinandan, the PAL for this village said, "I enjoy the field work and have learnt that peace will only be achieved and sustained when the poor households have smoke coming out from their chimney."

A woman in an orange sari is herding a group of pigs on a dirt path in a rural village. The pigs are of various sizes, including several adults and many piglets. In the background, there are brick walls, trees, and other people, including a child carrying a pot on their head. The scene is set in a rural area with a mix of natural and built environments.

Transformations of Doms

If we rear cows or buffaloes for milk, nobody buys from us. If we start a tea stall, we won't have customers and, if we work as vegetable vendors, there are hardly any buyers because other ethnic groups despise us as Dom. What else can we do other than produce bamboo products and rear pigs?



“

It was painful to listen to our children who return from school saying that teachers force them to sit in the last bench and threaten them not to mix up with other children”. Doms (a Dalit group) have lived in humiliation due to abject poverty and caste based discrimination that still exist in rural areas. Complaints to the school authorities have, however, gone unheard.

Amala Mallik says that, “We could no longer tolerate to be helpless before our children when they complained of ill treatment in the school. So we all went to the school and warned the teachers to treat our children equally and allow them to mix up with other children and sit in the front bench. The teachers have promised to treat all children equally. We haven’t visited the school again but our children have stopped complaining,”

The knee deep muddy road leading to the thatched huts has been brick paved and cemented and has given a face lift to the settlement of excluded, poor, oppressed and underprivileged Dom community in Ekadarabela VDC of Mahottari district. The new community building constructed with support from LRP has created a space for regular meetings and, a shelter during monsoon when the village becomes flooded. The children now have a place to study till late at night. The newly constructed building has come as a symbol of prestige for the Dom community who hopes to use it for administering polio drops and Vitamin A capsules to their children.

“It was painful to listen to our children who return from school saying that teachers force them to sit in the last bench and threaten them not to mix up with other children.”

-Doms (a Dalit group)

Lately, the Doms are going through hard times due to the decreasing demand for bamboo products, their traditional primary occupation. The bamboo products is not as popular as before but the community still has the hope that it can be modernized. “We have produced only Dala and Daura (baskets of different sizes) but if we receive training on producing more bamboo products, we can learn to make gift items also,” says Pappu Mallik.

“If we rear cows or buffaloes for milk, nobody buys from us. If we start a tea stall, we won’t have customers and, if we work as vegetable vendors, there are hardly any buyers because other ethnic groups despise us as Dom. What else can we do other than produce bamboo products and rear pigs?” questions Ramini Mallik, member of the community group.

Ram Janaki Jibikoparjan Group received grant assistance through LRP project for pig rearing, as decided by themselves. Doms see higher prospect of improving their livelihood

through pig rearing because they say this is the trade they are best fit for and will meet few competitors.

Gradually as the Community Group has become empowered, the members of RamJanaki Jibikoparjan Samuha have started to act together not just as one family but as one community. For example, they visited the Village Development Committee office to claim the government funded Dalit scholarship for their children.

One of the worst social practices that has stigmatised this community is child marriage practised widely even today. Social mobilisation and empowerment of the community has brought the new understanding that they must give up this practice. Echoing the commitment of the Dom community, Rambati Mallik said, “We are sending both girls and boys to school. With education I hope this practice will be discouraged.”





From Catching Mice to Making Money

The moment there is any misunderstanding among two members, the third voice is always there to tell them not to quarrel.

The usual scene at Pidari village in Sarlahi district has changed today. The streets are still muddy but the sanitation around small one room mud and thatched houses are clean. People's engagements in small income generating activities tell the story of their enthusiasm to start a new way of life and be more empowered and literate. Girl children alongside boys are seen returning home from school giving the clear message to other communities how much Mushahar community has started caring for the education of their children.

"I do not go to the field or send my children to look for rodents any longer. I am at the service of customers from dawn to dusk to sell what I have in my shop," says Shanti Devi Majhi, a member of Chameli Livelihood Community Group of Pidari Village in Sarlahi district. A small grocery and snacks shop she opened in April 2011 with grant assistance of NRs. 9000/- from UNDP has brought remarkable change to her life. The small village shop has helped her to start saving NRs. 230/- (US \$ 3/-) per day with a local savings and credit cooperative.

"Because I get about 100 buyers a day in my shop, my neighbors know that I am earning money and, ask for some loan. I am happy with the saving in the cooperative which also pays interests," said Shanti Devi. She takes pride in showing the calendar hanging in her shop, a complimentary copy from the same cooperative. It may sound strange, but hanging a calendar on the wall is a big sign of prosperity for Mushahars whose sole possession is a little thatched hut.

Transformation of one of the excluded, socio-economically deprived and most disadvantaged communities from hunting 'rodents' to opening up small village grocery shops and tea stalls has come within a relatively short period of time. The Mushahar communities were mobilized and facilitated to form groups by the Livelihood Recovery for Peace Project in early 2010 to build their individual and institutional capacities primarily through increased information on their rights over public goods and services, access and control over local resources, and re-building livelihood system and assets.

"We have about 200 households in our hamlet and most of the time we were quarreling amongst ourselves. We discovered the strength of our community only after being socially mobilised into community groups. We began to respect each other. We have now buried our little acrimonies we were living with against our neighbours and have begun to respect each other and see each other differently. The moment there is any misunderstanding among two members, the third voice is always there to tell them not to quarrel," said Feku Majhi, treasurer of the group.

In the village of Pidari in Sarlahi District of Nepal, Mushahars still hunt rats to supplement deprived diet. Mushahars are labeled and categorized as 'rat eaters' for which they are despised by others in the form of proverbs and local maxims.

Mushahars have begun to understand the importance of participation and having their own representatives in the local level bodies. After all they have a sizeable population in Pidari. They know they have not yet been a priority of any government scheme because their political and social representation has been virtually nil and exploitation remained high. "Next time we have a village level election, we will find candidates from our own community," said Phekni Devi Majhi, a woman member of the community group.

Much to the delight of Mushahars, the project has installed five hand pumps as per their demand. Many requests were made to the village Secretary to help them improve their water source but, their requests had been ignored.

The integrated livelihood recovery and peace project of UNDP has brought positive changes in the Mushahar community. The rim of status quo is coming off gradually and the community is now creating a new identity through better income and regular participation in village level gatherings in an assertive way.

“My son was planning to borrow money from the local money lender and go to Saudi Arabia for work, but he has decided to stay back in the village to grow vegetables now”.

- Ramrati Sada

The socio-economic empowerment of the disadvantaged Mushahar community is seen in other villages of Mahottari, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts as well. The precarious way of life is replaced with small agro-based income generating activities.

The waste land at ward no. 7 of Koluha Bagaiya Village in Mahottari district has turned into a lush green vegetable farm.

Altogether 61 vulnerable, excluded and economically deprived Dalit households of the two community groups received an income generation grant of NRs. 729,000/- from LRP project, intended for leasing a land for the vegetable garden and purchase of agriculture inputs.

Beneficiaries like Mukhiya who have never had their own land to grow vegetables, let alone sell them in the market, have now started reaping the fruit of their hard work. The project has brought 10,710 people under its fold for income generation, micro-enterprise development and technology transfer programme activities.

“My wife is better than me in tagging prices on vegetables and selling them in the weekly Haat Bazaar” says Mukhiya Mandal of Koluha Bagaiya, adding a note with a smile that they sold vegetables worth NRs. 1500/- in two months. Showing bottle gourds and cucumber all around the field he says more income is likely because of the good production.

One of the beneficiaries, Ramrati Sada said, “My son was planning to borrow money from the local money lender and go to Saudi Arabia for work, but he has decided to stay back in the village to grow vegetables now”.

The newly found hopes of increased livelihoods for the beneficiaries are well founded with the realisation of their potential.



Courage not Seen Before

The visit of 55 people also came as a surprise to the villagers. It was no wedding or election time. Nevertheless, they were eager to share their stories of change and request for more assistance from the team.

“ It is now time to question whether the District Development Committee (DDC) will have courage to take us to its project sites for monitoring just as UNDP's Livelihood Recovery for Peace Project has done. Why should it hesitate if everything is done the fair way and why should there be any reluctance for any organisation to imitate a good practice?” asked Satendra Yadav, a young politician from Mahottari, in the reflection meeting, organised soon after an observation tour of stakeholders to LRP project VDCs of Mahottari.

Ravindra Uprety, journalist from Kantipur Daily who was also in the same team, noted that, “there are basically two types of conflicts, affecting people's psyche; one is the decade long armed conflict and the other resulting from the absence of elected local bodies in place. Politicians are wrangling over project

contracts and priorities. It was encouraging to see UNDP carrying out its activities so smoothly amidst the difficult context of Tarai with highly marginalised communities like Dom, Chamaar and Mushahar.”

Kamdev Jha from District Agriculture Office said, “traditionally marginalised people cannot be more true when they complain about inadequate government facilities,” adding he had been the boss of agriculture office for 15 years and had “never visited so many villages to inquire the status of services provided by his office from the marginalised communities' perspectives.” He expressed the confidence that a large number of community groups that LRP has formed would be useful to avail training and other government rendered services.

The surprise visit of 55 people also came as a surprise to the villagers. It was no wedding or

“Traditionally marginalised people cannot be more true when they complain about inadequate government facilities.”

- Kamdev Jha



election time. Nevertheless, they were eager to share their stories of change and request for more assistance from the team.

Mother of five children, Sonabati Sada, 32, from Badiya Banchauri village said, “we answered all their questions, we told them about our experience of going to the market for the first time and purchasing raw materials like iron rods and cement to construct a culvert. We even told the reporters to write more about the challenges of poor people.”

“This is a rare case one gets to hear that Dom, Mushahar and Chamaars are empowered, represented and learning the importance of User Committee for infrastructure or, income generation projects. The activities are well designed and people driven,” said Gopal Baral, a correspondent for National News Agency.

Observation tours have been a rewarding experience for the visitors as much as for the target groups and the project to see the level of transparency and accountability to the people. More importantly, it has been a useful tool for a wider stakeholders’ participation in the monitoring and evaluation of UNDP’s work.

Organising stakeholders’ visit to the villages where the LRP is implementing different interventions brings both accolades and criticisms. But most importantly, it provides a bird’s eye view to politicians, journalists, social



workers, government officials and people from wide professional backgrounds to feel the ownership over the project activities. Taking stakeholders from a wide spectrum of society to the project VDCs and encouraging them to provide their critical feedback on the work done is what the stakeholders called “a courageous act, something not seen .”

Song ^{for} Social Change

An old lady sitting in the front row claps her hands and starts singing in a local Bhojpuri dialect.



“You have given us the solar energy support and we have the milky light; oh LRP sisters and brothers, we were waiting for this development for many years.”

-Anarwa Devi



The winter is back with the cold but the spirit is high for women and men of Mathiya village in Rautahat district. A group of some 40 women are sitting close to each other wrapping a shawl to keep them warm. High above their head stand bamboo poles holding the solar panes lighting their home at night. The road to the village was widened and improved. The community constructed two culverts with the assistance from UNDP-LRP. Vehicles have started to ply. All this was possible within a year. The change is deeply appreciated.

"The road to the village was muddy and difficult to walk. We have improved it. You have helped us to construct two culverts. The crossing is easier. You have given us the solar energy support and we have the milky light; oh LRP sisters and brothers, we were waiting for this development for many years. We voted our leaders but they did not come back to the village. Oh LRP sisters and brothers, we did not know who you were but you listened to our plea and brought development into our village." The song continued, "Oh LRP sisters and brothers, our children are getting free tuition classes, what a wonder..."

An old lady sitting in the front row claps her hands and starts singing in a local Bhojpuri dialect. Other women followed. More joined in on the chorus. The effect is magnetic, sparking

enthusiasm to both the singers and listeners. The song ends with a touch of gratitude.

The joint monitoring team from UNDP-LRP is awe-stricken by the melody and the skills of the old lady to reflect the physical and attitudinal change that LRP's work has brought in the community. The LRP team looks for the most suitable words to congratulate the community for the song and keeping their settlement clean. Special thanks are shared for sending children, both boys and girls, to school and a reminder that all these changes should sustain. Some even suggest that such a beautiful voice of the old lady should be played in the national radio and television.

Mathiya has a pre-dominantly Muslim population and is one of the most outlying villages of Rautahat. It shares its border with India. As the village is relatively behind in development, the integrated work of the project is well appreciated. Social mobilisation, community infrastructure, micro-capital grant for income generation activities, and rural energy support are augmented by special drives to fight the gender based violence and empower women at the community level. All women and men coming together to share their plans and ideas, and speaking the same voice gives a reason to be hopeful that community empowerment is leading to building peace.





*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

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