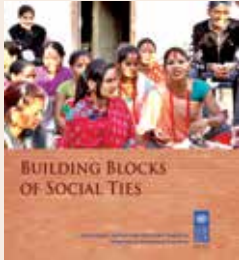




BUILDING BLOCKS OF SOCIAL TIES

Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme
United Nations Development Programme





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PREFACE

Nepal is known for its beautiful mountains and temples but also for long being a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural country. A total of 125 castes and ethnic groups were identified and it is estimated that 123 different languages are spoken in Nepal, according to the 2011 national census. Despite this rich diversity, the Nepali people have long lived in harmony.

But as the country undergoes a complex political transition that started after the conclusion of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement bringing an end to a 10-year conflict and following the adoption of a new Constitution in September 2015 leading to the transformation of Nepal into a federal state, it is critical that social cohesion be maintained and strengthened.

Prolonged tensions between communities in a post-conflict environment and in a country that is still marked by strong inequalities across geography and social groups, run the risk of setting Nepal's development results back, spoiling the efforts to achieve national development objectives as well as the Sustainable Development Goals Nepal has committed to as a member state of the United Nations.

Bringing communities together, promoting inter-community collaborations, empowering individuals and groups and increasing ownership by the people of political processes are key to ensuring the stability and cohesion needed to create a conducive environment for development to deliver its results.

In this context, UNDP's Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP) is focusing on strengthening inter-and intra-community harmony and building trust between the citizens and the state.

Through micro-grants at local level, the Programme has supported the communities to engage with each other through existing cultural and social practices that act as connector in a diverse society. The Programme also promotes active engagement of the state representatives, such as the district level officials, VDC officials and law enforcement authorities through collaborative community-based activities.

We are pleased to bring to you the ***Building Blocks of Social Ties***, a compilation of short stories highlighting some of the exemplary social cohesion initiatives in the communities. The publication draws upon experiences and lessons from SCDP's micro grants support to civil society organizations at the local level. We hope that this publication will contribute to enrich our knowledge and understanding on ways to promote social cohesion while also sharing widely the tested methods for potential replication across the country and beyond.

Kathmandu
April 2017




RENAUD MEYER
Country Director
UNDP Nepal

INTRODUCTION

UNDP's Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP) extended its support to community-based civil society organizations in select seven programme districts (Panchthar, Sunsari, Chitwan, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur) to pilot an initiative to bring divided communities together through micro grants. In late 2016, the four-month grants funded a diverse array of activities, tailored to the specific dynamics of localized situations, which encouraged communities to work together for a common good and build and maintain a cohesive society. The 12 micro grants brought together members representing diverse social groups, including women, youth, marginalized communities and religious leaders, which share histories of friction and hostilities. The grants facilitated to mutually benefit the recipient communities through collective actions.

The brief stories in the ***Building Blocks of Social Ties*** navigates you through different tiny towns and far-flung villages from the eastern hills to the southern plains of the Far Western region and tells you how agile support brings hope and facilitates cultural exchange and knowledge transfer among diverse communities in vulnerable villages and its vicinities. It contains accounts of the people whose common efforts brought divided communities together to build and maintain a cohesive society. The collection of brief stories intends to help pave a way forward, leading to similar initiatives in the future.



AJAY DAS
National Project Manager
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PREACHERS
PROMOTING
SOCIAL HARMONY



“I am under severe pressure from some fundamentalists who want me to stop collaborating with Muslim Maulanas, Christian pastors and Sikh gurus. But I will not leave my team from the Inter-Religious Network,” said Mahantha Chandra Nath Yogi, a well-known Hindu priest, at an event organized in Neplagunj. “Some extremists dislike our efforts in promoting social cohesion but I will leave no stone unturned to promote social harmony in Banke,” he emphasized.

Nepalgunj, the headquarters of Banke district, is a hub for hill-migrants from nearly eighteen districts of the mid and far western regions of Nepal. The city is therefore home to Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists,

Sikhs and Christians, who had lived in harmony. Not only Nepalgunj, the entire Banke district has diverse cultural communities with different religious faiths. Recently, however, some sporadic communal clashes between Hindu and Muslim and Pahadi and Madhesi communities have been reported. For instance, in December 2016, two persons were killed, and ten others injured, during a clash in Matehiya, a nearby settlement across the Rapti River– known as Raaptipari.

In that backdrop, UNDP’s Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP), along with its district partners – Bageshwori Asal Shasan Club (BAS) and Information and Human Rights Research Centre (IHRC) – have been working towards mobilizing



religious preachers in the promotion of social cohesion. The role religious leaders of different faiths play in order to create a society that ensures coexistence, fairness, equal participation with attention to different caste, class and ethnic groups is critical. To that end, Banke-based partners have been closely working with religious gurus, despite many challenges and threats.

Furthermore, partner organizations in Banke have been actively promoting social cohesion through various interventions in the region. The project helped organize a school-level speech competition, a public hearing, celebrations of inter-community festivals, a perception survey on social cohesion, a series of awareness campaigns and even named a Chautari (a traditional resting spot) as Social Cohesion Chautari.

While the District Profile of Banke shows that it is ranked as one of the top twenty highest paddy

producing districts and 50.17% of its land is covered by forests, it does not paint the true picture of the entire district. Residents of Raaptipari VDCs – Banakalti, Betahani, Holiya, Gangapur, Matehiya, Phattepur and Kanchannagar–face several hurdles that impede them from acquiring government services that they are entitled to. Raptipari is also highly vulnerable to floods and other natural calamities. Under the SCDP, an information centre has been established by the UNDP partners in tension-torn Matehiya. The centre offers information with regards to access to government services.

As part of the initiative, the project partners also organized a public hearing in Matehiya. It was the first time that the locals had an opportunity to have a public discourse with concerned authorities.

The hearing, which concluded with a five-point declaration in order to improve access to government services, was well-attended by government authorities and representatives of the civil society and helped in promoting social cohesion and improving community security. In addition, in order to enhance the quality of service delivered, an Ilaka (area) Administration Office, which was relocated to Nepalgunj during the civil war, will now resume its operations in Matehiya. This will also aid the government's Border Area Development Project (BADP) initiative that focuses on eight Terai districts, including Banke.

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INFORMATION
CENTRE
CONNECTING AN
'ISLAND'

Connectivity has always been an issue for the residents of the “island-like” settlement of Dodhara-Chandani in Kanchanpur district. Flanked by the Mahakali River and connected to the mainland only by a suspension bridge, the settlement also remains highly susceptible to flooding when the water level rises during the monsoon.

To add to their vulnerability to natural disasters, the residents of Dodhara-Chandani face unprecedented

challenges due to poverty and the lack of access to governmental services. With reference to data from the national census-2011, it is now estimated that there are nearly 12,000 Dalit and indigenous people residing in the settlement. These historically marginalized communities have faced obstacles – social, economic and linguistic– that limit their access to governmental services, but Dodhara-Chandani’s isolated topography had further limited the services its residents could enjoy.



सद्भाव बाटिका

सामाजिक एकता र सद्भाव प्रवर्द्धनका लागि स्थानिय पहल कार्यक्रम

समन्वय

कालिका उपभोक्ता समूह, RCDC

सहयोग

SCDP/UNDP

But with the establishment of a Service Facilitation and Information Centre, within the Joint Ward Office building, in October 2016, Dodhara-Chandani's residents have become more aware of the government services that they are entitled to. Established in partnership with the Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme under its micro grant initiative, the information centre has through its services increased access to vital services to local residents.

Due to the high rate of illiteracy among the marginalized communities of Dodhara-Chandani, applying for even basic services, like birth and marriage registration, had been a challenge. Now, with the centre facilitating the collection, writing and validation of forms in line with directives from citizen charters, residents enjoy timely services from government authorities. "I always see a queue of people in line to receive assistance from the centre," said Amir Tiruwa, a local, "The centre has greatly benefited the people who have otherwise faced hassles with formalities while receiving services from public organizations."

Currently run by a three-member management committee, under the leadership of local journalist Pappu Gurung, the centre is the first of its kind in the region to offer services to vulnerable and voiceless communities. Acknowledging the centre's contribution, Ward Secretary Mohan Sunar stated, "The centre has helped us as we now receive correctly filled forms in the required formats from the service seekers which expedites timely service delivery as mentioned in citizen charters". Located near Laxmi Higher Secondary School, the centre also supports citizens with photocopy services and allows students access to daily newspapers. Charging a nominal cost for copying documents and other services, the centre has so far



collected Rs. 6,000 from the initial months of operation. "What worries me the most is the operational costs from December onwards," said Pappu Gurung, speaking about the three-month micro grant with which the centre was established. "I have requested the Chief Executive Officer of Dodhara-Chandani Municipality, who has assured us the budget that will ensure the centre's continuity," he added. As the budget has been approved by the Ward Citizen Forum, it is likely to be endorsed by the Municipal Council as well.

According to Gurung, as of January 2017, 350 people from mostly marginalized communities have had access to the centre's services. In the few months that the centre has been in Dodhara-Chandani, the centre has been promoting social harmony by providing services to vulnerable and voiceless communities and by connecting citizens with state mechanisms.

“KALIKA
COMMUNITY IS
OUR SCHOOL”

It was in a little chapel that Bishnu Pariyar, from Madi in Chitwan, tied the knot with the man she had fallen in love with. At the time of her marriage, Bishnu did not realize that their inter-caste marriage would cause a stir, but because she was from a “low-caste”, “untouchable” Dalit family and her husband from Tharu community, the union became stigmatized for breaking taboos.

Despite the many challenges this brought, Bishnu decided to persevere; even if she always longed for an outlet where she could share her pent-up frustrations. She would eventually find that at the Kalika Women Community Development Centre— a cluster of deprived and in-need women in Madi, Chitwan. What fascinated her most about the forum was that the centre was formed by members of marginalised and deprived communities, including Dalits, Madhesis and Tharus.

“I had a chance to share my problems with fellow peers and it really unburdened and energized me,” she says. Currently, there are 335 women members at the centre, who hail from Ayodhyapuri, Bubule, Kalyanpur-Jwala, Bagauday and Gardi VDCs. In addition to functioning as a big family and a support system for its members, the centre has also been providing its members an opportunity to learn about collective farming and other livelihood skills.

When asked if collective farming has made her life more prosperous, Bishnu cheerfully says, “Yes! Indeed! It has drastically changed my family life. We’re flood-affected victims and we used to live in a very vulnerable site; but now we

have been able to build a new house in a safer site.” It is a sentiment echoed by another member, Yagindra Timilsina, as well. “We have been collectively engaged in fishery and have started goat and vegetable farming as well. It has helped us improve our living standard and has allowed us to send our children to school,” she shared.







Project coordinator, Ganga Bhandari, says that even though their group was made fun of in the past, the situation has now changed and that the centre has become an agent for change. "At the time the centre was founded, the members knew nothing about politics," she says, "But now they have joined political parties, forest user's group committees and Ward Citizen Forums." According to her, the members are now active in fostering social cohesion as the society remains politically fractured, economically divided and socially fragmented.

"The group is our school; we learn skills here and translate it into our farms," says Bishnu Pariyar. What thrills the members the most, according to her, is that not only is there a transfer of knowledge, but the centre has also facilitated vibrant cultural exchanges.

"The members from the Tharu community bring Chichchad (traditional food) during their great festival Maghi and the Hindu women invite the rest of the members over during the Dashain festival. However, none of them perceive collective farming from political lens. What they most care about is their rights, livelihood and social harmony, she says.

"An orientation by SCDP in Biratnagar opened up my eyes," stated Kopila Shiwakoti, the chairperson of the Kalika Women Community Development Centre. "It sensitized us, as it connected people from various castes and class to promote cohesion". Following the SCDP's training, the Kalika community has recently also submitted proposals to the Madi Municipality and a national NGO hoping to make the interventions sustainable in the long term.

TAPPING THE
YOUTH FOR THE
PROMOTION OF
SOCIAL HARMONY



Narsinhatappu, a Village Development Committee (VDC) that lies on the East-West Highway, is considered to be one of the most vulnerable VDCs of Sunsari district. Marred by poverty, which has impaired inter-community harmony and social cohesion, the residents of Narsinhatappu—which includes Muslims, Yadavs, Mehtas, among others—have had to suffer through communal disputes and conflicts of late. Moreover, as one of the poorest VDCs in the district according to development indicators, Narsinhatappu continues to see outlawed social malpractices, including dowry, child marriage and caste-based discriminations still practiced.

In order to tackle these challenges, forty youths representing various castes, ethnic groups, religions and political ideologies, have formed a Youth Network for Social Cohesion in the VDC, aiming to promote social cohesion at the local level. The youths have kicked off their campaign to promote unity by forming Youth Vigilance Groups that help spot and mitigate potential risks that may strain communal harmony.

The interventions became possible after the Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP) partnered with a local organization Community Development Organization (CDO) under UNDP's micro grant project.

Under the programme, CDO also established a youth-focused Community Information Centre in Narsinhhatappu—which is well-equipped with internet connectivity, a computer and library facilities.

The centre has been helping bring the different communities of the VDC together, catalysing regular constructive interactions. Before the newly-established centre, Narsinhhatappu did not have a common platform that provided opportunities for social interactions and mutual understanding between inter-community youths. As a result, the youth had not been able to work towards fighting against social malpractices.

“We are committed to reaching out and building friendships”, said Mukesh Mahato, the coordinator of the Youth Network, “With a deeper understanding of each other’s cultural beliefs, and by speaking out in one voice against racial discrimination, we will strengthen our unity and resilience in the face of any adversity”. The youth have also started translating ideas into action by performing street dramas in the community in collaboration with theatre artists. Speaking about the street theatre initiative, Ehsaan Ansari, a member of the youth network said, “I’m very happy to be a part of the inter-community youths’





initiative for fostering inter-community respect, co-existence and recognition of diversity which are pre-requisites for societal transformation.”

Further, the youth also successfully concluded an inter-community friendly cricket tournament, which saw various teams fielding players from Hindu, Muslim and different Madhesi communities. One of the players Durganand Prasad Yadav said: “The cricket tournament was a powerful medium for building trust, collaboration and mutual respect for each other. It brought us all together and we’re now actively trying to diminish social tensions together.”

“About a dozen of Muslim youth are now collaborating with youth from other social groups to promote inter-community ties for the first time,” stated Irfan Mansuri, “Earlier, we had a conservative mind-set

and frequently stereotyped other communities. But now [because of the interventions], we are actively engaged in connecting with each other to collectively work towards inclusive development.”



CHEPANGS SET
OFF JOURNEY TO
MAKE SERVICES
ACCESSIBLE

Bishal Chepang and Rajkumar Chepang of Shaktikhor, in Chitwan district, had to deal with bureaucratic obstacles while acquiring their citizenships because their parents' marriages had never been registered at the local administrative body. According to the existing legislation, a marriage certificate validating the marriage of an applicant's parents is mandatory while seeking citizenships.

Most Chepangs– a highly marginalized indigenous community that lives in sparsely populated regions – know little to nothing about citizenships and other official credentials required to make claims to government entitlements. Chepangs, who used to lead a semi-nomadic lifestyle, have historically relied on shifting cultivation, fishing, hunting, trapping birds and gathering wild tuber for a living.





According to the Declaration from the sixth National Assembly of the Chepangs, in 2005, 62% of the community is landless and 85% have no citizenship. Jitendra Chepang, the chairperson of Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) says: “Citizenship campaigns significantly helped us. Yet 15 percent of Chepangs have no citizenship”.

Bishal and Rajkumar themselves had never sought to apply for any official documents until a citizenship campaign, organized by the NCA in 2008, helped them obtain their citizenships. Bhim Chepang, one of the campaigners said, “During the citizenship campaign, we found that 30, out of 85, elderly couples did not have a marriage registration certificate. It

demonstrated that the Chepangs have limited access to basic government services because they do not hold official state documents.”

A land ownership issue that has strained relationships between the Chepangs of Shaktikhor and the local Forest Office further highlights how the community is affected by the lack of access to government services. The Chepang have traditionally relied on the forest for a living but do not hold any ownership certificates. But when the Forest Office merged “*khoriya*”– the patch of forest that the Chepangs use for shifting cultivation– into the community forest under the community forestry programme, it limited Chepangs from using the forest as they had traditionally done.

“We have been portrayed as agents that destroy forests,” says Jitendra Chepang, “But because our lives are so intricately tied to the forests, we have been conserving, while utilizing it, for generations.”

In another example of the lack of access to services, in 2016, when the District Agriculture Office announced grants for goat herding, none of the applicants were Chepangs, as the community did not know about the handout. 70 types of medicines are also made freely available by the government, but the Chepangs have yet to enjoy that provision fully either. In view of this information gap, an information centre has been set up in Chitwan, with support from the Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP), to mitigate the various challenges and to improve access to government services for the indigenous Chepang people.



The information centre is located within the NCA building in Chitwan. The centre has also held trainings for local volunteers from the Local Resource Persons (LRP), made up mostly of Chepang women. The key issues brought up during training, were then presented at a meeting before the district-based government agencies. The NCA-trained LRPs are now working on pro bono basis at their respective villages in order to disseminate information they receive from the information centre. The centre also helps with implementation of decisions made by the NCA conventions, like its recent decision to activate village committees to act as change agents.

Further, the Chepangs campaigners are now well-trained in proposal writing and have started seeking support to ensure the information centre’s continuity. They remain involved in training and mobilizing local Chepang teachers in order to establish a good network through which information can be disseminated in the community. This has helped the Chepangs to better understand their rights, roles, responsibilities, entitlements and has also helped relax the strained relationships with the district forest office. It is expected that SCDP’s partnership with the NCA in Chitwan will promote social cohesion by mitigating possible inter-community conflicts.

BIJULA KC—
A MODEL
MODERATOR FOR
SOCIAL COHESION



When Bijula KC, married Tabu Master, a tailor from the Muslim community, she had to put up with plenty of remonstrations from her neighbours and the society. Born and raised in a Hindu household in a far-flung village in Bajura district, Bijula faced further stigmatization when she refused to wear a *Hijab* on her head, like the women from her husband's community.

Bijula's first husband, a Hindu, was a security personnel and an alcoholic who frequently subjected her to physical violence. Desperate to find an escape from the abusive relationship, Bijula thought that she had finally found happiness in her marriage with Tabu. While religious and caste-based discriminations have been outlawed in Nepal, Bijula quickly realized that it remained pervasive in the society and inter-caste marriages continued to remain a taboo.

Inter-caste marriages and inter-religious collaborations can be a means of social harmony that connects people from different religious faiths and cultural practices. As for Banke district, particularly VDCs across the Rapti River— also known as Raptipaari— Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme

(SCDP), along with its partners BageshworiAsalShasan Club (BAS), organized a series of events like rallies, a public hearing, school contests, meetings and established an information centre in the region. The interventions in Raptipaari have inspired Bijula KC, and women like her, to further foster social cohesion campaigns.

Bijula KC, now a resident of Baghauda, Kathkuiyan VDC, is today a role model in the promotion of social cohesion and has been inspiring and teaching other women in the community. "Women generally stayed at home in the past," says Bijula, "But, now that they see me earning an income and mobilizing other women, they have started coming out of homes too. I grew up in a Hindu family and am now married to a Muslim. But I'm free to choose, we happily celebrate both Hindu and Muslim festivals in our family."

SCDP interventions, together with the local civil society, have encouraged Bijula and other women to openly share their struggles, which in turn have promoted social harmony in their communities. The interventions have helped nurture community leaders, who are affecting change and leading by example.

POLICE-PUBLIC
PARTNERSHIP IN
PANCHTHAR

The police and the public share a unique mutual relationship. The police force has been mandated with taking care of public security. The tax payers, in return, pay them back with salaries and perks through established government channels. In Nepal, however, it has become factitious and fraught with distrust. Which is why, Bharapa VDC of Panchthar district, has emerged as a role model when it comes to police-public partnership, while simultaneously promoting social harmony.

In 2014, the locals committed to restoring the dilapidated Jorpokhari Police Post located at Bharapa-2 of eastern hilly district Panchthar, which had been unsafe and unstable and lacked a proper kitchen, impeding with the police personnel discharging their duties for the maintenance of peace and security.

Once the initiative was formulated, the locals brought Bharapa VDC office and the office of the neighbouring

Subhang VDC onboard to help with the project. However, because of budgetary constraints, the initiative couldn't complete the kitchen construction as planned. As a result, on the request of locals and the police, UNDP's Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP), in partnership with Nepal Janauddhar Sangh, provided the project with a purse of Rs. 70,000 for the renovation of the police post and the construction of a kitchen.

The Jorpokhari Police Station was first established in 1987 as a temporary post. It was upgraded to a full police station in 1996. While police continued to be posted by at the station, it had no office and had to share quarters with a Nepal Army barrack. Later, the police station moved to its own building but it had remained incomplete for years before the recent intervention.





Before

The monetary support for the police post was followed by a two-day workshop organized for key representatives of Bharapa VDC, along with the Police In-charge Jit Bahadur Tamang. The forum candidly discussed police-public partnership, and was an opportunity for sensitization about peace, social harmony and community security. A fully functional Social Cohesion Coordination Committee was also formed during this workshop and was mandated with taking care of issues pertaining to social cohesion and community security. As requested by the Social Cohesion Committee, Subhang and Bharapa VDCs have agreed to allocate a budget of Rs. 30,000 to support the cohesion committee to take forward its initiatives.

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After

“ *I am glad to have received such wonderful cooperation from the public. We can now fully focus on providing service, as my team is not occupied with renovation and construction work anymore.”*

Jit Bahadur Tamang
Police In-charge

As a result of the efforts, the construction of a kitchen at the police post and plastering of the once-bare walls have now been completed, in part because of the contribution of locals, who contributed with labour and local construction materials. Acknowledging local support, the police in-charge Tamang said: “I am glad to have received such wonderful cooperation from the public. We can now fully focus on providing service, as my team is not occupied with renovation and construction work anymore.”

UNDP’s interventions with its partners in Panchthar not only supported the promotion of police-public partnership but brought all stakeholders together. As a result, the local cohesion committee believes that the project has created the groundwork for continued cooperation from the VDCs, the police and other stakeholders in the future, contributing towards peace, security and social harmony.

BADIS FROM
BARDIYA
CAMPAIGNING FOR
SOCIAL COHESION



The Badi people belong to the Dalit community, and have been marginalized and treated as 'untouchables' throughout history. Traditionally employed as musicians and dancers, the lack of livelihood opportunities and poverty has even forced Badi women into prostitution in the past. As a result, the community continues to remain stigmatized and the Badis have been deeply discriminated against, even within the Dalit society. So much so, the Civil Code issued in 1853 categorizes them as the lowest among the socially and economically deprived communities.

Following an agitation in 2007, the Badi Movement came to an end after the government reached an

agreement with the community to establish retraining and alternative employment programs; and to extend grants to poor families. The pact, however, is yet to be fully implemented. Landlessness and homelessness continue to remain major problems for the Badi people and discrimination, and exclusionary practices continue to impede their social inclusion and communal harmony.

In that context, Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP) in partnership with Dalit Feminist Upliftment Organization (DAFUO) – a Bardiya-based community organization – initiated a social cohesion intervention in Rajapur Municipality

and five other VDCs Gola, Patabhar, Pashupatinagar, Manau and Khairi-Chandanpur, with the aim of promoting income generation opportunities, increasing awareness against discrimination, and strengthening capacity of the peace committees in order to help promote social harmony.

As part of the initiative, the town of Rajapur, which is the home to 165 Badis, divided into 30 households, was chosen as the hub for the campaign in Bardiya. Putting the Badi community at the centre, the project first helped form two Badi Women's groups.

Then, Dinesh Tharu, an agro-technician, facilitated an orientation programme to help members of the women's groups in formulating business plans for vegetable farming and goat, poultry and pig rearing.

Once well-equipped with necessary knowledge and skill sets, micro grants were then offered to the members to help initiate their farming businesses, which was handed over by DAFUO chairperson, Bimala BK and Rajapur Municipality representative Shyam Sharma. Additionally, the project also organized a series of dialogue sessions on caste-based





discrimination, gender equality and rights to educate young girls and students from different castes and social classes.

Following the successful implementation of the project, Sharma pledged continued support from the Municipal Council for the promotion of social cohesion to deprived communities, including the Badis. He acknowledged that programmes like these help ensure sustainable interventions and promote livelihood activities and opportunities that help reduce conflicts in the community. “The two women’s groups are grateful for the support and have initiated collaborations with other communities as well,” Bimala BK said. “The transfer of knowledge has increased opportunities for

the community, and the anti-discrimination campaigns for students were very effective as well and they considerably helped change mindsets,” she added.



COHESION
CAMPAIGN HELPS
IN KNOWLEDGE
TRANSFER



Maya Jogi of Masuriya, looks physically frail but she is hale and hearty and talks candidly to the visitors in the village. A victim-turned-warrior, Maya is now known as a community mediator and a model farmer in Masuriya – a small town of Kailali district of Far Western region of Nepal. It is located about 51 kilometres west of Tikapur where several local indigenous people, predominantly Tharus, and police officers were killed during the Tharuhat protest of August 2015.

“In the past when opportunities knocked on our doors, we generally kept it within our Tharu communities; but now we let our Pahadi friends take advantage of the opportunities too. It is good for everyone. It has made us feel strong together”. Maya highlights how they are promoting communal harmony in their villages.

Like Maya, twenty women and girls gathered at an event, eagerly volunteered to share their efforts with respect to community cohesion. “During the marriage ceremony of my 32-year-old brother, Siddha Raj Joshi, all the Chaudhari (of Tharu origin) women helped my mom and family with the cooking,” stated Kamala Joshi, a local resident, speaking about a recent social cohesion exercise. “We sang, danced and enjoyed together,” said Chandra Devi, another resident of Masuriya.

Chandra Devi is the one who introduced the *Deuda* dance– a popular folk song and dance from the far western hilly regions of Nepal– to the Tharu women, originally from the Terai plains.





In the aftermath of the violent clashes in Tikapur, some Tharu-owned houses were reportedly set on fire and charges were filed against them. As the situation worsened, a series of events triggered during the Pahadi-Tharu tension continued to linger not only in Tikapur, but also in the neighbouring southern plains, including Masuriya. In order to closely work the local communities to enhance their effort in maintaining harmony, the SCDP partnered with a local partner – Freed Kamaiya Women Development Forum – a community based organization. Since the launch of the project with a small grant, there has been a visible progress on the ground as Maya and other’s testimonies clearly corroborate it.

The progress shown in the peace building process in the community, even by those affected by the violence, has been exemplary. Maya Yogi and others attended at the event say that the forum has facilitated two-way knowledge transference. “We received cauliflower

seeds last September. Our kitchen gardens are beginning to bear fruit and we can harvest them soon; it is approximately worth 2, 24,000 rupees. Previously, our friends from the hills had no idea about seedbed plant production. After we trained them, they are now busy with vegetable farming as well. In return we learnt how to milk cows from them,” she says. The trade-off is not just economical, however, says Suman Chaudhary, another community member, “We learnt how to cook *selroti* from our Pahadi friends and we taught them cooking *Dhikri*– a traditional Tharu cuisine from the plains”. *Selroti* is a doughnut-like rice-bread, commonly cooked during festive seasons in the hilly regions.” In Masuriya, UNDP-supported collective farming that had social cohesion as its central motive, not only helped in bringing the two communities with history of hostilities together, but it also contributed in transferring knowledge and skills– both economic and cultural.

CONNECTING
THE CHEPANG
COMMUNITY WITH
GOVERNMENT
SERVICES



Janakala Chepong, who belongs to the highly marginalized indigenous Chepong community, lives in the remote Dhanbang Village of Lothar VDC in Chitwan. Until recently, Janakala had never had the chance to directly interact with government officials regarding public services, nor had she expected that some essential items were made available for free by the government.

But following a recent interaction program, organized by Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP) in partnership with Nepal Chepong Association (NCA) Chitwan, where Rammani Silwal, the in-charge of the local Yauralitar Health Post, made the community aware of government provisions that provide essential medicines and public health facilities free of cost to the Chepong community, she has been able to utilize opportunities that had not been accessible to her before.

Janakala, however, was not the only member of the Chepong community that lacked awareness about the available government services. Curious to test what she learnt at the interaction, Janakala rushed to the local health post and requested for medicine, which she received immediately. Now, she shares her knowledge and experience with family, friends and neighbours, encouraging others to make use of the services as well. And though specific number of beneficiaries has not been documented yet, with initiatives like these, local partners like the NCA continue to connect and strengthen relationships between local communities and government agencies.

ALCOHOLIC TEK
TURNED
WORKAHOLIC
PREACHER

Not long ago, Tek Tamang, a resident of Bharapa Village in Panchthar district, spent his days drinking, gambling and causing nuisance in general. With his vices running up his family's debt, he often bickered with his wife and was never able to provide a learning environment at home for his children. But when the Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Programme (SCDP), along with its local partner– Nepal Janauddhar Sangh– launched an initiative to promote social cohesion in Panchthar, Tek luckily, had the opportunity to attend a two-day training in the district.

During the training on social cohesion linked with livelihood support, Tek was selected as a member of the Poultry Farming Group. At the training, along with technical tips, the group was also further supported with cages, coops, eggs and other tools required in starting their own businesses. "It has helped me change my life," states Tek, "I am delighted to have been selected as a group member."

Now completely sober, Tek and his wife remain busy rearing and tending to their chickens.







What is more, Tek, once the village loafer, has now become a role model figure that has given the community a greater sense of togetherness, further promoting social harmony.

As promised, Tek has been working tirelessly and his efforts are beginning to bear fruit. "Although it was freezing in the winter, I continued to take care of the chickens," he says proudly, "Now the weather is warming up, and like the farming group suggested, I will expand my poultry farm with 100 more chickens soon." Tek now projects making a saving of Rs. 100,000 a year, excluding annual expenditures.

Previously, the family's expenditures had been met by Tek's wife through conventional farming. Today, Tek has become an inspiration to many. His commitment and transformation had been well-recognized by his fellow friends during training, but now the entire community also acknowledges his progress. While he is still a novice poultry farmer, his commitment has made him one of the leading members of the Poultry Farmers Group. The group, which includes members from different cultural communities, has been instrumental in promoting livelihood, social cohesion and the value of hard work in the community.



FIVE SISTERS
IN ACTION!



The Tikapur incident in August 2015, in which eight people, including locals and senior police officers were killed, was hard for the community, particularly the women and children, to cope with. Since the incident, the community has had to live in tension and terror. A group of five sisters, from Munuwa village, the adjoining VDC of Tikapur and others under the Melmilap Women Cooperative, are now actively involved in the promotion of social harmony as they have strongly realized that situations can become very volatile. They have decided to form a forum where all can voice their opinions and continue conversations.

The Tharu sisters, formerly Freed Kamaiyas (bonded labour), who relied on daily labour for their income, are now entrepreneurs. The sisters who previously toiled outdoors for ten hours a day, now contently work for six hours daily at their own factory.

Along the Munuwa-Aaitha rural road, a tiny hut houses the factory for Kanchan Masala Udhyog. The passer-by hardly ever notice the structure, let alone show any interest in the spices produced there. It is not very fancy and merely processes spices to sell locally. The locals know the sisters as the survivors of the Tikapur violence.

Bimla Kathariya, Kusum Kathariya, Gauri Devi Kathariya and other two have successfully been operating the factory even after the deadly Tikapur incident.

The local community, and especially the women, has now come to understand that there are people who do not leave any chance to take bad advantage of any fragile situation. In order to cope up with the challenges posed by the Tikapur incident, the people of Hill (Pahadi) and Terai origin have begun an effort for social cohesion as the road to recovery. The operation of the masala udhyog is one of many of their interventions. "They (leaders) take away our kids to the protests; and we have to bear all kinds of cost," expresses Bimala Shahi, a cooperative member, in anger. "The killings have agonised us. It has caused fight among the leaders, but not among us".

The SCDP joined hands with the sisters through a local partner Digo Bikas Samaj. The enterprise that includes vegetable collection centre and spice factory among others, are their interventions to calm down the tension as it is directly connected with the livelihood of



the locals, and provides a forum to have face-to-face conversations with the people of different ethnicities and classes. It responds to the notion of connectedness and togetherness in the fractured society.

The soft loan of Rs 72,000 to start the business was offered by the SCDP supported cooperative as the initial investment. The five sisters are the kin and kith of the Tikapur victims; they produce spices with a value of about Rs 80,000 a month, of which they save Rs 30,000 every month. The spices they produce are essentially required for Nepali cuisine and cookery. Importantly, the five sisters now feed both buyer's brain and bellies.

"We will make a profit after a year," said Bimala with a chuckle. According to them they now have an outstanding loan of only Rs 27,000; the rest has already been paid off over the last few months. The five sisters do not have to worry about marketing as the members of cooperative give them a helping hand.





So far, their products have delivered to Tikapur, Lamki, Josphipur and all village-shops.

The spice factory is only a means for them to break the state of silence in the aftermath of the deadly Tikapur incident. "This factory supports people from all castes and classes and has been an effective icebreaker to resume talks and strengthen social ties," added Kusum Khathariya. Everyone now interacts and shares their pains and plans. The factory also shows how they, as women, can contribute towards promoting social harmony in a disturbed society.



COLLECTIVE
FARMING
BRINGING
COMMUNITIES
TOGETHER



Sunsari district in Eastern Nepal is blessed with destinations like the holy shrines of *Budha Subba* and *Ramdhuni* and is home to the “paradise of birds”— the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. Although Sunsari is home to natural and religious attractions and is a strategically-located southern Terai district that connects to touristic hilly towns, such as Dharan and Bhedetar, its communities, like Chandbela Village Development Committee (VDC), continue to suffer from severe impoverishment and underdevelopment. Chandbela, which lies east of the district headquarters—Inaruwa, is a VDC that has large Tharu, Muslim and Khawas populations.

Having communities with different religious faiths, the community has both challenges and opportunities. The cause of recent discord in Chandbela can be traced back to 2013, when a Muslim boy allegedly attempted to rape a Hindu girl. The incident severely impaired the cordial relationship that Hindus and Muslims have traditionally shared in the community, and has continued to simmer over the years, seriously threatening social harmony. Consequently, the fear of reprisal and feelings of animosity remain prevalent and historically entrenched caste-based discrimination and practices of untouchability continue to wedge the diverse communities of Chandbela apart.

In that context, in order to make a difference and to implement a social cohesion campaign through inter-communal interaction and collaboration, SCDP is partnering with local actors to heal the psychologically divided communities. As a result, the once-factitious groups have now come together to collectively farm mushrooms commercially—enhancing income generation, which in turn is contributing towards strengthening social ties.

With UNDP's intervention, 17 farmers, mostly women—representing Muslim, Tharu, Rishidev, Uraw and Khatwe communities— have now switched from conventional farming to commercially farming mushrooms, a product that has huge potential in the market. Having sold out their first lot of produce, the collective has

been further encouraged to work towards achieving financial independence and to improve their living standards.

Further, the farmers have formed an Entrepreneurs Group which has initiated a prohibition on the sale and consumption of alcohol after 7 PM in the community, an initiative that has been fully supported by the local police post. "I am now respected by my family and the society and it has boosted my morale and self-esteem", said Sanjha Rajdhani, a member of the farming group. She attests that the collective farming initiative has helped create a common forum where people from diverse ethnic communities come and work together for a common cause, which in turn has strengthened social cohesion.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



1

End poverty in all its forms everywhere



2

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



3

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all



5

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



6

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all



7

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all



8

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



9

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

GOALS

G

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



10

Reduce inequality within and among countries



11

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



12

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns



13

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts



14

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



15

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss



16

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels



17

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

Social Cohesion and Democratic Participation Program (SCDP), UNDP

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