



Social Mobilisation *in Nepal*

A WAY OUT OF POVERTY





The Decentralised Local Governance Support Programme (DLGSP)

DURATION: 2004 to 2009

BUDGET AND DONORS: \$22.1 million (UNDP and the Government of Norway)

IMPLEMENTED BY: the Ministry of Local Development (Government of Nepal), 66 district local government bodies (DDCs) and 27,221 community organisations

IMPLEMENTED IN: 66 of Nepal's 75 districts and 880 village development committees.

OVERALL ACHIEVEMENTS: DLGSP is the latest phase of a rural development programme that began in Nepal in 1994. Up to the end of DLGSP the programme has reached 66 of Nepal's 75 districts in some of the more remote areas, the programme has been the first development assistance programme encountered by local people and has brought schools, water supplies and other vital services to these deprived areas.

Some overall achievements of DLGSP are:

- > the 624 million rupees (\$8.9 million) saved by community organisations
- > the 361,531 loans taken from group savings and from capital provided by DLGSP
- > the 105,666 places provided on skills training courses
- > the 75,668 income generating activities started by community organisation members
- > the 3,469 community infrastructures built and rehabilitated benefiting 62,442 households.



Saving a fortune five rupees at a time

Up to three years ago, Sabitri Adhikari of Kailali district in far western Nepal struggled to eke out a hand-to-mouth existence. The produce from her small farm was barely enough to provide her family with two basic meals a day. In 2006, her situation changed after she joined 27 other women to set up a local savings group

Since then each of them has deposited about five rupees a week (about Norwegian Krone 0.50) in their group's fund; and altogether they have saved more than 13,000 rupees. They have in turn loaned this money on to needy group members at an interest rate of 2% per month — half the rate local moneylenders charge.

Sabitri was the first to take a loan, borrowing 1,000 rupees to buy a goat. Later, she took another loan to open a kiosk selling instant noodles, soap and other items. Her economic condition has greatly improved with the money she earns from her kiosk, her five goats and the vegetables she grows for sale.



THE SAVINGS GROUP

This saving group is one of more than 27,000 started with the help of a rural development programme that began in Nepal in 1994. This programme has supported the Nepali authorities to improve local services and empower local people to demand better services and develop their livelihoods. It has helped thousands of villagers like Sabitri to save and invest money to provide for their day-to-day needs. The latest phase of this programme — the **Decentralised Local Governance Support Programme** — is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Norwegian Government.

HELPING THEMSELVES

The savings group — the Ekata Women's Community Organisation — has another important function: it helps its members communicate their needs and demands to the local authorities. Villages such as the one where Sabitri lives have many needs, and one of the most pressing is to improve sanitation. The members hope that their request to the local authority for funds to buy cement to build toilets will be successful. The women say that they can build the toilets themselves and just need a little help from outside.



Social mobilisation

These self-help groups have been the focal point of the rural development programme. The saving and credit, livelihoods support and infrastructure works that the programme has supported have all been channelled through these groups.

The process by which these groups are formed and built up is called social mobilisation. The Government of Nepal is a strong supporter of social mobilisation for delivering development to rural communities.

The main strength of social mobilisation is that it closely involves local people in achieving their goals, thus:

- > laying the foundations for long-term development in communities
- > ensuring local ownership of programme inputs
- > helping deepen local democracy
- > helping overcome outdated and harmful social customs
- > increasing local people's access to knowledge and information.



A saving and credit group meeting

Lifesaving loans

Most of the 39 families of Nikani village, Dadeldhura district subsist on less than a dollar a day. Until a few years ago, many local children suffered from malnutrition and often became ill. The fact that their parents could not afford modern health care for their children served as a harsh reminder of their poverty.

The village women started up a group with each member saving 10 rupees a week. The fund grew and the money has been leant out and repaid several times over to pay for medical costs, for supplementary food before harvests and to buy goats and chickens that are grown on for sale. The women greatly value being able to easily get hold of small amounts of cash to cover emergency health care costs. One common emergency is when their children fall from the steep hillsides whilst collecting fodder for their cows and buffaloes. Getting the injured to the faraway hospital is costly and then there are doctor's fees and medicines to pay for. The small loans can be lifesavers.

Pleased to get a loan





Giving women and the poor a voice

Women have traditionally had little say outside the household domain in Nepal. Social mobilisation, although it works with all community members, has been particularly successful in increasing women's participation in local decision making. These groups are also successfully helping the traditionally marginalised 'low' caste people (Dalits) and the poorer ethnic groups to get a fairer share of the fruits of development.



Other development programmes work through the group

United women making demands

The women are proud of their group. They tell how it has given them a great degree of independence — something that was a novelty until recently in this conservative society. The women say they are in a stronger position now they are organised and speak with one voice. They laugh as they tell how they even dare contradict their husbands and are no longer shy to approach the local authorities and aid organisations for assistance. Several years ago their group approached agencies working in their district. As a result Unicef agreed to build a new school and support a health campaign whilst the World Food Programme started providing rice when food was scarce. These agencies now use these groups to find out about the local situation and as a means of alleviating poverty.

Their group has given these local women the strength to try and tackle their problems and improve their families' living standards through their own efforts. "But we still need help," says group member Jayanti. "We would like to learn how to grow more vegetables and seek help to overcome the lack of water for our households and for irrigating our fields."

Other agencies are using the community organisations for their programmes. The noticeboard in the photo on the left records the status of pregnancies, births and childhood illnesses in the village and is maintained by a women's community organisation. The idea came from a Unicef programme that works with mothers to monitor whether or not children are getting enough to eat.



Targeting the poorest

Nepal's more than three million Dalits and one million Muslims are Nepal's poorest and most disadvantaged people. They suffered the most from the lack of development and the ten years of violent conflict.

Since 2007 new funding under DLGSP's **Quick Impact for Peace Support Initiative (QIPSI)** has gone to communities in the most conflict-affected and poverty-stricken areas. This programme has built more than 1,700 drinking water schemes, schools, toilets and other public works.



Before

After

One community that has benefited from QipSi are the remote village of Ghauratole the conflict-affected district of Rolpa (see photos of public audit meeting and of before and after the new roof) The new roof on Ghauratole's school has helped remove local grievances that their community was so often ignored by development programmes. This support has led to better education for local children. The programme paid for materials and skilled labour with local people providing their labour free of cost.

Development amidst conflict

Most of Nepal's population is spread across its southern plains and middle hills. The steep hillsides and the frequent floods in the plain areas make it difficult to build roads and supply communities with clean drinking water and other services.

Developments in the 1990s led to decentralised local government as local people voted in district and village representatives. However, this progress was halted by the armed conflict between the Government and the Maoists (1996-2006).

One of the greatest successes of DLGSP was to operate during the conflict. In spite of the many difficulties caused by the rebels targeting Government buildings, programmes and personnel, the programme was able to continue because of its strong grassroots presence through its community groups. The programme guided and funded the community groups to develop their local areas.



Public audit of Ghauratole school project



Combating alcoholism and violence

The village of Gadchaura, Kailali on the plains of western Nepal, is home to the indigenous Tharu people. They have lived there alongside malarial mosquitoes for so long that they have become immune to their deadly bites.

Manju Chaudhary had suffered her husband's drunken behaviour for a long time. He used to get drunk and beat her and also didn't allow their children to go to school. Manju's women's group found a solution. They gave him an ultimatum that unless he stopped drinking and beating his wife he would be sent away from the village. He took notice and is a reformed character who no longer beats his wife and sends his children to school.

Drunkenness is a problem for many families in this area. In 2005 Manju's group successfully ran a campaign to close down the local drinking dens and to stop the men drinking and causing problems.

Enterprising women

Manju and her fellow group members have also been improving their economic situation. Their group has saved 20,000 rupees, which has gone to provide 75,000 rupees of loans to members to buy goats, set up shops and pay school fees. In 2005, Manju's group started a cooperative that produces incense sticks and the decorative bindis Nepali women wear on their foreheads. The programme trained them on the skills whilst their group fund provided the small capital they needed to start up. The thousands of similar examples across Nepal have significantly boosted women's social and economic independence.



New support to local governance in Nepal

The armed conflict and the political instability of recent years set back the development of local governance in Nepal. With the conflict's end and the on-going transition to peaceful and sustainable development the Government of Nepal and its donor partners see strengthened local governance as crucial for overcoming the reverses of the conflict and for accelerating development in Nepal's rural areas.

In these rural areas many communities still lack access to clean drinking water, electricity and other basic facilities. Two major causes of this are the inadequate involvement of local people (and in particular of disadvantaged people) in decision making on how funds are spent and the limited accountability of many local authorities.

In 2008, support to local governance in Nepal entered its next phase as a large

new multi-donor programme began. The programme is led by the Government of Nepal with the Government of Norway as one of the donors. This **Local Governance and Community Development Programme** (LGCDP) is giving greatly increased annual grants to all the district, village and municipal local governments to extend the road network, improve drinking water systems and provide special programmes for women and disadvantaged groups. To ensure that this money is goes on local priorities for the benefit of all community members LGCDP is making large efforts to make local government more accountable.

The thousands of active community organisations with their savings and credit activities provide a great asset to this and other governance improvement programmes as a force to make local government more accountable.



All photos by Marte Lid except for front and back page photos (by Peter Bruyneel) and page 6 QIPSI photos (by DLGSP).