



POVERTY AND HUNGER



LOST DIGNITY

Bhaudaha VDC in Morang district is located 6 km northeast of Biratnagar. The VDC is inhabited mostly by the indigenous Jhangar community, Batar, and Brahmins and Chhetris who have migrated from the hills. Mohini Devi Mudiary is a resident of Bhaudaha VDC.

Like Mohini Devi, the entire Jhangar community is struggling for its identity and rights and would like to be addressed as Mudiary, Munda or Urau. Mohini Devi does not even have a vague idea how old she is. She lives with her husband and nine-year-old son. The eldest son, who is 23, lives separately with his wife near Biratnagar.

Mohini Devi's family is landless and lives in a mud house built on public land. Her husband's family had some unregistered land, but a local elite got it registered in his name.

"We *adibasis* (indigenous people) are very simple and do not know anything about the government regulations. So the land was registered by someone in his name. We do

not have an inch of land to produce grains and vegetables. We often get drunk and are happy," she said. There is no electricity, water supply or toilet in the house.

"To me, poverty is the denial of opportunities, which results in scarcity of resources to satisfy one's personal desires. If a person cannot have the desired food, wear the clothes of his or her choice and use modern equipment for personal pleasure, then that person is poor. If opportunities are created, then poor people can earn to meet their desires. My own childhood was full of misery and deprivation, and there were no opportunities. As a result, I could not study beyond Grade 10 although I badly wanted to. Had I studied more, I would have been in the government or some other service, and my life would have been much easier and more comfortable."

Aash Narayan Sardar
Hattimudha, Morang

They survive by selling unskilled labour in agriculture. But Mohini Devi or her husband is able to find work for only 10-12 days a month. They must live on whatever they make from the work for a whole month. Mohini Devi does not understand why there is discrimination in the daily wages paid to a man and a woman. A man gets Rs. 100 a day with one meal, whereas a woman gets only Rs. 60 with some snacks. It is difficult for them to survive with this little income.

The elder son pulls a rickshaw in Biratnagar but does not help the parents. The parents do expect some help from the son who has a regular source of income, but they realise that he must be having his own problems. "My eldest son has three children aged nine, five and three years. May be he himself is finding it hard to support his family of five," says Mohini Devi.

She is happy to see two of her grandchildren go to school. "If my grandchildren can complete their

education, their future will be bright and will not be like their grandparents or parents."

The only alternative income comes by working in others' houses for Rs. 50 a day. While doing so, both husband and wife face humiliation, the wrath of the masters and sometimes even physical torture. They try to borrow a little money from their neighbours, but it is not easy to get a loan as the people in the community do not trust them simply because they do not have a regular source of income and property.

The family makes some money selling home-brewed liquor, but Mohini Devi says it is difficult to get firewood from the local community forest. Like many other people from the Jhangar community, getting a job in the local factories is difficult as she does not know anyone who can influence the factory management to take her. Their nine-year-old son doesn't go to school as they cannot afford to pay for the school uniform and stationery even though tuition is free.

Mohini Devi says being poor is the greatest sin and blames her fate for the poverty they live in. "It is very difficult for poor people to survive as they do not get opportunities to work. People do not trust us, and we often have to face humiliation," she says. "Many development programmes are being implemented in the villages, but they are not meant for poor people like us."

KEY MESSAGE

The Women Development Office and *Adibasi Janajati Mahasangh* (Federation of Indigenous, Ethnic Communities) run many programmes in support of poor people in the village, but people like Mohini Devi have not been covered by them as these people are not able to regularly save the required amount fixed by the groups.



NEW TOOLS PUT THE POOR OUT OF WORK

Mangala Sardar, 35, lives with his wife Bhakhari, 32, in Hattimudha-2 of Morang. As most poor Dalits, this couple also is not so sure about their age. “We do not have time to think about our age, and no one celebrates birthdays. So we don’t keep records of our age,” she says.

They have three children aged 10-15 years, all of whom go to school. But Mangala does not want them to continue beyond Grades 7 or 8. “Education up to Grade 8 is enough to get a job in a local factory. So why invest our hard earned money on educating our children which does not help them earn bread for the family? Our children have no jobs as we do not have links with influential persons,” he says.

This landless family has a mud house with a thatched roof on land that belongs to someone else. Therefore, their shelter is not guaranteed as it all depends on the landowner’s whims. However, the family has been living there since the time of Mangala’s grandfather. “Sometimes I spend

sleepless nights when I think of what will happen if the landowner decides to vacate us from the place. I cannot find an answer to this question. So I sit up and smoke. This gives me some peace of mind,” says Mangala. This is how he got to smoking.

Mangala did not attend school in childhood. “My parents were so poor that they could not afford to send me to school with their seven children. We all had to

“Different organisations provide services and support to the Jhangar community. But they are not trickling down to the poorest of the poor. The government should try to promote self-employment opportunities by organising special targeted skill development training, making available soft loans and providing support to market linkages.”

Lamalesh Mudiary
Treasurer, Mudiary Upliftment Committee
Bhauaha, Morang

work the whole day on others' land so that the family could manage with some food in the evening." But Mangala feels fortunate to have found work with a village uncle who was a skilled carpenter. While working with this man, he learned some carpentry skills. He started working as a carpenter in the village and earned some money to support the family.

However, his skills became redundant after most carpenters started using modern equipment that greatly improved the quality of work. But Mangala was unable to afford expensive modern tools, and the quality of his work could not compete with that of others. "I get to do only some work in the village, which is not sufficient to cover the

KEY MESSAGE

Introduction of modern tools usually keeps poor people out of work. So attempt should be made to build up the capacity of the poor people to cope with new techniques and equipment.

regular expenses on rice, oil, salt, spices, clothes and stationery for the children," said he. Thus, Mangala is forced to work as an agricultural labourer, that too only during the transplanting and harvesting seasons.

Being seasonal, Mangala and Bhakhari's work does not yield sufficient income for their survival. Mangala makes Rs. 100 for working 12 hours a day and Bhakhari Rs. 80 with some snacks. Furthermore, Mangala suffers from asthma due to chain-smoking. A lot of money has also been spent in the treatment of one of his hands, making their life all the more difficult.

The couple works on other's land on a crop sharing basis, which has made their life a little easy. They have also managed to get a Rs. 15,000 loan from the local micro-finance group to buy a pair of oxen. An agricultural labourer who works with a pair of oxen gets 50 per cent more wage along with a meal, that too for working only six hours. This work has raised their income substantially, and the family has been able to meet its expenses.



FATALISM AND POVERTY: TWO SIDES OF A COIN

Kumari Rajbansi, 34, has been living in Letang for the last 21 years after getting married to Dirche as his second wife. She was only 13 years old when she got married. In fact, she fell in love with her brother-in-law, husband of her own first cousin, while visiting him regularly. The family lives in a rented house as they do not have a house or land of their own.

When she first came to this house, her husband and his first wife used to collect wood from the local forest and sell it in the market just like the other poor people of Letang. Kumari had skills in dressing chicken for sale, which she learned when she was only 11 years old from her mother. Along with her husband, she started this business and sold 3-4 chickens a day. She along with other family members would also collect wood from the forest once a week when it is opened by the local community forestry users' group.

Unfortunately, her husband was injured in the eye while cutting wood in the forest. A *bandh* had been called by the Maoists that day, and it was not possible to take him

to the eye hospital in Biratnagar. When the roads finally opened after a week-long strike, it was already too late to treat him. So he lost one of his eyes, and it is difficult for him to collect and cut wood.

Kumari's youngest son is suffering from asthma and other diseases and needs regular treatment. She recalls those days when she had to manage the expenses for the treatment of her husband and son. "I had to sell all my ornaments, nearly half a kilo of silver and 20 grams of gold, which I had received as a wedding gift from my parents," she said.

"It is fate that has made me poor. I cannot change my life, and I have to live with what I have," she added. "If this is not fate then why is my elder sister, who was also born in the same family, spending such a good life in Kathmandu with her rich husband? And why am I poor when my parents have so much property which my brothers now control? They have not given me a single penny after my father's death. And my mother can do nothing as she also does not have anything."

There is nothing worse than being poor as we do not have proper food to eat and good clothes to wear, she said. "As a poor person, I always feel like a losing player." At times, Kumari spends hours alone in a forest, comparing her past with the present - the occasional hunger, humiliation from her husband's first wife and in the community from the local elite, and demands by the children for better clothes and food.

"People help those who have something to offer, the poor have nothing to give, so no one helps them. No one trusts us, and we cannot even borrow a small amount of money at times of emergency," she said.

The income from the sale of chicken and wood helps meet the day-to-day expenses. But it is extremely difficult to meet unexpected expenses like medicines.

For six months, during the conflict, the family had difficulties running their business and collecting wood from the local forest. Kumari wants peace and is confident it will prevail during the festival time. But she is not sure if it will last long. Kumari recalls those days during the insurgency when there wasn't a grain of rice in the house. "I was once caught in the crossfire while collecting wood in the forest and narrowly escaped. That day could have been the end of my life."

Kumari has not yet lost hope. She is confident her life will improve if she can borrow some money at low interest rates. She wants to expand her poultry business. She also feels that if she has her own house, she can save on the rent.

KEY MESSAGE

Women are poor as they are denied the right to parental property. Had Kumari been a man, it would have been easy to ask for a piece of the parental property.

POVERTY FORCES CHILDREN TO WORK

Sanu Maya Chepang, who does not know how old she is, lives in Shaktikhor in abject poverty. She is a victim of a landslide triggered by heavy rains in 2051 B.S. She was living with her family that included her husband, children, in-laws and others in Korak village when they lost all that they had. Everything including their house, cattle and a small plot of land were washed away. The family was happy collecting *gittha* and *bhyakur* for food from the forest and was also growing some maize, millet and buckwheat.

After losing everything in the landslide, her family decided to move to Lothar, a village near the highway. In Lothar, they got work tilling someone's land for a share of half the crops grown. But disaster struck again. Says Sanu, "May be it was our fate, the land we were tilling was also swallowed up by the river, and we were once again left with no work and nothing to eat or wear. Then we moved to this place and rented a house."

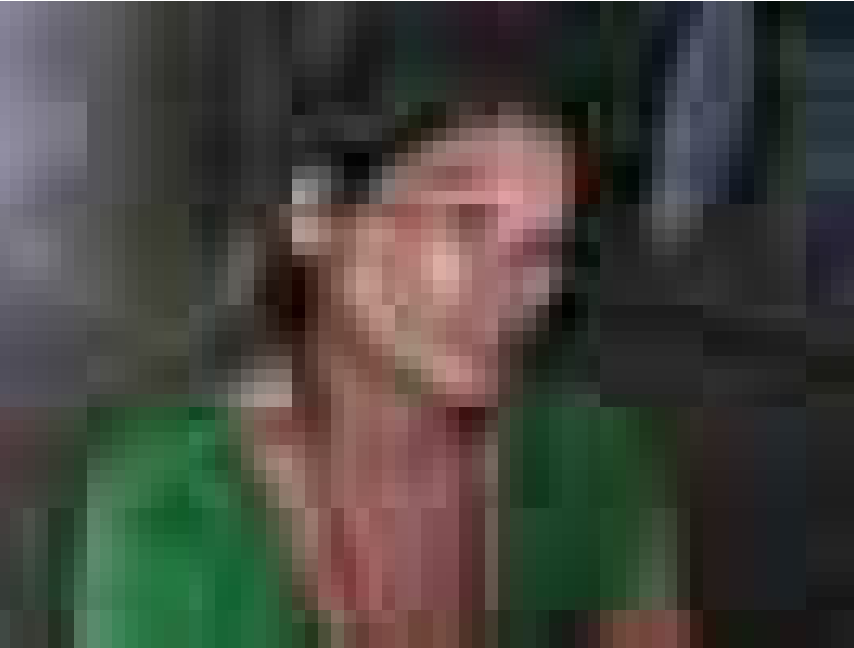
She works as a seasonal agricultural labourer, and her husband works with a local

contractor who supplies labour for road and other construction. But she cannot work long hours as she has to take care of her six children who are aged 2-13 years. She admits she has too many children to look after. But his husband badly wanted a son, who was born after having five daughters.

"I understand that the government has initiated many programmes aimed at reducing poverty and providing basic services like health, education, drinking water and many others. On paper, all the programmes look very good. But in reality, the benefits of most of the government services have not trickled down to the truly poor people who are in need."

Rita Ghimire

Female Community Health Volunteer
Torikhet, Bharatpur, Chitwan



It is extremely difficult for the family to meet household expenses with the little income that her husband makes. In Korak, the food grown on their land used to last for about six months; but now they must buy everything. But Sanu Maya tries to console herself with the proverb she first heard from her mother when she was small “Nirbaha ko nau sing hunch re”, which literally means there are nine different ways of subsisting.

To meet the family expenses, Sanu Maya thought of starting a grocery, but she felt that it would not be feasible with six children at home as they would consume all the stuff. Also it would not be possible for her to handle both the shop and children at the

same time. And her husband is away from home most of the time.

Since it was difficult to feed and educate six children, Sanu Maya decided to send her 13-year-old daughter, who should have been attending school, to Kathmandu to work as a domestic. Her daughter sends home Rs. 500 a month, which goes to pay the house rent.

“As a mother, it is my duty and responsibility to send my daughter to school. Because I never had the opportunity to attend school, I always wanted my children to go to school. But when my first daughter was small, we were still in Korak, and the school was too far away for a small child to walk everyday. When we came here, the school was located nearby, but she had grown and did not want to go to school with the smaller children. Also it was difficult to provide food and clothing, and we had no option other than to send her to Kathmandu, which is a great relief for us now.”

Like most Chepang women, Sanu Maya knows how to distil *raksi*, or homemade liquor. She makes some money selling liquor, which meets some of the living expenses. But the rebels had put a ban on the production and consumption of alcohol that again affected the family's income. But now that there is peace, she is producing and selling it. She hopes there will be lasting peace in the country so that she can produce and sell liquor, which is so essential for their livelihood.

SAVINGS GROUP PROVIDES RAY OF HOPE

Krishna Maya Rajputuwar, 58, lives in Ratopati, Sundal VDC with her 69-year-old husband, who is paralysed, and 18-year-old son. She has four children out of the seven born. Two daughters who are married live in Kathmandu with their husbands. Her eldest son, after squandering all the money they got from selling their land, now lives at his in-laws' place outside Kathmandu.

Said Krishna Maya, "Our eldest son was our biggest hope. He was starting to earn, but he betrayed us and has put us in this difficult situation, especially now that my husband is paralysed and can no longer work." Krishna Maya's husband used to work in a local brick kiln.

Like many other poor families in the community, Krishna Maya has joined several self-help groups. Although not all groups have provided benefits, those groups promoted by local micro-finance promoters provide credit for income generating activities. Other groups make Krishna Maya save some money every month.

With the credit, she has purchased a cow, whose milk she sells in the local market. She has been repaying the loan every week, which is mandatory. But it's hard to sustain a family from the sale of milk of a single cow. So she also got a pair of goats from the agriculture group and hopes they will provide good income as there is plenty of ground nearby to graze them.

What bothers her most is a loan of Rs. 27,000 that she took from her two sons-in-law to treat her husband. "How can I use my sons-in-law's money to treat my husband? It is a sin to take money from one's daughters. I must repay the loan soon, but I am not sure how. They have not asked for the money yet, but if I fail to repay their loan for a long time, then they may start dominating my daughters," she said.

Because there was no alternative, her youngest son had to discontinue school and start working in a brick kiln nearby. Her son earns about Rs. 300 a day for making 1,000 bricks during the winter season, which is suitable for brick making.

Because of her age and asthma, she does not have the energy to work as an agricultural labourer to support the family expenses. But during the brick-making season, Krishna Maya runs a small grocery shop to cater to the brick makers who come from outside Kathmandu. But due to lack

of sufficient capital, she cannot keep a good stock of groceries. With whatever profit she makes, she pays her electricity bills and buys kerosene for cooking.

“I am happy with the government for providing me the goats through the groups. I have benefitted from the micro-finance group as well,” she says. She understands that the government cannot help all the poor people, but she thinks that it should create training and job opportunities for young people like her son.

KEY MESSAGE

Although they work hard, poor people are unable to cope with emergency situations like sickness.



TRAPPED IN POVERTY

Punyashwori Suwal, 37, lives in Yatachen *Tole*, Ward no. 3, Bhaktapur municipality with her four children. She is not sure about her age or that of her children. Punyashwori was born in Bhaktapur municipality, not very far from where she lives now, in a relatively well-off family. She grew up in a not too big joint family with her three other brothers and sisters. As most other families in her community, her family was also into farming, cultivating and harvesting mainly rice, wheat and vegetables. Hence, during her childhood, she had to work hard on the farm with other members of the family and never got an opportunity to study in school.

“I never knew that there were schools and that children should go and study there. I spent my entire childhood on the farm. I had to go to the field early in the morning only half awake and come back home half asleep late in the evening. A female member of the family would bring all the three meals to the field itself. I had off days only during Dasain and Tihar,” she said.

After spending her childhood on the farm, one fine morning, her father told her that she was getting married soon. As per the tradition, the family members started preparing *aila*, alcohol from millet, and *thon* or rice beer. Then she went to her husband's house, which also was a farming family. But her husband's family was not that well-off compared to her parents. But she had no problem getting three meals a day after working hard.

While her father-in-law was still alive, he decided to divide whatever property he had between his two sons. The big house was divided into two, and the land was also divided equally between the two brothers.

One after another, she gave birth to four children. She has three daughters, aged 2-13 years, and one son who is eight years old and is a border line case of mental retardation. Although her husband was a hard working man, he developed the habit of drinking heavily. Whatever money her husband earned working as an agricultural labourer was spent on liquor, and their own land could not feed the six members of the family.



Punyashwori also worked as a labourer, but her husband would beat her and take her wages. To sustain his drinking habits, her husband sold half the land he had received from his father. Then the family was left with almost nothing for their survival.

As an alcoholic, her husband developed different kinds of diseases and ultimately died a year and a half back without getting any treatment as they had no money. Just before her husband's death, he had

mortgaged whatever little land they had to the moneylender to borrow a nominal amount of money. Punyashwori is not in a position to repay the loan, and the moneylender will not allow her to grow rice or any other crops on the land.

"There is nothing left to feed my small children. I started working in a local school as a part time worker cleaning the school floor every morning, and made Rs. 300 a month. I can buy some rice with that money but cannot afford vegetables or even firewood to cook the food. We do not have electricity, and I cannot afford to buy kerosene," she said.

She added that whenever she manages to collect some firewood from the nearby locality, she cooks rice. If not, they must do with beaten rice and water instead of vegetables or lentils. Her daughter does not attend school regularly mainly because there is no food. So she roams around the temples and begs from the visitors, mainly tourists. Sometimes she makes a good amount of money with which the whole family has a good meal.

Punyashwori has never travelled to Kathmandu, which is only 12 kilometres from her home. "I do not see why I should visit Kathmandu where I have nothing to do. More than that, I have heard that it costs a lot of money to travel by bus, which I cannot afford," she said.

Punyashwori knows only the local Newari language. She does not understand a single word of Nepali. She questions, "Why should I learn the Nepali language?" She has no idea about what a government is and does not know what it can do for poor people like her. She also does not know the name of the current prime minister of the country or even the capital of the country.

KEY MESSAGE

Punyashwori personifies poverty which is lack of resources, exclusion, isolation, ignorance and bad health. The most vulnerable issues need to be identified, and support schemes must be introduced to remove people like Punyashwori out of the cycle of poverty. But who will take this initiative?

POOR OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM SUPPORT PACKAGE

The life of Surja Bahadur Khadka, more popularly known as Mohan in the community, is an example of extreme poverty. He lives in Rato Pati, Ward no. 5 of Sundal VDC. Surja, 36, is married to Sarit, 30, from another caste.

He was born in a poor family. He does not recall his mother as she ran away with another man, leaving him and her husband. Surja assumes his father must have been an alcoholic and was constantly quarreling with her, so she left him. His father also did not have any property like land, a house or cattle. As there was no one in the family to look after the newborn, he was taken to his maternal uncle's home. But he was brought back to his village after some time, where he started living in his uncle's home.

He had to fetch fodder, look after the cattle and wash the dishes. He was admitted to school, but with so many chores to attend to, there was little time for studies. "When I passed Grade 4, I could not manage Rs. 25 for the books for Grade 5, and so I had to drop school."

When Surja was 11 years old, he was sent to Kathmandu to work as a domestic and had no opportunity to study. He also worked in a small eatery to earn a few rupees. Because work was difficult, he returned to his own village where he had no food, shelter or anything. When he was 14, he started working as a farm labourer in his village, just sufficient to buy him enough food. He went from one house to another everyday to spend the night. Not everyone was cooperative.

He was fortunate to be admitted to a government-run vocational training centre. "It was a good opportunity to learn and also get Rs. 300 in allowances. It was big support for a person like me. But my uncles were so cruel that they told me to hand over the money," said he. "If I did not give them the money then I would have to continue fetching fodder, looking after the cattle and doing the dishes. But if I gave them the Rs. 300, then I would not have money to pay for the bus fare and daily tiffin. So I had no option other than to quit the centre."

He then joined a government-run herbal factory, but when the general manager who appointed him was sacked with the change of government, Surja lost his job.

He got married when he was 23. He had neither any money to start a business venture nor any property to bank on. So both worked as agricultural labourers and started living in his uncle's cowshed. With hard work, they managed to save a small amount of money and started a small tea shop with just 250 grams of sugar, a packet of tea, some powder milk and five packets of cigarettes.

Business expanded slowly, and he was able to purchase a small piece of land, where he built a small hut to house the shop. His days are still difficult, but he feels that his most difficult days are over. He is looking forward to building a concrete house on his land and expanding the shop, but he lacks sufficient capital. He must

give away a lot of goods on credit, and getting the customers to pay back is extremely difficult. During the season, his wife works in the brick kiln and makes some money.

Surja's 12-year-old son studies in Grade 5 in a government school, and his daughter attends Grade 2 in a local boarding school. "I send my daughter to a boarding school as she is still young and cannot walk long distances to the government school, but my son is big enough. When my daughter grows up, I will also send her to a government school as I cannot afford the fees in the boarding school," said Surja.

Surja says he has not benefited from the services provided by the government. The government had once promised to provide land to the landless. But with the change in government, the policy was not implemented. Surja feels that the benefits of the programmes launched in the village have not trickled down to the poorest people. So he strongly suggests identifying the poorest of the poor and providing them with a support package. "Support from outsiders alone will not change our lives. We ourselves must work hard with the outsiders providing only the opportunity." Surja says development support has benefited the relatively better off people, which needs to change.

KEY MESSAGE

Many development programmes are being implemented without first identifying the poor. As a result, the local elite or those who are better off get all the benefit of development support. It is essential to identify the poor people through a coordinated and participatory process before providing the support package.

INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT FOR A LIVELIHOOD

Bhagawati Chidimar, 32, lives with her husband - a rickshaw puller - and three children in Purwa *Tole*, Ward no. 16 of Nepalgunj municipality. It's a settlement of the Chidimars, who traditionally killed birds in the area for sale. But now most of the people in this community have lost the skill as the number of birds has dwindled. Her husband also did not like killing birds for a livelihood.

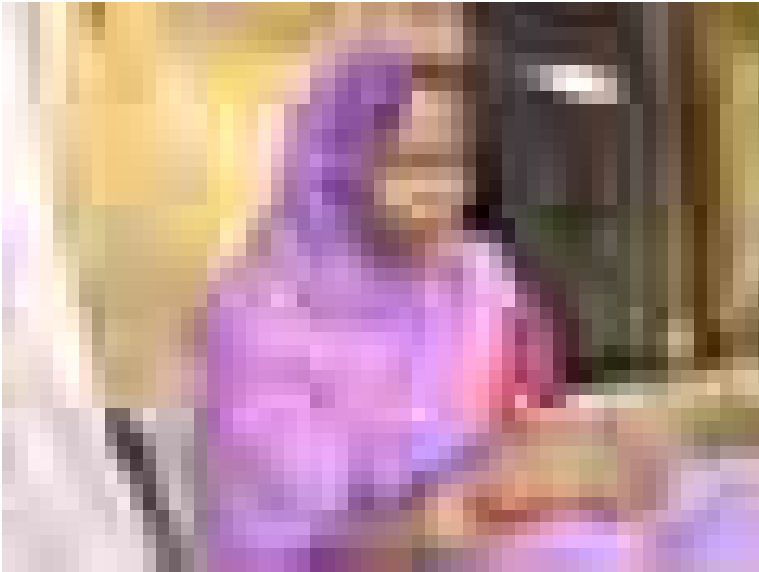
So like many other people in the community, Bhagawati and her family had to find alternative means of survival. Her husband used to work as a construction and agricultural labourer. His son, who is now 14 years old, had to discontinue his education while in Grade 5 to work as a labourer to help with the family's expenses. Bhagawati also works during the transplantation and harvesting season as a labourer. But such work is not available the year round.

"My husband keeps drinking most of the time. When he comes home drunk, he threatens to kick me out of the house.

Only when my son started working as a labourer were we able to have food in time and some clothes to wear," said Bhagawati. "In such a situation, how can poor people like us continue to send our children to school? Our survival is more important than children's study. My son was interested in continuing with his studies, but he preferred to work and eat than study and go hungry."

She is proud that her son makes Rs. 80 a day and hopes that her son will not take to drinking like his father. But she is not sure. She remembers when she first came to this home 18 years ago as a bride, her husband, who was only 15, was not drinking then. Like many other Chidimar men, her husband, however, also started drinking and torturing her.

Her husband would not spend the Rs. 3,000 needed for the treatment of her high blood pressure. She borrowed the amount from a self-help group promoted by an NGO and is paying back from her own income. Her son helps pay for her treatment.



While looking for work, a local NGO had approached her to join the self-help group. It is mandatory for every member of the group to save a nominal amount every fortnight. Her husband does not want her to join the group. When drunk, he always makes this an issue. But realising the benefit of being a member of the self-help group, she manages to save the money from her own earnings and also attends the regular meetings. This has helped her raise

KEY MESSAGE

The traditional skills of many poor communities have been lost, making it difficult for them to eke out a living in the absence of other skills. The government or support agencies should help communities like the Chidimars with alternative sources of livelihood. Skill development with income generating activities would help greatly.

the level of awareness in the field of sanitation, health and education.

The entire group has approached an international NGO to construct toilets and tube wells, and improve the trails. As a member of the group, she was entitled to borrow money for income generation activities. After consulting her husband, she applied for a loan of Rs. 11,000 to buy a rickshaw.

Her husband started making a little more money from the rickshaw. After he started making more money, he also started behaving better with her. The couple has now repaid the loan, and they own the rickshaw, which is a matter of pride for the Chidimar community.

Bhagawati also participated in a skill development training organised for the self-help group members by the local NGO. But she feels that the training was not well conducted as she can neither weave a sweater nor paint on wood.

“When an NGO organises training for poor people like us, it should be a complete package. I lost so many days participating in the training and got nothing. I would have earned some money working during that time,” says Bhagawati.

She feels that follow-up training should be organised so that she can further improve on her skills and work at home as she cannot go out and work as a labourer due to her illness.

WORK FOR THE POOR

Kaushila Sunar, a 47-year-old widow, lives with her two sons, a daughter-in-law and her grandchildren. After her husband died, her sons had to support the family as they did not have any land or property save for a thatch hut. However, as there was no work, Kaushila's two sons went to *Kalapani*, which is to say they left for India to work. They were 23 and 15 years old.

Recalling her husband, Kaushila said, "He was a very skilled goldsmith and earned good money to lead a comfortable life. But once he took to drinking, he stopped working long hours, which brought down the family income. Later, he spent almost all of his earnings on liquor and gave nothing to the family. He roamed around the streets like a mad man."

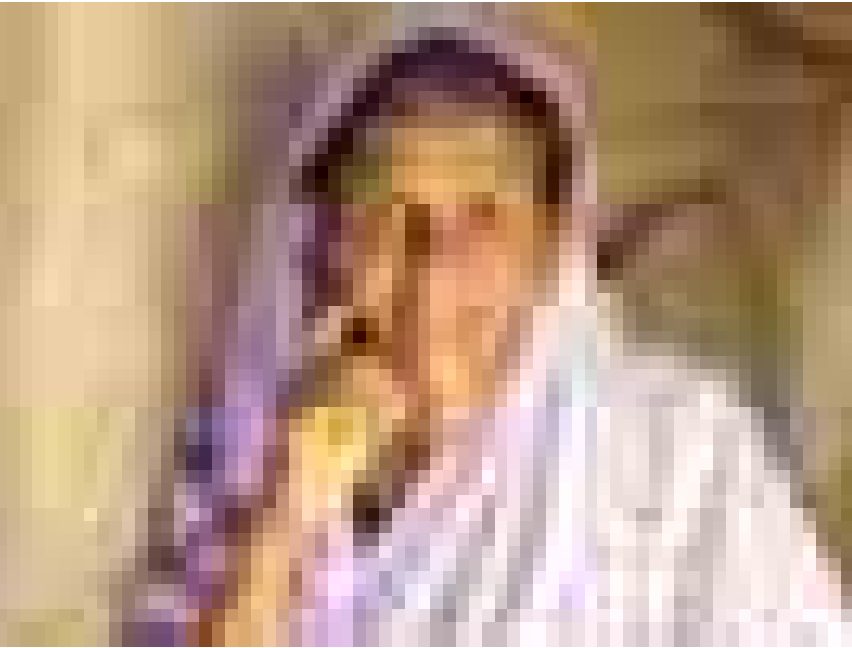
Kaushila tried everything, hoping her husband would mend his ways. She consulted the witch doctor, medical doctor and others, but they failed. As the drinking habit grew worse, the family had to sell whatever land they had to meet the family expenses.

One of his sons works in an eatery as a helper and sends a small amount of money regularly. Another son works as a labourer at a construction site. Since many young Nepalis work as labourers in India, the Indian contractors exploit them and pay them less wages compared to other workers.

Kaushila wishes that her sons could work in Nepal itself. She feels that they could have started a business or raised goats in Nepal. But they preferred to go to India

"Dalits have no wealth, no education, no job and no income. Had they money, they could eat nutritious food, be healthy and suffer less from illness. Even if they are sick, they could go to hospital for treatment."

Dalit Female Community Health Volunteer
Letang VDC, Morang



probably because they thought it would be easy to find work there. Secondly, the family does not have the needed capital to start a business. “Nobody trusts poor people like us as we do not have any property to mortgage,” she said.

KEY MESSAGE

Perennial source of income, no matter how small, is important for poor people. Generation of employment opportunities for the poor could be one option to reduce poverty.

Kaushila joined a poverty reduction programme run by an NGO in the community that provides soft loans to the poor to start income generating activities. She tried borrowing Rs. 20,000 to raise some goats but failed to deposit in cash 10 per cent of the total loan.

Says Kaushila, “How can I manage to deposit so much money before taking a loan? There wasn’t much to save from working as a labourer. More so, there is no work for women in the village. And I cannot borrow from the local moneylender as the interest rate is as high as 60 per cent.”

She is, thus, baffled as to how this programme can reduce poverty if it does not benefit the poor people. The condition that one must cash deposit 10 per cent of the loan is anti-poor, says she, as they are deprived of the benefits aimed at the poor people.

The poor, she adds, have a hard time passing their time. The women especially cannot find work, and there isn’t enough to eat. “My only option is to wait for my son to send home some money.”

Kaushila, like many other poor people in the community, has not benefited from the government’s services. “We are poor, and we do not have any knowledge. But we are willing to work hard for a livelihood. So we would be greatly obliged if the government could provide us work,” she said.

LIFE ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT FOR POOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Milla Rana Tharu of Kaserol, Jhalari-6 is about 50 years old (he is not quite sure of his age) and is physically challenged. He developed the disability after he fell while running when he was about 10-11 years old. Since he did not receive immediate treatment, he has been permanently disabled. He was taken to the traditional faith healers who gave him locally available herbs.

Milla is not only physically challenged, he was orphaned in childhood. Milla's father had died even before he was born, while he lost his mother when he was still an infant. He never had the opportunity to attend school as he had to work hard in his uncle's house. "Who will want to take the trouble of educating someone else's children?" he said.

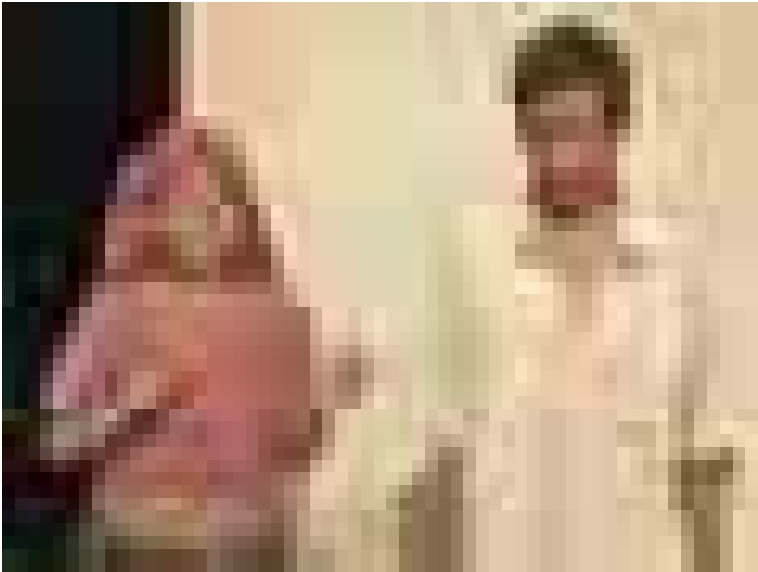
Milla got married to a girl whose hearing and speech are impaired. He has five children - three sons and two daughters. One of his daughters is already married, while his eldest son, now 15, works as a domestic in Kanchanpur and sends some money to meet the family expenses. His

second son is now 10 years old and goes to school. But Milla wants this son also to go to Kanchanpur and work when he is 15. His third son is only three years old.

Milla received about five *katthas* of land in paternal property. Production from this land is not sufficient to feed the family. But he owns a pair of oxen which he uses to plough the neighbours' fields for wages. But he faces problems.

First, the big landowners are increasingly turning to machines like tractors. Second, the wages are low. Usually, the landowners prefer to contract out the work of ploughing the fields for Rs. 2,200 a bigha for the entire season. Land must be ploughed at least three times, and the wages for working 12 hours from dawn to dusk work out to be just Rs. 100.

Being physically challenged, he knows something about the rights of the people with disabilities. He travelled several times to Kanchanpur to get an identity card for the disabled and spent Rs. 700.



But he and his wife were denied the identity card for reasons not explained to him.

“If I had the card, I would have gotten disabled allowance from the government and gotten concessions on the fare while travelling,” he says.

KEY MESSAGE

Poor people are vulnerable to exploitation due to ignorance. Those physically challenged who are well-to-do and come from the elite group have access to the government benefits, but the poor Dalits are deprived of them. Organisations ‘of’ the Dalits and ‘for’ the Dalits should try to improve the access of the poor people to the government benefits and services.

But he is not blaming anyone except the president of the disabled association, who happens to come from his community. “He tried to exploit me and other poor disabled people for his own benefit. We poor disabled people cannot fight for our rights. We are helpless.”

Like other people in the community living in the buffer zone, Milla is also affected by the wildlife reserve. He cannot graze his cattle on the pasture across the river, which makes it difficult to feed his oxen. The wild animals also go on a rampage and destroy the crops most of the time.

A project for those people affected by the reserve has been promoting a savings group in the community. As a member, Milla must save Rs. 30 a month. He borrowed Rs. 1,000 from the group to repair his mud house, but he has not been able to repay the loan. He knows that if he does not repay, others will not be able to borrow from the group. He hopes to repay the loan when his son sends money next month.

Milla, though desperate and frustrated, is confident that life will improve. He thinks there is no other person who has a more painful life than his. “It is because of the sins that I committed in my previous life. But the hard times should be over by now, and my life should get better,” he says. “Hope has been steering my life all along.”

DALIT WOMAN FIGHTS FOR HER RIGHTS

Laxmi Lohar of Sukhasal, Ward no. 5, Mahendranagar, is now 31 years old. She was married 18 years ago when she was only 13. She was married at that age because of the prevailing social custom. Also most parents had the notion that a girl married early would prevent her from being 'spoilt'. After marriage, she, however, managed to attend school and study up to Grade 8.

Laxmi, now a mother of four children, strongly feels that her daughters should be married only after they reach 22 years. "We have learned so many things, and I have lived through the pains of marrying early, so I will marry off my daughter only after she is 22 years of age," says Laxmi. She was only 16 when she gave birth to her first son, who is now 15 years old.

Her husband inherited two *katthas* of land and a small hut in parental property. The land does not grow enough food to last even two months. During the transplanting and harvesting seasons, Laxmi works as an agricultural labourer and contributes to the family income. Her husband pulls a rickshaw in Mahendranagar, not very far from her home.

It is very difficult for the couple to manage for the food and other expenses such as salt and oil, clothes and stationery of the children. But scholarships provided to the Dalit children have helped their children enrol in school. However, for the last two years, the children have been receiving only Rs. 250 a month instead of Rs. 500. She complained at the local education office, but no one paid heed.

"The level of awareness in the Dalit community has risen substantially, and we are now able to raise our voice against discrimination and humiliation, and fight for our right to freedom of mobility and freedom to enter a temple. The Dalit community will not keep silent and will continue struggling for its rights. But at the same time, we will be accountable to our duties and responsibilities."

Bhakta Bahadur BK

Sharada Social Equality and Development Association
Dodhara VDC, Kanchanpur, Nepal

“One of the many reasons why people are poor is they have no education. I really feel sad when I remember the day when I was forced to leave school and get married,” said Laxmi. “Another major cause of poverty is lack of resources, mainly land. A few rich people own a lot of land while many poor people do not have any land.”

Laxmi worked as a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) for five years before being replaced by a non-Dalit woman. She feels that she was sacked simply because she is a Dalit and not too educated. “When the authorities hold such an attitude even in a small position that does not have much facility and income, how can one expect them to ensure the rights of the Dalits?” she asks. After the incident, she joined a political party as a cadre to fight for the rights of Dalits.

She was also active in organising Dalit women into a mother’s club. Given her own experience with alcoholism in the family, she started an anti-alcohol campaign. But her experience tells her that it is impossible to stop alcohol consumption and the ensuing domestic violence. However, she feels proud of being the chairperson of a local mother’s club which has promoted a small but regular savings group. At times of need, its members can borrow a small amount of money at low interest rates.

Laxmi is also an active member of the Regional Dalit Network which is raising a voice against caste-based discrimination and fighting for equity. She is proud to be involved in all these organisations, and there is a sense of self respect. But participating in the meetings, training programmes and other events is consuming a lot of her

valuable time so important for earning the family’s bread.

Laxmi has always struggled hard to make life easier, and she had confidence in herself. But mere confidence is not enough, we also need money to start something, says she. But people do not trust the poor and will not lend substantial amounts of money to start a business or any other initiative.

The rich people or even the banks will not trust the poor as they do not have any property to mortgage. And in the case of Laxmi, the family has nothing but a hut and two *katthas* of land. They tried to own a rickshaw that costs about Rs. 11,000, but no one trusted them with a loan.

Being a party cadre, she is very conscious about national politics. She has experienced different forms of government and has come to the conclusion that no government will help the poor as no government has so far lent any support to them. Even then, she feels it is the obligation of the government to effectively implement the act on untouchability. “Only declaring laws in the House of Representatives has no meaning. They need to be implemented.”

She claims there is caste-based discrimination in her own village which lies close to the zonal headquarters where the government machinery is located. Dalits cannot draw water from public water taps in this village. “At times, I also feel that tradition and superstition are yet another cause of poverty in our country,” she said.

The conflict has not had a direct impact on her life, but the frequent *bandhs* have affected the family income as it is not possible to pull a rickshaw on such days. For the family, it is difficult buying daily essential commodities as the markets are closed frequently. She feels that there is no alternative to a lasting peace for the overall development of the country and is hopeful the on-going peace process will last.

KEY MESSAGE

Dalits are still deprived of opportunities. Unequal distribution of natural resources is making a lot of people poor. This structural cause of poverty should be addressed seriously if abject poverty is to be eradicated before it is too late.

PEOPLE CAN SAVE FOOD ONLY IF THEY HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT FIRST

Maghu Ram Chaudhary, 70, heads a joint family of 24 people. The family members include his wife who is now 65, four sons, five daughters-in-law and their grandchildren. The family has three bighas of land, a house, a tractor purchased with money borrowed from a bank and a few cattle. They also work on other's land on a 50:50 crop sharing basis. The family must manage the seeds and labour, while the cost of fertiliser is borne equally by Maghu and the landowner.

One of Maghu's sons looks after the house, land and cattle. Two of his sons plough the land of the landowner with their tractor. The money earned has helped to repay the loan and also to meet the family expenses. One of his sons is studying at the Bachelor's level and hopes to study more to get a good job. According to him, the Tharu people cannot join the bureaucracy and are deprived of basic opportunities. All five daughters-in-law along with Maghu's wife tend to the household chores such as cooking, kitchen gardening, feeding the cattle and washing.

As is the tradition among the Tharus, Maghu stocks a certain portion of the paddy production for times of emergency to ensure food security. He recalls his childhood days when there was a drought for two years in the area, and his family had survived on the stored paddy. Each Tharu household has a place where they store paddy, rice and other food grains as well as potato. It is called the *dehar* and is built out of mud by the women. It is safe from mice and insects, and goods stored in it do not go bad for even 10 years.

Everyday, Maghu's family requires about 20 kg of rice. Additionally, the family needs another 200 kg of rice every month to make rice beer traditionally consumed by the Tharu people. "The rice beer (*jaad*) is as good as food, and it gives us energy necessary to do hard work. I cannot survive without it," says Maghu. "I start my day with it."

The cost of other essential commodities is covered from the money received by operating the tractor and selling the surplus paddy and wheat. Thus, the family has

enough food even to last during times of food shortages. “But,” says Maghu, “one must work hard, earn more. Only then is it possible to store for times of emergency. If a family does not have sufficient food to eat, how can they save?”

Maghu is not happy with the way people perceive the Tharu community. The elite people think that we Tharus are useless people who drink *jaad* all the time. They try to humiliate us. It is not good. We are not foolish, we know how to live our lives,” says Maghu. “Yes, we are afraid to express our views because we have been suppressed for generations. Most of the Tharus are not educated, and very few are in high positions. So the Tharus have no opportunity.”

Maghu says the government should take the responsibility of creating jobs for deprived communities like the Tharus. “We are ready to work hard, but where is the opportunity?” questions he.

“The Tharus are traditionally farmers, and their skills need to be modernised. So those Tharus who have a little education should be trained in modern agricultural practices so that the people do not forget how to do farming. Otherwise, once people are educated, who will work in the fields? And if people stop working in the fields, then we will have to forget about food security. The question of survival will arise then,” he says.

“I know many young educated people who tried to get a job but could not simply because they were Tharus. Instead of being humiliated by other communities, we should do our own work and live with dignity.”

Key Message

People must have enough to eat before they are able to save for the future. So agricultural productivity must increase, for which investment in agriculture is a must.

“The health of poor mothers and children are poor due to their poor socio-economic condition. The poor and Dalit mothers cannot afford to buy nutritious food and pay for the medicines and hospital’s treatment.”

Punita Gurung

Female Community Health Volunteer
Dodhara VDC, Kanchanpur



LEARNING TO STAND ON ONE'S FEET

Gyani Chaudhary admits that poverty forced her to start working at an early age. Gyani, 16, joined a brick kiln at Pakali, Sunsari four years ago. The kiln is 20 minutes' walk from her home. The reason she chose the brick kiln was that all her friends work there and 95 per cent of the employees there are women. So she feels safe. She was given permission by her family to work in the kiln for these very reasons and also because it is located nearby.

In the beginning, however, carrying bricks looked like a Herculean task for her. "Lifting two bricks at a time when I was only 12 felt like lifting the world, but it was the hardest of times for us as my father was the only working member in the family. I had to work anyhow," she said. But four years after, she likes the work and is content with her life.

Gyani contributes 50 per cent of her earnings to the house, while she keeps the remaining amount as pocket money. She earns Rs. 35-40 a day depending upon the amount of work she does.

She does not regret leaving school at an early age. She is glad that she is earning now and does not have to go hungry. Gyani says that poverty has been an important lesson for her. "In school, we learn to recognise the alphabets and numbers, but life has taught me that the greatest strength lies in endurance."

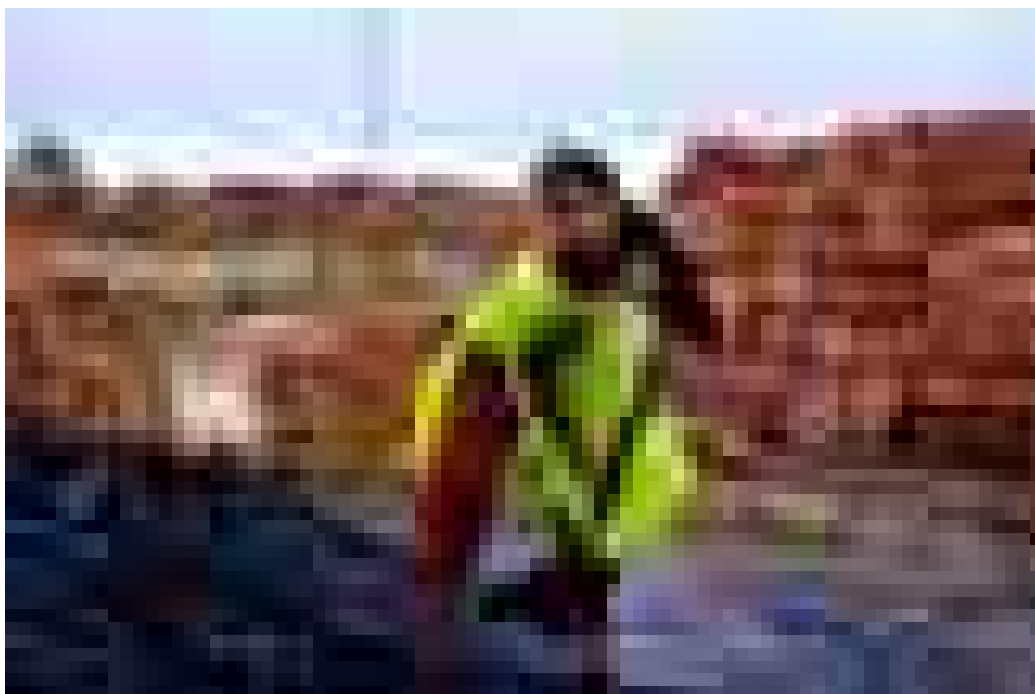
Life, she says, has taught her to stand on her feet and not be a parasite on others. So she does not see education in the classroom as the path towards enlightenment. Instead she lives in a world of reality, learning to cope with it.

There was a time when Gyani and her family ate just one meal a day and that, too, just plain boiled rice with salt and green chilly. When the eldest brother, who was an earning member, decided to shift with his wife, it brought difficult times for her family. Her father was not in a position to send her to school anymore as his earnings were just enough to buy rice. It was then that Gyani decided to join the brick kiln.

She is happy as everybody treats her like their own daughter or sister. Nobody has ever been cruel to her. "What good is a human being if s/he cannot extend support to the family during trying times?" she says. She makes no unreasonable demands as she is a witness to the difficult times at home. She is glad to be

of some help to her parents and be independent.

Five years ago, her desires may have been crushed. Today she is confident that no matter where she goes or whom she marries, she can look after herself.



STORY OF AN OVERJOYED MOTHER AND HER GROWING DAUGHTER!

Chandrakala Neupane from Mangalpur VDC in Chitwan is an average Nepali village woman. She has two children, a son aged six and a daughter aged two.

In 2001, *Pragati Mahila Sahakari Sanstha*, a women development co-operative in Mangalpur VDC, began organising a federation in Mohanpur, Chandrakala's village. In August 2005, the DACAW programme was introduced in the community.

As an active woman in her community, Chandrakala was selected as a community mobiliser and received basic training in July 2005. During the training, she learned all about the importance of early childhood care and development. "Before the training, I did not pay attention to *sarsafai* (hygiene and sanitation) and had no knowledge about the need to give nutritious food to my children several times a day. I used to give my children whatever food they liked and whatever was easily available, such as biscuits, instant noodles, etc," she said.

"But after the training, I came to know that *sarbottam pitho*, *dal bhat tarkari* are more nutritious than these readymade foodstuffs. I realised that love, care and hygiene are equally important in addition to the locally available nutritious foodstuffs. Whatever I learned during the training, I first wanted to apply it in my own household and then in the community."

She added, "My daughter, Archana, has been underweight since birth. After completing my training, I immediately

"I want to make my children neat and clean, give them an education and make them *thulo manchhe* (educated, well paid, smart)...big people have brains."

Dropati Majhi
Majhi Tole, Bacchauli VDC, Chitwan

started applying the knowledge gained on my daughter by giving special attention to her food and hygiene. But even till December, she had not gained much weight and was still underweight.”

Archana was born in April 2004 and weighed only two kilos at birth.

Chandrakala then decided to draw the attention of her family members, husband and mother-in-law to the condition of her daughter. When they understood the importance of child growth and development, they also became concerned and asked her to take proper care of the children and feed them regularly. They also started helping out

more with the farm work. Encouraged by the support from her family, she started to make *sarbottam pitho* using locally available grains and made sure that her daughter was fed at least five times a day - twice with soft *dal bhat tarkari*, the usual family meal, and three times with *lito* and *jaulo* in addition to breastfeeding.

She also found time for other care, such as playing with her little girl. January 2006 brought her the news that she had been anxiously waiting for - her daughter was no longer underweight! Chandrakala and her family were very happy with the achievement. She shared her story and experience with the entire community. Since January 2006, Archana has been gaining weight with each passing month and now weight normal. Said a proud Chandrakala, “She is so happy, healthy and lively, look at her!”

Chandrakala summed up by saying, “We don’t need expensive food such as meat, fish and eggs to give nourishment to our children. We can use regular food available in the household combined with patience, special efforts and support from the family. Love and care are equally important to improve the situation of malnourished children.”

“Everybody is poor and landless in our village, Tretrigachhi of Rangeli VDC. We do not have proper shelter and food. We often suffer from TB, malaria, Kalaazar and other illnesses.”

Dinesh Mandal
Rangeli VDC, Morang

AWARENESS ABOUT NUTRITION

Alisa BK, a woman of Coupon *Tole*, Piple-7 was unaware about all the nutritious food rich in vitamins that was going to waste. She thought rice gave more energy than green vegetables and beans. Therefore, she used to buy rice from her daily wages and give her children only *jaulo*. Now she knows better.

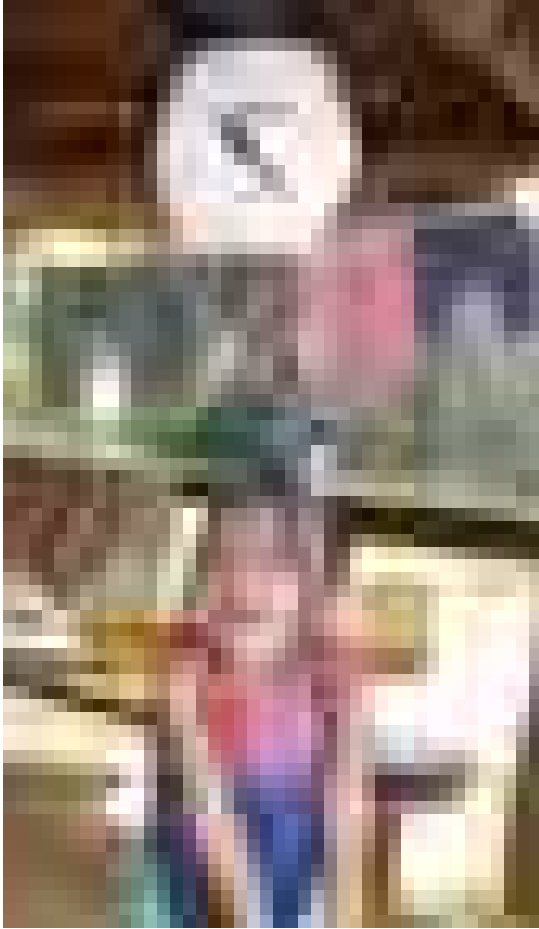
When Alisa returns home from work, she collects seasonal vegetables available aplenty on the way. She also buys some beans. She cleans the green vegetables, cooks them with beans and feeds her 25-month-old twin sons. As a result, there has been an improvement in the weight of the babies. They are now safe from common illnesses which used to attack them due to lack of hygiene.

She has also learnt to prepare a balanced diet from materials readily available at home for the physical growth of the babies. The Decentralised Action for Children and Women (DACAW) programme, launched by the District Development Committee (DDC), in Chitwan is the partner that has brought about all these changes for her.

According to Alisa, she's learned how to prepare nutritious food for babies and feed them according to a timetable. In the past, she had trouble feeding the twins. "I used to feed them only milk in the beginning, which was not enough. Their weight was low, so I took them to the DACAW social mobiliser (SM) for advice. Sister Durga Magar advised me to give them *lito* (porridge) and *jaulo* and taught me how to prepare them. Soon their weight started increasing," she said.

For her first child, Alisa used to make *jaulo* by frying the rice in oil and cooking it. She has now learnt that *jaulo* prepared this way doesn't contain all the necessary ingredients of a balanced diet for babies. So she adds seasonal vegetables and beans to the rice. Earlier, she used to feed her children only during the free time, but now she feeds them five times a day by managing breaks during her work.

Alisa and her husband Jeevan live in a slum called Coupon *Tole*. It was so named because the families in the slum were distributed 10 dhors of land based on a



coupon system. The twins were born on June 20, 2004. They had low birth weight (LBW), weighing less than two kilograms.

At first, Alisa fed them buffalo milk since her breasts would not produce enough milk. This did not improve their weight. They weighed only seven kilos when they were 14 months old. There was a significant improvement in their weight only after their mother started feeding them nutritious *lito* and *jaulo* mixed with green vegetables and beans and at the right time.

Both the babies have shown similar improvements in their weight. At 26 months, they weigh 10.5 kilograms. About this change, Durga has this to say, “After the launch of the DACAW programme, the people of Coupon *Tole* have gained knowledge on child-maternity care and sanitation.”

Alisa also visits the pregnant women in her area and gives them advice on ways to take good care of themselves so that babies are born healthy.

POVERTY BEHIND CHILD'S POOR HEALTH

Jamuna Chaudhary, 25, of Khairahani VDC is conscious about health and hygiene. She also has knowledge about child nutrition and the appropriate food to take. However, she cannot put her knowledge into practice because she is poor.

All she has is a small plot of land and a hut with a tiled roof. Day in day out, she wakes up early in the morning, and with a baby on her back leaves home in search of work. The only time she was relieved of this daily schedule was for four months immediately after giving birth to a baby.

Her son, Krish, weighed normal at birth. He weighed more than two kilograms at birth and reached about four kilograms within a month. The weight reached six kilograms when he was four months and crossed eight kilograms when he was six months. Extra food was necessary for the child after that, but Jamuna was already working then to make ends meet. Consequently, the weight of Krish became constant for about a month and grew by only two kilograms in the following three

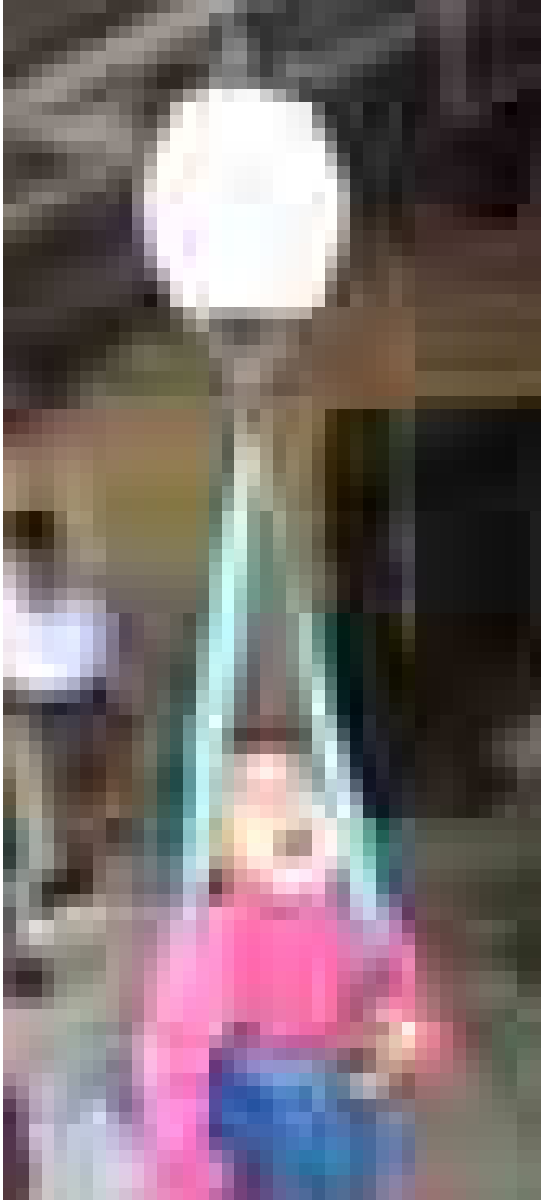
months, to reach 10 kilograms in 10 months. Then it started decreasing. Krish weighed nine kilograms in 15 months, i.e., he had lost one kilo within five months. Now he is in his 18th month, but his weight has not increased since he was 10 months old.

The extreme poverty in Jamuna's family is the root cause behind the decreasing weight of the child. There is neither a grain of rice in her hut nor a penny to

“Infants and children in the poor households do not get adequate food and nutrition. They are malnourished and often suffer from diarrhoea and pneumonia. Treatment should be free or it should be given to them at subsidised rates.”

Sunital Mandal

Rangeli VDC-6, Tretrigachhi, Morang



purchase it. She must sell her labour to even feed *jaulo* to her son once a day. Her clothes, face and condition of the house speak of the abject poverty the family lives in. The child's dim appearance also tells the same thing. She cannot feed him *lito* or *jaulo* even though the child is hungry.

Krish snuggles up to his mother's breasts hoping some milk will ooze out while his elder sister of six years looks around for something to eat. They are unaware that their mother has come home from the fields for a short break because we had dropped in to talk to her.

Jamuna and her husband, Kebal, have studied till Grade 6. Although Jamuna knows that the *lito* of *sarbottam pitho* (porridge powder), made up of grains and beans, given with equal quantity or *jaulo*, prepared with seasonal vegetables and beans, supplies the full nutrition for babies, she cannot afford them. "I once prepared *sarbottam pitho* but didn't have the time to cook and feed the baby because I had to go out to work. Therefore, it all went to waste," she said.

Jamuna and her husband can find work only in the fields as they do not have any vocational skills. "Working the fields is the only thing we know how to do, and even that work is not always available," said Jamuna.

POVERTY BEHIND DISCRIMINATION AND HUMILIATION

Buddha Maya Sunar, 50, lives in Kapahiti, Ward no. 2, Changu VDC with her husband and a granddaughter from her daughter's side. She lost her two sons - five and three years old, in a single year 23 years ago after suffering from a high fever and diarrhoea. She regrets not being able to take them to hospital mainly due to lack of money and also awareness. They relied on the local witch doctor instead of taking them to the hospital in Bhaktapur town, which is seven kilometers away.

Both her daughters are married and live in other districts. Buddha Maya herself has been suffering from tuberculosis for the past 17 months. She has been receiving medicines from the hospital in Bhaktapur but has not been cured.

Buddha Maya's husband is a blacksmith by occupation and caste. It is very difficult to meet him at home during the daytime. He returns home in the evening and tries to work at the smithy but is unable to concentrate on his work. When he comes home, he starts quarreling. Everyday, he

threatens to throw Buddha Maya out of the house. If she is forced to leave the house, she has nowhere to go.

"Whenever my husband works at the smithy, he cannot work properly. As a result, the quality of work started deteriorating, which our bista, the traditional clients, did not like." Who wants to pay for shoddy work?" she said.

Because of this, the number of his clients has gone down from 65 about 10 years ago to six now. Currently he serves only 6-7 households. The bista households give a

"We FCHVs tell the mothers to prepare and feed nutritious food to their children. But how can they make nutritious food for their children when there is no food at home?"

Ambika Bhattarai
Female Community Health Volunteer
Shaktikhor VDC, Chitwan

few kilos of paddy once a year for making or repairing agricultural tools. The income generated from the bista is not enough to cover the food requirements of the family's three members.

According to Buddha Maya, whatever additional income her husband makes with the extra work does not even pay for his daily intake of raksi (liquor). Buddha Maya does not recall receiving any money for meeting the household expenses from her husband.

Buddha Maya, being a tuberculosis patient, does not have the energy to work in the fields. She is not even sure if her husband is mentally fit as he is drunk most of the time. The only means of income are the two ropanis of someone else's land that they work on. The land yields about 400 kgs of paddy a year, which is shared equally with the landowner. They also grow some wheat, which is not shared with the landowner.

Buddha Maya is a member of a local self-help group promoted by the District Agriculture Office. As a member of the group, she got a pig which is about six months old. She must return one piglet to the agriculture office and would then be entitled to own the pig fully. She is hoping to make some money out of it. But she is not sure how much profit she can make as this is her first initiative. She is also a member of another self-help group formed by a local VDC. She was also a member of

a self-help group promoted by the Women Development Office.

"I must make a nominal saving in all the self-help groups. It was not possible for a person without a single paisa in income to make savings in all the self-help groups. So I left the membership in all the groups except the agriculture group which has given us a pig," said Buddha Maya. "How can a poor person like me deposit in so many places? It looks like we are saving to safeguard someone else's job. It does not help us."

Feeling sad about the loss of her two sons, she says, "Had my sons not died, they would have taken proper care of me, and I would have lived a happy life. Now my life is full of misery. I am sure that they would not have taken their father's path because today's boys are not like that."

Buddha Maya's daughters provide some support to her in buying oil, spices and clothes. She is proud of her daughters and says, "My daughters have done whatever they can even if their own condition is not very good. When my own husband is not supporting me, how much support can my children provide me?"

Being a Dalit, Buddha Maya says, "The high caste people still dominate and humiliate us. Their blood is red, like ours, so why do they want to dominate us? May be because we are poor. I have not seen rich Dalits being dominated by the high caste people. Domination is more related to poverty and not caste..."

She cannot think of anything that the government can do for people like her. But she feels that the government should bring lasting peace in the country. Though she is not directly affected by the conflict, she cannot bear to see the killing of Nepali sons and daughters everyday.

KEY MESSAGE

Poor people, particularly the Dalits, still do not have access to many government services. Whatever services that exist in the community like micro-finance groups do not help the poorest of the poor like Buddha Maya.

It is poverty, and not caste, that determines the extent of discrimination, exploitation and domination in society.

DIM FUTURE

Jhaggu Kabadiya, 12, is a rickshaw puller in Nepalgunj. With his bare feet, he pedals the rickshaw in rain or sunshine. He wears torn half pants and a T-shirt which is wet with sweat. Jhaggu began pulling the rickshaw since last year.

He is the sole breadwinner of the family. His is a five-member family and depends on his income to make ends meet. His father has been sick for the last four years. He is just 42 years old but looks much older. The mother's health is also not good and falls sick from time to time. His parents cannot work and are most of the time bed-ridden. His 17-year-old brother operates a cycle repair shop. Although he lives with the family, he doesn't share his earnings.

Jhaggu makes Rs. 50-100 a day. He must pay Rs. 30 a day for renting the rickshaw to the owner. If he fails to pay, the owner seizes the rickshaw. Because of his age, he gets less chance than others to transport passengers.

"People think that I am young, therefore, weak. That is why they buy the services

of other rickshaw pullers. As a result, I earn so little money that it hardly meets my needs. When I pay for renting the rickshaw, I cannot have lunch. If I take a meal, I at times cannot pay the rent," he says.

His father was sad to talk about the family's financial condition. He said "when I was able to earn, I had supported the family. Now that I am ill, we are having to depend solely on Jhaggu. He is young, but he can bear much sorrow and pain. My elder son also earns some money, but his income doesn't even cover his expenses."

Jhaggu's home is located at Bulbuliya, Ward no. 17 in Nepalgunj municipality. The piles of garbage around his home and in the settlement cannot go unnoticed. The environment of the house is also dirty. Jhaggu and his elder brother spend most of the time outside the home and have no time to do any cleaning. The parents are sick, and there is no one to do the laundry and sweep the house clean.

There is no one in the house who looks neat and clean except the elder brother.

Jhaggu has only one set of clothes. When he washes his clothes, he wraps his body with a towel until the clothes get dry.

“I wanted my son to get an education. But due to poverty, I was unable to do so,” said Jhaggu’s father. Jhaggu can neither read nor write. He has a five-year-old sister. She also hasn’t attended school.

Jhaggu said there were many nights when the family had to go to bed without food. The family’s meal consists of dal and rice.

When there is not enough rice, the family takes bread with chutney.

He loves to watch films and go out with friends, but he has little time for such things. Before he started pulling a rickshaw, he used to go to the cinema, play with friends and visit the market with his elder brother.

Jhaggu doesn’t have big dreams. All he wants is to have two square meals a day and earn enough money to buy medicines for his ill parents.