

Beldangi refugee camp on fire



Elderly refugees after a fire disaster

This year, too, a Bhutanese refugee camp in east Nepal reeled under a fire. On March 11 at around 7:45 pm, the staff of LWF Nepal received the sad news on the camp's base office radio in Damak that Beldangi II was on fire.

LWF Nepal team rushed immediately to the disaster site located on the east side of the refugee camp only to find that almost all the huts in Sector E and Panchawati English School were burnt. Most of the huts in Sector D were demolished to stop the fire from spreading far and wide.

The Bhutanese refugees of Beldangi II told the visiting staff that the fire outbreak started from the hut No.D1, 86, of Birkha Bahadur Thapa, at 6:45 pm.

A flurry of relief activities began. Various agencies working for the refugees, including UNHCR, the government's Refugee Coordination Unit and LWF Nepal, made relocation plans. The fire-affected refugees were taken to camp classrooms for shelter at the first night of the disaster.

The next day the agencies' meeting decided to provide immediate relief materials and do some need assessment. In that connection a Disaster Management Committee, comprising related agencies and refugee representatives, was formed in order to cater services to the refugees.

With support of various agencies, food and non-food items were distributed through LWF Nepal

to the affected refugees. WFP has pledged to provide one-week advance ration to these refugees. Additionally, LWF Nepal planned and handed over tarpaulin sheets, water tanks, kitchen utensils, plastic jerry cans, blankets, washing soaps, briquette stoves and medicated mosquito nets, among others, to the refugees.

Reconstruction and renovation of huts and school buildings have been sped up in view of the forthcoming school-leaving exams. The reconstruction is expected to complete within the end of March.

Preliminary survey

- No. of fire affectees: 1452 in four sub-sectors of the camp
- No. of burnt huts: 98
- No. of demolished huts: 135
- No. of burnt toilets: 60
- No. of demolished toilets: 20
- No. of burnt school classrooms: 38

Working with minority groups in 2008

There are many different peoples across Nepal, the Gurkhas and Sherpas being the most famous internationally. There are also larger groupings, such as Newars, who have kept their identity without loss of prestige and power. However, many smaller indigenous societies have long been marginalized, socially and/or physically, and struggle to maintain their independent and unique ways-of-life. LWF Nepal works with a number of indigenous nationalities and marginalized occupational groups in the central, eastern, mid-western and far-western regions of Nepal.

Kushbadiya

Twenty-one Kushbadiya members have access to safe drinking water and practice improved personal hygiene, thanks largely to four community hand pumps LWF Nepal

provided them with. A minority indigenous nationality, around 550 Kushbadiyas live in Banke and Bardiya districts. They carve stone-grinding slates and wheels, weave ropes and make brooms. They also hunt birds and animals.

Maganta and Sonaha

This small but poor community—Maganta—in Banke was organized in 2008 into groups that were then affiliated with the Jana Ekata Samaj, a CBO of the poor and oppressed. LWF Nepal installed an irrigation treadle pump in the fields of a Maganta farmer, which resulted in a much better vegetable harvest this year, improving nutrition and income. Another two members were provided with livestock (goat and pig) as a means of livelihood improvement.



Sonaha, a small fishing community, lives on the banks of the Karnali River in mid-west Nepal. To identify the challenges facing them and to work out ways to combat them, a Sonaha Group, working with LWF Nepal, devised a development action plan. This is to be implemented in 2009 by their community-based organizations (CBOs), which will tap resources from both government and non-government sources. Through this empowering process, the Sonahas will, also known as gold-sieving community, be able to direct their development along a path they have chosen, protecting their lifestyles.

In 2008, a baseline survey and group formation steps were undertaken in three Village Development Committees (VDCs), involving 150 households in nine groups that formed the grassroots organization, Nepal Sonaha Sanga.

Raji

Altogether 13 Raji households organized into the Harin Samuha Group that was affiliated to the Samaj Sewa Samittee Chaumala CBO. It set up a savings-and-credit scheme for everyone, with the group's leaders receiving book-keeping training. In addition, a goat was provided through an exchange program to improve livelihood prospects while four households were given



vegetable seeds and training. The installation of a hand pump provided safe drinking water to 13 households.

The Rajis are an endangered group enlisted as an indigenous nationality of inner Terai (plains). They eke out their living by fishing, foraging for forest products, ferrying people across rivers, and recently by farming.

Kisan, Meche and Santhal

In 2008, a Community Advocacy Center was established for each of these indigenous nationalities, who got access to resources from a variety of sources. In a breakthrough event, a member of the Meche community was elected to the Constituent Assembly.

Kisans (or, farmers) are found in a couple of VDCs in Jhapa district. Having a population of 2,876, they are categorized as an endangered group among 54 indigenous nationalities. Although farming is their main occupation, they make straw and bamboo mats.

Meches are another endangered indigenous nationality who live near the basins of the Mechi River and in some parts of Jhapa district. Farming, hunting and fishing are the occupations they are engaged in. Their population stands at 3,763.

Described as one of the highly marginalized indigenous nationalities of Nepal, Santhals (also known as Satars) are found in Jhapa and Morang districts. Hunting and fishing are their common occupations. These days, they are also involved in farming and labor work.

Tamang and Sunuwar

In collaboration with NGOs, LWF Nepal launched various livelihood programs that include 167 Tamang and 83 Sunuwar households in Ramechhap and Lalitpur districts. Development of cooperatives, establishment of child centers, school enrolment support, provision of drinking water and irrigation facility are some of the activities implemented to uplift the living standards of these marginalized indigenous nationalities.

Health and HIV & AIDS activities

A number of activities related to health and HIV & AIDS were conducted in February. Nepal Development Program East Office of LWF Nepal coordinated with various resource partners to implement these activities. Community-based organizations, rights networks and NGOs were mobilized for program implementation in Jhapa and Morang districts.

Women rights and human rights networks held a joint meeting with the government staff of health posts with the objective of knowing the existing physical and economic conditions of the health facility, and finding ways to improve the condition of such health posts, especially in view of services needed for pregnant women. Altogether 22 women and five men took part in the meeting. Through training sessions, 58 women and 37 men received basic knowledge about bird-flu (Avian Influenza) and how to sensitize communities on the issue. A women's rights network organized the orientation program with support of the District Public Health office and District Livestock office.

With the aim of generating awareness about HIV & AIDS issues, and encouraging them to treat people living with HIV & AIDS with respect and care, the Social Awareness Development Group

and Pathari Janta SoVAA Samuha organized an interaction program. Altogether 24 school teachers participated in the event. Two interaction events were organized for 44 people to explain the issues of HIV, & AIDS, sexually transmitted illness, concept of volunteerism concept, and to encourage them to spread the message they had received among the communities.

A SoVAA group in Morang organized a home visit program and visited 26 households. The main objective of the program was to make the community aware of the risks of being trafficked, and of safe migration.

Altogether 154 school students of grades eight and nine took part in three education programs in Morang district. The objective of the school education was to impart the basic knowledge about HIV & AIDS, STI and human trafficking to school students.



Partnership in western Nepal

LWF Nepal made agreements with six community-based organizations (CBOs) in Banke and Kailali districts for implementing Nepal Development Program (NDP) this year. A two-day orientation program was held from 12 to 13 January for program staff and executive members of CBOs. The participants said that the orientation was a valuable opportunity to get a clear understanding of the program objectives and implementation.

In view of strengthening the capacity of CBO Federation members and staff, NDP West Office allocated its resources, mainly for organizing and facilitating different types of activities in the first quarter of this year. The activities consisted of training of trainers in Farmers' Field School, organizational management, account keeping and finance management.

LWF Nepal started its NDP program in six Village Development Committees in Dailekh district, following consultations with district stakeholders and a baseline survey.

With the aim of strengthening democratic practices, 394 groups, 14 Main Committees at the grassroots and two CBO Federations completed their annual general assemblies. During the assemblies, the members represented their progress reports and financial overviews.



LWF DESK

Silver Jubilee Year

LWF Nepal marks its 25th anniversary this year. We have come a long way since we began our journey to contribute to poverty alleviation and to assist displaced people in Nepal. We have learned a great deal along the way.

Although still international, we are in many ways a Nepali organization in terms of knowledge and values. The progress made has been possible because of the concerted efforts of our staff working with grassroots communities, local partners supported by our resource partners. Thank you all for your dedicated support.

Because of armed conflicts on the plains in the southern region, frequent local strikes, nationwide shutdowns, fuel crisis, regular power cuts, and natural disaster in LWF Nepal's working areas, it was very challenging for our staff and partner organizations to implement planned activities. Despite hindrances posed by external factors, we were largely able to meet our targets last year and in this quarter as well.

Challenges of poverty, discrimination, exclusion and violence abound. As a development and humanitarian organization, it was not very easy for us to set priorities and reach out to the poorest of the poor in Nepal. Nevertheless we believe that inclusive and broad-based dialogue has guided us in making wise choices and taking informed decisions. The participatory learning approach has been a guiding principle and has helped in changing attitudes and effecting changes in our society.

Seeing community-based organizations (CBOs), which we have helped form, grow up and take up responsibility to implement their own programs is a dream-come-true for us. This inspires us more than ever to help organize and empower our focus communities so that they can assert their rights to development and to resource to improve their lives. At present, we are working with numerous groups, federated into 29 CBOs and their federations in 15 districts. We conducted the first baseline survey of our focus communities in 2008.

We have combined human rights and participatory development in our program. Our engagement with rights issues does not abandon the fulfillment of community needs. We seek to create suitable preconditions to sustainable livelihood. Therefore we also give our focus groups infrastructure and material support.

Finnish impressions

Nepal is in a strong transition period, in which a positive development is expected by most people contacted here. The fragility of the situation is also recognized by many.

The demands and needs of various marginalized and poor communities are being strongly raised with decision-makers. The expectations are very high and the possibilities to meet them in a short term seem limited.

The 6 September 2008 decision by the Government of Nepal to free the bonded laborers, particularly the Haliyas, is seen as a very positive indication that the government has taken the needs of the most marginalized groups at heart. The implementation of this decision is not going to be easy. The lessons learned from the decision to free Kamaiyas in 2000 and their rehabilitation process since should be taken carefully into account when working for Haliya rehabilitation.

Procedures in the allocation of cultivable land, according to set criteria of different Kamaiya right holders, were not coherent and transparent. The mistakes particularly identified at the local governance level should be avoided. Attention should be paid more to code of conduct and coordination of the implementation process at all levels of governance.

Improvement in the rehabilitation of the freed Kamaiyas are also urgent, because still thousands of households are waiting for their land and/or recognition of their settlement, based on the government decision taken eight years ago.

Issues of ownership of adequate land, granting legal status to originally illegal settlements of freed bonded labourers, provision of basic services and supporting livelihood development among the freed bonded labourers are to be settled.

The potential and existing local unrests due to poor implementation of the rehabilitation of the freed bonded labourers must be paid careful attention. Protests and violence due to, for example local land disputes, seem to take place regularly.

Human rights violations during and after bonded labour are serious and need to be properly dealt with.

The organizations of freed Kamaiyas and Haliyas, supported originally by LWF Nepal and Finn Church Aid, are well functioning and recognized groups. Support for national and local level advocacy is still needed to varying degrees, mostly for certain targeted activities, e.g. fundraising, dialogue with the government authorities (local or national level) or liaising with other actors with similar agendas.

Land issue is one that unites many of the demands

of many of the civil society movements. Land seems to be part of the Nepalese power structure and seen as an investment commodity and status symbol for some, but crucial for existence and survival for others. With the country's total population at 28 million, it seems that in addition to considering a land reform, there should be emphasis on livelihood development, based on non-land-related employment.

One of the challenges of the civil society movements is heterogeneity of the groups. The landless, the Dalit, the women, the indigenous peoples' and the bonded labourers' groups all have their own movements, demands and concerns, although many of the issues are shared by all the groups. It seems also, that the success of achieving recognition by some movements (such as the freed Kamaiyas) encourages others to voice their needs more strongly.

New rights issues, such as Badhi (sex workers) or Kamlari (household labour), are emerging. There is a clear need for coordination between the different social movements within the Nepalese civil society. Another challenge seems to be the disparity between the centralized political decision-making and the administration, with limited resources to implement new policies. The administration is also scattered, for example landless, Dalit, Kamaya issues etc. are all dealt with by different ministries. The central decision-making structure and non-existence of local-level democracy are also difficulties for local-level implementation.

Finn Church Aid (FCA) would like to raise awareness of Finnish and international actors of the close links among the fragility of the situation of peace in Nepal, human rights issues of the marginalized groups as well as poverty. FCA would also like to promote responsible response to the rehabilitation of freed bonded labourers and improvement of human rights of in Nepal. FCA continues to support the work of LWF Nepal who work together with communities and organizations of the Haliyas and Kamaiyas.

The FCA team thinks it is crucial that the Nepalese government and the Constituent Assembly, as well as the international community pay attention to the inclusion of the most marginalized groups and communities into the new Nepalese society (to rights, services, decision-making, judicial system) on the one hand, and to the specific actions needed for their speedy rehabilitation on the other, at this fragile situation of political transition.

(As reported by the visiting Finn Church Aid Invisibles Campaign Team to Nepal, from 23 November – 10 December 2008)



NEWS IN BRIEF

Policy revisions

The first Senior Staff Meeting of 2009 was held from February 17 to 18 at Godavari. Altogether 27 staff from Kathmandu, Jhapa, Nepalgunj and Dadeldhura offices attended the meeting. Policy revisions, audit issues, humanitarian accountability, climate change impact, budget and Silver Jubilee celebration, among others, were the main agenda of the meeting. The National Review Meeting, attended by the most senior staff members of LWF Nepal, was held in the same month. It took inputs from the Senior Staff Meeting to make decisions on program and staff welfare issues.

New office established

LWF Nepal opened a new office for the Freed Haliya and Kamaiya Empowerment Project in Dadeldhura, a district in far-west Nepal. Finn Church Aid has supported the project. The office is situated in Amaragadi Municipality -5, Tuphan Danda in the district. The office has overnight stay facilities for staff and visitors. The staff of this project can be contacted at 977-09-6420572.

Human rights

LWF Nepal played an active and prominent role in celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, mainly in Kathmandu, eastern and western regions. The organization field offices in the eastern and western regions organized mass rallies, media campaigns, exhibition, cultural shows as part of awareness-raising campaigns on 10 December 2008.



The activities were carried out both at the community and at district levels in cooperation with community-based organizations, local NGOs, INGOs and rights networks.



Art exhibition in mid-west Nepal

Annual picnic

LWF Nepal organizes picnic for all the staff and their family. On February 7, the Country Office staff, their spouse and children went on picnic to Dolalghat. The staff and their families eagerly await this type of outing as it gives them an opportunity to have merriment along with their friends and colleagues, at least once a year. Such picnics are organized in the field offices as well.


Condolence


We are deeply shocked and saddened by the untimely demise of the daughter of Ambika Prasad Timilsina, LWF Nepal's program officer, on 19 March 2009.

Our prayers are with you and your family in this difficult time. We pray for your daughter's soul.

LWF Nepal & Family

LWF Nepal Working Districts



- Working areas: 4 Development Regions; 15 districts
- Implementing Partners (federations of community-based organizations): 8
- LWF Nepal staff: 126
- Total budget: US\$ 5.1 million

COMMUNITY VOICE

Becoming self-employed

Pahalman Chaudhari, living in his father's house at Narayanpur, Kailali, used to be a carpenter, but he barely managed to feed himself on the money he earned from the few jobs he found in the area. The whole family often went hungry, despite all the adults working, and the children could not go to school. It seemed

to Pahalman that he had a bleak future and doubted he could ever afford to marry and set up his own household.

But today Pahalman thinks himself fortunate, because, when he got the chance, he agreed to join a new CBO, the Pragatisil Samaj which showed him other options for someone who was prepared to study and work hard. In

recent years, new types of employment have emerged as village society has become used to more modern lifestyles based on electrical equipment—televisions, radios, fridges, cookers and the like. The Samaj, seeing his potential, sent him on a three-month house-wiring course in Sakti Bazaar in June 2008, under LWF Nepal's livelihood program.

It was a wise choice, as he sailed through the training and was quickly back in his village to set up a stall in the market place of Beluwa Chowk. His was only a Ghumti (portable) electronics shop, but it fulfilled all of Pahalman's dreams of changing his life around. Soon he was earning over NRs 2,200 a month, which he handed over to his father. Not only was the family now eating better, able to afford new clothes, his younger sister was also delighted to find that she could again attend school. Everyone in the family was very pleased. Pahalman went off to become an electrician.



A target group farmer of LWF Nepal in the central region

From father to son



A Haliya at work in far-west Nepal

Hajari Ram Mahar, 75, lives in Nagarjun, Baitadi, a district in far-west Nepal, with his wife and their family. Sixty years old, he is a Haliya, a bonded farm laborer, tied to the land of his "masters". His first owner was Raghu Singh Pant, from whom he borrowed NRs 7,000. But as this debt was sold on to others, and as he has borrowed more over the years, he still owes money to his present master.

Too old to work, the debt fell a few years ago onto his eldest son, Raghu Ram Mahar, who automatically became a Haliya because his father was, and who became a slave to Hajari's last owner. But quarrels between different owners caused even more problems for both Raghu and his father and they were very badly treated.

Although he inherited his father's debt, Raghu had not inherited his submissive nature and decided to fight against the situation of slavery in which he found himself. Becoming an active member of the district's Haliya Mukti Samaj, which fights for the rights of the Haliya, he discovered that it was not just his own freedom that was at stake and so he became involved in local and national campaigns to change things. Eventually, Raghu saw the government free his community, ensuring no one would ever again be tied into the service of others.

Today, with his father's support and with hopes of a better future for his son, Raghu still fights for his community. He was one of those in his community, no longer willing to remain poor, oppressed and marginalized from society, who joined a Legal Education course put on by LWF Nepal and he now teaches others about their rights to freedom.