

Goldhap refugee camp in flames

Hope amid charred remnants



Homeless again: Bhutanese refugees in temporary shelter

By Beena Kharel

Jhapa, 13 March 2008: Jhuma Dhakal, a 52-year-old Bhutanese refugee woman, is visibly distraught. She was squatting on the floor to eat her evening meal along with the family on that ill-fated first day of March.

All she can remember is her neighbours shouting "Fire! Fire" on her doorstep.

"I was shocked. I tried to pull myself up and get out of the hut. I fell down. I was numb for sometime. I didn't even see fire, though it started from my house," she says. When she regained her consciousness, she was away from her hut. A block of huts in Goldhap refugee camp was roaring with flames. She saw people rushing about to extinguish the fire.

Her humble belongings and little savings were charred. "More painful is the accusation from the refugee community. They call us criminals for setting fire to the camp on purpose. Yes, it broke out at our house. But I do not know how it happened," she says crying.

Across from the shed in which 17 members of the Jhuma family is taking refuge, another group of refugees has gathered around to discuss the fire. Most have been victims. Some point accusing fingers to other refugees. Others recall

how everyone helped douse the flames, and the material loss they incurred two weeks ago.

A devastating fire that swept through Goldhap Refugee Camp in Jhapa, a district in far-east Nepal, left thousands of refugees homeless. Out of 1,512 huts, 1,284 were burnt down completely so the refugees again found themselves homeless, and now live on the edge of the burnt-out camp in temporary shelters, consisting of tarpaulin sheets.

Amazingly, no-one died in the blaze, and even the reported injuries to seven refugees, were remarkably light.

Lives saved!

"Luckily, all lives were saved. I am happy. Life comes first. We can acquire property only if we are alive," observes Khadananda Dhakal, Jhuma's next-door neighbour. His hut was reduced to ashes and his hand broken in a rescue operation.

The fire incident occurred at around 6:00 pm on 1st March 2008. "If it had taken place later into the evening or at night, there would have been loss of lives, too," says Bhabnath Poudel, who had previously received fire fighting training in the camp.

"Greed takes lives!" The majority of refugees responded sensibly to the fire. Most did not further endanger their lives by attempting to retrieve their possessions from their burning huts. This is one reason why nobody was killed

and very few people were injured, according to Tularam Lamichhane, sector representative of Goldhap Refugee Camp.

Sabitra Subedi, the gender focal person of the camp, tells LWF Nepal staff how young refugees and police fought the fire bravely and readily came to rescue the fire victims. "Seeing their working style and co-ordination ability, one can say that the youth are aware of fire fighting techniques to some extent. The disaster was large-scale. But they demonstrated their strength and ability," she says.

Fire survivors say they are lucky to have water reservoirs nearby. The trained ones rushed to fetch water; others used banana leaves to put out the fire. Those with no training tried to dismantle the blazing huts. Women and girls were seen scurrying with jerry cans of water. This is how the refugees recall the people's efforts to tackle their own humanitarian crisis.

Pointing to the charred remnants of his hut, Yadav Dhakal, 27, son of Jhuma, says: "More fire fighting training and awareness programmes should be organised in the camps."

Assistance

As soon as the news of the fire reached LWF Nepal's camp management, they dashed to the site and helped co-ordinate rescue operations. They were impressed by the support the refugees received from host communities while police support was remarkable and unprecedented.

"Earlier, the police offered little co-operation but they were very supportive this time around. Maybe because the election is approaching! Coincidentally, the home minister was also visiting the district," says a local resident on condition of anonymity.

Whatever the reason, the refugees appreciated all the external assistance they received quickly.

In the initial phase, LWF Nepal was mainly responsible for establishing temporary water and sanitation facilities in the camp. As usual, it is fully managing all food and non-food commodities, and maintaining coordination with other donors for distribution of relief materials.



With support from LWF Nepal, a fire committee of the refugees is in place in each of the seven refugee camps. The committees give orientation on fire-fighting techniques in the camps.

The refugee children forums also organised a drama entitled "Kharani" (Ashes) in 2007. A public service announcement regarding fire hazards is aired regularly from local Pathibhara and Kanchanjunga FM radio stations.

Indra Timilsina, a Bhutanese refugee who is involved in media mobilisation, thanks LWF Nepal for providing "timely assistance".

Lessons learnt

Although all the lives were saved, some practical difficulties surfaced in the aftermath. An hour after placing a call, at least four fire brigades arrived on the site. But it took almost five hours to extinguish the fire which was leaping from the rooftops.

The fire brigades could not enter the settlement, says Lamichhane, sector representative of the camp.

It's a small but a densely populated camp. The internal roads to the refugee huts have become narrower because the inhabitants have planted trees and shrubs on them. Some have built

even platforms for washing dishes. Others have constructed small religious shrines.

Belatedly though, the refugees have realised that keeping the roads wide and open is crucial to rescue operations.

March is the beginning of the windy season that sparks off fire incidents. Fire is not a new hazard to Goldhap camp, which it had experienced many times. But the latest one was on a major scale not encountered before.

The refugees have requested donor and humanitarian agencies to seek to restore normality to their lives as soon as possible.

"I see hope. Huts can be rebuilt. I would like nothing better now than to leave the tarpaulin shelter and return to my own rebuilt hut soon," says Durga Devi Khatiwada, 68. Her hand was wounded while carrying her physically-challenged daughter out of her burning hut.

She expresses the view common among many that the solar cookers and solar street lamps installed outside the huts had helped spread the fire. "I am not educated enough to comment on this. But I ask experts to review the effects that this equipment can trigger during such disasters. And then proper actions need to be taken," Durga Devi adds.

Radio programmes jointly produced by LWF Nepal and Hatemalo Sanchar Samuha in mid-west and far-west Nepal

RADIO STATION	PLACE	PROGRAMME	DAY	TIME
Radio Bageshwori FM	Nepalgunj	Kiran: HIV& AIDS	Thursday	7:30 pm
Fulbari FM	Tikapur	Kiran: HIV& AIDS	Thursday	7:30 pm
Bulbule FM	Surkhet	Kiran: HIV& AIDS	Thursday	7:30 pm
Radio Bageshwori FM	Nepalgunj	Nagarik Manch (civil forum)	Saturday	7:30 pm
Fulbari FM	Tikapur	Nagarik Manch (civil forum)	Saturday	7:30 pm
Bulbule FM	Surkhet	Nagarik Manch (civil forum)	Saturday	7:30 pm
Suklaphanta FM	Mahendranagar	Nagarik Manch (civil forum)	Saturday	7:30 pm

Refugee advocacy radio programme in east Nepal

With support from LWF Nepal

RADIO STATION	PLACE	PROGRAMME	DAY	TIME
Pathibhara FM	Jhapa	Saranathi Sarokar (refugee issues)	Wednesday-Saturday	7:30-8:30 pm

Rights docudrama

A premier screening of a docudrama on Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was held amid a gathering of around 250 human rights activists and dignitaries on 19 Feb 2008. The day coincided with the anniversary of the advent of democracy in Nepal.

The 35-minute docudrama entitled "Rise of Rights" is the first of its kind in the Nepalese landscape. "Even at the international level, there are animated versions of UDHR, but to the best of my knowledge there is no such docudrama," says Yadu Lal Shrestha, LWF Nepal's human rights and advocacy coordinator.



Produced by LWF Nepal in collaboration with INHURED International and Population Watch, the Nepali-language docudrama contains English sub-titles. The docudrama was released to mark the 60th anniversary of UDHR.

OHCHR-Nepal Representative Richard Bennett congratulated the producers for bringing out a docudrama on UDHR and hoped that it would be a valuable material to generate awareness about human rights.

LWF Nepal Country Representative Marceline P. Rozario asked the viewers to send in suggestions and comments to improve the product. "We consider it an important information and educational material and plan to show to a wider group of rights holders and duty bearers—from the grassroots to the national level," he said.

Advocacy materials

LWF Nepal has come up with two publications that are expected to amplify the voices of rights holders and rights defenders. One publication compiles translation of "big six treaties" (CAT, CEDAW, ICCPR etc.), which can be used as an IEC material by human rights defenders. The other publication entitled "Saranathi Sarokar" [refugee issues] contains court verdicts, refugee convention and evolution of refugees, among others. The inclusion of court verdicts makes the publication stand out among a list of publications on refugees. The two publications will be handed over to Nepal Bar Association, Law Campus, Kathmandu School of Law, human rights activists and implementing partners.





LWF DESK

Financial Resources

The organisation's annual income reached US \$5.7 million in 2007, up from \$4.5 million in 2006. The increment is attributed to ACT Emergency Fund, which stood at around US\$0.5 million, allocated for assistance to flood-affected people in southern Nepal. An additional fund of US\$0.5 million for the Bhutanese Refugee Project, a huge humanitarian operation in Jhapa and Morang districts, pushed up the income last year.

The total expenditure of the fund received for Nepal Development programme—a core programme that consists of several donors—was recorded at one million US dollars.

The Australian Lutheran World Service, DanChurchAid (DCA), Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), FinnChurchAid (FCA), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and The Interchurch Organisation for Development (ICCO) were the core resource partners in 2007. The present framework agreement with ICCO ends in 2008 and support beyond that period is yet to be discussed.

As usual, NCA provided additional activity-specific funds, including anti-trafficking programme. FCA contributed to staff capacity building—a new activity from the donor standpoint.

UNHCR and WFP provided financial resources for refugee projects. The biggest donor, UNHCR, provided LWF Nepal with US\$2.3 million for the refugee and Tibetan New Arrivals projects. The total fund received by the Tibetan New Arrivals in Nepal project from UNHCR and other sources came to around US\$237,000.

Two projects funded by DipECHO and EU completed in 2007. Another EU- and DCA-funded Dalit Empowerment Programme in Western and Central Nepal is going on. PhotoVoice gave financial and technical assistance for a refugee youth programme and photography training in Bhutanese refugee camps. It also set up a photography laboratory in a refugee camp. Likewise, J.S. Foundation (Japan) provided assistance for installing solar street lamps in the camps.

The existing resource partners have given a preliminary indication to support the projects on the basis of the Country Operation Project Plan.

Other potential financial sources were explored in 2007. A Resource Mobilisation Committee, comprising senior staff and country representative, was set up within the organisation to galvanise fund-raising. Issues of resource tapping were brought to the fore and an action plan was prepared by the committee members. Interaction among the members is regular.

Dalit Empowerment Programme

The Dalit Empowerment Programme (DEP) addresses the root cause of poverty and exclusion of Dalits, which is reflected in their degree of access to and control over resources, information and participation in the socio-economic and political process.

Since Jan 2006, DEP is being implemented in five districts (Achham, Doti, Kailali, Banke and Lalitpur) in partnership with three established Dalit national NGOs: Dalit Welfare Organisation, Nepal National Dalit Society Welfare Organisation and Feminist Dalit Organisation.

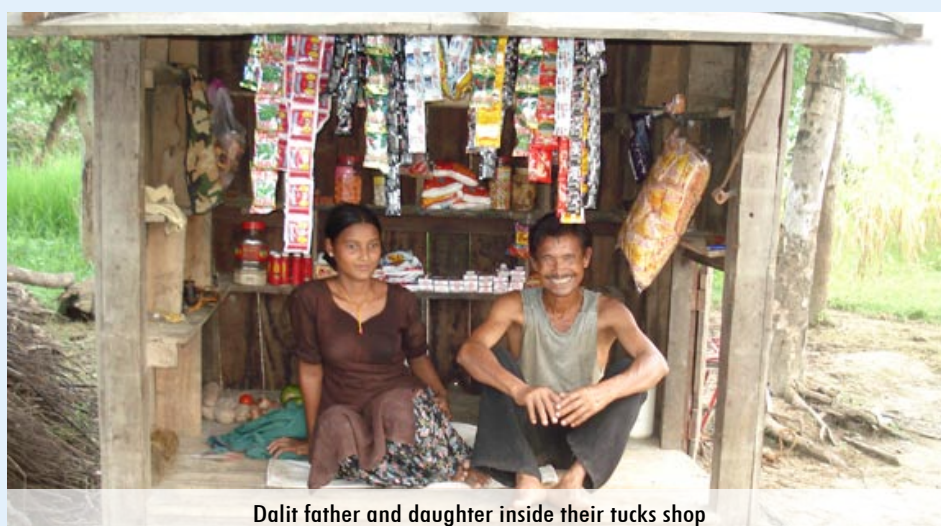
The project aims to enable around 53,000 Dalit participants (60% women) to improve their living standards and social status by:

- Engaging them in appropriate economic activities at the household and group levels
- Enabling Dalit NGOs and Dalit grassroots groups to manage their organisations and development programmes
- Enhancing awareness and self-esteem of Dalits through meaningful social action-literacy education and improved attitudes towards Dalits in the wider community
- Resorting to effective mass awareness among Dalits and non-Dalits, and exercise of influence by Dalit institutions in the governance process

The more people are aware of their rights, the more access to and control over resources they have. This year there was a significant increase in their access to resources of the Village Development Committees (VDCs). Internalization of rights-based approach to development among staff, board members, facilitators and community offers a springboard for claiming of rights. Presence of pressure groups at the VDC level formed at their own initiative can be a strong watchdog for incidents of violence and discrimination. These are the important lessons the project had learnt in 2007.

Major outputs in 2007

- 502 groups, including 9,403 members (7,701 Dalits, 7,992 females), are engaged in regular savings and credit schemes
- 110 social literacy classes conducted
- 74 course of business enterprise literacy classes ran at the community level
- 6,457 people benefited from 96 small-scale irrigation and water supply schemes
- 121 training events organised for partner staff, local facilitators and group members in various issues such as constituent assembly, gender and empowerment and advocacy lobbying skills, group capacity building and social audit
- 484 households were provided with different agricultural inputs such as goats and seeds
- 69 training programmes in livelihood-related skill development such as carpentry, tailoring, vegetable farming and goat rearing organised
- 87 events of awareness campaigns (street drama, cultural show, folk song competition etc.) against discrimination and gender violence waged
- 52 episodes of weekly national radio (Dalit Jana Jagaran Radio Programme) programme on Dalit issue aired



Dalit father and daughter inside their tucks shop



NEWS IN BRIEF

For modified monitoring system

A two-day workshop on monitoring system of LWF Nepal was organised for senior staff on 19 March in Kathmandu. Altogether 16 staff members participated in the workshop. Dr Aldo Benini, a consultant based in Switzerland, facilitated the workshop.

The objective of the workshop was to produce a diagnosis of the current monitoring system vis-à-vis expectations raised by implementing partners and by a new country strategy. The workshop identified relevant elements and relationships of the future system in conformity with LWF requirements, partner ambition and internal capacity.



The first day was devoted to diagnostic aspects, plus creating a clearer vision and missing of the future system. The second day revisited some of the current problems, discussed how they could be reduced and identified major elements for a revised system to gradually come into place in 2008.

A separate training event on data management, an integral part of the monitoring system, was organised for 19 staff members, including programme and IT officers, beginning 23 March. The training programme that ran for three days and half imparted the techniques of using data management and analysis tools to the participants. Visiting consultant Dr Benini was the trainer.

General agreement signed

The General Agreement between LWF Nepal and Social Welfare Council (SWC) was signed by the representatives of the two agencies for five years, effective from 01 Jan 2008. Three project agreements are expected to be signed by April this year.

Affiliated to SWC—an agency of the Government of Nepal—LWF Nepal implements programmes and projects that are approved by LWF/DWS in Geneva, and SWC in Nepal.

LWF Nepal entered into formal partnership with various organisations, the overwhelming majority being community-based NGOs that it helped nurture over the years.



Family picnic



GIVE ME A BREAK: Children of our colleagues enjoying themselves while their parents look on. Our staff and their family members joined an LWF Nepal picnic in Thankot Park on 2 Feb 2008.

Staff restructuring

With the new Country Strategy (2008-2013) in place, LWF Nepal has restructured its staff. The organisational staff chart sees the entry of district advisors, thematic officers, MIS officer and internal audit manager.

Beginning this year, the organisation has opted for a new mode of operation that reduces partnership with intermediary NGOs and increases it with community-based organisations (CBOs) and their federations. As some mature CBOs take the lead in implementing various programmes, LWF Nepal assumes the role of facilitator. Accordingly it has recruited a number of new staff to facilitate programme implementation.

Anti-trafficking

Addressing the evil of human trafficking has also become a primary concern of LWF Nepal. It has been selected as a focal country for anti-trafficking programmes by AZEECON, a regional network of four sister organisations of LWF/DWS.

The organisation launched an anti-human-trafficking project on a very modest scale in central Nepal. And a plan is in place to expand it in 2008.

In 2007, with the help of a partner organisation, an information desk for safe migration was established in Ramechhap, a district in central Nepal. This programme covers four Village Development Committees (VDCs). One VDC will be added, thanks to the financial assistance of US\$33,000 from Norwegian Church Aid. Awareness is being generated among target groups through peer education.



CBO: Community-based organisation

CBNGO: Community-based NGO

CBNGOF: Federation of CBNGO

MC: Main Committee

Working areas, partners and coverage

S.N.	District	NGO/CBNGO/CBNGOF	Group Members/CBO/MC
1	Doti	Upekchhit Samudaya Sashaktikaran Tatha Bikash Manch	Group Members: 4,793 Naya Samaj Nirman Sanstha ; Samaj Sewa Kendra ; Jagriti Samaj Sanstha ; Basudhara Gaun Bikas Samiti ; Khaptad Upekchhit Janasewa Sangh ; Sagarmatha Bikas Kendra ; Jana Utthan Sewa Sangh ; Pragatishil Samaj ; Samudayik Jana Utthan Samiti ; Gramin Jana Sarokar Sanstha
2	Dadeldhura, Doti, Kanchanpur, Darchula, Baitadi, Bajhang, Bajura	Rastriya Haliya Mukti Samaj	Group Members: 1,107 Jilla Haliya Mukti Samaj, Dadeldhura Jilla Haliya Mukti Samaj, Doti Jilla Haliya Mukti Samaj, Kanchanpur Jilla Haliya Mukti Samaj, Darchula Jilla Haliya Mukti Samaj, Baitadi Jilla Haliya Mukti Samaj, Bajhang Jilla Haliya Mukti Samaj, Bajura
3	Kailali	CBO Development Centre Kamaiya Pratha Unmulan Samaj Digo Bikash Samaj	Group Members: 3,178 Sashaktikaran Mul Samiti ; Swayam Jagriti Samaj ; Pidit Mukti Samaj ; Samaj Sewa Samiti ; Ekata Samaj Group Members: 2,508 Mukta Kamaiya MC (10); Joyti MC ; Krishna MC Group Members: 2,752 Chetansil Samaj ; Janauthan Samaj ; Gaributhan Samaj ; Pragatishil Samaj ; Dhansinghpur Ekata Samaj
4	Banke	Triveni Bikash Samaj Jana Ekta Samaj Jana Jagaran Samaj	Group Members: 1,692 Namuna Samudayik Mul Samiti ; Sangam Bikas Mul Samiti ; Annapurna Samuhik Mul Samiti Group Members: 1,105 Kanchanjangha Mul Samiti ; Samaj Sudhar Mul Samiti ; Jana Kalyan Mul Samiti Group Members: 2,430 Samaj Bikas Mul Samiti ; Shristi Mul Samiti ; Jana Shakti Mul Samiti ; Jana Bikas Mul Samiti ; Srijana Mul Samiti ; Janahit Mul Samiti
5	Lalitpur	STEP Nepal Center for Environmental and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED)	Group Members: 750 SAATHI Information Centre (2) ; Kishori Information and Counseling Centre (1) ; Lubu Youth (SAATHI) Information Centre (1) Group Members: 507
6	Ramechhap	Development Project Service Centre (DEPROSC-Nepal)	Group Members: 1,730
7	Morang	Janabikash Ka Lagi Chhahari Milan Kendra Grameen Samudayik Bikash Sanstha Social Awareness Development Group (SADG)	Group Members: 1,290 Group Members: 935 Peer Educators: 1,027
8	Jhapa	Samajik Nyaa Ka Lagi Yekikrit Samuha Samajik Bikash Parichalan Kendra Samajik Bikash Ka Lagi Yekikrit Samuha SAHARA Nepal SADG	Group Members: 603 Group Members: 1,141 Group Members: 647 Group Members: 1,122 Peer Educators: 2,070



Community Voice

A Santhal woman shows the way

By Basanta Karki

She was just 15 when she married for love and against the wish of her parents. Although born into a marginalized indigenous Santhal community in east Nepal, she was bold from early childhood.

She is 34-year-old Sona Murmu, also a mother of two children.

When she got married, life was not easy as she became a member of a large 10-member family that did not have any means of sustainable livelihood. She had to work hard as a daily wage labourer.



Sona (right) with her daughter

Despite difficulties, she never lost her spirit. Upon her prodding, the husband cultivated a habit of saving, though his income was meagre. Later on, she joined a local small savings group.

She is a leading vegetable producer in a 20-member group and earns around NRs 60,000 (around US\$ 938) every year by selling the produce. She is now a proud bread-winner of her family.

Her husband quit driving to work with her. Vegetable farming is now the only source of livelihood for the family of four. Both of their children go to school.

Recently, she bought a cow and roofed her hut with corrugated sheets. Now she has acquired membership of six different groups and saves around NRs 400 per month through the groups.

This metamorphosis did not happen overnight. It became possible because of her hard work, commitment and strong desire to do something on her own and the land provided

to her by LWF Nepal under an Indigenous Community Empowerment Project in Jhapa, an eastern district.

She had joined a group formed under the project about two years ago and started saving some money. She entered another agriculture group under the project and received various kinds of training. But she did not own any land for growing vegetables. The group received support from the project to take a small patch of land on lease for vegetable farming.

"But it was difficult. It took us two months to make the land cultivable. And I was not much hopeful that vegetable farming could uplift my economic status," Sona recalls. She received around 630 sq.m. of land for the purpose. From the second cultivation, she started selling her produce and making good return.

"Prior to joining the group I was like a frog inside a well that knows nothing about the outside world. I am no longer depended on my husband to fend for the family," she says.

Success has not tied her hands. She plans to broaden her livelihood options. She wants to buy a pair of oxen for easier cultivation and to start paddy cultivation by sharecropping. She also wants to take some land on Byaaj Marauni to expand her vegetable farming.

Byaaj Marauni is a local system in which certain amount will be given to land-owner for certain years; in return the latter gives the borrower the right to use land. The production from the land will be treated as interest against the loan.

Notwithstanding her busy life, she manages to find some time for social work. She makes her community members aware of various issues such as evil traditional customs, health and sanitation issues, HIV and AIDS, and reproductive health. Perhaps she is the first Santhal woman to be a member of a local School Management Committee.

"We have to work for social transformation," she says, "Nobody comes and offers us rights. We must step forward to claim our rights."

(The writer is manager of the Eastern Region Centre, LWF Nepal)

“Nobody comes and offers us rights. We must step forward to claim our rights.”

Indigenous minority



A Chidimar woman in Haldalpur of Banke district dabs her son's wound with a glob of herbal paste. The Chidimars, found in mid-west Nepal, are basically bird-hunters. LWF Nepal has launched an empowerment programme for such communities.



Engrossed in stone sculpting: A group of Kushbandhiyas, an indigenous community, of Indrapur village, Banke district.