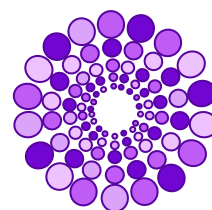




The Social and Health
Education Project



**Report from the evaluation of the
Community Governance for Empowerment and Social Transformation programme
of Sahakarmi Samaj (SS) and The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP)**



**Conducted by Mal Simmons and a team of SS staff,
on behalf of Irish Aid.
May 2010**

Executive Summary

A decade or more of political turmoil in Nepal has left a legacy of division and bitterness and exacerbated pre-existing deficiencies in personal and institutional capacities in dealing with the obstacles to people's attainment of human rights, sustainable livelihoods and a sense of wellbeing. The Community Governance for Empowerment and Social Transformation (CGEST) programme was undertaken primarily in Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts specifically to address this situation. It is an extension of the pioneering work undertaken in Surkhet District in the early 1990s and draws heavily on the early work of the educationalist Paulo Freire and the humanistic, person-centred approach of Karl Rogers.

The project aims to help very poor and marginalised people combat fatalism and effect meaningful developmental change through mutual support and considered collective action through the use of five clear strategies, namely i) group formation and critical problem analysis, ii) process facilitation for rights-based development, iii) organisational development and network formation, iv) training and consultation for concerned agencies, and v) production and dissemination of training resource materials. This evaluation was commissioned by The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP) and Sahakarmi Samaj (SS), on behalf of Irish Aid, to assess the achievements and impact of the project after the first three years.

The fieldwork was undertaken over a three week period in May 2010 by a team comprised of an independent consultant and 13 staff of Sahakarmi Samaj. Evaluation questions were based on the project's seven strategic objectives and five areas of possible impact, and the findings drawn from 59 semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and workshops with a total of 722 people from 31 community groups and network organisations, the board and staff of SS, government and non-government agencies, local political leaders and respected people.

The project has met or significantly exceeded almost all of its stated objectives. In so doing it has encouraged the formation of 146 community groups, with 4,328 members comprised overwhelmingly but not exclusively of women from lower castes and minority groups. Collectively these groups have utilised local and external resources in undertaking almost 1900 separate actions and activities of varying size and complexity and established ten higher-order Main Committees (MCs) and three Community Based Network Organisations (CBNOs). The project has also provided training and orientation to over three hundred government and non-government staff, instigated a national learning network and produced a number of Nepali-medium resource materials. CGEST was also found to have incorporated a significant number of changes stemming from an evaluation of an earlier project, periodic project reviews and from ongoing reflections on practice.

By these actions poor and marginalised groups have "come out from the well", empowered by and confident in their collective capabilities. They have successfully claimed a range of entitlements, accessed local development funds from government and exacted improvements in corrupt and

substandard services. Entrenched attitudes on discrimination, women in leadership positions and the value of local resources for example, have all changed as a result of interactions within their groups. Members have learnt greater tolerance, better communication skills and respect for other opinions that have also led to improved relationships within and outside the family.

In relation to six evaluation criteria stipulated by Irish Aid, the project is considered to have been highly *relevant* to national priorities and individual community needs. It has also been very *effective* in reaching its stated target group and bringing about significant changes in their sense of empowerment and collective agency. The project is deemed *efficient* partly because of the social infrastructure it has fostered in a relatively short space of time and partly because of the number of community activities that it has spawned, often solely through the use of local resources. *Impact*, in terms of changed attitudes and community infrastructure, has been significant but the benefits have not spread far beyond the groups and their immediate communities. The *sustainability* of the project is assured by the fact that so much of the social infrastructure has remained well after the end of similar projects and the nature of the transformation that has occurred in individuals. The approach has also proven its suitability for *replication*, having already been successfully implemented in two districts prior to the commencement of this project and two since.

These findings and conclusions point very clearly to the fact that the approach being used by Sahakarmi Samaj is both needed and very effective. Lives are being changed in a fundamental way and people are taking a measure of control over their own development. Local government and other resource / service providers are being challenged to operate in a more just and transparent manner and communities are coming together, questioning traditional forms of discrimination and patronage, and experiencing small but significant changes in their sense of wellbeing.

This is followed by a series of thoughts and comments intended for future consideration by Sahakarmi Samaj, grouped under the sub-headings of i) ways of working, ii) developing theory from practice, iii) spreading impact and iv) enhancing sustainability. These are points for discussion and are presented in the form of comments and questions intended to stimulate discussion within the framework of a very sound and effective programme.

The report concludes with a list of recommendations that follow and largely encapsulate to the preceding discussion points. The recommendations include i) deepening the analytical skills of communities, ii) maintaining a focus on Community Groups, iii) developing robust analytical tools for measuring change, iv) increasing coverage within VDCs, and exploring work with non-conventional communities, v) enhancing staff capacity and vi) diversifying funding sources from both within and outside the country.

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List of acronyms

CBNO	Community Based Network Organisation
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CG	Community Group
CGEST	Community Governance for Empowerment and Social Transformation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDC	District Development Committee
INF	International Nepal Fellowship
MC	Main Committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
RRN	Rural Reconstruction Nepal
SS	Sahakarmi Samaj
SAKTEE	Strengthening Awareness & Knowledge Through Education & Empowerment
SHEP	Social and Health Education Project
UMN	United Mission to Nepal
VDC	Village Development Committee



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1.0 Introduction

Purpose

This evaluation was commissioned by The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP) and Sahakarmi Samaj (SS) on behalf of Irish Aid, to independently assess the achievements and impact of the Community Governance for Empowerment and Social Transformation programme in Nepal, which was majority-funded through Irish Aid's Civil Society Fund and co-funded by ICCO - Kerk in Actie. Through both the process and resulting documentation this evaluation is also intended to contribute to the enhancement of the Sahakarmi Samaj programme in the future.

The self-defined objectives of the evaluation were:

- i) to determine the extent to which the project's strategic objectives have been achieved,
- ii) to identify the impact of the project's interventions on the lives of poor and marginalised people in the host communities, and
- iii) to identify the strengths of the project's approach and recommend ways to modify this approach to deliver improved outcomes for communities.

The programme was also evaluated against six criteria specified by Irish Aid.

Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken over a three week period in May 2010 by a team comprised of Mal Simmons, an independent consultant, and 13 staff of Sahakarmi Samaj. The team was joined by Khum Chapayain, an interpreter / translator and during the planning stage by Henk-Peter Dijkema, an experienced community worker in Nepal who provided translation and mentoring support. Movement of evaluation team members was initially hampered by a nation-wide general strike but this did not compromise the findings. The team collectively developed a series of 12 'key questions' that would directly address the first two evaluation objectives. Each of these questions was broken down into a number of guiding or operational questions that formed the basis of the evaluation interviews. A stakeholder analysis was then used to determine who should be interviewed and what questions should be addressed to whom. A review of project documents not only informed the evaluation findings but also provided leads to questions and useful respondents.

Due to the travel limitations imposed by the strike, communities and respondents were initially selected on the basis of accessibility but known weaker groups were purposefully added when this became possible. The evaluation process was highly participatory and involved staff, community members, local government officials and other stakeholders in facilitated discussions, occasionally stimulated through the use of a variety of PRA techniques. A total of 22 case studies and/or vignettes were also recorded during the course of the field work and were used to inform the findings. In total the team undertook 20 semi-structured individual interviews, six semi-structured group interviews and 30 focus group discussions in 27 communities in Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts, two stakeholder workshops in Nepalganj town and one interview in Kathmandu.

In doing so the evaluation team met with 722 people, comprised of 180 men and 542 women, from 20 Community Groups (CGs), six Main Committees (MCs), five Community-based Networking Organisations (CBNOs), three Nepali NGOs and the board, executive team and staff of Sahakarmi Samaj. In addition, interviews were held with six CG Facilitators, three VDC Secretaries, three local political leaders and five respected community informants. A rudimentary 'control group' was also constructed from interviews with three people who had chosen not to join local groups and with people from four communities neighbouring programme sites.

Report structure

A brief overview of the program is presented below, followed by the key findings of the evaluation, listed against the programme's seven strategic objectives and five additional outcome areas that together made up the 12 key questions of the evaluation. The next section contains the conclusions of the evaluation, measured against the Irish Aid-specified criteria of i) relevance, ii) effectiveness, iii) efficiency, iv) impact, v) sustainability and vi) replicability. The final section addresses the evaluation's third objective and presents suggestions and issues for further discussion on possibilities for programme improvements.



2.0 Project background

History

The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP) is an Irish charity that delivers a range of facilitation, training, therapy and advocacy services to promote human wellbeing and social justice. In 2006 it provided planning support for Sahakarmi Samaj and the two organisations subsequently entered into a 'learning partnership'. In 2007, the partners were successful in securing funding from the Irish Aid Civil Society Fund and from ICCO-Kerk in Actie to deliver the CGEST programme.

This project is being implemented primarily in Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts of SW Nepal, with some ongoing strengthening of civil society organisations that were established in Banke District under a preceding project. The fundamental concept of the current project originated from a pioneering community empowerment initiative successfully trialled in Surkhet District in the early 1990s. Sahakarmi Samaj commenced work through its SAKTEE programme in Banke District in which a number of the Sahakarmi Samaj staff were involved. The philosophy drew heavily on the early work of Paulo Freire, and his theory of 'false consciousness', and the humanistic, person-centred approach of Karl Rogers that emphasises the importance of people identifying and overcoming obstacles to growth for themselves. The approach is aimed at helping very poor and marginalised people to combat fatalism and effect meaningful developmental change through mutual support and considered collective action. An ex-post evaluation conducted in 2000 found that many of the institutions and institutional relationships established earlier had been sustained and were continuing to support inclusive, justice-oriented development five years after the project had stopped.

Sahakarmi Samaj commenced work in Banke district in 1998, adopting this same approach while incorporating minor functional changes suggested by ongoing action learning and the specific conditions of the new working area. An external evaluation of the SAKTEE programme in 2008 commended its unique and highly successful approach to empowerment. As well as promoting the effective and sustainable use of local resources, the programme enhanced the capacity of disenfranchised communities to claim their rights to external resources. Like the current CGEST programme, the SAKTEE programme took a very difficult but principled stance of not providing any material or financial resources to communities in order to avoid the creation of dependence and to promote longer-term relationships with (primarily government) institutions tasked with providing these resources and services. The current CGEST programme has lent greater emphasis to strengthening these institutions in order to meet community claims.

Problem and target group

There exists in Nepal stark deficiencies in the personal and institutional capacities of local communities and local government/non-governmental agencies to effectively address the growing range of obstacles to people's achievement of human rights, sustainable livelihoods and psycho-social wellbeing, particularly among the very poor and marginalised. In recent times, traditional community institutions in Nepal have been largely superseded by structures of community governance, involving Village Development Committees (VDCs) and District Development Committees (DDCs) through

which government resources for development are channelled. Whilst some of these committees were effective in promoting and supporting local development many fell victim to partisan politics. The ensuing ineffectiveness of local government fuelled discontent and encouraged many people in rural areas to support the Maoist insurgency that, in many places, saw the VDCs replaced by Maoist forms of administration.

At the same time, many of the NGO-instigated community institutions collapsed following the forced withdrawal of the concerned agencies from many conflict areas. Despite the ceasefire and incorporation of the insurgents into mainstream politics, the mandate of the elected members of the VDCs expired some five years ago and the committees are effectively run by VDC Secretaries under advice of groups of unelected, and often ill-equipped, representatives of the main political parties. These events have left Nepal with a greatly impoverished institutional infrastructure, both in local communities and in local government. They have also left the country with a legacy of division and bitterness which serves as an obstacle to the emergence of collaborative deliberation, planning and action.

This project focused on the Terai districts of Bardiya and Kanchanpur (and to a much lesser extent, Banke) that had been severely affected by the civil conflict and pose particular challenges for community building and institutional development. Many of the people now living on the Terai have been forced to migrate there from the hills due to growing pressure on limited land resources. There is little sense of collective identity amongst these recent settlers and no history of community cooperation. In addition to the strong caste and gender discrimination that exist in traditional Hindu society there are cultural differences between the recent settlers and the original inhabitants of the Terai. Divisions also exist between the Hindu settlers from the hills and the Muslims from India, the majority of who have settled in the Terai. In choosing to work in these districts and focusing on the poorest and most marginalised communities this project aimed to empower the most vulnerable individuals and families to justly claim their rights and to promote the emergence of democratic, inclusive and justice-oriented community institutions that can support and meet these claims.

Process & summary of activities

The project employs five clear strategies for achieving its aims, namely i) group formation and critical problem analysis, ii) process facilitation for rights-based development, iii) organisational development and network formation, iv) training and consultation for concerned agencies, and v) production and dissemination of training resource materials. These are expanded on in the strategic objectives set out in the Key Findings section below.

The normal process of community intervention begins with the selection of particularly disadvantaged communities through a participatory community screening process that allows people to define their own communities, irrespective of administrative boundaries. This is followed by listening surveys and social analyses in the selected communities and a period of facilitated group emergence and vision forming. Drawing on the information gleaned from the listening surveys, generative themes are identified and community groups (CGs) are guided through a process of problem posing and problem

analysis leading to participatory planning, collective action and post-activity evaluation. Consideration is given here to the specific needs of particularly vulnerable families through individual and family coaching. As the groups begin to show resilience they are provided with a series of trainings intended to further strengthen them and pave the way for the formation of representative VDC-level network organisations, known as Main Committees (MCs), and regionally based Community-Based Network Organisations (CBNOs) comprised of representatives from a number of MCs. These organisations at each level are in turn given ongoing support and advice on the possible sources of technical and material assistance.

Project objectives

Sahakarmi Samaj's mission statement, and effectively the goal of this project, is:

"To ensure that there is sufficient capacity amongst disadvantaged and marginalised people, as well as among the organisations and institutions which are mandated to serve them, to initiate and sustain inclusive processes of governance oriented towards the just distribution of rights, opportunities and resources and an optimal quality of life for all."

The project is also guided by seven quite detailed and complex strategic objectives that are reproduced as sub-titles in the Key Findings section below.

Previous evaluation

An evaluation of the SAKTEE program, the fore-runner of this CGEST programme, was conducted in November 2008 and concluded that the programme had been successful in empowering poor and marginalised communities and should continue along the same lines. The evaluation recommended that more attention be given to the formation and strengthening of networks through which citizens can claim their rights from the state, gain greater access to and control over resources and demand more accountable local government.



3.0 Key findings

Outputs against strategic objectives

- 1. At least 120 community groups comprising disadvantaged / marginalised people in 10 VDCs in 2 districts (Bardiya and Kanchanpur) will have identified, analysed and mitigated shared problems through inclusive democratic deliberation, planned collective action and the effective mobilisation of local and external resources.***

Since the commencement of this project a total of 146 community groups are reported to have been formed in ten VDC areas of Bardiya and Kanchanpur. Records indicate that these groups comprise 4,328 members, 83% of whom are women. The groups are very inclusive of so-called lower castes, with over 60% of members coming from the Dalit, ethnic and indigenous castes. A sizable number of these were found to be representing their groups at MC and CBNO level. The strictly non-partisan stance of the groups has encouraged people from all political parties to participate alongside one another. These groups were also found to include a small number of Muslims and Christians among the predominantly Hindu population and membership.

While restricting itself to the poorest and most marginalised communities within particularly impoverished VDC-administered areas, participation in the groups was open to all residents of these communities. One community member commented that this inclusive approach contrasted sharply with that of most NGOs who work specifically and exclusively with defined socio-economic groups, such as Dalits or women, and had been fundamental in building inter-group understanding and tolerance among people of different political persuasion, caste, ethnicity, religion and sex.

Experience has taught the central significance of the initial door-to-door listening phase and spending time in communities. Accurately identifying those issues that are most important to community members has been found to be crucial to engaging them in subsequent analysis, planning and commitment to action. CG Facilitators and SS staff commented on the ease of engaging with groups and their inclination toward action once the genuine issues had been identified. Numerous respondents referred to the difference in commitment and activity between groups established by SS and project committees set up by other agencies during the latter's brief and few visits to the community. A number of the community respondents acknowledged being members of other groups but saw these as simply an avenue to low-interest loans, with virtually no opportunity to meet, to discuss issues or to build personal capacity.

Each of the groups interviewed could clearly explain the process of problem identification, analysis, action planning, resource mobilisation and activity implementation. This is achieved through a very open yet facilitated discussion that encouraged wide participation and acceptance of other points of view. The external evaluator witnessed one of these sessions with a particularly problematic group and found the process to be an example of best practice. In groups ranging in size from 20 to over 60 members, participation of every person in every meeting is not realistic but should remain a goal. Out of these discussions the 146 community groups in Bardiya and Kanchanpur are reported to have decided upon and successfully

undertaken close to 1,900 separate community actions of varying size and complexity, utilising both local and external resources. Reports indicate that many other activities have been discussed and were either discarded or are currently being implemented.

The nature of the project is such that community actions should not be measured by their coverage but by their diversity, as communities decide on and respond to their own needs. A sample of only those activities mentioned by respondents during the field work, and arranged by category, include:

Social development: i) campaigns to encourage the enrolment and admission of children in school and parental monitoring of the performance of teachers and students, ii) demand for and access to government-sponsored adult literacy classes and the establishment of self-managed classes in the interim, iii) prohibition of gambling, home brewing and public consumption of alcohol, and the playing of certain street games that had been enticing children away from school, iv) campaigns to discourage child marriage and the pre-birth betrothal of girls, v) group contributions towards funerals and emergency needs of particularly vulnerable families, communal meals on special occasions and temple cleaning prior to specific ceremonies.

Livelihoods: i) collective bargaining over wages for domestic and farm labour, ii) production of organic fertiliser, establishment of home (kitchen) gardens and the reinstatement of a local vegetable market, iii) vocational training and the establishment of small business enterprises, iv) establishing of group savings funds from which members can borrow at low interest.

Community infrastructure: i) repair of tertiary roads, including gravelling, clearing of drainage channels and installation of culverts, ii) construction and renovation of community schools, construction of bridges and erection of electricity poles, iii) construction of group meeting halls using entirely local resources, iv) purchase and installation of communally owned and operated treadle pumps for irrigation.

Health, water and sanitation: i) discussion, testing and treatment of common, but highly sensitive health issues such as HIV/AIDS and uterine prolapse, and a significant contribution from group funds towards the construction of a local cancer hospital, ii) repair of community water distribution systems, iii) demarcating areas for defecation and the construction of latrines, iv) campaigns to clean up house plots and public spaces and remove domestic animals from roadsides.

Environmental protection: i) establishment, enlargement and protection of community forests, ii) establishment and support for tree nurseries, iii) use of trees and stone gabions to prevent erosion of river banks and public land.

Citizen rights: i) attainment of citizenship papers and registration of births, deaths and marriages, ii) registration of ethnic groups as 'endangered', thereby becoming eligible for special benefits, iii) claiming of various social security benefits and entitlements set aside for certain disadvantaged groups, v) accessing and disseminating information of citizen's rights and entitlements.

Whilst this list is itself impressive it does not reflect the numbers of people benefiting or the level of impact. Some actions benefited only a handful of participants while others had a significant impact on the whole community. It

is of note that, despite the apparent diversity of activities, many of the solutions to problems bear great similarity. This may reflect the limited options but may on occasion signal SS influence on the actions decided upon by groups. The practical limit of 15 CGs serviced by any one SS team means that some quite vulnerable communities are inevitably missing out. A number of community respondents asked that the SS program cover all wards or communities in a VDC area. This would provide greater opportunity to influence the functioning of the VDC office and its allocation of resources but would require either more field staff or a longer-term commitment to an area.

One of the most commonly mentioned indicators of group achievement was the size of the group fund. This was accumulated through a combination of voluntary savings, monthly contributions, fines and a variety of communal income generating activities. Whilst not a major concern at the moment there is a real danger of the purpose and function of the groups being reduced to that of loan providers when SS leave the area. Another tendency mentioned by many of the respondents was the increasing focus of groups on accessing external resources in order to address problems. This may reflect an increasing complexity of problems but is reported to be demoralising for groups when these resources are not obtained. The sense of achievement is essential for the sustainability and perceived benefits of group membership. Smaller, group-controlled activities implemented alongside the more ambitious and external resource dependent actions could enable groups to celebrate small successes while being frustrated by higher ambitions.

2. At least 100 community-based organisations (CBOs) will have become formally constituted and be demonstrably capable of autonomously initiating and sustaining justice- and wellbeing-oriented change through clear, inclusive, democratic and accountable procedures of governance, programme implementation, and rights-based advocacy.

As noted above the project has fostered the formation of 146 community groups, all of which have been formally constituted in terms of being managed in accordance with clear policies and procedures and affiliated with their respective MCs and CBNOs. Each of the groups has an elected management committee comprised of a chairperson, secretary and treasurer. These are chosen by all the members of the group, based on agreed criteria, and with clear roles and responsibilities. Many of the groups have constructed rudimentary meeting/office structures, drawing entirely on volunteer labour and local resources, and a few have managed to open their own bank accounts in which to safely keep their group fund.

All groups interviewed claimed to have written policies and procedures to guide their operations, including the holding and attendance at weekly meetings, the decision-making process (ostensibly by consensus) and criteria (based on need rather than personal influence), transparency of proceedings (often shared with non-members) and the management of group funds for which elementary financial records are kept and reported on monthly. It seems that the rules and discipline associated with these groups are a significant factor in their success. Each of the groups undertakes capacity self-assessment exercises every six months to identify areas of weakness and to establish group development goals.

The predominance of women and lower castes among the members has effectively ensured representation in group committees and nomination for membership of their respective Main Committees, providing invaluable experience and role modelling for other socially disadvantaged members. Of course, the reason that women in particular, greatly outnumber men in the membership of groups raises questions as to how these groups are viewed by men. But the achievements of these groups could very well be dispelling the widely-shared belief that discussion groups are for women and activity focused groups for men.

It should be noted that the continued relevance and sustainability of these groups lies very much in the hands of the Community Group Facilitators, of which there are nominally four trained members per group. The capacity of these facilitators varies considerably, with some assuming a very active role and others are largely inactive. There is a danger that those who are taking a more active role may assume responsibility for organising and implementing actions on behalf of the group members. Their roles may need to be clarified and some may need to use their skills to nurture leadership qualities of other group members. The size of the groups is also an issue as those with more members (one group interviewed boasted 63 members) have greater difficulty establishing and maintaining a sense of solidarity. Despite the strict rules governing attendance at meetings, lateness and absenteeism are common in 'weaker' groups, with some mainly male members regularly sending family members to represent them in meetings. The relevance of the discussions and resulting actions are crucial to meeting attendance and will increasingly rely on the skills of the CG Facilitators as Sahakarmi Samaj withdraws.

3. 10 VDC-level networking committees and 3 regional community-based networking organisations (CBNOs) - (two in Kanchanpur and one in Bardiya) will have been formally constituted and be demonstrably capable of autonomously initiating and sustaining justice- and wellbeing-oriented change through clear, inclusive, democratic and accountable procedures of governance, programme implementation, and rights-based advocacy.

Ten MCs were established - four in Bardiya and six in Kanchanpur - along with three CBNOs. The two CBNOs in Kanchanpur have been registered with the District Development Committee (DDC) while the one in Bardiya is currently undergoing this process. All CGs had selected two members to represent them at the General Assembly of their respective MCs. From this assembly half were chosen as committee members. Again each MC nominated two people, one from their committee and one from their General Assembly, to represent them at the General Assembly of their respective CBNO and half of these were elected onto the CBNO committee. Each of the committees has a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer elected by the committee members, with clear roles and responsibilities. The project has adopted recommendations from the previous evaluation and introduced limited tenure of these office bearers. Both the CBNOs and MCs interviewed claimed that they conducted annual General Assembly meetings at which their annual reports and plans were presented.

The committees met monthly and claimed to be transparent and fully accountable to their members. They operate in accordance with written rules and procedures, which also cover the management of staff, finances and any ancillary services provided by the organisation. Committee membership was inclusive in terms of ethnicity, caste, religion and sex but, due to the practice of selecting one man and one woman to represent each group or committee, men were disproportionately represented on the higher committees. As with the CGs, these committees were open to participation of all their members and were said to make decisions by consensus. All decisions were said to be reported back to MCs and CGs. There was a clear ownership of the respective networking organisations by their members at CG level and all the authorities spoken to during the field work saw these as community-owned and led structures.

Both the MCs and CBNOs have a role to play in supporting community groups to advocate with service and resource providers, particularly the DDCs and VDCs. SS staff join with MC and CBNO members to orientate new VDC staff on the structure and functions of the network and MC members have now been invited to participate in the annual VDC Council meetings. They were also said to regularly participate in NGO coordination meetings but this was not corroborated by respondents from other NGOs. Committee members of the CBNOs are responsible for monitoring the performance of the MCs and CGs and the annual re-registration of their organisation with the DDC, involving the updating of group membership lists and reports on accomplished and planned activities. Several CBNOs have taken on projects with other donors, such as HIV peer education, that has involved the recruitment and management of paid project staff. As their role changes to that of project managers, with paid staff, the CBNOs are likely to reduce their accountability to their constituent communities. As their reputation increases and their donor base expands, the CBNOs are being influenced by the different values, visions and ways of working of their new sponsors, to the detriment of their members.

Considerable effort has gone into training and supporting these committees to fulfil their roles and at least one of the CBNOs has a fulltime manager, partially paid for by Sahakarmi Samaj. This situation is being strongly debated within the organisation. Several of the CBNOs established in Banke during an earlier SS project have been encouraged by a more recent donor to offer ancillary services to their communities under the guise of Community Information Centres. These include community libraries and agricultural / veterinary supplies but also fee-paying services such as a photocopying, telephone use and veterinary testing of animals that are intended to generate income for the organisation. However, despite the reported usage of the libraries, it seems that these Community Information Centres are not well managed and are not covering costs. Unless the demand and money to pay for these services are there in the communities then these 'sidelines' may simply distract attention and energy from the core purpose of the organisation.

Basic operating costs of MCs and CBNOs are being met through a levy on their member CGs and this appears to be working reasonably well. The CBNOs have begun to aggregate the individual group funds into large common funds from which all members will be eligible to borrow at low

interest. These funds are to be managed by registered cooperatives that are planned to function as a service of the CBNO. Several of the CBNOs in Banke have fund accounts, present balance statements at monthly meetings and are said to conduct annual audits. The existence and size of these funds are clearly a source of pride and seen as an opportunity for future financial sustainability. However, tension is developing between the social goals of the CBNO and the financial imperatives of a self-sustaining cooperative. This was raised in one of the CBNO interviews as a matter of concern. There is also a risk that attention may shift from meeting the needs of its members to meeting the needs of the CBNO itself, with one organisation using a significant proportion of the joint fund to purchase land on which it plans to construct an office. This accumulation of funds and the formation of these micro-finance cooperatives threaten to hijack the goals and purpose of the CBNOs, reduce members' ownership and control over the use of their savings and increase the risk of corruption and theft¹. In collecting contributions and loan repayments from members CGs could soon feel that they are servicing the CBNOs rather than being served by them.

It should be noted that, as many of the smaller issues have been addressed through the use of local resources, attention is shifting to the accessing of external resources, and much of this responsibility is falling on the CBNOs. This increased dependence on the CBNOs risks reducing the responsibility and control exercised by the groups themselves and diluting their sense of personal agency. Having addressed a number of issues through local action, groups are increasingly seeking CBNO assistance to address more deep-seated and resource-intensive issues. SS staff and committee members spoke of the need for CBNOs to better link with other local organisations for the purposes of information sharing and possible collective action rather than focusing solely on agencies that can potentially provide services or resources. The role of the MC is being weakened when CG members take their issues directly to the CBNO for resolution. However, there is understandable confusion when the same person can sit on the committees of their respective community group, Main Committee and CBNO. There is a risk of certain individuals monopolising training opportunities or of cultivating 'development brokers' who effectively control what development assistance reaches which communities should be mitigated by the recently introduced maximum tenure of office bearers.

On the other side of this equation is the amount of time that some members are expected to volunteer to the various committee meetings every month. One CBNO committee member explained that he was expected to attend at least six or seven meetings every month for this project in addition to those held by groups set up by other NGOs of which he was also a member. The

¹ I feel very strongly (and concerned) about this. The relatively rapid formation of cooperatives to manage the savings of 100 or more community groups is, in my opinion, fraught with danger. There was no indication to me that these cooperatives had evolved in response to expressed or experienced needs of the community groups themselves. Group members mostly referred to (and presumably felt ownership of) the savings of their own group rather than of the collective; the more removed this fund becomes the less control and sense of personal achievement will remain with the individual members. Cooperatives have proven to be very susceptible to poor management and these cooperatives are being established at just the time when SS is withdrawing much of its support to the CBNO. The rules and regulations needed to protect and manage a much larger membership and fund are inevitably premised on the rule of law, an assumption that may not be well-founded in Nepal.

pressure of family commitments is leading to increased absenteeism at meetings. As paid staff are employed by CBNOs to undertake contracted project work or to manage income generating activities such as the cooperatives, it is only a matter of time before committee members demand compensation for the time they are being asked to contribute to the organisation.

4. The capacity of at least 150 government officials and development workers from at least 20 agencies to work in ways that promote justice- and wellbeing-oriented governance will have been enhanced through participation in significant programmes of training and organisational development.

The Executive Team and Training Unit of Sahakarmi Samaj provided training and other organisational development support to a number of government and non-government agencies. These included three separate sessions for 24 VDC Secretaries from four districts and one for 41 representatives of district-level government and non-government agencies on people-centred development and collaboration between CBOs and local government.

Training was also provided to several hundred staff from ten different NGOs (ISS, INF, Samari Utthan Sewa, Sundar Nepal, Samai Sewa Pariwar, RIDS, FIAN, BEE, S4 and PLAN), covering topics as wide ranging as: community development and community based network development; participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation; code facilitation and leadership development; communication and facilitation skills; organisational management; policy formulation; staff recruitment and selection processes; report writing and feature writing; social auditing; peace, reconciliation and human rights. Senior project staff were also involved in capacity building training for ISS (Surkhet), BASE (Banke) and RADAR (Dang), a mid-term evaluation of an ILO project to eliminate bonded child labour, and the facilitation of strategic planning for ISS (Surkhet) and the Bhanu Multiple Campus (Kanchanpur).

It should be noted that the difficulty faced by SS in recruiting a suitably qualified and value-based Training Manager has meant that many of these trainings have necessarily been undertaken by members of the Executive Team themselves, thereby reducing their time with SS's own field-based programs. Senior staff spoke of their inability to find time to develop new training courses or even to meet the current demand for training from other agencies. The lack of a purpose-built training centre is also seen as an obstacle but should not be seen as the cause of these problems.

Several international agencies have consulted Sahakarmi Samaj on localisation processes and staff regularly share knowledge and experience during NGO coordination meetings in Bardiya and Kanchanpur (although their standing among NGOs in Bardiya appears to be low). In the past year there have also been exchange visits between staff of SHEP and SS and a visit from 14 young people from The Netherlands. This considerable interaction with others over the years has influenced numerous programmes but few agencies have embraced a 'conscientization' approach, and those that have were primarily influenced by the Surkhet Project in the mid 1990s when they shared the same donor (UMN). It was suggested that local agencies are mostly influenced by the priorities of donors who tend to support short-term,

issue-based programs delivering quantifiable change in communities. This obstacle is recognised and is currently being discussed by an international group of practitioners connected through a dedicated internet website.

Feedback from the training participants interviewed during the evaluation was overwhelmingly positive. Even when certain conventional topics were available through other training providers, Sahakarmi Samaj was preferred mainly because the trainers could cite examples from their own experience in the field and were extremely comfortable using participatory learning methodologies. Other agencies were increasingly recognising the importance of building resource management skills in communities if for no other reason than to maintain project facilities and structures, and were coming to SS because of their reputation in the field. The agency also undertook to prepare very detailed village profiles for the VDCs where they worked with a view to building capacity and establishing closer ties with these local government bodies but the completion of some of these documents have been seriously delayed. While these documents provide potentially useful baseline data they have not been used by the VDC offices or SS to monitor changes in communities.

5. A national learning network will have been established through which relevant learnings are disseminated and peer-support provided for all organisations working in Nepal to offer facilitative interventions aimed at enhancing personal, collective, organisational and institutional capacity for justice- and wellbeing-oriented participatory governance.

The original plan of setting up a national network was set aside during the first year of the project following the establishment of a new network of ICCO-sponsored partners in Nepal that had a focus on democratic practice and human rights. However, this network did not serve the intended purpose since most of its members were apparently not familiar with or interested in taking a process-led approach in their development work. In the meantime, Sahakarmi Samaj facilitated several meetings of CBNOs, including those established in Banke District during the SAKTEE programme, with the intention of establishing a separate network of like-minded agencies from Surkhet, Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur. The first meeting of this network was held a week after the evaluation fieldwork had been completed and is reported to have been highly successful.

Greater use is reportedly being made of the media with items referring to the work of the project appearing regularly in local newspapers and on television. (The evaluation's final validation workshop was in fact covered on national television the following day.) Community Information Centres set up by CBNOs in Banke were also intended to disseminate information about the approach of the project but these centres are staffed by volunteers from the CBNOs and were said to have been not particularly well managed or effective. There has been a request from former training participants for SS to set up and host a form of alumni association whereby former trainees who are now working within many different agencies could come together and share experience. But again a lack of available time has apparently prevented action being taken on this so far.

6. A range of Nepali-medium resource materials will have been produced concerning the facilitation of personal, community, organisational and institutional capacity-building in disadvantaged and marginalised communities, which will have been made available at an appropriate cost to interested organisations.

Sahakarmi Samaj has used a range of written materials to share and promote its work. These have included the presentation and distribution of its annual report, and support for the preparation of annual reports by each of its partner CBNOs. It has also published a quarterly community newsletter, a bulletin outlining its civic education programme (funded separately by ICCO-KiA) and a booklet of case studies, community member profiles and features, which was used to document some of the successes of the project. A brochure explaining the unique approach of the project is still being given out on an ad hoc basis though it has not been updated in recent years. A new brochure is currently being prepared, as well as a DVD that documents the approach in visual form and will be accompanied by written guides.

Each year Sahakarmi Samaj has produced a 'pocket planner' that is available at cost and contains useful contact information on agencies and services available in the districts where SS works, along with a concise description of its vision, mission, values and community approach. The agency has revised much of its training curricula and again made these available to other agencies at cost. A SS website was set up but this is currently out of date and references to their work appear on numerous other websites. Sahakarmi Samaj has also collaborated with SHEP in setting up a website dedicated to refining, developing and disseminating this approach through international collaboration but SS does not seem to have a clear strategy for promoting its work within the country. Staff identified their lack of English proficiency as a major hurdle but a cursory assessment of the case studies produced during the evaluation indicate a reticence to write and/or a lack of creative writing skills in Nepali.

7. Learning from the SAKTEE programme will have been derived through an externally validated participatory evaluation and disseminated to all network partners and other agencies with an interest in institution building in disadvantaged or marginalized communities

There appears to be a genuine commitment to learning within the organisation and project, with time set aside for informal field team reflection/planning sessions most evenings and more formal planning sessions every ten days. Team leaders in each district meet monthly to discuss issues and enhance coordination. Every two or three months all field staff are brought together in each district for a joint reflection and planning session and there is an annual programme and planning meeting that lasts for three days. Partially resulting from their interactions with SHEP, the level of understanding and analysis of development issues among the senior managers seems to be high and a more strategic use of these programme meetings/workshops may enhance the analytical skills of other staff.

An evaluation of the SAKTEE project was undertaken in November 2008 and the report posted on several websites and shared with interested parties, including Irish Aid. This evaluation was very positive and highly commended the work being undertaken but made a number of suggestions for possible

improvement. While this document was never translated into Nepali, and hence was not read by most of the staff, it was said that many of the conclusions and recommendations reflected what the agency had already been discussing during regular review sessions and in preparing their 2007-2013 strategic plan.

During the current evaluation staff of Sahakarmi Samaj identified a large number of changes in the current program that had resulted from their learning from SAKTEE. These included i) the making of 'good governance' a core component of the project, built on the concept of community governance ii) the adoption of a rights-based agenda with DDCs and VDCs the primary duty bearers, while giving considerable weight to the responsibilities of communities, iii) more emphasis being given to the advocacy and capacity-building roles of CBNOs in lieu of that of project implementers, iv) establishment of district-level field offices and better coordinated and tighter individual work plans that resulted in more efficient use of field staff, v) the taking of information and services to the communities rather than field offices acting as a resource centre, and vi) the provision of orientation sessions for VDC Secretaries and local political leaders, resulting in greater understanding, cooperation and support.

At a functional level, changes included i) the use of local (vernacular) languages during group discussions, although this has not always been achievable, ii) more careful choice and better use of generative themes, iii) the use of a variety of techniques, including poems and songs, as 'codes' to stimulate group discussions, iv) the provision of family counselling to highly vulnerable non-members although, due to demands on staff time, this is still considered inadequate, v) follow up on sensitive issues in private sessions with individuals and families, vi) discontinuance of six-monthly house-to-house surveys that had not produced much useful information, vii) the use of capacity self-assessment tools by MCs and CBNOs. Staff also stressed the importance of the steady, respectful and highly supportive relationship they currently enjoy with their funding partners as a key factor in their improved performance and their ability to meet targets and deadlines consistently.

Outcomes resulting from these activities

1. *Obtaining justice*

The organising of marginalised communities into groups and networks has provided an effective mechanism by which they can lobby authorities and other duty bearers for just treatment and improved services. For example, many groups are now actively monitoring the performance of teachers, along with their children, and one group had their local school administration replaced after years of wrongful use of funds.

However, the main area of success has been in demanding greater transparency in the budget allocation and use by the VDCs, each of which receive between Rs.20-30 lakh (€20,000 - €30,000) annually from the central government to support local development activities. Each ward, of which there are nine per VDC area, is meant to decide on its development priorities through public meetings and these priorities should then be taken to the VDC for consideration. In reality however, allocations have often been made 'behind closed doors' by a small group of unelected, inexperienced, local

political leaders and government officials who currently control the VDC. In many of the VDCs where the project is operational, community groups are now de facto representatives of their ward. In places, these groups are filling the void left when traditional Tharu consultation systems were emasculated by political rivalries after the introduction of democracy to the country.

At the individual level, community members have been encouraged and assisted in claiming citizenship and in registering births, deaths and marriages, thereby securing tangible benefits and a sense of security. Local (Unity) police stations were persuaded to register land in women's names and bank accounts in the names of children. Various CGs, MCs and CBNOs have lobbied VDCs and DDCs over other issues such as the registration and allocation of funds for specially disadvantaged groups, access to and use of natural resources and the provision, cost and quality of government services. Marginalised community members have also been made aware of and been supported in claiming their entitlements to social security benefits, scholarships, government posts and compensation.

Most community groups have formed work gangs that have managed to negotiate fair and equal wages for their labour by acting and often working together. Group members usually assist one another at critical points in the farming cycle at a reduced rate and then contribute a fixed part of their increased earnings from work with non-members to their group fund. While most employers are accepting this practice and even benefiting from the availability of a reliable and organised labour force it should be noted that some are now turning to 'non-unionised' workers from India to work on their farms. The establishment of individual group funds has enabled members to steer clear of the exploitative rates of local moneylenders and skirt the conditionality and bribes often associated with applying for loans from the banks.

2. Empowerment

Unquestionably, the most important outcome for members of the community groups set up through this project was their increased personal confidence. For some this sense of confidence started with simply learning how to write their name. Although most group members were from downtrodden groups within poor and marginalised communities they spoke of how they had developed the confidence and skills to express their views openly and clearly through their participation in the group meetings where they had been listened to, and encouraged to listen to others. Community respondents claimed that they were not the same person as before. Many said how good they felt now being able to visit and lobby government offices and for one woman to register her child's birth and for another to take her child to hospital without their husbands' assistance. For others the fact that "even people from far places know me" brought considerable pride. Women in particular and people of so-called lower castes are being seen and seeing themselves in a new role, as leaders, advocates and emissaries of their communities.

A sense of personal agency has developed through individuals working together to tackle community works, to obtain rights and to confront injustice. When asked why members might continue their membership of groups after the departure of Sahakarmi Samaj the most common answer related to the

sense of solidarity that they enjoyed within the group. This sense of empowerment was skilfully nurtured by SS by encouraging groups to tackle smaller and more manageable tasks at the start so that they could quickly experience success from collective actions. One VDC Secretary contrasted this with the impact of other agencies that had given resources but not brought about any meaningful change in the people. The fact that the project now provides counselling / mentoring support to individual families appears to be useful in encouraging highly vulnerable and sometimes dysfunctional families to join or to remain in the groups but Sahakarmi Samaj will need to exercise care in maintaining the right balance between social and group work.

Respondents talked of their participation in these groups and higher-order committees as providing the opportunity for them to develop skills in for example, listening, presentation, leadership, facilitation, analytical, problem solving, planning, project implementation, organisational and financial management. Many spoke of how they could now analyse problems and other people's opinions, how to search for alternatives and how to formulate and express their ideas clearly. Some talked of being asked to join other committees in their community because of the experience that they had gained through participating in this project. A number of respondents also mentioned vocational skills such as sewing, knitting, mushroom growing and the manufacture of smokeless stoves that they had gained and were now providing them with additional income.

It should be noted however that not all groups and not all members of a group had developed the same level of confidence and personal empowerment. Failure to obtain sought-after external resources had been demoralising for some groups, leading some people to question the value of group membership. Several of the groups visited were also not sufficiently cohesive or confident to assume responsibility for their own operations but there was a marked difference in the level of self-assuredness of members of newer groups and that of members of groups that had been operating for several years, clearly indicating the effectiveness of the process.

3. Attitudinal & behavioural changes

A key feature of this project is the very strong value base that guides both the organisation and its ways of relating to communities. During the first evaluation workshop SS staff were able to reel off the nine core values of the organisation and then to identify how these values were expressed through their work. Unlike most organisations, field staff live among, participate in local activities and ceremonies of and pride themselves in learning from the communities with whom they work. Community members talked of how they also appreciated the fact that SS staff were open about their budgets and expenditures. These values may be as crucial to the success of Sahakarmi Samaj's work as the technical aspects of their approach. A respondent from another NGO commented on strength and consistency of values across the organisation.

The use of inclusive groups and the strategy of enabling these diverse groups of people to taste success and achievement through working alongside one another have been very effective in changing attitudes. Ethnic, religious, caste, class, gender and language discrimination among members of these

groups are reported to have significantly reduced. The achievements of these groups have also dispelled cultural suspicions about men and women meeting together away from their families. The culture of listening to and respecting one another that is promoted within groups seems, over time, to have built trust and understanding among quite disparate members, including those with different political affiliations, and helped to dissolve stereotypes.

Women and members of lower castes or minority religions are being accepted and elected into leadership roles that challenge convention. One woman talked proudly of having "left the well" and of being teased by neighbours about being a future leader of their community. It was said that group members have learned to speak one another's languages and actually switch between languages during meetings. Members from different castes and religions talked about sharing meals together and participating in one another's ceremonies.

The emphasis on responsibility and use of local resources has increased people's sense of ownership, agency and control over their own development. Respondents from neighbouring 'control villages' observed project groups first trying to solve problems using their own resources whereas before they had been totally dependent on families or political leaders for assistance. Families were said to be developing a 'savings habit' after experiencing the benefits of the group fund. The sense that life was finally improving was offered as a reason why smoking and alcohol consumption had reduced among group and family members. Group members and by example others were now said to be more willing to participate in community activities and works. However, it was also said that some group members were relishing their new-found right to speak but were not yet willing to respect and listen to other points of view. Traditional taboos that discriminate against certain people, such as menstruating women, were said to be lingering on in some groups.

Attitudes to schooling have also changed with parents showing greater interest in their children's enrolment and performance at school. Child marriages were said to have reduced and both daughters and sons were being encouraged to attend school. It was even claimed that some school drop-outs had actually returned to school after being able to borrow needed text books from their community library. But perhaps the most remarkable change has occurred among women members of groups. Their exposure through groups and trainings to new ideas, written handouts and to the importance of record keeping encouraged a number of women to return to school to improve their education. In one school alone it was said that ten mothers were attending school alongside their children. Others who had perhaps never attended school have been encouraged to join government-sponsored adult literacy classes. Several instances were mentioned by respondents of neighbouring groups connecting with one another to gather enough candidates to lobby their local VDC to set up a literacy class where there was none. One CBNO had set up a 'bridging' literacy class to build the confidence of the participants sufficiently for them to join the regular government-run class.

4. Relationships

Participation in project groups was said to have had a significant impact on relationships with families. Often husbands and mothers-in-law had been highly dismissive of women attending these meetings that didn't offer anything tangible in return but a number of women spoke of how attitudes had changed when group members came home with interesting and useful information and when the groups were able to do things for their community. Women talked of how their husbands now encourage them to attend and help out with household tasks to facilitate this. Group members also claimed that decision-making inside the home was now a joint matter, even involving the children at times. With their new confidence women were said to be helping their husbands with certain tasks outside the home. Members who had learned to listen to and respect others' views claimed that these skills had reduced the quarrelling and, where it existed, the domestic violence within their homes. Of course, not all men (or women for that matter) were happy with the time that their spouses devoted to group activities or felt able to accept the new ideas that they came home with. Attitudinal changes in group members was not always translating into changes within families and communities, particularly it was said among the older people, and this has led to tension between 'enlightened' group members and the more conservative family and community members.

Group membership provided many previously isolated individuals with a sense of belonging. A number of community respondents suggested that their group represented a new set of friends and one woman even spoke of now "never feeling alone". Members have also gained the respect of others for their level of organisation, motivation and promotion of community interests. One slightly wealthier community member admitted to not believing that a group of poor and disparate families would ever amount to anything but was now hoping to be asked to join their group. Meetings were occasionally open to anyone interested and group actions that could impact non-members were usually taken to the whole community for a decision, thereby soliciting broad agreement before implementation. Often through sheer numbers, groups were also said to be able resolve serious conflicts in communities, and particularly among group members, without needing to call for police intervention.

Community respondents talked of the opportunities that they had had to visit government and NGO offices and to meet people from many different VDCs. "Now ordinary people have access to the VDC whereas before it was only the big people". As their reputation grows members of MCs and CBNOs are being courted or invited to meetings of other NGOs. The CBNO network has also enabled CGs and MCs to share information on available resources with groups in other VDCs. Examples were given of when CBNOs were asked to mediate between communities when the responsible VDCs were incapable or unwilling to do so, suggesting that CBNOs may be assuming responsibilities that should rightly remain with the authorities.

5. Access to resources

There is a greater appreciation of the existence, value and need for protection of local resources among group members after resolving a number of problems without needing to call for outside assistance. Even previously

disregarded facilities such as water reticulation systems have been repaired by the communities and are back in use. Community members are now aware that they can do something to protect their environment through for example the establishment or expansion of community forests and the installation of various erosion protection measures. But perhaps the most spoken about local resource is the group fund that is now available for members to call upon when they face cash-flow problems and in times of emergency. It must be recognised however that there are a limited number of issues that can be addressed using local resources alone and that groups will increasingly look to outside assistance in the future.

The groups and committees spoke of their greater awareness of external resources and their ability to approach government offices and other NGOs for assistance. They claimed to know clearly about their VDC's annual budget and how it is meant to be allocated, and were confident of getting their fair share. However, the budgets and approval processes of the non-government development agencies was not as clear and groups did not seem to be as sure where they stood in relation to these providers. However, most CGs, MCs and CBNOs had earned good reputations for their ability to plan, implement and complete activities on time, within budget and with good community participation. Their transparent use of budgets alleviated fears of the corruption so prevalent in public works in Nepal. As such it was claimed, and confirmed by VDC Secretaries and staff of other NGOs, that many of the groups set up as part of this project are now highly trusted and are being encouraged to apply for funds. However, a reliance on VDCs may become a liability if machinations at national level place political conditions on the transfer or use of annual development funds by VDCs.

While this shift to greater reliance on external resources is inevitable, even unavoidable, there is a danger that groups will begin to unravel if they see their only purpose being the accessing of such resources. As the needs of communities become more and more complex (and expensive) the ability of external resource providers to meet these needs will decrease, leaving groups increasingly frustrated and demoralised unless they have other valued roles to play in relation to their members. The aggregation of group funds at CBNO level may offer an alternative role for the CBNOs but will severely curtail the role of the community groups and Main Committees. The frequent reference by staff to the amounts saved by the various groups indicates the significance that is being attributed to this activity and, by extension, who manages it.



4.0 Conclusions

Relevance

This project has consciously targeted one of the main underlying causes of poverty and marginalisation - that of a lack of personal and collective empowerment – and in doing so has enabled the project participants to address their needs and determine their priorities largely by themselves. Empowerment is fundamental if people are to be the subjects of their own development. While there are similarities in the nature of activities chosen by different groups the project encourages people to identify issues and priorities for themselves and to work to address these, ensuring that the activities and planned outcomes are highly relevant to the participants.

Both SHEP and Sahakarmi Samaj, the project's two implementing partners, share a strong commitment to capacity building for personal and social transformation, albeit in very different geo-cultural environments, and share a similar set of core values that plainly guide their work. The staff and board of Sahakarmi Samaj were quite enthusiastic about the relationship that had developed between the two agencies and the opportunities that it was providing for mutual learning. The project contributes significantly and directly to the objectives of the Civil Society Fund of Irish Aid, particularly those of i) strengthening the voice of CSOs, ii) supporting communities to participate in their own development, iii) supporting communities to access resources and improved services and, iv) the realisation of human rights. But through its group discussions and support for testing, counselling and accessing of medication the project is also supporting communities to respond to the HIV pandemic, the remaining objective.

The 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper represents the Nepali government's current development strategy and is built on the four pillars of i) broad based economic growth; ii) social sector development including human development; iii) targeted programs including social inclusion, in order to bring the poor and marginalized groups into the mainstream of development, together with targeted programmes for the ultra poor, vulnerable and deprived groups; and iv) good governance. The project has contributed to the latter three objectives in a very clear and significant manner.

Effectiveness

In terms of facilitating the empowerment of poor and marginalised people in the host communities, the project has also been highly effective. It has been able to significantly increase people's sense of personal and collective agency and their feelings of self-worth. Without exception community group respondents identified increased confidence and awareness of their ability to change their lot in life as the most valuable benefits coming out of their involvement in the project. The strategy of enabling groups of dispirited and downtrodden people to experience success through first tackling small communal issues collectively has been key to building their confidence and sense of agency. VDC Secretaries and staff of other agencies all talked of how groups that had been through the project's empowerment process were much more confident, competent and reliable in undertaking development activities than groups that had not. The project has also been very effective in

reaching the most marginalised groups within poor communities, with a vast majority of group members belonging to so-called lower castes. Women, who have traditionally been marginal to development decision-making and activities, comprise over 80% of the project's participants.

Respondents from the community groups often differentiated this project from others by the level of support provided by the sponsoring agency and the opportunities they had to learn through participating in the facilitated meetings and discussions. Within communities, as defined by the members themselves, membership of the groups has been open to everyone, regardless of caste, class, ethnicity, religion, sex and mother-tongue. This stands in contrast to other development projects that specifically target women or Dalits for example, an approach that several respondents described as divisive. Through participation in these highly diverse groups, people from very different backgrounds and identities have developed understanding, tolerance and a sense of solidarity with one another that was said to be influencing the wider community. However, there is always the danger of assuming homogeneity of the group. Occasionally members will have opposing needs and the facilitator needs to be sufficiently confident and competent to analyse and deal with these differences openly.

The project has been less effective however in promoting good governance with local government, but the political struggles currently tearing the country apart are presumably also being played out inside the VDCs. The often successful lobbying of VDCs to release budget figures or funds to empowered groups is a significant step towards the goal but good governance requires changes in the overall culture and practices of offices and institutions. This is occurring among the civil society organisations but a more strategic and concerted effort may be needed to bring about the desired changes in these local government bodies.

Efficiency

The nature of this project is relatively unique and many of the outputs are intangible but its emphasis on the mobilisation of local resources has spawned a multitude of development activities that have capitalised on and benefited significantly from community contributions. Several VDC Secretaries mentioned how project groups were able to complete community activities at a significantly lower cost than groups in other communities. Their superior planning and project management skills and their transparency in managing public works budgets also meant that losses due to inefficiencies and malpractices were greatly reduced.

In considering staff time as the project's major input into communities then it seems reasonable to include the cost of field staff as direct project costs. If so, then project and direct project support costs account for just over 60% of the in-country project expenditure to date. This is low but the management and administrative support needed for inputs of staff time is considerably more than had the inputs been materials or simply training. It is also acknowledged that 23 field staff are currently working intensively with some 4,328 members of 146 community groups in Bardiya and Kanchanpur alone. There are an additional almost 6,000 members of 329 community groups now receiving less intensive support in Banke District.

According to the responses from community group members very few, if any of the community activities would have occurred had it not been for the influence of the project. To date records indicate that groups in Bardiya and Kanchanpur have collectively implemented some 1,900 separate activities and actions, many using solely local resources and the remainder a combination of internal and external inputs. These activities ranged from campaigns to stop gambling to the repair and construction of roads, bridges and schools. This project has clearly generated activities that, in purely monetary terms, are worth many times the cost of the project's inputs. Compared with other empowerment programmes the three year programme cycle adopted by SS is short and the resulting social infrastructure is impressive. However, the most valuable outcome of the project is the empowerment of the participants, the benefits of which should be ongoing and cumulative.

Impact

As noted above, the project has had a very significant impact on the level of awareness and sense of personal agency of the individuals who participated. Many respondents talked of "being a different person" through their participation and of how their relationships with family members, neighbours and with the wider community had changed for the better as they themselves had changed. Understanding, tolerance, respect and the ability to listen and analyse had all increased while the incidence of discrimination, exploitation and exclusion had all been reduced, at least among members of the groups. These different attitudes and behaviours are being noticed (and even admired) by others but there is less evidence that these changes are making their way into the wider community in any significant way, admittedly after a relatively short time. Family members are now acknowledging the benefits of group membership and more accepting of women's involvement in activities outside the home but these changes in attitudes and behaviours have not spread much beyond the group members and their immediate families.

The project's emphasis on "good governance" has however achieved significant changes in the way local civil society organisations function, which have in turn had a positive impact on the lives of the poor and marginalised in those communities. The fact that these groups are democratically led, and by marginalised people, in the interests of their members is a significant achievement and undoubtedly providing a role model for future community organisations. The VDCs and other service providers are now responding to demands from empowered groups and networks associated with the project and this is in itself an important development but they seem to have changed little in the way they view their role in relation to the citizens (and hence rights-holders) at the village level.

The impact that this project has had on other non-state actors has been quite limited. It seems that most agencies (and there don't seem to be many) that are working in similar ways with communities were exposed to the Surkhet Project from which Sahakarmi Samaj evolved some 14 years ago. Judging by the demand it seems that the organisation is respected for the quality of its training, more so than its approach. However, it is equally fair to say that most local (and international) agencies are heavily influenced by the interests and priorities of their donors who it was said favour short-term, sector-based,

predictable and quantifiable projects. It was because of the encouragement of their common donor, in this case UMN, that these other agencies were convinced to adopt at least part of the approach being used so effectively in this project.

Sustainability

A survey conducted in Surkhet District found that over 40% of the community groups established through a related process were still functioning ten years after the completion of the project there. This figure is expected to be even higher in Banke where there are currently over 300 groups operating despite receiving no direct support for the past three years from this current project. This stands in stark contrast to the findings of most other post-project studies where project-related structures have disappeared within a very short time of the implementing agency withdrawing. When asked how they felt about the imminent withdrawal of Sahakarmi Samaj most of the interviewed CBNOs said that they were ready and would continue to function without this outside support. Sahakarmi Samaj's practice of agreeing and sticking to a clear withdrawal date from the very beginning of engagement, its steadfast refusal to provide resources itself, its encouragement of greater appreciation for local resources and the effort it puts into linking communities directly with potential resource providers have alleviated the fear that is normally associated with the withdrawal of outside support.

However, the increased interest in aggregating group funds into a large, communal fund that would be managed as a cooperative seriously threatens the integrity and sustainability of the community groups themselves. Firstly it may divert attention away from the social and personal empowerment benefits of these groups as they begin to emulate other micro-credit and revolving fund groups that already exist in most villages. The shifting of the fund, and hence the decision-making authority, to the CBNO will diminish the sense of equity, flexibility and personal control that currently exists over the funds and could bring about a situation where groups feel that they are collecting repayments on behalf of the CBNO. A possibly secondary motive in the planned formation of these credit cooperatives is that of income generation for the network. Operating costs of MCs and CBNOs, including salaries for the cooperative and inevitably CBNO staff, are planned to be covered by profits from the cooperative. But experience elsewhere has shown that these profits are often illusory and that the risk of corruption and outright theft increases as the fund increases and is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

However, the sustainability of the project's benefits should not only be measured in terms of community structures, such as the groups and networks, but also in its legacy with respect to personal capabilities and opportunities. The impact of this project on the psychological wellbeing, personal agency and sense of self-worth of the participants has been transformative and, as such, will remain after the project has finished, even if the groups and networks don't. However the influence that the project has had on non-members and neighbouring communities, as alluded to above, has been weak and will evaporate unless the project can somehow reach out to these people in the future.

During the political upheavals of recent years, the project was able to continue operating when many other NGOs had to withdraw their staff from rural areas. Interestingly the approach of building awareness without providing resources was embraced by opposing parties as aligning with their own philosophies. However, the real threat to the sustainability of this approach may come from within the aid sector itself. Initial expectations of communities are that outside agencies will (and have a duty to) provide goods and services to the poor and marginalised. Most other development agencies dismiss the approach as not addressing the immediate needs of poor communities and most donors consider the approach too imprecise and intangible to meet their criteria and thirst for 'deliverables'. The lack of an effective network of like-minded agencies leaves Sahakarmi Samaj isolated and under constant pressure to conform.

These same tensions exist within Sahakarmi Samaj itself, with some staff holding firm to the early principles and others wanting to bring about change. This tension can be considered healthy but it does highlight a dependence on several senior staff of the organisation; holders of the 'true vision'. The planned office also raises questions about "espoused" versus "values in practice". The practice of riding bicycles to villages does not coalesce with a multi-storeyed office / accommodation / training block. The belief that training fees and other administrative support facilities will contribute significantly to the organisation's operating costs in the future is also questionable. A modest office with limited attached accommodation may prove more appropriate, and sustainable, until such time as the training unit is generating much more income and would justify its own space. And finally, there appears to be an organisational reluctance to document that weakens efforts to 'convince and convert' others. The documentary of the SS approach may generate interest but it does not seem clear how and when this will be used. Perhaps there is a need to develop a clearer marketing strategy before investing time in developing more materials, particularly in English.

Replicability

The project has proven its suitability for replication in that it has essentially taken the same approach that was first trialled in Surkhet District to Banke as the SAKTEE programme, brought it to Bardiya and Kanchanpur under the current project and has since launched it in Dang District. Elements of the approach have since been used in human rights, governance and civic education work in Kailali, Surkhet, Dang and Banke districts. It has been Sahakarmi Samaj that has replicated the work in each of these cases but a number of other agencies were said to be interested in the approach and one INGO was planning to trial it. However, there is a question as to whether the success of the approach lies mainly in the techniques or in the values of the implementing organisation and staff. Sahakarmi Samaj has developed a meticulous recruitment process that values integrity and attitudes alongside the knowledge and skills of its staff. Unless field staff genuinely believe in the inherent potential of poor and marginalised groups with whom they choose to work then it is unlikely that any techniques will convince the participants to believe in themselves. The culture of Sahakarmi Samaj and the attitude of its staff may do more to convince communities of their intrinsic worth than any amount of words or deeds.



5.0 Areas for further discussion

The findings and conclusions that go before point very clearly to the fact that the approach being used by Sahakarmi Samaj is both needed and very effective. Lives are being changed in a fundamental way, people are taking a measure of control over their own development and local government and other resource/service providers are being challenged to operate in a more just and transparent manner. As a result, communities are coming together, questioning traditional forms of discrimination and patronage, and experiencing small but significant changes in their sense of wellbeing. For most programmes this would be more than enough.

Therefore, in suggesting changes or additions to the current approach I am wary lest they harm what is essentially a very sound and coherent programme. A discussion on "Where to from here?" was started during the validation workshop, the outputs of which are recorded in Annex 8, but it has a long way to go. The following comments are an extension of this earlier discussion and are presented under the categories of i) praxis, ii) paradigm, iii) reach and iv) resilience.

Praxis (ways of working)

a) Governance².

The programme has adopted "good governance" as a core theme of its work and has been successfully empowering MCs and CBNOs to lobby local government over their rights and access to resources. VDCs and other government offices may be responding encouragingly to these petitions but are not fundamentally changing their way of working or how they see their role in relation to the community. Communities are analysing situations in terms of their own immediate needs but not questioning the social and political systems and structures that are often the real cause of their (and other people's) poverty and marginalisation. There is a risk that they are focusing on symptoms rather than causes.

- How can the level of analysis by older community groups be taken to another level and what would their activities begin to look like?
- What role could MCs and CGs play in preparing (or assisting SS to prepare) VDC profiles and updates in the future?

b) Structures

The current network structure is both logical and representative but it draws a lot of power into the hands of the CBNO that forms the apex of the network. As these bodies become stronger (and this is essential if the networks are to flourish), they will inevitably attract the interests of political, state and non-state actors, each with their own agendas. It is futile (and unethical, as the CBNOs do not belong to SS) to try to prevent this from happening but the risks of co-option are high. Community groups need to be careful not to hand over too much authority or control over their resources to these CBNOs, including but not limited to control over the funds raised by the network

² For practical ideas on transforming governance, see "Training for Transformation Vol. 4" (1999). I would also recommend that Sahakarmi Samaj obtain copies of the revised versions of Vols. 1-3 (1995) as the changes reflect more up-to-date thinking on the original themes.

members. Networks can work well among more formal organisations while loosely defined alliances seem to work better among informal entities such as CBOs that can "mix and match" according to their specific interest at the time. Alliances also ensure that decision-making power is retained by the members.

- Is there a unique role for Main Committees, considering the extra layer of bureaucracy that they represent and if so, how can this role be better defined?
- Should CGs be encouraged to aggregate their group funds in a CBNO-managed cooperative and if so, what safeguards can be put in place to ensure that group members maintain ownership and control over these funds?
- How can SS ensure that CBNOs retain the core values of the programme and the very reason for their formation in the face of inducements and coercion from agencies with very different aims?
- How could SS encourage and support the formation of alliances between CGs and with community groups set up by other development actors, and what could this look like?

c) Community groups

Community groups are the very essence of this empowerment process and the bedrock from which poor and marginalised people are claiming their rights. Members share much greater affinity to their community groups than to the higher-order committees. However, the focus of ongoing capacity building and the shifting of responsibility for fund management and accessing external resources to the MCs, and CBNOs in particular, is downgrading the role and importance of the community groups. The continuity and performance of these groups lies also in the hands of the CG Facilitators, among whom the commitment and capacity vary considerably. Those groups that will have had as little as 12 months support at the time that CGEST finishes are immature and lack the confidence to continue unassisted. Other, longer-standing groups are welcoming new members and are growing to a size where full participation in discussions and decision-making is no longer possible.

- Is there a way that SS can continue to support and strengthen the weaker CGs and CG Facilitators after the completion of the normal period of engagement without jeopardising its principle of a firm withdrawal date?
- What is an optimum size for community groups and what can be done about those members of a community wishing to join after an agreed limit has been reached?

Paradigm (developing theory from practice)

a) Measuring empowerment

The central tenet of the Sahakarmi philosophy is of personal empowerment being the basis for "justice- and wellbeing-oriented change" in people's lives and yet the agency does not have a clear definition of what empowerment means and how it can be measured. Without question, confidence and a sense of personal agency are the changes resulting from this project that were most commonly mentioned by respondents but do these, in and of themselves, represent empowerment and what is the magnitude of these changes. If the programme is to convince government, donors, other NGOs

and other sceptics of the value of this approach then a way of rigorously measuring empowerment needs to be developed and employed, and the results of this analysis published. Much has been written about the measurement of empowerment in recent years but it will be up to SS to develop a definition and set of indicators that are meaningful to the communities themselves³.

- What does SS mean by empowerment and how do communities experience the concept? Can at least some of these indicators be made quantifiable and if so how?
- How and when can SS collect and analyse the information needed to ensure that the measurement of empowerment is valid in the eyes of the international community?
- Are there internationally respected institutes or organisations that could be engaged in the process of measuring changes in empowerment resulting from the SS programme?

b) Impact of the "conscientisation" process

Changes in attitudes and behaviours are believed to be a consequence of this process of empowerment and critical analysis; a belief affirmed by this evaluation. In fact, this approach was widely used in South America to effect changes in health practices. Much of the work that is being done internationally on social health issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexuality, reproductive health, gender-based violence and substance abuse is employing a technical, legal or public health framework whereas critical thinking skills and personal agency are absolutely fundamental to behavioural change and the attainment of rights. It would be a big "selling point" with donors and implementing agencies to have proof that this process brings about and helps to sustain behavioural change.

- How can the process be used to enhance other development programmes and who would be suitable agencies with whom to trial this collaboration?
- How can SS collaborate with other agencies to undertake multi-purpose "Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices" (KAP) surveys that could form useful baselines and/or can these be covered in VDC profiles?

c) Model of change

The reason for the success of this approach can be attributed to a number of factors, some procedural, some attitudinal and most a combination of both. The self-identification of community, the choice of generative theme, the facilitation of group discussions, the emphasis on local resources and the experience of early success through collective action are all key elements of the process, but so are the values, beliefs and attitudes of the field staff. It can be useful to conceive of change from a systems perspective whereby elements interact with one another in often complex ways. The preparation of a "model of change" might help to anticipate the impact that a strengthening

³ A good place to start could be "So now they are going to measure empowerment!" by James Taylor, (2000) www.cdca.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29%3Aso-now-they-are-going-to-measure-empowerment&Itemid=2 and "Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators" by Ruth Alsop & Nina Heinsohn (2005) www.sasanet.org/documents/Curriculum/ConceptualFramework/Measuring%20Empowerment%20in%20Practice.pdf.

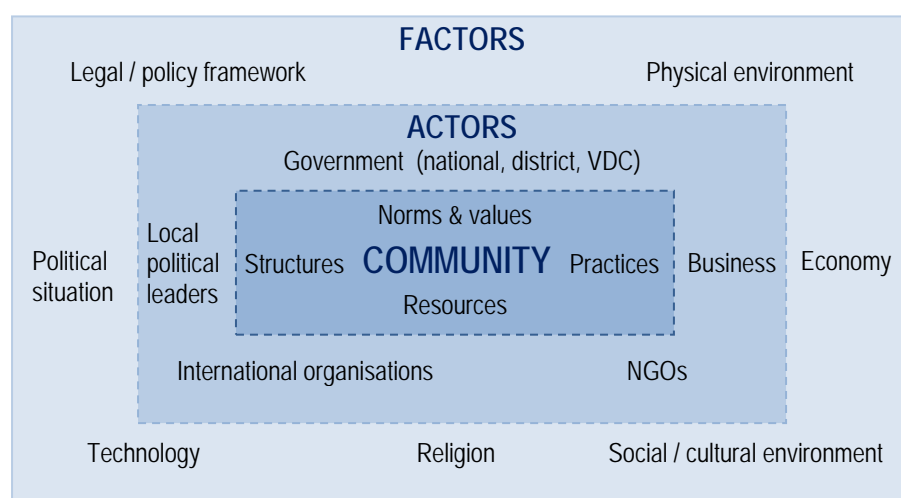
or weakening of any of the elements might have on the final result and could be a good way of explaining a comprehensive and interconnected approach to others

- What are the key elements that contribute to the achievement of change in individuals and communities as a result of their participation in this programme?
- How can these elements be portrayed in a way that best represents their inter-relationships?
- What are the different ways that such a model of change could be used?

d) *Analytical framework*

The programme is focused on strengthening communities, and groups of poor and marginalised within communities, to deal with actors and factors both internal and external to themselves. It is their powerlessness in relation to certain people and issues that keep people poor and marginalised. But as individuals and groups are empowered their relationships with others change and it is these changes in relationships that signify that development has occurred. However, different knowledge, attitudes, approaches or skills may be needed to shift the balance within different relationships. There are a number of ways to visualise the relationships between communities and their environment as there are ways to analyse the spheres of influence that communities can have on their environment. An example of a framework that I find useful is inserted below but there are numerous others that may be more useful⁴.

- What are the different people (actors), issues (factors) and internal matters that impact a community and with which unequal relationships may need to be renegotiated?
- What are the spheres of influence of the different bodies with the networks and in what ways do they interact with, overlap and complement one another?



⁴ Unfortunately I cannot trace the origins of this framework and hence acknowledge due credit. Training for Transformation Vol. 3 offers a different model that may also be useful.

Reach (spreading impact)

a) Coverage

The programme currently works with a maximum of 15 community groups in any one VDC, a number determined by the number and capacity of the staff allotted to each VDC and the period of time chosen for working there. The argument for limiting the number of staff and the time spent in a VDC is compelling but is resulting in some eligible, i.e. poor and marginalised, communities missing out on the opportunity to participate in the programme. From the evaluation interviews it can be deduced that knowledge of the achievements of facilitated groups has spread to neighbouring communities but the means by which this occurs has not.

Empowered communities are able to lobby their VDC for resources, often at the expense of their neighbours, and VDCs are responding to demands on a case by case basis rather than adopting a more just and transparent way of making decisions. In terms of equity, the promotion of good governance and the achievement of a critical mass there is a strong argument for establishing community groups in every community in a VDC.

- If a decision was made to try to cover all communities within a VDC, would it be better to cover them all at the same time (requiring additional staff) or over a period of time (requiring additional time) and why?
- How can experienced group members and especially CG Facilitators be utilised in the establishment and strengthening of new groups in the same VDCs?
- Will the empowerment of more communities in the same VDC simply lead to greater competition for the same resources or are there new opportunities for them to act together?

b) Dissemination

A clear finding of the evaluation has been the difficulty faced in convincing others of the efficacy of this approach but unless more agencies adopt this way of working then Sahakarmi alone will continue to have very limited impact on the nature of development in Nepal. As was seen (and used to possibly good effect) during the Surkhet Project a donor can wield significant influence on how its partner/s operate and the approaches that they take to their work. In addition, implementing agencies are very reluctant to change their way of working unless it has been sanctioned or championed by a donor. In this situation effort at changing attitudes should be aimed primarily at donor agencies and this requires a very persuasive case and strategy.

Having respected academic institutes publicly endorse the approach could be a good first step in getting donors on board and this could be achieved by hosting post-graduate researchers who would publish their findings/theses in journals and present at international forums often attended by representatives of bi-lateral and non-governmental donor agencies⁵. A high profile event in Nepal could go a long way in legitimising this approach in the eyes of the government and the donor community but would require a high profile speaker around which to organise it.

⁵ A possible starting point could be the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University who have done a lot of work and written volumes on participation and empowerment.

There is a risk however that the wrong agencies (those with incompatible values) will adopt the approach for the wrong reasons (purely to access funding) and will fail miserably, bringing the approach into disrepute. Sahakarmi Samaj would need to work closely with any "converts" to ensure that the approach is not abused.

- How could Sahakarmi identify and approach research institutes or other respected bodies and stimulate their interest in studying, writing up and publishing their findings on the impact that this approach is having in Nepal?
- What are the most appropriate donor coordination meetings at which the case could be made to adopt this approach more widely and what would be needed to be invited to address these forums?
- How could Sahakarmi ensure that the approach was not totally discredited by its misuse by others?

c) Children's groups

While this "conscientisation" approach was first developed out of and for work with adults the concept of developing critical thinking capacity is just as applicable to children. Critical thinking is now a core component in most recent educational approaches and is simply a derivative of the early "banking vs. problem posing" model that was the basis of Paulo Freire's approach. Proponents of improved community health and hygiene for example are increasingly finding children an effective way of getting information to parents, siblings and peers. However, much of the education provided in schools in Nepal is based on rote (banking) learning that is not preparing children to think and solve problems for themselves.

The suggestion here is that Sahakarmi experiment with after-school classes for children that introduce them to more interactive and self-guided ways of learning. Many of the concepts, such as generative themes and codes, can be introduced alongside games, songs, role plays etc. and lead to action plans and activities by the students. Once up and running these groups could be handed over to parents who are familiar with the approach through their membership of community groups and teachers who have shown an interest in learning more about it. This has the potential of encouraging more community interest and participation in the running of the local school, of influencing the teaching methodologies and approaches used in the school and of relaying ideas about children's needs and capabilities back to parents and siblings.

- What would be needed to prepare for a children's group, in terms of permission, facilities, materials, curricula or ancillary exercises and who can best provide advice on these matters?
- How feasible is it to encourage parents with community group experience and interested teachers from the school to eventually become co-facilitators of these groups?
- Are there other/better ways of engaging children in the process of learning and, at the same time, disseminating ideas about the Sahakarmi approach throughout the community?

d) Migratory communities

Possibly the most marginalised of all groups in most societies are those that regularly move from place to place, either for seasonal work or by tradition. They are very often landless, unregistered, uneducated and considered rogues and thieves. The Kushbandiya, Chidimar, Mahout, Badi, Raji, Gaine and Raute communities in Nepal all fit this description. Government and NGO social protection and development schemes are not set up to deal with people who are constantly on the move. These communities are either ignored or enticed/coerced into settling in one place, very often leading to a total dependence on welfare and the complete loss of cultural identity. The challenge in working with these communities is not in how to convince them to conform to the sedentary norms of society but how to adapt development activities to accommodate their regular movement. Sahakarmi is possibly better placed than most agencies to adapt its approach to the special needs of nomadic communities and can thereby prepare them to make democratic and informed decisions about whether or not to settle at some stage.

- Is working with transient communities something that Sahakarmi should consider now or in the future and what changes would it mean to the process and network model used elsewhere?
- How would it be possible for staff to maintain contact and facilitate group meetings in these communities if they were regularly moving and often living in desolate places under degrading conditions?
- Who could Sahakarmi turn to for advice on how best to engage with these communities and to make sense when things went wrong?

Resilience (enhancing sustainability)

a) Staff capacity

The strength of the current Sahakarmi programme lies in the calibre of the staff, not in the techniques that are employed. Many of the staff seem highly skilled in what they do, exhibit the values that underpin the approach and are fiercely proud of their programme and what it is achieving. However, some of the staff are relatively new, having joined when the programme moved into new districts or when experienced staff left for various reasons, and are less confident with the process. Certainly those, but possibly all staff could benefit from enhanced facilitation skills as the process used in group meetings is somewhat formulaic and does not equip them to deal with very different situations. Through this, some may show signs of becoming a good trainer and the Training Manager vacancy could eventually be filled from within.

While the assistance from SHEP in terms of finalising proposals and reports intended for English-speaking donors is both highly valued and valuable it represents a potential weakness in Sahakarmi Samaj. The quality of the case studies seems to indicate that many staff would also benefit from improved writing skills in Nepali. Training in English, project documentation and creative writing may all be useful over time and perhaps there is an argument for employing a bi-lingual documentalist.

As noted earlier there is an impressive series of staff meetings and programme reviews institutionalised within the organisation and most staff seemed confident to express their opinions in front of their colleagues. It was also quite noticeable how comfortable senior managers were in allowing a

free flow of ideas. But there appears to be a significant gap between senior management and the staff in their level of understanding, steadfast commitment to the values and process, and their analytical skills. It would seriously harm the organisation if these "custodians of the faith" were to leave. Enhanced analytical skills are needed particularly by the middle managers and more strategic use could be made of the regular reflection sessions to encourage staff to analyse situations and issues that are more philosophical in nature. Learning to think "out of the box" will eventually enhance programme-related decisions.

The recruitment of suitable replacement staff is crucial to the quality of the programme and, in addition to the prerequisite training course, Sahakarmi might consider introducing an internship programme in which inexperienced people are employed as trainees, on volunteer wages, for a fixed period of time during which they are systematically exposed to different aspects of the programme. Those showing most promise could be kept on or brought back to fill vacancies and the others would have gained valuable work experience and would take this experience into their next job.

- Who are the targets of any promotional material produced by Sahakarmi, what is wanted to be achieved and how will this be realised through the chosen methods?
- If Sahakarmi was to take a strategic approach to building the capacity of its middle managers, what would this entail and how would the impact be measured?
- Is the idea of an internship programme practical in the context of Nepal and how could Sahakarmi go about recruiting and paying suitable candidates?

b) Local resources

As with the communities Sahakarmi must continue to look at what is already available or can be obtained locally, and how these assets and resources can be best used to achieve what is needed. SS has a very good reputation with communities, government agents and other NGOs in areas where they have worked, many years of field experience in at least six districts in SW Nepal and a network of groups and umbrella organisations across the region. Many of the staff have heightened facilitation skills and believe firmly in the innate potential of others.

But perhaps the organisation's most important assets are its culture and core values. A modest organisation with modest expectations is a sound starting point in achieving sustainability. However, the quite imposing office building that is proposed seems incongruous with this culture and set of values. The viability of using office space as training rooms and facilities such as library and internet services to generate income is questionable. Operating a training centre is quite different from providing commercial training and requires different skills and level of organisational support. A training centre could lead to the provision of courses where SS does not have the requisite expertise and practical experience, thereby harming its reputation as a superior training provider. Specialised training may generate income whereas a training centre may not.

I am using "local resources" here to mean those available within Nepal, where each of the VDC offices is currently managing an annual budget of between Rs. 20-30 lakh. Of this, 25% is earmarked for human resource development. Sahakarmi Samaj is currently working intensely and less intensely in 18 VDCs in Banke, four in Bardiya, six in Kanchanpur and five in Dang districts⁶. Collectively these 33 local government offices manage an annual human resource budget of approx. Rs. 200 lakh. While VDCs are unlikely to fund SS directly CBNOs or MCs are eligible to apply for resources and could then commission SS to provide the service. SS would in reality be working for communities on a fee-for-service basis. The preparation of VDC profiles on contract to VDCs is unlikely to be lucrative but could help to subsidise the "listening surveys" and "social analysis" stages of the process and could be used to provide useful baseline data for research into empowerment and behaviour change.

- What are the likely impacts on staff values and perceptions of communities if SS owns and operates out of a multi-storeyed office building, and how can these been managed?
- What alternatives exist to constructing a purpose-built training centre within the new office building and how would they strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of the training?
- What services could SS provide to communities on an ongoing basis that they would be willing to pay for? How realistic is it that VDCs might agree to fund these activities through the CGs?
- What services could SS provide to VDCs directly that they would be willing to pay for but that would not divert the organisation from its core values and goals?

c) *External relations*

There is an adage that goes: "The best guarantee of sustainability is to do good work." But, in the case of SS, doing good work is not enough if very few people know about it. Promotion is two-edged sword, in that it shifts emphasis from what an agency is doing to what it says it is doing, but can be a "necessary evil". It is clear that Sahakarmi Samaj is not comfortable (and possibly competent) in self-promotion and should seek assistance in preparing an organisational marketing strategy. The funding relation with SHEP, and by extension Irish Aid and ICCO-KiA, is seen to be very respectful, supportive and mutually enriching but it represents a clear dependence on one agency that does not have its own funds and is not in itself a donor. However a challenge in expanding this donor base is ensuring that the values and expectations of others are compatible with those of SS.

Most bi-lateral agencies have rigid guidelines and focus on quantifiable outputs as a measure of achievement. This is where exposure on the international stage, as discussed under "dissemination" above could be useful in changing these requirements. Faith-based organisations often have their own core funds that can be used to support innovative projects and partners. Private foundations and trust funds can be open to novel approaches but tend to offer one-off grants. It may be worth contacting the Paulo Freire Institute at UCLA to see what interest, resources and contacts they can provide. In the

⁶ There are 132 VDCs in these four districts alone so the human resource budget is enormous.

wake of Freire's early writings on education there was a flood of agencies, particularly across South America, willing to try out his theories. Presumably some of these still exist and it might be worth the time to track them down, if for no other reason than to learn where their funding is coming from. And finally, there could be possibilities to collaborate with more mainstream agencies, working in the areas of primary health care, non-formal education, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and sexuality for example, on projects where SS provides the "empowerment software" and others the more marketable "hardware".

- What are the risks associated with taking funds from external sources and what guidelines are needed to inform decisions on what is acceptable and what is not?
- What are the risks associated with collaborating with other agencies in jointly implemented projects and what are some principles that should guide any such work?



6.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with the intention of contributing to the discussions encouraged above. The order in which the points are made correspond with the preceding section and the priority or level of importance attached to each must, in my opinion, be determined by Sahakarmi Samaj itself. In keeping with Freire's own philosophy, these suggestions should not become a substitute for debate and further discussion. With these caveats I recommend that:

- Sahakarmi Samaj hold firm to the values, principles and practices that underpin their development approach as these are both needed and highly effective in facilitating fundamental changes in the lives of poor and marginalised groups with whom they work.
- A more strategic and intensive effort be made to deepen the understanding of communities to the underlying causes of poverty, marginalisation and injustice in society.
- Caution is exercised in the transfer of resources and decision-making power from the Community Groups to the CBNOs for fear of promoting 'development brokers' and undermining ownership of the grass roots members.
- The focus of the programme remains on the strengthening of the Community Groups with whom the members have most affinity and which are the primary vehicle of the empowerment process.
- Sahakarmi Samaj develops a definition and set of measurement indicators of empowerment that are meaningful to the communities but sufficiently robust to satisfy others.
- A study be undertaken to explore the effectiveness of this development approach in bringing about sustainable behavioural change.
- Sahakarmi Samaj make conscious and document their 'model of change', which can then be used to assess the relative importance of the different elements and to explain their approach to others.
- A framework be developed by which the empowerment of communities can be further analysed with respect to relationships with their physical, political, socio-cultural and economic environment.
- The programme adopts an inclusive approach whereby all communities in a VDC are progressively accepted into the programme, using experienced Community Groups to partially train the newer ones.
- Sahakarmi Samaj presents the findings into the impact of its work, as suggested above, at a national seminar on empowerment that includes internationally respected speakers to give prestige and credibility to the event among the government and influential donor agencies.
- The scope of the programme is gradually expanded to include work with specific demographic and cultural groups such as children and migratory communities that can be highly vulnerable but often overlooked in conventional development programmes.

- Innovative ways are tried to identify and recruit new staff for the organisation and that more time is allocated to building the understanding, skills and confidence of particularly middle-level staff to ease current reliance on the senior management team.
- Sahamarki Samaj reconsiders its plan to construct a multi-storeyed office complex in light of its potential impact on organisational values and its image with donors and host communities.
- In-country funding opportunities, particularly with VDCs, are explored to better integrate the programme in the national development effort and relieve its almost total dependence on foreign funds.
- Sahakarmi Samaj diversifies its foreign funding sources by actively searching out sympathetic foundations and organisations, and by strategically collaborating with agencies undertaking more conventional (and more easily funded) programmes.



The Social and Health Education Project

Evaluation of the Community Governance for Empowerment and Social Transformation (CGEST) programme of Sahakarmi Samaj

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background:

In 2007 Sahakarmi Samaj initiated a new programme in Bardiya and Kanchanpur Districts of south-western Nepal; the Community Governance for Empowerment and Social Transformation (CGEST) programme. The CGEST programme involves the deployment of facilitators in marginalised communities to support the development of community groups and community based networking organisations (CBNOs) in which local people analyse their circumstances and act to address their concerns by mobilising local and external resources. The CGEST programme builds on the success of Sahakarmi Samaj's earlier ten-year SAKTEE programme in Banke District which was evaluated in November 2008.

The CGEST programme was designed in 2006 following a strategic review of the work of Sahakarmi Samaj and the development of a six-year strategic plan (2007-2012). It now operates with funding from the Irish Aid Civil Society Fund (CSF) and from ICCO-Kerk in Actie. This funding is channelled through The Social and Health Education Project (SHEP), which was already engaged in a 'learning partnership' with Sahakarmi Samaj and which, as an Irish civil society organisation, met Irish Aid's eligibility criteria for CSF support. Whilst Irish Aid has no direct involvement with Sahakarmi Samaj's programme in Nepal, both ICCO-Kerk in Actie and SHEP provide programme support under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the responsibilities of the respective programme partners (Sahakarmi Samaj, ICCO-KiA and SHEP).

The Evaluation Contract:

The current funding period extends from July 2007 to July 2010. It is a contractual requirement that CSF-funded projects of this kind be externally evaluated in accordance with Irish Aid's *Guidelines for Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation of projects funded under The Civil Society Fund*, which state that '*Organisations in receipt of a multi-annual CSF Grant are required to independently evaluate the project at the end of each three year funding cycle. For projects with a budget greater than €100,000 the evaluation should be conducted by an independent consultant(s)*'.

According to the Guidelines, the evaluation should address the following points:

Relevance

The evaluation should consider the extent to which the project addresses the needs and priorities of the target. It should also consider how the project fits in with the priorities and policies of the country and of Irish Aid.

Effectiveness

The evaluation should consider if the project design was the most effective means of achieving the objectives and the extent to which the objectives have been achieved taking into account the relative importance of each objective. The evaluation should examine how the inputs (financial, technical and human) contributed or hindered the achievement of the objectives.

Efficiency

The evaluation should assess whether the cost of the project can be justified by its results, taking alternatives into account.

Impact

The evaluation should determine the long-term effects of the project, whether these are positive or negative, intended or unintended, and the relation to the overall goal of the project.

Sustainability

The evaluation should determine if the project outcomes and impacts will be sustained without continuing external financial or technical support.

Replicability

The evaluation should also determine whether a successful project or successful aspects of the project could be replicated.

It is indicated that *‘The evaluation should preferably use participatory approaches and there should be consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including beneficiaries, staff, management, government officials, etc’.*

The reporting requirement for Irish Aid is relatively modest.

A written evaluation report should be submitted to Irish Aid. The reports should be no more than 10 pages in length including attachments.

The following format is proposed for the report:

Format of the Project Evaluation Report

Executive Summary:

Provide a synopsis of the evaluation emphasising the principal findings and the evaluation’s conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned. It should be written in a concisely and with consideration of the fact that some people may only read this section.

Introduction:

Present the purpose of the evaluation, including information on by whom and how the document will be used, the evaluation criteria, the principal questions to be answered, and the methodology uses. The introduction should also set out the structure of the evaluation report.

The evaluation:

Describe the principal characteristics of the project, its location, a brief history, a description of the CSF grantee, local partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders. This section should convey the principal problem addressed by the project, the project objectives, and its logic of cause and effect. It should include a description of activities which were undertaken and the principal results. This section also includes any assumptions made in relation to external factors in planning the project and the accuracy of these assumptions. If a project has been evaluated previously the findings and conclusions should be summarised here.

Findings

The findings consist of responses to the questions posed by the evaluation terms of reference based on evidence (data and examples) from the evaluation. *This is the main part of the report and evidence should be presented in a systematic way which will allow readers to form an opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of the conclusions of the evaluation.*

Conclusions

Present an assessment of the project and its results against the evaluation criteria set out in the TOR (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and replicability), and against standards of performance and established policies.

The evaluator will be expected to meet the requirements set out by Irish Aid. However, recognising that this evaluation comes at the mid-point of the six-year strategic plan, s/he will also be expected to write an explanatory commentary (c. 25 pages) on the evaluation report and provide clear recommendations to guide those who will be taking the programme forward. S/he should undertake the evaluation in a collaborative way with Sahakarmi Samaj and the international programme partners (ICCO-KiA and SHEP) and share her/his findings directly, as well as through written communication.

The contract for the evaluation will be awarded by The Social and Health Education Project in consultation with the other programme partners on the basis of tenders submitted. It is anticipated that the evaluator will need to spend 15 days in the Sahakarmi Samaj work areas and a further 10 days working on the report and other tasks related to the evaluation. The evaluation fieldwork must be completed by the end of June 2010 and the report, commentary and recommendations must be submitted before the end of August 2010. Given the charitable and justice-oriented nature of the programme, it is expected that consultant's fees will be pitched at a level that is fair for both parties to the contract. All necessary travel and accommodation costs will be provided.

Person Specifications for the Evaluator:

The following qualities will be sought in the evaluation consultant:

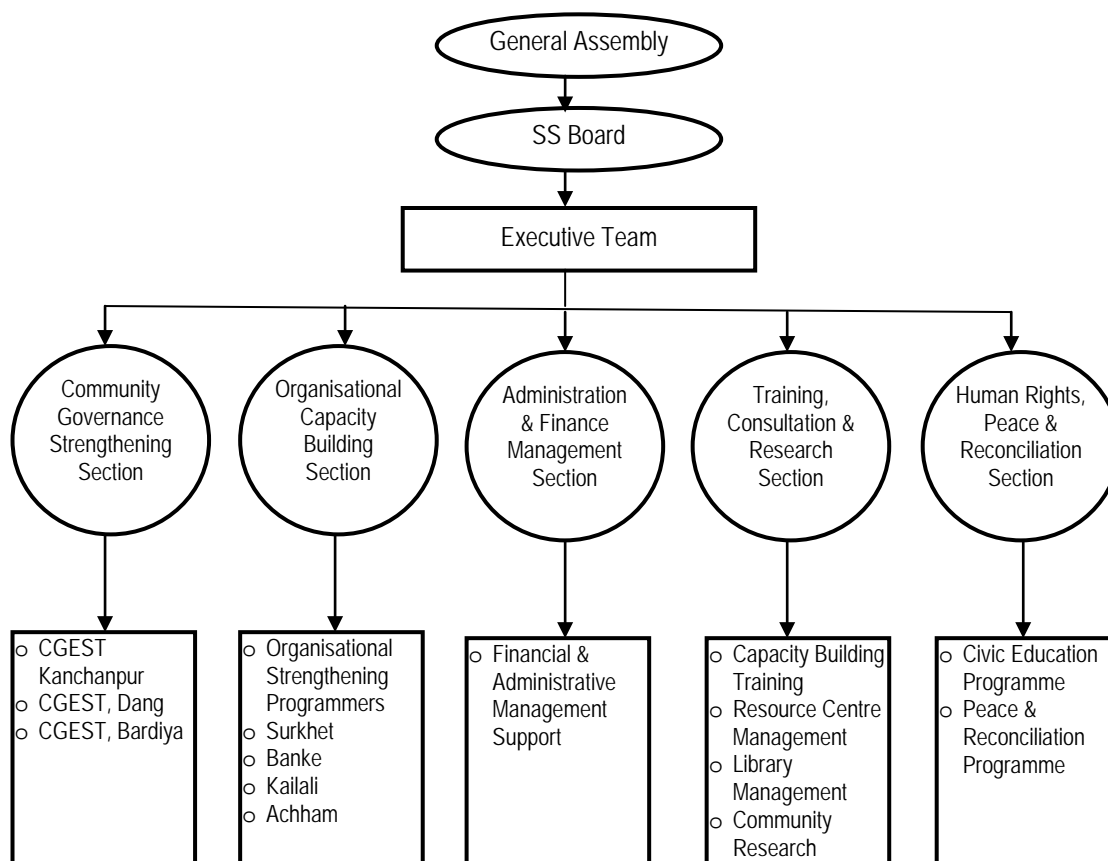
- Experience/understanding of empowerment-focused capacity development with marginalised groups in the Majority World
- Experience/understanding of humanistic community education (Freire, Mezirow, Rogers)
- Experience/understanding of process-led development (participatory situation analysis, action-planning, plan implementation, monitoring and evaluation)
- Experience/understanding of organisational and institutional development
- Experience of participatory evaluation
- Ability to contribute a balanced external professional analysis
- Excellent inter-personal skills
- Excellent facilitation skills
- Excellent documentation skills in English
- Capacity and willingness to travel to rural parts of western Nepal

Nepalese language skills and experience in rural Nepal would be an advantage. (An independent Nepalese translator/resource person will be provided to support a non-Nepalese evaluator).

Schedule of activities

Date	Activities	Days
1,2 May	Travel, Yangon – Bangkok - Kathmandu	1
3 May	Travel, Kathmandu – Nepalganj Meeting with SS Executive Team	1
4 May	Briefing by SS Executive Team	1
5 May	Meeting & fieldwork planning with Evaluation Team Meeting with SS Executive Team (HP)	1
6 May	SS staff workshop	1
7 May	Fieldwork planning with Evaluation Team	1
8 May	Rest day	
9 May	Fieldwork in Banke	1
10-12 May	Fieldwork in Bardiya	3
13 May	Travel, Banke - Kanchanpur	1
14,15 May	Fieldwork in Kanchanpur	2
16 May	Travel, Kanchanpur - Banke	
17 May	Interview INF & RRN Workshop preparation	1
18 May	Workshop preparation	1
19 May	Validation workshop	1
20 May	Debriefing with SS Executive Team	1
21 May	Interview SS Board Travel, Nepalganj - Kathmandu	0.5
22 May	Interview SUS	0.5
23 May	Travel, Kathmandu – Bangkok - Yangon	1
24 May- 4 June	Report writing	10
		<hr/> 29 <hr/>

Sahakarmi Samaj Organisational Structure



Key questions, indicators and guiding questions

	Key questions	Indicators	Guiding questions
Objective 1	1. To what extent have the CGs solved shared problems through discussion, collective action and mobilisation of local and external resources?	Identified & analysed problems. Planned & taken collective action. Mobilised resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the problems that you have discussed in your group since its formation? • What process did you use to identify which were the more important issues to act on? • What actions/activities have you taken together to solve these problems? • Where did you get the resources needed to implement these activities? • Which of these problems would have been solved even if you had not discussed and acted on as a group? • Other than taking action together, are there any other benefits from belonging to this group?
	2. To what extent are the CGs using clear, democratic and inclusive management/operating practices?	Active, clear rules, decision-making processes, composition of membership, accountability, advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do you meet and how do you make decisions in this group? • Do you have written rules and procedures and do members abide by these? • Who can join this group and do you have members from different (wealth) classes, castes, religions, ethnic groups? • How do you ensure that the leaders of this group and also the leaders of the Main Committees and CBNOs remain honest and do the right thing? • Can you give examples of times when you have used the strength of the group to lobby government and non-government service providers?
	3. To what extent are the MCs and CBNOs using democratic and inclusive management / operating practices?	Active, clear rules, decision-making processes, composition of membership, accountability, advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of this committee/organisation and how are the members chosen? • How often do you meet and how do you make decisions in this group? • Do you have written rules and procedures and do members abide by these? • How can members of the Community Groups be sure that the leaders of this group remain honest and do the right thing? • Can you give examples of times when you have used the strength of this group to lobby government and non-government service providers?
	4. How has the awareness of government officials and other agency staff been raised through contact and training with SS?	Trainings, participation, feedback, attitude changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you know about the work of SS and how often have you met SS staff in the past? • Have you attended any trainings or meetings run by SS and do you remember what they were about? • How useful do you think the SS approach is of facilitating discussions and linking communities with government offices and other organisations but not providing any resources or services themselves? • How could SS improve the way that we work with your office?
	5. To what extent is information and experience on facilitative ways of working in community being shared among like-minded organisations?	Membership, meetings held, meeting participation, other contact, benefits experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your organisation belong to any network where you can share information about your work and even work together on common issues? • How often does this network meet and do you attend the meetings regularly? • Other than meeting with agencies to access resources, do you ever meet with other groups to discuss your work? • What benefits, if any, have you gained from belonging to this information-sharing network?
	6. To what extent has a resource library of materials been set up and is being used by others?	Range of materials produced, use by other organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you seen any written materials describing the approach of SS and the type of work that you are doing? • Have you ever written anything about your work, other than a progress report, that you have shared with others? • Are there more effective way of disseminating information about your work than written documents and what would you suggest?

	Key questions	Indicators	Guiding questions
	7. How have the learnings from SAKTEE been used in the current CGEST programme?	Processes of reflection, lessons, programme changes, results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What are the different ways that SS reviews or reflects on its work and who are involved in these exercises? •To what extent are outside stakeholders (communities, government officials, donors) involved in giving feedback to SS on the programme? •What were the main lessons learned from the SAKTEE programme and what are the main changes that have occurred in the CGEST programme as a result? •Have there been any unintended consequences (negative effects, new problems) of making these changes? •In what ways is the current CGEST programme better (or worse) than SAKTEE?
Objective 2	8. What actions have been taken to address injustice, corruption or poor service delivery as a result of the CGEST programme?	Injustice identified, action taken, effect of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What does the term "injustice" mean and can you give examples of this in Nepali society? Who are the people who are mostly hurt by this injustice? •Who is responsible for confronting injustice and corruption in our society? •What can ordinary people do to address injustice and stamp out corruption in their society? •What actions has your group (or SS-facilitated community groups) done to tackle some of these problems, and how successful have these actions been?
	9. In what ways, if at all, have members been empowered through their participation in the CGEST programme?	Confidence, skills, self-belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Do you feel that you have changed after becoming a member of this group, and in what ways? •What knowledge or skills do you have now that you didn't have before, and how are these useful to your life? •Why do you think that this group has helped you to make these changes or might you have changed anyway? •Do you feel that you can solve most problems facing you and your community through this group or is it only the government or 'big people' who can really change things?
	10. What attitudinal and behavioural changes have resulted from participation in the CGEST programme?	Agency, movement, contacts, livelihoods, attitude to others,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can you give examples of things that you do now that you didn't or couldn't do a few years ago? •In what ways has your life improved or worsened since becoming a member of this group? •In what ways has your attitude changed about people of different sex, class, caste, religion or ethnicity?
	11. How have relationships within families & with others changed as a result of participation in the CGEST programme?	Respect in family & outside, shared workload, familiarity with VDC, DDC members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Have there been any changes in the way that your family members relate and help one another since you joined this group? How has your membership of this group influenced this change? •Do other people in the community relate to you differently now that you are a member of this group? •Are you afraid to meet 'big people' (such as VDC members) or are you confident to complain to them if necessary? Has your membership of this group changed the way you think of these people?
	12. To what extent have communities been able to mobilise resources to address their problems?	Use of local resources, contacts with outside service/resource providers, successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Can you give examples of when your group has been able to solve problems without having to ask for help from outside the community? •What are the advantages and disadvantages of using local resources to address problems? •Have you ever contacted outside service/resource providers to ask for assistance and were those requests successful? •What can you do if these service providers refuse to help, particularly if it is their job to help?

Stakeholder analysis

	Key questions	Community Groups	Main Committees	CBNOs	CG Facilitators	SS Executive Team	SS staff	SS General Assembly / Board	VDC Office	DDC Office	Local political leaders	Other CBNOs	Other NGOs	Learned people / Social workers	School principal / teachers	Non-members	Former CG members	Community forest users	Village health post	Local police	Religious leaders	Unity Agricultural Centre	Unity Veterinary Centre	Neighbouring villages	Sub-totals
Objective 1	1. To what extent have the CGs solved shared problems through discussion, collective action and mobilisation of local and external resources?																								4
	2. To what extent are the CGs using clear, democratic and inclusive management/operating practices?																								5
	3. To what extent are the MCs and CBNOs using democratic and inclusive management / operating practices?																								3
	4. How has the awareness of government officials and other agency staff been raised through contact and training with SS?																								5
	5. To what extent is information and experience being shared among like-minded organisations on facilitative ways of working in community?																								3
	6. To what extent has a resource library of materials been set up and is being used by others?																								4
	7. How have the learnings from SAKTEE been used in the current CGEST programme?																								3
Objective 2	8. What actions have been taken to address injustice, corruption or poor service delivery as a result of the CGEST programme?																								6
	9. In what ways, if at all, have members been empowered through their participation in the CGEST programme?																								6
	10. What attitudinal and behavioural changes have resulted from participation in the CGEST programme?																								9
	11. How have relationships within families & with others changed as a result of participation in the CGEST programme?																								6
	12. To what extent have communities been able to mobilise resources to address their problems?																								4
Sub-totals		7	5	5	5	7	10	3	3		4			3		3								3	

List of interviewees

District	Date	Interviewee	Organisation	Male	Female
Banke	4-May	Manager	Triveni Vikas Samaj CBNO	1	
	4,5-May	Executive Team	Sahakarmi Samaj	4	
	6-May	Staff	Sahakarmi Samaj	16	6
	9-May	CBNO	Jan Jagaran Samaj	3	1
		Main Committee	Namura, Samsarganji	3	4
		Community group	Tharu Jagaran, Rajhena	1	13
		Community group	Janajoyti, Raniyapur	6	7
		Community group	Bahiri, Hirminia	13	13
		Resp./Political leaders	Shamsergunj	4	
		VDC Secretary	Indrapur	1	
		Neighbouring village	Raniyapur		1
Bardiya	10-May	Community group	Jansewa, Mohamadpur	1	17
		Community group	Shankarpipal	3	27
		Community group	Milijuli, Kalika	3	25
		Community group	Jankalyan, Kalika	2	26
		Community group	Chetana, Sorhawa	1	26
		Political leader	Kalika	1	
		CG Facilitator	Milijuli, Kalika		1
		Non-members	Sorhawa	2	1
	11-May	Main Committee	Jansewa, Kalika	3	11
		Community group	Sunaulo Samaj, Kalika	12	20
		Community group	Laliguransh, Sorhawa	1	28
		Community group	Pragati, Mainapokhar	5	13
		Community group	Siwonrikash, Mainapokhar	1	22
		Neighbouring village	Mainapokhar	4	4
	12-May	CBNO	Janshakti Bikash Samaj	7	5
		Main Committee	Sangharshsil, Sorhawa	3	10
		Respected	Kalika	1	
		CG Facilitator	Gausudhar, Kalika		1
		CG Facilitator	Sahayogi, Mohamadapur	1	
		VDC Secretary	Sorhawa	1	
Kanchanpur	14-May	CBNO	Shrijansil Samaj	4	7
		Main Committee	Nava Bihani, Dekhatbuli	3	12
		Community group	Laliguras, Dekhatbuli	1	19
		Community group	Ujayalo, Krishanapur	8	40
		Community group	Himal, Jhalari		24
		Community group	Janchetana, Dodhara	3	36
		Community group	Pasupati, Chandani	4	26
		Community group	Chandani, Chandani		10
		Non-members	Dodhara, Ward 3		1
		Neighbouring village	Dodhara		1

District	Date	Interviewee	Organisation	Male	Female
Kanchanpur	15-May	CBNO	Janjayriti Vikas Samaj	4	3
		Main Committee	Navaprativa, Jhalari	2	14
		Main Committee	Navajagaram, Dodhara	3	8
		Community group	Sital, Pipaladi	3	23
		Community group	Sangh Samela, Asaina	1	17
		Respected	Pipaladi	1	
		Political leader	Pipaladi	1	
		CG Facilitator	Akikrit Santi CG, Dodhara		1
		CG Facilitator	Janachetana CG, Dodhara		1
		CG Facilitator	Sakti CG, Jhalari		1
		VDC Secretary	Jhalari VDC	1	
		Neighbouring village	Pipaladi	1	
Banke	17-May	NGO	International Nepal Fellowship	1	2
		NGO	Rural Reconstruction Nepal	2	
	19-May	Validation workshop	SS, CBNOs, govt. & NGOs	29	10
	21-May	Board members	Sahakarmi Samaj	3	2
Kathmandu	22-May	NGO	Samari Utthan Sewa	1	2
				180	542

SS staff workshop

A. What are the strengths of the CGEST programme?

- Increase in social justice, peace, common agreement and social harmony.
- Initiation of good governance in community.
- Increase in female participation and leadership.
- Problem identification, analysis and response for endangered people.
- Awareness on rights and responsibilities.
- Identification and mobilisation of local resources and increase in partnership resources.
- Specified working process and implemented accordingly.
- Increase in capacity building of staff.
- Formation and implementation of work plans.
- Documentation of changes.
- Transparency of the programs.
- Decentralisation of responsibility.
- Development of media relations.
- Committed staff.
- Mobilisation and exploration (through research) of various opportunities.
- Feedback, coaching, counselling and interaction according to needs.
- Impartiality.
- Hearing interest, problem analysis and research alternative solution for problems.
- Holding interaction and discussion according to needs.
- Mutual understanding, respect and equal treatment.
- Understanding of responsibility and performance.
- Participation of all in discussion of programs.
- Regular communication.
- Staff stay in the community.
- Participation on various festivals and rituals of communities.
- Exchange of help and mutual understanding.
- Inclusive working networks based on groups, MCs and community.
- Family arrangement/management of staff and community groups.
- Establishment of working network organisation.

B. What are the parts of the programme that are not as good as you would like?

- Unclear process for forming and facilitating cooperatives of CBNOs.
- Insufficient effort to coordinate with other organisations.
- Insufficient and untimely production and distribution of materials on working processes.
- We encourage people to be clear and to claim their rights but our facilitation is still insufficient to find/search the resources for gaining their rights.
- SS initiated people-centred approach but has insufficient written documents.
- SS chose limited criteria in limited area for disadvantaged and marginalised people but many needy communities are left out.
- MCs role is not clear therefore it seems inactive.
- Less time to coordinate CBNOs.
- The capacity building training of groups is a little short.
- SS hasn't promoted its work although it has achieved much at the local level.
- Low facilities/remuneration for staff despite increased cost of needs.

C. What are the processes that are actually used in community and how do they differ from the theoretical approach?

- Should be equal number of male/female membership in community groups but women make up more than 75%.
- Provision of training and interaction every 6 months for group facilitators sometimes done at 3-4 months intervals.
- Sometimes untrained people are accepted as members.
- Village profile should be submitted before the end of the first step working process but is still not submitted.
- Insufficient support for later-formed groups.
- Staff have chosen to live in 'good' houses rather than in houses comparable with those of the target poor and marginalised.
- Staff workshops not done on time.
- Planning is often not done on basis of analysis of approach.
- Provision sometimes given to CBNO development / capacity building when none had been budgeted.
- Some participants to workshop given allowances when none had been budgeted.
- Other SS programs (RISE, CIVIC) do not follow normal process.
- Training for cooperatives provided despite not originally planned.
- Some staff are appointed without adequate training in SS approach.

D. How does Sahakarmi Samaj relate to other agencies and government offices?

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Nature of relationship</u>	<u>Strength of relationship</u>
1. Target community	• CGEST programs	• Direct, very close
2. Groups / MCs	• CGEST programs	• Direct, very close
3. CBNOs	• OD, civic education	• Direct, very close
4. Other CBNOs	• Share learning & capacity building	• According to need
5. Other NGOs – Sayol, B group, INF, Samari Utthan, SWI, RRN, DWO, DAO	• Share experiences, training of facilitation process, coordination, research, conduct of program	• Good, according to need
6. Related VDC offices	• Resource mobilisation, capacity building and research	• Good, direct regular contact
7. District based govt. agencies	• Legal support, coordination, share plan and progress	• Direct, regular
8. SHEP, ICCO	• Organisational partnership, share learning, partnership agreement	• Good, regular, direct
9. Other INGOs	• Capacity building, share learning, program development, program evaluation	• Good, regular, direct
10. Bhunu multiple campus	• Strategic plan, share learning	• As needed
11. Political parties	• Coordination, interaction, resource mobilisation and capacity building	• Satisfactory
12. Civil society	• Share experience, coordination, share suggestions	• Satisfactory
13. Banks	• Running account	• As needed
14. Hotels	• Running workshops	• As needed
15. Media	• Advertisements	• Satisfactory
16. NGOs - CSSD, SBS	• Program partnership	• direct, close

E. What are the core values of SS?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good governance ▪ Environmental sensitivity ▪ Just peace ▪ Interdependence ▪ Mutual respect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Equality ▪ Integrity ▪ Trust in inner potential ▪ Awareness of rights and responsibilities |
|---|---|

F. What evidence do you see of values actually being expressed in behaviour?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addresses problems/grievances of disadvantaged communities. ▪ Family environment among staff, with mutual understanding and no discrimination. ▪ No personal (improper) use of program materials. ▪ Regular exchange of knowledge, skills, experiences in workplace. ▪ Participatory approach in evaluation – fieldwork and planning. ▪ Provision for staff leave during festivals. ▪ Motivation for staff to improve education. ▪ Celebrate annual cultural rituals and festivals, with families of staff. ▪ Staff support and help each other. ▪ Both male and female participation. ▪ Participatory decision-making, planning. ▪ Staff take responsibility. ▪ Respect and listen to all opinions. Consult each other. ▪ Inclusive staff selection – castes, races, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Common understanding of programs. ▪ Clear allocation of works and responsibilities. ▪ Compliance with policies, structure, working processes and practices. ▪ Staff trust each other. ▪ Open interaction to solve misunderstandings and arguments. ▪ Staff get opportunity to present their thoughts and views. ▪ Use of voting rights of members at General Assembly meetings. ▪ Transparent accounting system, including annual audit of organisation. ▪ Publication of annual report. ▪ No abuse of position or resources without immediate action. ▪ Weekly performance appraisals. ▪ Use of local languages, participation in local cultural programs. ▪ Preservation of tradition and heritage. ▪ Value for money in purchasing. |
|--|---|

- gender & groups.
- Code of conduct has been prepared and implemented.
- Conducted various programs fairly in difficult circumstances.
- Clear circulation of information.
- Economic use of organisational and public property.
- Conduct orientation for new staff on rules and policies of organisation.
- Regulations amended on the basis of need and experience.
- Delivered services according to need.
- No smoking/drinking of alcohol in workplace.
- Willing to expose weaknesses.

G. What evidence do you see of a gap between behaviour and organisational values?

- Untimely publication of materials.
- Less opportunity for experienced and skilled staff.
- Some staff seem to prefer the title Sir/Madam these days.
- Inconvenience of conducting meetings in local languages.
- No women in Executive Team.
- Sometimes opinions/thoughts are ignored in practice.
- Some of the personal opinions are not guided by organisational issues.
- Unclear practice of trusting efficiency / capacity of staff.

H. What has been learnt from the SAKTEE program?

- Closer and more effective relationships with local agencies mean community groups will get more support from them.
- If young and adult people participate equally in leadership positions of community groups, the groups can be more sustainable and stronger.
- The program will be more effective if balanced relationship maintained with all stakeholders such as VDCs, DDCs, local organisations, teachers, learned/political leader.
- People can mobilise local resources more effectively if they develop conceptual understanding of those resources.
- It would be easier if local language, culture and rituals are adopted in the program.
- It is better to give training of local agencies and multi-party mechanism of VDC before beginning work in VDC.
- It is better to launch program with all identified marginalised groups.
- It is better not to add groups later.
- To coordinate with district level NGOs/INGOs.
- Third step in the working process should be conducted after 6 months.
- Make provision for staff to stay in marginalised people's houses.
- Focus on the participation of local agencies, civil society, and political representatives in the activities of groups, MCs and CBNOs.
- Share experiences and have regular meetings with local organisations.
- Identify the capacity building needs of CBNOs, plan and implement accordingly.
- Group[s], MCs and CBNOs should be involved in local issues and rights oriented activities and should create favourable environment.
- Create favourable environment for CBNOs to be accountable to MCs and MCs to CGs.
- Timely staff workshops.
- Create favourable environment for groups, MCs and CBNOs to work independently.
- A capable group facilitator should be selected to contribute to the group in the future, and provided with family coaching for his/her capacity building.
- Regularly hold discussions of meetings and programs of group members / facilitator's family.
- It would be easier to make organisational and personal change if organisational norms and values are adopted / followed.
- Team members should live in the house of disadvantaged and marginalised people.
- Should have been complete team from the beginning of the programs.
- The specific/perfect work plan can lead to achievement according to needs.
- Should launch programs for those areas where there is no presence of other organisations.
- The more problems analysed in the groups, the stronger the groups will become.
- The living standard of people increased after the groups are organised.
- Should not compromise norms and values of the organisation because of minor problems – double standards create confusion in the working process.
- There should be a specific working process for network building and donations and grants should be avoided.
- Clear working process makes well-managed and results-oriented actions.
- Regular sharing of experiences and learning increased the working capacity of staff.
- If marginalised people are organised they can access state services and facilities.
- Future strategies are needed on the basis of experience in organisational development.

CGEST Evaluation Validation Workshop

1. Welcome and purpose of evaluation [Narad]

2. Outline of day [Mal]

3. Evaluation objectives [Mal]

1. To determine the extent to which the project's strategic objectives have been achieved.
2. To identify the impact of the project's interventions on the lives of poor and marginalised people in the host communities.
3. To identify the strengths of the project approach and recommend ways to modify this approach to deliver improved outcomes for communities.

4. Methodology [Khadka]

Scope of evaluation: 17 July 2007 to date

Data collection techniques (to date)

- 20 semi-structured individual interviews
- 30 focus group discussions
- 6 semi-structured group interviews
- 1 workshop.

Sample method and size

- Convenience and purposive selection
- 675 respondents (147 men + 528 women)

Respondents

Banke	▪ SS Executive Team, ▪ SS staff, ▪ SS Board members, ▪ 2 LNGOs, ▪ 2 CBNOs, ▪ 1 MC, ▪ 3 CGs, ▪ 1 VDC secretary, ▪ 1 local political leader, ▪ 1 respected person, ▪ 1 neighbouring village
Bardiya	▪ 1 CBNO, ▪ 2 MCs, ▪ 9 CGs, ▪ 1 VDC secretary, ▪ 1 local political leader, ▪ 1 respected person, ▪ 3 CG Facilitators, ▪ 1 non-member, ▪ 1 neighbouring village
Kanchanpur	▪ 2 CBNOs, ▪ 3 MCs, ▪ 8 CGs, ▪ 1 VDC secretary, ▪ 1 local political leader, ▪ 1 respected person, ▪ 3 CG Facilitators, ▪ 2 non-members, ▪ 2 neighbouring villages

5. Key Findings

Overview of groups & group structure [Khadka]

[Diagram of CBNO - MC - CG structure]

Bardiya:	1 CBNO	4 MCs	60 CGs	1699 members
Kanchanpur	2 CBNOs	6 MCs	86 CGs	2629 members
Total	3 CBNOs	10 MCs	146 CGs	4328 members

<u>Gender breakdown:</u>	Men	17%
	Women	83%

<u>Social breakdown:</u>	Brahmin	7.4%	Chetri/Thakuri	27.5%	Madhesi	2.2%
	Ethnic	6.7%	Indigenous	26.1%	Dalit	27.8%
	Muslim	2.3%				

Key evaluation questions

1. To what extent have the CGs solved shared problems through discussion, collective action and mobilisation of local and external resources? [Buwaneswori]

Groups mobilised resources and took action in the following areas:

Livelihoods

- Regular saving & fund mobilisation
- Vegetable growing
- Grocery shops

Education

- Student admission campaign
- Regular school visits & monitoring
- Literacy classes

Health

- Treatment of uterine prolapse
- Counselling for HIV/AIDS & STIs
- Protection against possible epidemics

Citizen rights

- Citizen, birth, death & marriage registration
- Social security allowances
- Access to information

Community infrastructure

- Road building & repair
- School building construction
- Bridge construction

Water & sanitation

- Reticulated drinking water
- Latrines
- Road cleaning & drainage

Environmental protection

- Tree nursery & plantation
- Erosion control
- Community forest management

Points of concern:

- More focus on group fund collection and loans to detriment of other actions.
- Groups demoralised by unsuccessful attempts at external resources.

2. To what extent are the CGs using clear, democratic and inclusive management practices? [Ghanshyam]

Policies & procedures

- Fund management & policies
- Group operation procedures

Functions

- Weekly meetings
- Consensus decision-making
- Good group discipline

Points of concern:

- CG Facilitators assuming increasing responsibility for group actions.
- Some CG Facilitators are inactive & absent from meetings.

3. To what extent are the MCs and CBNOs using democratic and inclusive management / operating practices? [Tul]

Governance

- Inclusive representation
- Transparency & responsibility
- Participation

Organisational development

- Various working processes
- Financial & administrative regulations
- Annual assembly

Functions

- Advocate and participate in VDC
- Participation in NGO coordination meetings
- Record collection

Points of concern:

- Lack of mobilisation of local resources
- Irregular attendance in meetings
- Holding onto power

4. How has the awareness of government officials and other agency staff been raised through contact and training with SS?

[Prema]

Training

- Trust in working process.
- Importance on human development.
- Utilisation of local resources & increase access to external resources.
- Sharing of information.
- Creating cooperative environment for community groups.

Contact

- Sharing of knowledge, skills and experience in NGO coordination meetings.
- Need based meeting & discussion.
- Resource distribution.
- Increased recognition and participation.

Points of concern:

- Unable to develop new training courses.
- Unable to meet current training demand.

5. To what extent is information and experience on facilitative ways of working in community being shared among like-minded organisations?

[Ram]

Learning network

- 3 day workshop on governance & experience sharing among CBNOs.
- Partnership meeting among CBNOs.

Information sharing

- Sharing of experiences & information during General Assembly.
- Use of Community Information Centre.
- Exposure visit.

Points of concern:

- No clear strategy for coalition building.
- Not able to conduct meetings regularly.
- Poor management of Community Information Centre.

6. To what extent has a resource library of materials been set up and is being used by others?

[Narayan]

Reports

- Annual reports
- Successful stories
- Community newsletter
- Civic campaign bulletin.

Other documents

- Pocket planner.
- Training materials.
- Working process documentary
- Website.
- VDC profiles

Points of concern:

- Publications delays.
- Updating of website.
- Cessation of SS bulletin

7. How has the learning from SAKTEE been used in the current CGEST programme?

[Netra]

Functional changes

- Discussion of generative themes,
- Use of local languages in group discussions,
- Use of different techniques as 'codes',
- District & VDC teams offer CG consultation
- Role of CBNOs shifted from project implementers to advocates,
- Use of capacity self-assessment techniques,
- Follow up on sensitive personal issues in private
- Celebrate formation of MCs and CBNOs
- Discontinuation of 6-monthly community surveys
- Improved planning, tighter staff work plans and less interference allowed most activities to be undertaken as planned and completed within time

- Work with highly vulnerable non-members,

Points of concern:

- Some staff cannot use local languages in group discussions.
- Insufficient time available for vulnerable non-members.

8. What actions have been taken to address injustice, corruption or poor service delivery as a result of the CGEST programme? [Champha]

Advocacy

- Equal wages.
- Reduction of caste discrimination.
- Access to natural resources.
- Use of government services.

Claiming rights

- Claiming resources from VDC.
- Claim right to decide on community works.
- Claimed rights & compensation for vulnerable families.

Practices

- Property & bank accounts in woman's name.
- Women included in community management, NGO and users' committees.
- Citizenship, marriage and birth registration.

Points of concern:

- Forgot responsibilities while claiming rights.

9. In what ways, if at all, have members been empowered through their participation in the CGEST programme? [Laxmi A]

Confidence

- Able to speak.
- Can tackle works if work together.
- Able to obtain rights from collective & personal effort.

Skills

- Shared leadership.
- Planning, implementation & evaluation.
- Facilitation.
- Problem analysis.
- Effective listening.
- Organisational management

Roles

- Able to conduct meetings.
- Participation & took responsibility in local groups.

Points of concern:

- Some members hesitate to talk in group meetings

10. What attitudinal and behavioural changes have resulted from participation in the CGEST programme? [Bakhat]

Attitudinal changes

- Reduced racial, gender, religious & language discrimination.
- Changed attitudes toward schooling.
- Recognise responsibility for own development.
- Increased ownership of development activities.

Behavioural changes

- Sharing experience and cooperation with each other.
- Participation in public works.
- People of different castes eat together.
- Listen to other views and present ideas clearly.

Points of concern:

- Some members still discriminate against others.
- Some members consider themselves superior to others.
- Some discrimination against menstruating women.

11. How have relationships within families & with others changed as a result of participation in the CGEST programme? [Laxmi T]

Family dynamics

- Increased participation of women & children in family decisions.
- Reduced domestic violence and increased harmony within families.
- More equal sharing of responsibilities within families.
- Increased open discussions and transparency.
- More productive and develop savings habit.

Community engagement

- Increased cooperation with neighbours.
- Compliance with positive community norms and values.
- Increased involvement in public work & recognition for this.

External relations

- Increased interest from non-members in works of community groups.
- Invitations from various organisations.
- Increased sharing of resources between neighbouring communities.

Points of concern:

- Less time available for families, leading to complaints.

12. To what extent have communities been able to mobilise resources to address their problems? [Janak]

Local resources

- Solving emergency problems through use of group fund.
- Increased community facilities due to resource identification, mobilisation & maintenance.
- Cooperate over resources to solve problems.

External resources

- Encouragement & priority from VDC for group activities.
- Vocational training.
- Challenge VDC over unfair allocation of resources.
- Coordination with government offices.

Quality of life

- Improved education, environment, health & sanitation.
- Use of fresh vegetables.
- Increased family income.
- Reduced smoking & drinking.

Points of concern:

- Group members becoming reliant on external resources.
- Some members do not follow through on commitments.

BREAK

6. Conclusions

[Mal]

Relevance

- Addresses fundamental needs if development is to be controlled by the people themselves.
- Relevant to people's needs as they choose the issues on which to work.
- Relationship with SHEP (and Irish Aid) considered highly supportive, with few donor demands.

Effectiveness

- Able to significant increase people's sense of agency and feelings of self-worth.
- Reaching marginalised communities with majority of members from lower castes.
- Strategy of encouraging cooperation to solve small problems first builds confidence.
- Facilitated group discussions build understanding among members of different castes, religions, ethnicities and sexes while successful actions fosters sense of solidarity leading to harmony and tolerance.

Efficiency

- Highly efficient as stimulates and builds on community contributions.
- Community activities draw heavily on local resources, delivering significant benefits with minimal inputs from outside.
- Treating field staff time as major input then input to groups is minimal but able to trigger projects worth many times the input cost.
- Planning and management skills of groups are minimising losses due to inefficiencies and malpractices.
- Requires a long-term commitment and strong personal commitment of staff.

Impact

- Very significant impact on awareness and sense of agency of individuals.
- Significant impact on relationships within target communities.
- Successfully delivering functional changes (good governance).
- Focused on local issues and not addressing structural issues.
- Limited 'ripple effect' due to lack of uptake by others.

Sustainability

- Sustainability should not be measured solely in terms of structures e.g. groups, but personal capabilities and opportunities.
- Impact on individuals has been transforming and will not be lost even if groups cease to function.
- Clear and consistent withdrawal timeframe with much effort put into linking groups with appreciating local resources and identifying external resources.
- Empowerment of members means that most groups don't fear SS withdrawal.
- Drift toward raising of funds and formation of cooperatives may divert focus toward economic goals and paid staff.
- Initial expectations of communities, dearth of like-minded agencies, conditionality of donors and the prevailing focus on deliverables is challenging values and purity of approach.

Replicability

- Proven ability to be replicated in other areas.
- Dissemination is not 'converting' NGOs who are focused on quantity, short-term and issue based, often dictated by donors.
- Replicability by others questionable as values of agency and staff more important than techniques.

LUNCH BREAK

7. Ideas for discussion

[Mal]

- ***Coverage of all communities in VDC, using experienced CG members as 'animators'***
 - Better to select qualified and skilled group facilitator than community animator to cover all VDC communities.
 - Select at least 2 community animators, with salaries/wages and mobilise within VDC.
 - Prepare animator to form new CGs within VDC and support existing groups.
 - Link new community groups to existing CGs set up by SS within VDC.
 - Support capacity building of VDC authority and community animator.
- ***Focus on capacity of CGs rather than management functions of MCs and CBNOs.***
 - Develop capacity of group support and monitoring team and provide regular support to community groups.
 - Compensate expenses incurred during support and monitoring of CGs.
 - Conduct refresher training in skill development for community facilitators.
 - SS field team should identify and analyse the generative themes within the CGs.
 - Identify and cooperate with other community groups, users' committees and clubs.
- ***Explore network / alliance approach to organising CGs.***
 - Strengthen Main Committees to be more effective and active in their support of CGs.
 - Identify the full range of groups in communities.
 - Form issue-based networks or alliances within the VDC.
 - Make membership easier to obtain for those interested in joining community groups.
- ***Extend support for new groups and enhance analytical skills of older groups.***
 - Extend the length of support to new groups and make specific plans to strengthen analytical skills of older groups.
- ***Set up 'children's groups' in schools.***
 - Support the idea of children's groups in schools.
 - Students will become more responsible to community.
 - Increase understanding of rights and duties towards society and family.
 - Increase the speed of change.
 - Make the existing structures more effective.
 - Bring about change in teaching methodologies.
 - Will help to develop discipline and personality.
 - CEs can reduce one CG and take one session in school.
 - Start with 1 / VDC or 1 / school with teacher facilitating the process.
 - Mobilise qualified group facilitator in school.
- ***Working with migratory communities.***
 - Program would be more important and effective with migratory communities, such as Kushbandiya, Chidimar, Mahout, Badi, Raji, Gaine, Raute etc.
 - Planning and support should be flexible.
 - It will require patience by the program and person.
 - Should move with migrating communities.

8. Close

[Narad]

Literature reviewed

- "So what can we learn about the Surkhet Project: Findings of an Impact Review on UMN Rural Development Department's Surkhet Project (1992 – 1998), by Paul Doherty, 2000.
- Nepal Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, 2003
- Irish Aid Civil Society Fund Application, from SHEP, 2006.
- Irish Aid Guidelines for Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation of projects funded under The Civil Society Fund, 2007
- Irish Aid Civil Society Fund Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, 2008 & 2010
- Sahakarmi Samaj Strategic Plan, August 2007 – August 2013
- SS Strategic Plan Logical Framework Analysis, 2008
- Evaluation report of the SAKTEE programme, by Moira O'Leary, 2008.
- CGEST Annual Reports – Years One, Two & Three (draft), 2008, 2009, 2010
- Key Lessons from the 2009 Learning Exchange Visits, by SHEP & Sahakarmi Samaj, 2009.

Case studies

1. Other Community Members amazed seeing the Changes in the Mahout community

The neighbouring community members of Banke district, Hirminiya VDC was now amazed seeing the changes on Mahout community. Mahouts have started to gain the services of the government offices and court without assistance of their neighbouring community people. They said 'Let's work ourselves if we do like this we shouldn't feed chickens and wines to other, it is not necessary too.'

With the assistance and facilitation of Sahakarmi Samaj, Bahiri group in the name of Bahiri god was formed. The group member Agyan Ram Mahout and Manohar Mahout eagerly stressed that when the group was formed. Common problems and interests were discussed weekly and started to work one after another making plan together. In the initial phase they ignored meeting. Gradually after knowing participants among themselves increased, they understood the fact that the activities of gaining their rights and empowering the community should be done by themselves. They made their efforts to do the possible activities themselves they grew confidence when they took initiatives organizations for those activities which they couldn't do.

Group comprises 36 members but there was no group in the past. Through many organizations visited outside the community, Sahakarmi Samaj only provided us knowledge and ways and empowered us. With the assistance of this organizations, we are able to speak confidently and openly claim about our rights; Patteshwaory Mahout, a group facilitator said. 'We have submitted memorandum to concerned authorities/agencies about our demand should be addressed in the new constitution and hope that our voice will be heard'.

The old Mahout men and women didn't value to make citizenship and birth\marriage registration. They didn't know whereabouts of CDO and DDC offices after the formation of this group, we ourselves went to district and we all made citizenship and birth/marriage registration. We have demanded the drinking water pipes. We have get chance for pig/goat keeping running grocery shops and knew about right to food Birza Mahout and Kelaram Mahout said.

They further added "we used to sit in the floor in VDC offices but now we sit in the chair and speak confidently with the VDC authorities". Therefore other community members like Madeshi who used to dominate them amazed now and say how did you get empowered how did you know to speak such things' Such changes were not possible for their capacity building. As all group members spoke unilateral voice everyone is compelled to trust on their saying.

2. Trust of Bishowraj

Bishowraj the resident of Kalika VDC-3 civil society leader and learned opined that impartiality on politics insistent struggle staying with landless squatters, Dalits and marginalized community are the excellent working process of Sahakarmi Samaj.

Being the former member of Kalika VDC Bishowraj said he is motivated with the use of common leadership skill of the people in real practice not in speech only. Several organizations worked in Kalika VDC but some organizations gathered Tharu community and gathered some women and formed the group. But Sahakarmi Samaj stayed in the village and conduct daily visits door to door of people and formed group after six months. Now these groups organise meeting weekly. and discuss and analyse problem. All people from different walk of life male, female, races, classes, languages, culture unite for the development of the community.

As Subedi said that he got influence with the activities of building meeting hall, filling path with clay, digging drainage, cleaning roads, making temporary toilets, unity for visiting VDCs and other organisations to explore resources, common contributions of labour and works, coordination with all, demand of consultation/suggestions, family unity and well managed and planned actions.

'Sahakarmi Samaj did not give any resources to the community, but implanted such knowledge and capacity where is created spiritual relations, equality, end of the discrimination and justice and peace. It is a social treasure/property. It will be model work if we preserve it'. Bishowraj further said. He suggested that Sahakarmi Samaj should facilitate to keep concrete pipes in the road initiated by community, some income generation sectors, literacy and capacity building training and in the financial transformation sector.

3. Muslims began to have food and receive Tika in Hindu Pahadi and Tharu people's house.

This is the statement told by Saunri Tharu the chairperson of Tharu Jagaran group. There is one of the members named Kalli Muni from Muslim community in the group. After joining the group she found many changes. 'Through we used to work together in construction of road, making bridge and drainage. We did not have food together, celebrate festivals and receive Tika among each other even we did not use to enter their houses. Now we have seen changes among us. We Whole heartedly welcome each other have food in marriage, parties make fun and merry making together and received Tika etc to Manju Tharu said. The group was established in 2056 BS. After forming the group, the involved member Kalli Muni Saha's family member easily accepted the culture, rituals of Pahadi and Tharu people. But other Muslim family did not accept her way easily at the beginning when they got influence of group work, cooperation and understanding. They started to agree on these activities.

The secretary of the group Ram Bahadur Tharu the same group said ' sharing of each others culture and rituals have made the relationship of people stronger. If the group may reach consensus, after discussing an issue in the group, the concerned authorities can make quick hearing to them. The groups also have been encouraged due to the quick decision of stakeholder. They even give priority to their own local resources saving fund has been made a medium of resources. The group collected, Rs. 5 at the beginning but now they have despite Rs. 75000 in cash. They can provide loan to their members in low interest rate. Implement the money in income generating activities which have further increase the recognition of the group in the community. In this way, the group is able to end the racial discrimination, in the reality by creating harmony among cultures and rituals.

4. Appeal to Husband to join in the Group

Chetana group- Daulatpur- Sorahawa it is known that group was formed Hariprasad Tharu's wife wish to join in the group but he has talked negatively for two years saying that group member status does not adjust with them. His family has sufficient food to survive for a year but group members are very poor. Now his wife has felt hurt for missing the group. He said ' I should not have ranked them thinking our status only. I have negative attitude to them. Instead they are habituated to respect me more than before. I think group will make people more practical. I am influenced with there participation in group work and I also thought to make here join in the group.

5. Built Up Toilet in Bhada Riverside

With the support of Sahakarmi Samaj a group was formed in Mohamadapur VDC in ward no. 9 Sanobikri and 2nd Falyun 2065. In one of the regular meetings there has been discussion on common problems and use of Toilets have been found a solution to control diarrhoea.

'Human excretion and urination left in the edges of the road are carried to our houses by hands and indirectly mixed up in our food too', one of the members said. To solve this

problem three members from the group getting consultation/facilitation from Sahakarmi Samaj, Bardiya and obtained materials like pan, cement, mechanic etc. For forty toilets women participants of the group contributed to carry sand, labour to build up toilets. After using toilets, the surrounding environments turned into neat and clean and it resulted to less people to fall ill and suffer from diarrhoea. Group members had situation to cover their nose while walking but there looks no excretion now. Neighbouring community, looking at the changes at present suggested that it is better to use toilets nearby home to make community clean. There is no more open excretion habit in the riverside and path. River, house yards, paths are clean now because children also used the family toilets now.

Neighbouring community members, being rich, landlords and elite class have not used toilet since past. Their children and guests are compelled for open excretion in the river side. But being the member of poor family Janasewa group members are united and successful to make their community/road/path/riverside clean. Neighbouring so called rich people envy looking at the activities of poor. But group members are committed for unity to solve problems.

6. Children Started to Became Regular in School

After children having taken food at home, they used to set out for fishing and playing Careemboard. But nowadays they attend the school regularly. It happened due to no study at school, children's negligence and parents carelessness to enquire school going record of their children. They failed in the exam too. Even their neighbour lodged information at their house about children setting to stream carrying bags, instead of going to school.

Such a problem widened in the community. The Laliguran group discussed the issue of children's irregularity in the school. They had analysis into depth of the causes. Then they concluded that the main reason of children's absence in the school and going for fishing is parents and teachers carelessness. Not only the group members but neighbouring community members also called on during the discussion. The solution was sought involving the community members in group effort. Out of the several solutions /ways 'parents and groups monitoring at school is the most' was selected. All agreed to assist in monitoring the school.

Two monitoring committees were formed including five members in each in the decision of group. They started to monitor the school every week and inquired the presence / absence records of the students and teachers as well. As a result study and students began to be regular in the school. At present student do not appear at lake and stream for fishing. It has extended the relationship of community and school more and improve the study of the children as well.

7. Group Banned for Careemboard

School going children, wearing school uniform, did not reach in the school and used to huddle around the Careemboard. Some of them used to come back after theory took one or two periods. There were more viewers than the players around the Careemboard. They used bet the money in the Careemboard stealthily selling the crops of their houses. They were weak in study too. At present, Chetana groups made it efforts ban the Careemboard. No one play Careemboard in the village now. Students are regular in the school. They no longer steal crops. The study has been improved and study to read at home too. Chetana group members said, 'it is an opportunity for all to improve.

Sahakarmi Samaj implemented community Governance Enhancement for Social Transformation (CGEST) on Sorahawa VDC Daulatpur. Chetana group was formed in the village; various problems were discussed in the groups. They analysed about school not going and playing Careemboard in the meetings. One of the group members was asked to inform the Careemboard host to stop Careemboard. Seven Careem playing stations were and they stopped to play at home also. Some of the players asked them to stop in a whole village otherwise it wouldn't stop. Group members held interactions and discussion between

group and community. All participants appreciated group activities for banning Careemboard and agreed to ban in whole community.

As children used to bet in the Careemboard by stealing crops, it was difficult for them to save crops, children used to set out in the morning and be late in the evening. Without attending the school, they used to play Careemboard. The group has banned it and children started to assist in house chores too. They are regular in the school and interested in study. Group has well done one of the group members said.

8. After warning to stop VDC council meeting got a room.

Nababihani MC, Dekhatbhuli, Kanchanpur comprises 14 community groups. MC's monthly meeting holds at 11am, 28 every month. In the meetings they discuss on sharing experiences, problem analysis, plan formation and implementation process. Nababihani MC meeting was held on 28 Mansir 2066. MC doesn't have its meeting hall therefore sometimes they stay on the ground and sometimes under a tree. There was discussion about hiring a room from other organization. They thought to use a room of the VDC after repairing it. With the decision of MC they submitted application in VDC. VDC Secretary stressed that it should be decided by VDC Council. MC members met VDC Council too. They heard the discussion issues of VDC Council but their problem was not discussed. "What happened with our application? they said. But political leaders denied then saying it was not possible to give like that. MC members warned to stop VDC Council if they couldn't use their property after repairing by themselves. Finally, VDC Council decided to provide a room and donated extra Rs.5000 to group. Then meeting continued. Now, MC members are busy to collect wood and tiles to repair the room. Thus relation has been extended between VDC and MC.

9. Adoption of Supreme Democratic Process

Janajagaran Samaj, Khauura, Banke is a community based CBNO. It was established in 22/09/2059 as an umbrella organization of 124 groups and 7 MCs. Homraj Kurmi, the chairman of CBNO said "The organization with inclusive of male, female, all caste, religion, language and culture is moving ahead from written bylaws, regulation and working process and has supreme democratic decision-making process on the basis of these documents." He further said "The members of CBNOs, MCs and community groups, MCs and CBNOs conduct annual general assembly according to their rules, policies and bylaws and present their financial record, activities among their members and other stakeholders in public."

Ram Bahadur Pun, the executive manager of CBNO, said "collection and prioritization of the problems from community groups, MCs and CBNOs, explore local and external resources, coordinate with govt. and NGOs, build up the environment of social harmony from, working plan for mobilization of local resources, maintain groups responsible towards MCs, minimization of social hazardous, formation and implementation of annual working plan, selection and mobilization of staffs, take care of finance and maintain discipline, and main role is to implement people centred process in practice by brainstorming for improving the life standard of marginalized community.

As manager Pun said "We can have confidence to implement it for those people who are associated with CBNOs. Because of our practices, we have developed the feeling that we can do something for ourselves. People insistently make their effort to recognize problems, analysis, search for alternatives, working plan, and implementation. People have capacity for self-analysis.

10. Janachatana Group became exemplary for social transformation.

"If we possess knowledge, skill and opportunity we can transform the society easily" Setu Khadka, the chairman of Janachatana Group said. We didn't have any knowledge about social transformation. we were like a frog inside the well. After the formation of Janachatana Group, we attended meeting regularly. After discussion we came to know that we can do

many things from our local resources. We completed many development activities that we could do from our local resources. If we had known such things before we could have changed our community.

In the working process of Sahakarmi, people's inner capacity is empowered or released outside. Similarly, Setu Khadka's change is one of the examples of empowerment. Like Khadka, other members of the group were very eager to tell the changes that occurred in their life. They said "We began our group from 25 members but now we are 40. All community problems are discussed in group and make decision to do it. We worked together and facilitated advocacy for those who got injustice. We built up meeting hall to hold our meeting. We assist for other groups that can't solve their problem. We raised our voice against injustice nearby the border of India. We claimed rights and resources from VDC. We put on pressure on them to gain our rights. After we held interaction program with school and community, we took initiative to build up toilets in school. We raised our voice for clean drinking water and quality education in the school. The community people and school family changes their attitudes to look at us.

Group members said "We can do more with skill and knowledge that we gained from Sahakarmi Samaj though we don't get anything from outside. Withdrawal of Sahakarmi doesn't make us any difference we will continue our activities coordinating with others. Our group work was awarded by VDC with Rs.200. This is an example of learning for all. We learnt a lesson that unity and enthusiasm lead us to success. The members of Janachetana group are committed and unilateral voice to complete their mission.

11. Development should be done by ourselves

Tukraj Ghimire, Nepali Kanyass general committee member and resident of Kalika VDC ward No. 8 has pleasant experiences to the working process of Sahakarmi Samaj. As he said excitedly, "At the beginning Sahakarmi's staff visited door to door of the people alone, I had on them because they might be some political party cadres and exciting manipulating the people. When I observe their one year's activities I myself amazed. People started to build up the road, clean drainage, preserve forest and plant trees, monitoring school, claim their rights and resources from VDC.

Kalika VDC consists of 94 groups organized by NGOs and INGOs including Women Development Office, Simi Nepal, ENCCI, Agricultural Development Office and forward etc. All those groups collect money and invest it specially focus on income generating activities. But no one involve in public activities. 14 groups affiliated to Sahakarmi Samaj are actives in 9 wards. They hold regular and weekly meeting, discuss and analyse different problem. After making working plan, they implement it. All contribute their labour and unite together for public works.

I have got that development is for us. No one do it for us, people have also realized the same things. I have participated in their discussion, interactions, general assembly and people contributed campaign. I have political ideology. I am Nepali Congress general committee member. In the groups all people from different walk of life, religion, cultures, caste, class and community unite together. Sahakarmi Samaj has developed such a spirit which is really important work.

12. Confidence and analysis capacity increased.

The important changes have taken place on the members' life of MCs, a representative organization of 14 community groups affiliated to Sahakarmi Samaj in Bardiya district, Kalika VDC. Indu Pariyar, a group member said "I am from Dalit community. Before I joined in the group my husband didn't allow me to go outside. I was discriminated in the name of caste by other community members. When Sahakarmi friends insistently made their effort to form and empower group in Kalika VDC for 6 months, I also became a member." She added "In weekly meeting of the group different castes, religious, gender and cultural people stayed together and discussed on problem. We searched various alternatives to solve minor

problems and participated to implement our working plan. While talking to each other, we increased harmony among us, increase cooperation, participated in training. Now I am in leader of the group, my husband began to help me and reduced discrimination."

13. Retrospection

There was an opportunity to visit the place where Sahakarmi worked 10 years before. It was on 26 Baisakh 2067. We all including 3 Sahakarmi staff, 1 Netherlands guest and 14 group members stayed in circle inside the house built up by the groups. It was regular meeting of the group about discussion, solving problems etc. But today discussion shifted to ask about the impact of our program. In this process, they were asked to talk about the changes that they have got.

Among many members one of the members was eager to tell his views. Narayan Paudel, a father of four sons, said "I have many sons. In the past I didn't have sufficient food to feed my children, to send my sons to school was far reach of my status. I had innumerable problems therefore I put my problem for the discussion in the group. My problem was discussed in the group. It was on my favour. Group provided me some loan to buy a cart pulled by the buffalo. I felt that I got eye that I didn't have. I was very happy." A white-haired Paudel sustained his life running cart and able to send his children to school. He has also well managed settlement.

Currently his eldest son has gone abroad after passing SLC. Second and third sons study in school and pointing to his youngest son, he said "I was able to send him in boarding school too. He amazed himself with his success." When he increased his earning, he migrated to the productive land. The previous place was not productive. He has donated about 6 sq.m. land to build up group meeting hall where meeting is held by the group now. Unfortunately his buffalo was stolen last year but he is not much worried as before because sons also started earning and he also can do differently. It is easier for people to learn something if they are laborious, tolerant and entrepreneurship. He made us learn that you should have patience to do something. We should work hard.

14. Professionalisation of inherited skills

A group is formed in Pipladi VDC. The group comprises 26 members inclusively Rana Tharu and mountainous Brahman and Chetri. After joining in the group Brahman and Chetri learned Ranatharu's traditional skill of weaving Dhakiya, a pot for keeping flowers, crops etc., Laxmi Devi Bhatta from Brahman community is now able to train people for making dhakiya. Among the members in the group 3 members including Bhatta are making dhakiya and selling it in the market. Now she has trained 4 people including Rana Tharu women. She said "For the dissemination of this skill she is trying put it in the discussion of their group as we possess this skill."

15. Experience of Dalli Sunawar.

Dalli Sunawar, resident of Kanchanpur district, Krisnapur VDC, is a woman from Dalit community. Her neighbours didn't behave to her well two years before. When she needed some help they didn't talk with her nicely. Now she saw drastic change on the behaviours/manners of neighbours. She became member of Ujyalo group affiliated to Sahakarmi Samaj a year before. All types of people including Brahman, Chetri, indigenous group, Dalit have been active sitting together for discussion, analysis of the problem, finding alternative solutions, plan formation and implementation process.

Stating her experiences she said "Brahman and Chetri people didn't have water touched by us before, with so-called high class people was supposed to be a crime. We had to sit separately. But joining in the community group, the discrimination of untouchability is reduced and enhanced solidarity among us.

16. Mother and son together in school.

[Husband, who used to make remark to his wife not to go school in the children schooling time, began to deliver message from abroad by phone for his wife not to leave school.]

Tulasi Tamang, resident of Banke district, ward No 6, study in the school with her son together. Tamang, the chairman of Namura MC remained under the work field of Triveni Development Community, said while attending at the friend education HIV/AIDS training, Surkhet conducted by CBNOs, I realised that I couldn't write the points discussed in the training. I didn't have facts to tell in the group." She told in the group about her training. Discussion started in the group. Illiterate members in the group decided to admit in the school. Some of them were admitted in 3/4 class and some joined in class one too. Some of them had studied in class 2 or 3 and some didn't have any schooling in their childhood. Out of the admitted women, some left due to their busy schedule and some continued to study. Tamang got admission in class 6 with her son together. She studied herself and encouraged others who are illiterate like her. She has been able to put the minuting of the meeting.

Due to busy schedule at home she thought to leave school but husband who is in Saudi Arabia for foreign employment suggested her to sell goats and grow vegetables only for her kitchen. He assured her to send home expenses but asked her not leave school.

17. Group initiative in resource mobilisation.

VDC accepted a bid to control Jogabudha River flood from erosion but bid holder began to sell net in India and Janachetana group formed in Dodhara ward No 5 captured the net and made barricade in stream edges.

Janachetana group began to discuss in various local problems and made plan accordingly. They planned to ban heavy loaded truck tractor which made holes in the path. Due to the bordering area of India and Nepal smugglers have made it passage to transport their goods. Though community members suffered from the erosion, they didn't get net from VDC to protect from erosion. The smugglers truck with net heading to India was caught by the group and they held discussion with the host of the truck and finally he agreed to provide 20 nets out of 60 to make barricade in riverside. Later the group members caught heavy loaded truck and charged Rs.200 for making the hole on the road. It increased their fund too.

After the formation of the group the members grew their confidence. To make barricade, the group demanded 400 sacks from Flood Affected Disaster Office, Mahendranagar. Setu Khadka, the chairman of the group said, "If brothers, sisters of the community work together, local resources can be mobilised appropriately and be aware of our rights."

18. Pain for not delivering assistance

Sabita Air, aged 25, the resident of Kanchanpur district, Jhalari VDC Ward No 5, Sisaiya is now assistant secretary of MC, a representative organisation of groups affiliated to Sahakarmi Samaj, on behalf of Ujalo community group, and taking responsibility of assistant secretary of MC, she talks about the changes that occur inside her.

"I remember an incident of three years before. One night my neighbour's son got stung by snake. During the night time they asked for our help to rush his son to the hospital but my husband didn't like to offer them help because they had migrated from Bajhang district and we didn't have any traditional relationship with them. Later they went to next neighbour and got bicycle and rushed his son to hospital. His son got recovered after long treatment.

Being a member of community group, she has been learning about sharing of cooperation and exchange from different medium for three years. I recalled the same incident that we didn't give motorcycle. If my neighbour's son wasn't alive it would be a dreadful crime for me. Now I cooperate with people who come to my house and if any neighbours have shortage of rice, salt, oil, they borrow from me" she said.

19. Various alternative measures to increase funds

Laligura group in Dekhatbhuli VDC, Ward No. 3, started to collect funds. At the beginning Rs.5 was collected from each of the groups. "The members associated in the group have got loan in cheap (2%) for various income generating activities and fulfilling the urgent need of the family. But regular savings was not sufficient to fulfil the demand of loan from the members. Therefore, they discussed several alternative ways of increasing the funds in the group, Anudevi said, such as: 1) Work collectively for paddy and wheat harvest and gain certain amount. 2) Organise various cultural programs related to caste, national festivals to protect our culture and ask some money from concerned people and stakeholders according to their will. 3) Build up and run Kanji house. and 4) Establish nursery for plantation and preserve and run it.

Thus, Laligura group search for varieties of alternative solution and make consensus decision to implement it. Group has captured the one bigha land (around 2.5 sq. km.) and planted 3500 various species of trees and cut straw and collected Rs.3000 in their fund by selling it. "We earned Rs.1500 from the Kanji house", Ram Chandra Tharu, the secretary of the group, said. Thus, the group has collected regular monthly saving Rs.5, and seasonal fund, interest from the loan. Implementing all these alternative measures the group has collected Rs.21,540.

The group was formed in 2065/02/01. According to Santi Chudhari, there are 20 female and 3 male members in the group. She said "We have insistent effort in the group for solving our problems, contributing our labour in various public work. We have tried to move ahead making coalition with others. It makes the group stronger" Sabiram Chandra Tharu said.

We got an opportunity to join in the group meeting in 2067/01/03. There was discussion on caste, religion, culture etc. They run group with clear thinking and with the process of advocacy made them aware on the resources they get from local agencies. I hope group will be good and sustainable.

20. Group played the role of Badghar (a traditional leader of Tharu community)

The traditional community service holder, Tharu Badghar is on the verge of disappearance so community based group Sibin Bikash group started to work as badghar. Sibin Bikas group in Bardiya district, Mainapokhar VDC have been conducting regular meeting, analyse the problem and formation plan and started community works coordinating with various govt, NGOs and INGOs. The Tharu Badghar system which worked worshipping god and goddess, solving generative themes of Tharu community, have been gradually disappearing. They could allot time for community, they used to select Badghar from within the community for three years. But due to various political conflicts, they do not trust to each other, small cases are also brought to police station and seem to have increased attitude of taking pride. Lila Tharu, a local Tharu member, said "culture is degenerated, left their costumes, community is split, and people did everything in their own consent".

Though Sibin Tole Badghar community left to work, the group leaders started to work as Badghars. Group made toilets, coordinating with RRN, seasonal saving, cutting wheat together, solving minimal conflict of the community, demanding budget from VDC from the road construction, began to worship[together in cultural festivals" Bimala Chauhari, chairmen of the group said. Jayaprasad Tharu, the former Badghar of the Sibin Tole said "out of 9 wards, 6 toles have Badghars but they are inactive. But when group started to work as Badghar, people from other toles requested to solve minor conflict and took suggestion from it."

21. Husband and wife as members in a group

Tharu Jayaran group in Rajhena VDC was formed in 2056. At the beginning it has only 26 members, but now 18 including 17 female and 1 male. They have made rules and regulations and conduct annual general assembly. Group provides an environment for decision-making on consensus, discussion, participation and mutual respect. They collected Rs.7500 with regular monthly saving Rs.20 and seasonal group works, and altogether Rs. 7500 in fund. They have invested in their own group in cheap interest, opening bank account.

Ram Prasad is working as a secretary and Rupa Chaudhari as a chairman. In their discussion they attached -ji (a respectful tag added after name or surname in Nepali) after their name. The chairman of the group has much responsibility to make plan and implement it. "Isn't it Sauriji?" the secretary (husband) said to chairman (wife)." He again said "We are members at home as in group. We realise that this is a change. My wife and I are proof of change."

22. Tharu Jagaran trying to market its product.

Our body needs vitamins. we must have green vegetables. The left over after eating can be sold in the market and earn money. We came to conclusion after financial analysis. we began to grown vegetables. Triveni Bikas Samaj and Western Terai Poverty Alleviation assisted us.

The group formed with Sahakarmi's SAKTEE program has been habituated to analyse problems, make plans and complete them in practice. We facilitated discussion among many friends about how to sell vegetables that have been produced much. There were many alternatives, selling in the markets, calling for wholesale vegetable sellers. Established in Kohalpur but not run recently, the nearest market was searched and we discussed with market management committee. They also expected the same. We took initiative to talk with other organisations. All liked our plan. We hired the nearest market and announced through microphone to sell their product in the market. Really, people started to go to sell their product in the market. Now, it is running smoothly.

