

# Let the People Lead



Lessons for working effectively  
with excluded groups

THE CHEPANG COMMUNITY'S EXPERIENCE IN NEPAL



Netherlands

Development

Organisation



Nepal Chepang Association

The content, findings, interpretations, and conclusions of the paper in this publication are the views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and Nepal Chepang Association. The material presented in this publication does not imply the endorsement or the expression of any opinion about the legal status of any country, territory, administration, or authority, or the delimitation of its frontier or boundaries by SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and Nepal Chepang Association.

**Photographs courtesy of:**

The cover photo is provided by CDO.  
Photos in page 8 and 16 (right) are provided by SNV.  
The others are provided by NCA.

**Cover Photo:**

"Land Bank policy kills the poor!"  
Protest programme on Lang rights in Makwanpur in 2005

**Please send your comments and suggestions!**

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and Nepal Chepang Association would appreciate any comments and suggestions on this publication.

Published by

**SNV Netherlands Development Organisation**

Bakhundole, Lalitpur, Nepal  
P.O.Box 1966, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Phone: +977-1-5523444  
Fax: +977-1-5523155  
e-mail: nepal@snvworld.org

**Nepal Chepang Association**

Pulchowk, Lalitpur, Nepal  
P.O.Box 8975, E.P.C 984  
Phone: +977-1-5539141  
e-mail: chepang@wlink.com.np

# Foreword

It is very rewarding to see how the collaboration between the Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation has contributed towards the positive changes in the Chepang community. It has been a mutual learning process for all people involved in various roles in different phases over a decade. SNV provided funding for programme support in the early days and continues providing advisory services to this present day. Such long term support contributed to the development of Chepang human resources and the foundation of NCA today.

We have learnt a lot about how to involve different actors to achieve social change. We believe that the success factors and lessons documented in this study are applicable to any development organisation working in partnership with excluded groups.

The main lesson learned by both parties is 'Let the people lead their own development and movement'. We know that there is not a short term fix to overcoming exclusion. It takes time to empower people from excluded groups and create an enabling environment within which they can exercise their rights. We hope that readers will find our story interesting and that it will help them to reflect on how development organisations can work effectively with excluded groups.

We would like to thank Shizu Upadhya (researcher), Masako Tanaka, and Roz Saad (SNV) for compiling this document, which has added another milestone in our collaboration.

Govinda Ram Chepang  
Chairperson  
Nepal Chepang Association

Hans Heijdra  
Country Director  
SNV Nepal

# Acknowledgements

Firstly sincere thanks go to Mr. Tom Derksen, Interim Country Director of SNV Nepal in 2007 who encouraged us with thoughtful suggestions on much of the content of the case-study.

We are grateful to all the participants of the brainstorming meeting at SNV Nepal in September 2007. We gained valuable information on changes in the Chepang community from different actors: members and staff of NCA: Jeetendra Chepang, Dal Bahadur Chepang, Manju Chepang, Binod Gurung; staff from partner NGOs: Samita Pradhan of CAED/SEACOW, Somat Ghimire of CDO and Netra Pratap Sen of FORWARD; Jagat Gurung of NFDIN as a member of Steering Committee of CMP; Sanjay Rana of Enabling State Programme/Department for International Development, and ex-colleagues who worked with Chepangs in the past and other SNV colleagues currently working with excluded groups. Bijaya Subba of CAED/SEACOW who has been working with the Chepang for many years helped us to find old photographs and relevant data from her archives.

We are thankful to Basu Dev Sharma, Diana Brandes, Leela Rasaily, Nigma Tamrakar, Rik van Keulen, Rudra Sapkota, Swasti Pradhan, Suchana Pokharel, Tej Raj Dahal of SNV Nepal, Nicolette Matthijsen of SNV Laos and Que Nguyen of SNV Asian Regional office for providing support to carry out this task and stimulating discussions about the role of SNV in collaborating more effectively with excluded groups in Nepal. We are obliged to ex-SNV Nepal staff that sent their suggestions from different parts of the world including Rajesh Shrestha and Carol Gribnau.

Last but not least, we are indebted to Chepang young leaders: Santa Bahadur Chepang, General Secretary of NCA and Abhay Chepang, office assistant of NCA. They supported field visits, interviews and dealt with our endless enquiries about data and documents until the final stage. Throughout this process, we were again impressed by their transformation over time. We are particularly touched by the personal life stories provided to us by members of the Chepang community.

We also appreciate the SNV Asia governance network for providing the funding and support for the documentation process.

# Table of Contents

Foreword	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Executive Summary	v
List of Abbreviations	vii
Prologue	viii
<b>1. Context</b>	<b>1</b>
1-1. Changes in development agenda	1
1-2. Nepal - Its diversity and agenda for inclusion	2
<b>2. SNV's mission and ethos</b>	<b>4</b>
2-1. Original mission	4
2-2. Remit of SNV Nepal	4
2-3. Capacity building as an approach	5
2-4. Client selection	6
2-5. From Empowerment to Social Inclusion	6
<b>3. The Chepang Story</b>	<b>8</b>
3-1. The People	8
3-2. Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) - Indigenous Peoples' Organisation (IPO)	9
3-3. SNV Nepal's interaction with the Chepang	10
3-4. Milestones in Chepang community development	18
<b>4. Success factors</b>	<b>21</b>
4-1. Useful hints when working with excluded groups	21
4-2. Working in partnership	24
<b>5. Lessons learnt</b>	<b>28</b>
5-1. General lessons for assessment and planning	28
5-2. Balancing advisory work in SNV	31
<b>6. Replication to other excluded groups supported by SNV today</b>	<b>33</b>
6-1. Balancing support to advocacy and service delivery?	33
6-2. Process Facilitation or mediation in multi stakeholder environment	35
6-3. Increasing roles in brokering, networking and further links to market development	35
<b>7. Conclusion and future direction</b>	<b>37</b>
Epilogue	38
References	39

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Caste/ethnic/religious groups as per 2001 Census	2
Table 2: Overview of budget for the Chepang programmes	10
Table 3: Overview of number of staff who worked for the chepang programmes	11
Table 4: Components and NGO Consortium Partners	14
Table 5: Major events in Chepang community development	16

**List of Boxes**

Box 1: Struggling for justice - Life story of Jeetendra Chepang, Dhading	9
Box 2: Claim against irregular teachers	20
Box 3: Facilitating spontaneous community development - Life story of Suntali Maya Chepang, Chitwan	25

**List of Charts**

Chart 1: SNV's working modality for Social Inclusion and Gender Equity until 2007	7
Chart 2: Chepang settlement districts	

# Executive summary

SNV Nepal has been working with the Chepang, marginalised indigenous people, for the past 15 years. This case-study documents SNV's interventions, impact achieved and the changing relationship between SNV and excluded groups. It highlights lessons learned which are applicable to all development practitioners working both in international and national organisations.

The case-study explains the implications of SNV's shift from an implementer to an enabling capacity builder. It is highly topical in that it provides an insight into the development of thinking around shifting power relations and how to enable empowerment through working with multiple partners. Messages are reinforced by short personal stories of empowerment of individual Chepang women and men.

It was SNV's support to bee keeping which started the relationship with the Chepang. A more comprehensive Community Development Programme commenced in 1996. The aim of the programme was to improve the quality of life and 'claim-making' power of the Chepang. After two phases of the project, SNV then moved from acting as an implementer to being in an advisory role. The programme was extended to other Districts and the scope was expanded to include fundamental rights issues in addition to improving schooling and food security. Throughout the project, the Chepang was actively involved in the growing Indigenous People's Movement during the period of state restructuring in Nepal.

Results include increased income through the establishment of an agro-co-operative; strengthened identity; citizenship and land rights; access to education; and influence on policy making and political circles. So power relations shifted as a result of the programme and the empowerment of Chepang.

The success factors and lessons learned which contributed are numerous and complex. It is essential to begin by establishing a relationship of mutual trust with the client to really understand and empathise with the needs and experiences of the excluded group. The focus of the intervention needs to involve a Rights Based Approach in recognition that exclusion is often a result of a denial of fundamental rights. Programmes should be designed to be flexible to the changing needs of the clients, enabling them to develop their own human resources. Technical support was found to be most effective when involving a mix of international and national

advisors. There is a danger that a programme may develop in isolation and efforts need to be made to link with other actors operating in the sector at local and national levels. There are also benefits in aligning programmes with national indicators to enable measurement of progress and impact in a coherent and co-ordinated manner. This also helps to focus efforts within excluded groups in a more targeted manner.

It was found that there is a tendency for excluded groups, once they become organised, to be pushed into a service delivery role because donor funding tends to be more easily available. This results, to some extent, in a lack of focus on their original vision. So development organisations need to consider how to support advocacy work for example and not just service delivery, and assist with networking and brokering to secure funding opportunities to ensure sustainable development.



# List of Abbreviations

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CAED/SEACOW	Centre for Agro-Ecology Development/School for Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDO	Community Development Organisation
CMP	Chepang Mainstreaming Programme
CTP	Central Terai Portfolio
DDC	District Development Committee
EFA	Education For All
FORWARD	Forum for Rural Welfare and Agriculture Reform for Development
ICCO	Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation
IPO	Indigenous Peoples' Organisation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MTR	Mid term review
NAF	Nepal Agro-forestry Foundation
NCA	Nepal Chepang Association
NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
NFDIN	National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities
PCDP1	Praja Community Development Programme
PCDP2	Praja Capacity Development Programme
PVP	Praja Vikas Programme
RBA	Rights-Based Approach
RHO	Rights Holders' Organisation
SIGE	Social Inclusion and Gender Equity
VDC	Village Development Committee

# Prologue

In 2007, Sarala Chepang, a mother of a two-year old child from Gorkha, delivered the closing remarks at a workshop entitled 'Participation of Highly Marginalised People in Constitution Making', at an auditorium in Kathmandu. It was organised by the Community Development Organisation (CDO), an NGO consortium partner of the Chepang Mainstreaming Programme (CMP). Samita Pradhan (an ex-SNVer who worked with the Chepang in 1990s), who works with the Chepang as Executive Director of the Centre for Agro-Ecology Development/School for Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works (CAED/SEACOW), was impressed to see Sarala. Two decades ago, no one would have imagined that a young Chepang woman would deliver such a speech in front of an audience of hundreds of people at a national event. Today, it is not difficult to find Chepang young leaders on stages at public events. They are indispensable resource persons for any events to promote indigenous people's rights in Nepal.

Govinda Ram Chepang, Chairperson of NCA, shares his commitment to his organisation's way forward:

*I am proud of the achievement by our Chepang brothers and sisters who founded and strengthened NCA with assistance of many supporters from outside. We, Chepang, are lucky to have got such an intensive support from SNV for more than a ten year period. Until recently, I neither expected that other excluded groups would replicate our efforts nor imagined that NCA is always referred as a successful Indigenous Peoples' Organization. Still now, I find weaknesses in NCA and we are not yet perfectly ready to handle everything by ourselves. But at least, we have developed good networks with others during the past project periods. We will surely continue our efforts and work more with other excluded groups. We do not have any hesitation in getting support from others because we are no longer isolated from other parts of the society. SNV gave us confidence and dignity which were the most precious assets for us.*

# 1. Context

## 1-1. Changes in development agenda

Whilst reviewing the experience of working with the Chepang community, it has been useful to set it within the wider context of the global agenda about how to demonstrate impact on poverty reduction. The establishment of the Millennium Development Goals declared by United Nations (MDGs) is a strong example of the heightened awareness in the development world of the need to step up the objectives of development assistance. There has also been debate over the past decade about North-South cooperation and now there is a will to promote more South-South co-operation, with developing countries being in the driving seat.

Despite this agenda, the gap between the rich and poor has widened and the 'have-nots' have not reaped the benefits of globalisation. Poverty is now defined in broader terms: not just as a condition of low income, but also inadequate access to assets, capabilities and voice. The underlying causal factor is an imbalance in the distribution of power between individuals and communities. A higher rate of economic growth is, therefore, an insufficient response to complex exclusionary processes that isolate poor people from new opportunities. SNV therefore places a high value on promoting the empowerment of local communities to define and manage their own development objectives.

In 2002 SNV had adopted a new understanding of poverty and its structural causes in the socio-political sphere:

*"Poverty is more than a percentage of people living on less than a dollar a day. We have experienced that helping small groups of poor to earn more and to eat and drink better doesn't fundamentally change the structural causes of their poverty. We have learned that poverty exists because society and its institutions fail to correct excessive socio-political and economic inequalities and inequity, leading to injustice and exploitation".*

Power is manifested in political, social, economic and cultural rules at national and local levels that discriminate against specific types of people – generally the poor. Thus addressing issues of disempowerment in a society requires changing the balance of power.

Adding a human rights perspective to poverty analysis in the development arena also introduces the important idea of a Rights-Based Approach (RBA). Human rights are explained as universal values which ensure the civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights of everyone in the world. However, there are certain groups of

people whose rights are denied due to exclusion from the state, society or often within their own communities, e.g. particular ethnic and caste groups, women, people with disabilities, etc. Since social exclusion is one of crucial causes of the denial of their rights, people from excluded groups are forming their own groups: Rights Holders' Organisations (RHOs). These RHOs address their particular rights, e.g. indigenous people campaigning for the use of their mother tongue in schooling.

Governments are considered as the primal 'duty bearers' responsible for ensuring the rights of all people. However, in the context of a development scenario, the private sector and other citizens are also duty bearers, responsible for contributing to social change. Within a RBA, people are encouraged to claim and exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities, with a clear-cut understanding in their positions either as rights holders or as duty bearers. RBA is also essential for addressing good governance by enabling people to influence government and/or other stakeholders. In Nepal, a RBA is widely applied by development agencies who promote inclusive democracy within the restructuring of the state.

## 1-2. Nepal – Its diversity and agenda for inclusion

In 2007, Nepal moved from a Hindu absolute monarchical Kingdom to a secular state. It is now undergoing further change, possibly to a Republic, as a result of a decade long conflict and people's movement. These recent changes have resulted in inclusive democracy being brought to the top of the national agenda which will lead the establishment of a constituent assembly and the restructuring of the state. One of the major contributory factors to these changes has been the deep-rooted, ongoing inequality amongst Nepali people and emerging debate over identity and diversity.

In the 2001 Census, 103 social groups were listed: based on caste, ethnicity, religion and language, and categorised into ten major groups:

**Table 1: Caste/ethnic/religious groups as per 2001 Census**

Population ratio		%
Hindu caste groups (57.5%)	Hill Brahmin and Chhetri	30.9
	Terai/Madhesi Brahmin and Chhetri	1.9
	Terai/Madhesi Middle Castes	12.9
	Hill Dalit	7.1
	Terai Dalit	4.7
Janajatis (37.2%)	Newar	5.5
	Hill Janajatis	23.0
	Terai/Madhesi Janajatis	8.7
Muslims (4.3%)	Muslims	4.3
Others (1%)	Others	1.0

*Quoted from DFID/World Bank 2006*

As far back as 1854, these diverse groups of people in Nepal were not treated equally but categorized into five strata by *Mulki Ain* (Civil Code). It located Hindu high castes at the top and Dalit - Hindu 'untouchables' at the bottom of its hierarchy. Hindu middle castes, Janajati – ethnic groups and others were classified as per '(non-)slavable', or 'alcohol-drinking' and positioned in-between. This ranking also reflected obvious gaps in wealth distribution and unfair political representation between different groups. Although caste-based discrimination was officially abolished in 1963, it still remains in everyday practice, which creates economic and political power imbalances.

The concept of social exclusion, in comparison to earlier notions of income poverty, looks beyond economic inequalities to other types of marginalization. In particular it concentrates on identity-based discrimination often legitimized by cultural norms and laws, including discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, caste, gender, religion and places of origin.

Examples of excluded groups include: Janajati, Dalit, Madhesi - people of Terai origin, women and other groups, e.g. religious minorities, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, and people from remote regions, the Karnali districts for example. These groups have begun to challenge their exclusion and claim political representation to differing degrees. The context of exclusion varies for different groups depending on their situation, from national down to household level and discrimination is exercised in different ways. For example, Janajati people find their ethnic identity, language and cultural traditions are often ignored and denied due to laws, policies, resource allocation and representation at a national level. Dalits have more problems at community level where caste-based discrimination is still exercised and experienced. Women struggle on a day to day basis at household level where social norms and beliefs are strictly maintained which reinforce their subordinate position. There are also shared aspects of the impact of discrimination: Janajati, Dalit, Madhesi and landless people, all face difficulties to obtaining citizenship certificates, which prevents them from participating in elections, acquiring property and applying for foreign employment opportunities.

# 2. SNV's mission and ethos

## 2-1. Original mission

SNV is a Netherlands based international development organisation that delivers capacity building services to government, civil society and private sector organisations in 32 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Balkans. At its inception, it concentrated on posting young Dutch volunteers to share know-how with groups in the South and to help develop middle management skills in those countries. The organisation evolved into a professional, expert-based development organisation at the beginning of 1990s. SNV was under the Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation until 2002 but is now an independent international development organisation.

## 2-2. Remit of SNV Nepal

SNV commenced working in Nepal in 1980. It remained an implementing agency working with government bodies until 1996. SNV Nepal contributed to community development, infrastructure programmes, biogas support and women's rights in different parts of the country including Mechi (East) and Karnali (Mid-West) zones, where it continues to work today. From 2000 SNV moved to a more sector based programming approach with an emphasis on institutional development and the promotion of local ownership. In 2003 the shift away from project implementation continued when its remit became capacity building advisory work.

SNV Nepal specialised in seven practice areas until 2007:

1. Decentralized Natural Resource Management
2. Market Access for the Poor with a focus on Business Development Services
3. Pro Poor Sustainable Tourism
4. Biogas and Renewable Energy
5. Community Built Rural Infrastructure
6. Local Governance
7. Social Inclusion and Gender Equity

At the end of 2007 SNV adopted a new strategic direction with a focus on two impact areas: Basic Service Delivery, and Production, Income and Employment. In order to increase potential impact, SNV reduced the range of sectors with which it would be involved. The following positioning choices were identified as priority sectors for SNV Nepal:

<Basic Service Delivery>

Water and Sanitation for Health

Renewable Energy – Improved Water Mills, Bio-gas

<Production, Income and Employment>

Forestry – Timber and Non-Timber Forest Products

Agriculture – Smallholder Cash Crops

Tourism – Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism.

SNV introduced the concept of 'Governance for Empowerment' as cross-cutting theme for capacity building work being undertaken within all sectors. SNV Asia defined it as:

*"Facilitating a process of changing attitudes, behaviours and systems to strengthen the capacities, voices and choices of excluded people to participate in and benefit from development to achieve sustainable poverty reduction".*

In the new strategy, SNV will focus on excluded groups as clients when they have a common interest and potential to contribute to a particular sector(s). Working with cross-sector clients will also be a necessary precondition to achieve inclusive impact in sectors where fewer linkages are currently found with people from excluded groups.

## 2-3. Capacity building as an approach

Since 2000 SNV deliberately adjusted its role based on an improved understanding of what sustainable poverty reduction is really all about. Rather than offering only technical inputs or working in isolation, SNV decided to focus only on advisory services: to harness, combine and mobilise the existing skills and potential of local organisations to improve their capabilities. SNV began to facilitate local partners to liaise with donors and organise their own financial management. Thus a conscious choice was made by SNV to reduce its own leverage over donor funds and to cease allocating direct development funding. This was in the belief that this would lead to more sustainable poverty reduction.

Advisors comprise of both international and national staff in order to bring the best possible combination of skills and inputs to clients. Up until 2007, a typical capacity development package negotiated between SNV and the client organisation comprised of one or more of the following services: process facilitation; specialist sector-based advice; training and coaching; networking and linking; knowledge facilitation and development; advocacy and lobbying support; and support in program and financial management.

## 2-4. Client selection

SNV's values include: human dignity, social justice, gender and cultural equity and ecological sustainability. It aims to transform the capacity of the client from being in a state of dependency to one of action and assertion. No doubt, the success of which very much depends on the types of clients selected; their goals need to be in tune with SNV's values. More recently SNV has formalised its intention to work with committed partners by developing a set of client criteria which comprise: potential impact, strategic importance, potential for up-scaling, leadership, learning potential, willingness to change and develop, and commitment.

## 2-5. From Empowerment to Social Inclusion

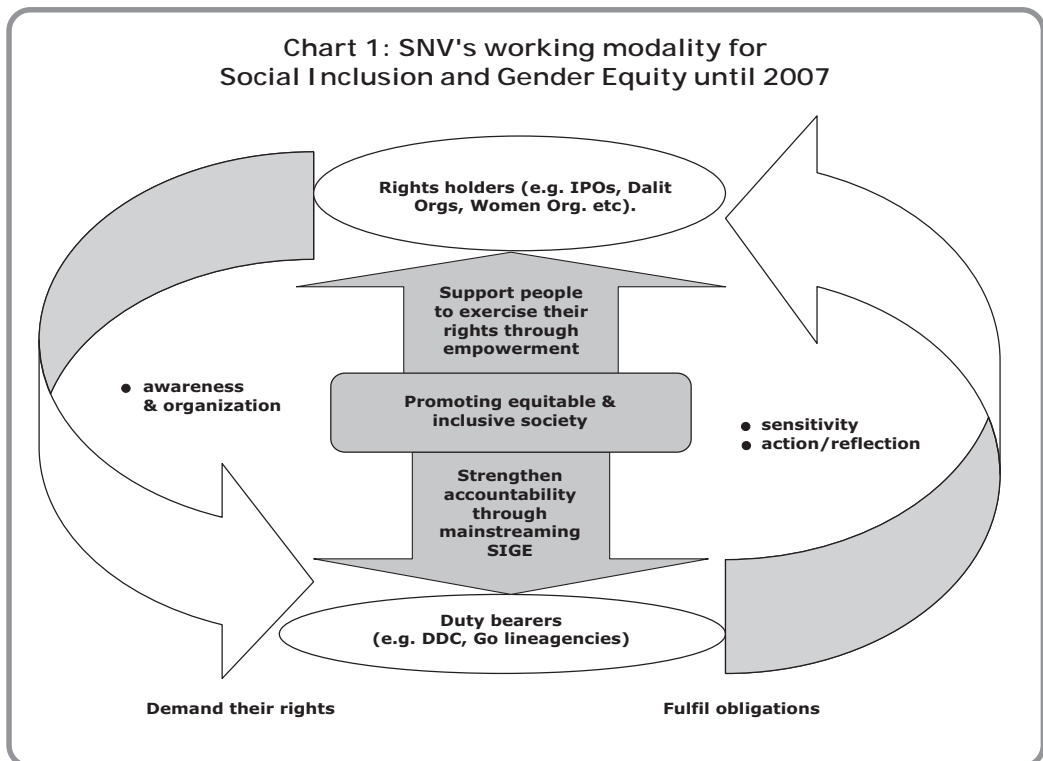
SNV Nepal implemented programmes specifically focused on community empowerment of the Chepang community until 2003. According to Tom Derksen, a former SNV Country Director (1996-2000), empowerment and indeed 'exclusion' had pervaded SNV by then – particularly as a result of Latin American experiences of rising inequality in the 1990s. This had revealed the repercussions of weak governance for poor people. Furthermore he recalls, the new, democratic environment in the country around that time, helped imbue a new energy to empowerment initiatives in SNV Nepal. Although 'empowerment' was at the heart of SNV's mission even then, SNV Nepal's work in those years did not tend to generally work with marginalised groups. This perhaps indicates that there was a gap in understanding within the organisation between the theoretical significance of the goal – which existed – and more practical knowledge of how to best achieve it.

In 2005, SNV Nepal incorporated its early work on gender into the broader practice area of Social Inclusion and Gender Equity (SIGE), since it was accepted that gender equity is an integral part of social inclusion.

Three major developments have had both a direct and indirect influence on the work of SNV in Nepal over the years: the new and growing attention to the rights perspective in poverty analysis; an intensification of political conflict in Nepal; and the emergence of a more active and inclusive civil society. Consequently in recent years more attention has been paid to unfair power relations, reinforced by social exclusion, as deep rooted causes of poverty. Higher rates of poverty are found amongst people from excluded groups who are denied access to resources, public services, markets and employment opportunities. They are unable to escape from the poverty trap based solely on their individual efforts, without the institutional changes resulting from a 'power struggle'.



SNV Nepal applied two approaches 'empowerment' and 'mainstreaming SIGE' to promote equitable and inclusive society. This helped advisors to understand inter-linkages and synergies between the two (see Chart 1 below). Previously SNV Nepal had been working with local government and its line agencies without positioning them as duty bearers. The Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) – Rights-Holder Organisation was also not clearly differentiated from other ordinary NGOs. So this new SNV approach brought a clear-cut understanding of the different roles of clients and partners. But it did however pose the potential risk of creating a confrontational relationship with SNV's own partners/clients who held different positions, for instance between a Dalit organisation – RHO, and District Development Committees - Duty Bearers. However, the SNV approach was not considered to be controversial by partners/clients because some of them already understood it to be part of a good governance framework. The political environment in Nepal was favourable to this increased understanding of governance relations, particularly when the country began to move ahead with the debate about a federal state. A minimum consensus existed about the dis-benefits of assimilation and a conducive environment for promoting diversity and rights holders' movements.



# 3. The Chepang Story

## 3-1. The People

The Chepang is an indigenous people living in the upper hills of the central region of Nepal. The total population exceeds 55,000, located across Chitwan, Dhading, Gorkha, Makwanpur, Lamjung and Tanahun districts. They are categorized as a highly marginalised indigenous nationality by the National



Farming a slope in Chitwan in 1990s

Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN). In addition to economic impoverishment, the Chepang have also confronted cultural discrimination since Mulki Ain (Civil Code) 1854 had defined the Chepang as masinya matwali (enslavable alcohol drinkers). This provided high caste migrants with the legitimacy to treat the Chepang as the 'third class' citizens (ranked after the highest caste group and the second group of non-enslavable alcohol drinkers). This discrimination was internalized by the Chepang themselves over time, even after the introduction of new Civil Code in 1963 which cancelled the hierarchy defined in the Civil Code of 1854.

Above all what underpinned asymmetric power relations was land. The Chepang often had no ownership of land, or more importantly, were not very interested in low-land areas since their main traditional interest was in the forest where they could enjoy natural resources. Therefore, migrants easily settled and took ownership of the best quality plots in the low-land areas. In turn, the Chepang were pushed out to live on marginal lands higher up the slopes. Later they recognised the importance of this type of land when they became more interested in farming.

Their access to forests, to pursue their hunting and gathering lifestyle, was restricted following forest nationalisation in 1956. New developments in the area continued to primarily further benefit privileged people. The improved road connectivity to the area following the control of malaria in the 1960s provided more benefits to the migrants who were already familiar with trading. As a result, the Chepang became increasingly indebted to the migrant communities as they tried to cope with a more monetary dominated economy. Moreover, since interest rates on loans were exorbitant, it was not surprising that many Chepangs became "bonded" to their creditors, sometimes over generations.

The Chepang came to be known as the Prajas (King's subjects) according to the wishes of the late King Birendra who visited Chepang areas in 1977. The King ordered the start of the Praja Vikas Programme (PVP) for the upliftment of the Chepang. This was in response to his observing their miserable conditions. The Ministry of Local Development operated the programme until NFDIN took over responsibility in 2003.

As an indigenous group, Chepang have had their own language and spiritual beliefs. Yet a dominant and persistent Hindu and Nepali language ethos attempted to define their traditional knowledge and values as insignificant. Moreover, Chepang marginalization by the larger society continued even after the reinstatement of a multiparty democracy in 1990. Over the last ten years, the younger generation in particular have steadily rejected the Praja name which came to symbolize subservience and dependency. In 2004, the then, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, agreed to apply the terms 'Chepang' together with 'Praja' for citizenship certificates. Later, in 2007 the Government of Nepal finally renamed the 'Praja Vikas Programme' as the 'Chepang Development Programme'.

### 3-2. Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) - Indigenous Peoples' Organisation (IPO)

In 1998, the Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) was established by young Chepang activists working for Chepang communities to promote and preserve their culture, religion and language. It is one of Indigenous Peoples' Organisations (IPOs) affiliated to the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) with individual and organisational members in 6 districts.

#### **Box 1: Struggling for justice - Life story of Jeetendra Chepang, Dhading**

*Born in Dhading district hills thirty years ago, Jeetendra Chepang was brought up by his grandfather when his father died and his mother left home. Facing great hardship he was able to complete the tenth grade at school. He then moved to Kathmandu to earn a living – taking on odd jobs here and there but always thinking of home..*

*After several years he got together with other Chepangs who had come to Kathmandu in search of work. They heard about a local NGO called SEACOW that was working for the benefit of the Chepangs. About six or seven of them started to meet every Saturday morning at the office of SEACOW in Kathmandu. "We talked about different things but mainly about home", Jeetendra recalls. "When the newspapers reported untrue and mean stories about the Chepang customs and way of life, we would read the article together and spend hours discussing it. After some time, we felt we had to do something about it".*

*The idea germinated into the beginnings of what was to become the NCA of today. "I remember the early days when we had no office, no telephone", says Jeetendra. He encouraged his wife to participate in an adult literacy class and she supported Jeetendra in his endeavours. Eventually, Jeetendra started giving most of his time to NCA.*

*Continued*

Recently, Jeetendra started coordinating the community action for the lime mine victims in his home district, against the Hetauda Cement Factory which offered unacceptable conditions as compensation for resettlement from the mining sites. The campaign is ongoing and the outcome is yet to be determined. But Jeetendra says: "We know we are on the right track with this issue: that gives us the confidence to stay firm. We have presented our points of view to parliamentarians in Kathmandu and countless journalists, researchers and activists and we will continue doing so for as long as it takes".

### 3-3. SNV Nepal's interaction with the Chepang

In this section, the distinctive features of each programme are briefly introduced. Funding scales and number of staff are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

**Table 2: Overview of budget for the Chepang programmes**

Year	Project phases	Project areas	Total budget provided by outside		Local contribution <sup>3</sup>		External sources
			EURO <sup>1</sup>	NRs <sup>2</sup>	EURO	NRs	
1992-1994	PDP	1 VDC	Information not available.				KAP <sup>4</sup>
1996-2000	PCDP1	4 VDCs	255,258	22,973,220	6,667	600,000	NEDA <sup>5</sup>
2000-2003	PCDP2	5 VDCs	791,406	71,226,540	50,155	4,513,950	AusAid, ICCO, SNV
2004-2007	CMP	4 Districts	426,524	38,387,160	6,490	584,100	ICCO, SNV, NCA

<sup>1</sup> External funds were provided in Netherlands Guilder (NLG) till 2002. Conversion rate of SNV that time was NLG 25.50 = EURO 11.57.

<sup>2</sup> Mean conversion rate, EURO 1 = NRs. 90 was applied.

<sup>3</sup> Local contribution

*PCDP1: There were labour contribution by villagers in addition to this amount provided by VDCs as matching funds to Fund for Local Initiative of the Praja.*

*PCDP2: This figure includes labour contribution by villagers and funds provided by VDCs.*

*CMP: This figure includes labour contribution by villagers.*

<sup>4</sup> KAP - Small Embassy Project

<sup>5</sup> NEDA - Netherlands Development Assistance.

Table 3: Overview of number of staff who worked for the Chepang programmes

Year	Project phases	No. of staff (excluding local motivators, lead farmers and staff of CBOs during PCDP1 & PCDP2) <sup>1</sup>													
		SNV			NCA			Partner NGOS							
		Inter-national	National		Non-Chepang	Chepang	Non-Chepang	CAED/SEACOW		NAF		FORWARD		CDO	
Non-Chepang	Chepang		Non-Chepang	Chepang				Non-Chepang	Chepang	Non-Chepang	Non-Chepang	Chepang	Non-Chepang	Non-Chepang	Chepang
1992-1994	PDP	Only for monitoring													
1996-2000	PCDP1	1	7	2	6	0	4	2	6	0	-	-	-	-	-
2000-2003	PCDP2	1	7	3	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	4	4	-	-
2004-2007	CMP <sup>2</sup>	1	6	0	2	16	3	7	-	-	8	9	5	6	6

<sup>1</sup> Staff is disaggregated between Chepang and Non-Chepang to illustrate increasing Chepang human resource.

<sup>2</sup> SNV staff were not full-timers.

## 1) Beginning of the story

### - Honey brought us to Chepang villages, 1992 - 1994

SNV Nepal had been working jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture for a Beekeeping, Training and Extension Support Project since 1988. One of its project sites was in the Chitwan district where the Chepang kept traditional beehives. From 1992 to 1994, SNV supported the Praja Development Programme in Siddhi Village Development Committee (VDC) of Chitwan, which is the heartland of the Chepang settlements. Their assistance aimed to promote income generation through beekeeping, agro forestry, fruit tree plantation and animal husbandry, implemented by two non-local consulting firms. SNV Nepal was responsible for monitoring, which commenced direct contact between the Chepang and SNV.

## 2) Rapport building with the Chepang

### - Praja Community Development Programme (PCDP 1), 1996-2000

Although it took a few years to start a more comprehensive project, the Praja Community Development Programme (PCDP1) was launched under a partnership between SNV and the Ministry of Local Development in 1996. It was differentiated from other regional or sectoral development interventions by its special focus on creating an enabling environment for mobilizing the Chepang. It invested sufficient time for SNV to develop rapport with the Chepang and to understand their social institutions. Foundations for the establishment of formal Chepang CBOs and a cooperative were laid during this period. The programme aimed to improve the quality of life of the Chepang people by increasing their capacity and claim making power to VDCs - duty bearers responsible for the allocation of resources for service delivery, e.g. drinking water supply.

The project, designed two years earlier, was re-designed after an intensive six-month long baseline survey in four VDCs (Shaktikor, Siddhi, Kaule and Korak) in Chitwan. The study was conducted by applying participatory tools and its results were compiled in a report entitled, "Can Orange Trees Blossom on a Barren Land?" The condition of the Chepang villages in late 1990s was described as follows;

*Although relatively accessible - given its location in the centre of Nepal and being surrounded by major highways - PCDP's working area is rather marginalised..... With its moderate to very steep slopes, friable soil and vulnerability for soil erosion, the area can also be characterized as a marginal area from an ecological point of view.....they receive very little support from government and non-government services.....All four VDCs are poorly staffed and lack the necessary capacity to enhance development processes. Although some line agencies appear to have offices in the area, they also lack the capacity*

*and an understanding of Prajas, resulting in only very limited services being directed towards Praja. NGOs, if at all present, are also characterized by poor strategic management capacities and operational management skills.*

During the study, the team found that there were different types of traditional social institutions already in existence, e.g. parma groups for labour exchange, and meat consumption groups for sharing the cost of meat during festivals. Therefore, the programme tried to look into possibilities of expanding their scope and to include more development related activities as well. These grassroots organisations of Chepangs were linked to the service delivery of VDCs through a Fund for Local Initiatives of Prajas, NRs. 300,000 was allocated to each VDC, and mostly used for small infrastructure projects, e.g. drinking water supply schemes, and skill development training. Although VDCs needed to provide 25 % as matching funds, this scheme did gradually attract resources from VDCs. Its participatory planning process also raised awareness amongst the majority of the non-Chepang population and contributed to building rapport between Chepang and non-Chepang people.

Technical assistance was provided by two NGOs already familiar with the Chepang: Centre for Agro Ecology Development/School for Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works (CAED/SEACOW) and Nepal Agro-forestry Foundation (NAF) in the areas of conservation farming, Non-Timber Forest Products and Community Forestry.

### **3) Giving responsibility to Chepang - Praja Capacity Development Programme (PCDP2), 2000-2003**

Still implemented by SNV Nepal, PCDP 2 included some modifications including extending project coverage to another VDC, Lothar, supporting 5 VDCs in total. There was more of a focus on advocacy; and the NCA becoming a project advisor. Supporting the NCA as an indigenous peoples' organisation (IPO) was a distinctive character of this project. NCA conducted research in villages to identify issues pertinent to the Chepang and started advocating on issues of citizenship certification, land registration and access to education. They shared research findings with District Development Committees (DDC) through to government authorities including the Prime Minister. However, their lobbying was still not strong enough to get full attention at national level.

In PCDP2, another local NGO, the Forum for Rural Welfare and Agricultural Reform for Development (FORWARD) joined as an implementing partner. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and Interchurch Christian Organisation (ICCO) also jointly funded the PCDP 2, in addition to the local contribution and funding support by SNV Nepal. During this period, CBOs, later affiliated to NCA, were further strengthened and the Praja Cooperative, the first

cooperative owned by the Chepang (called Praja at that time) was operationalised with intensive technical assistance from partner NGOs.

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) of PCDP 2 recommended the following two points for the next phases;

- 1) More responsibility should be given to the Chepang since Chepang CBOs had become capable and NCA had gained credibility amongst its own community.
- 2) Need to address the vast majority of the Chepang needs through the extension of project areas beyond the Chitwan district.

There was a consensus among stakeholders of PCDP 2 that it should be horizontally extended to other districts and vertically up-scaled for effective advocacy to take place at national level.

#### 4) The Chepang in the driving seat

##### - Chepang Mainstreaming Programme (CMP), 2004-2007

By the completion of PCDP 2, SNV Nepal shifted from being an implementing agency to becoming an advisory organisation. Some staff considered that this differing role was necessary since they had already provided enough continuous, intensive support to the Chepang. Although the NCA was not yet fully capacitated, it was nevertheless assigned to lead the Chepang Mainstreaming Programme (CMP) at its project office in Kathmandu. The CMP was funded by ICCO and its scope was expanded to cover the four districts with Chepang settlements: Chitwan, Dhading, Gorkha and Makwanpur. This programme applied a Rights-Based Approach (RBA) to the assert rights of the Chepang and comprised of the seven components in Table 4 below.

**Table 4 : Components and NGO Consortium Partners**

Project Components	NGO Consortium Partners
(1) Food security and income generation	Forum for Rural Welfare and Agriculture Reform for Development (FORWARD)
(2) Natural resource management	
(3) Education	Centre for Agro-Ecology and Development (CAED)/School of Ecology Agriculture Community Work (SEACOW)
(4) Land and citizenship	Community Development Organisation (CDO)
(5) Promotion of Chepang culture and language	Nepal Chepang Association (NCA)
(6) Institutional capacity building	
(7) Representation of women (Gender)	



The NCA was in the driving seat of CMP, leading an NGO consortium consisting of CAED/SEACOW, FORWARD and the Community Development Organisation (CDO). All these organisations employed field level staff from Chepangs wherever possible. Consequently the ratio of Chepang staff dramatically increased (see Table 3) .

The number and breadth of stakeholders increased with the inclusion of two strategic allies on indigenous issues at the policy making level: NEFIN and NFDIN. In addition the Ministry of Local Development, (the agency responsible for the government led Praja Vikas Programme) and SNV, as an advisor, joined the Project Steering Committee.

While project efforts which focussed on securing access to citizenship certificates were effective, achievements on claiming land were more mixed. No dramatic change in land reform by the government occurred, although some public land was acquired (see Box 3) on which the Chepang were resettled. Facts and figures on Chepang land holdings were presented to the government, and debates were initiated with MPs and political parties. Planned well and often implemented in new, creative ways, this work was well covered by the local and national media. The CMP-MTR in 2006 acknowledged the following positive achievements:

- Shown resilience at the height of the conflict period when other projects were forced to close down;
- Strengthened Chepang livelihoods through promotion of root crop, kitchen gardening and goat raising through lead farmers and groups;
- Involved and benefited women e.g. Representation of women within NCA increased;
- Supported NCA in becoming a more established and representative organisation of the Chepang; and
- Helped strengthen Chepang identity in policy making and political circles.

The NGOs in the consortium were expected to provide technical support in relation to their own area of expertise, while NCA was responsible for ensuring the outreach of the project to grassroots levels through their own networks. The consortium was supposed to be a place to coordinate activities of different sectors and to develop synergy through proactive sharing. However, partners in the consortium found that NCA did not monitor the partners' activities at grassroots level effectively and this led to mistrust among the consortium members.

An SNV Social Inclusion Advisor was stationed at the NCA/CMP project office in Kathmandu for half of the project period, while other advisors provided occasional support for organisational assessments such as facilitating a planning workshop. With intensive support from the advisor placed at the NCA/CMP office, the functioning of the project and NCA were significantly improved. But the CMP-MTR suggested that SNV should keep its distance from the daily operations of the CMP to avoid dependency.

**Table 5: Major events in Chepang community development**

Year	Major events at national level	Major events and implications in the Chepang community
1854	Mulki Ain (Civil Code) defined caste hierarchy	
1952	End of Autocratic Rana Regime in Nepal	The first primary school established in the Chepang settlements, Siddhi VDC in Chitwan district
1956	Enactment of Private Forest Nationalization Act - 2013	The Chepang' access to natural resources restricted
1950-60	Malaria control programme in Terai	Migration to the Chepang areas increased
1963	Mulki Ain (Civil Code) replaced	
1977	Land Revenue Act-2034	Migrants claimed land rights in the Chepang areas
1970s	Road connection improved	Migration pushed the Chepang further up hills to poor quality land
1977	The late King Birendra visited the Chepang area in Makwanpur district	The Chepang started to be called 'Praja'
1979		The then HMG started Praja Vikas Programme
1990	People's Movement - 1 for Democracy New Construction - 1990 defined Nepal as multi-ethnic and multi-lingual State	Human Rights, fundamental rights ensured
1991	NGO Federation established Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) established	
1992		SNV supported own project, <b>Praja Development Programme (PDP)</b> until 1994
1993	Forest Act-2049 and Forest Regulation-2051 legitimatised the Community Forest User Groups	Chepangs lacked access to forests due to unfamiliarity with registration process
1996	Peoples' war started Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) established	SNV launched <b>Praja Community Development Programme (PCDP1)</b>
1998		Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) registered Praja Cooperative formally registered
1999	Various legislations taken for inclusion, for instance, Local Self Governance Act	The Chepang magazine, "Chepang Awaaz" started regular publication NCA chapters both at district and at village levels started to be established

Year	Major events at national level	Major events and implications in the Chepang community
2000	Bonded labour - Kamaliya - freed (momentum event of Rights Based Approach in Nepal)	The first Chepang national conference organised. SNV started <b>Praja Capacity Development Programme (PCDP 2)</b>
2002	11th amendment of Civil Code - 1963 established women's property rights, for instance	
2003	National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) established	NCA associated with Praja Vikas Programme by the Government
2004		NCA started <b>Chepang Mainstreaming Programme (CMP)</b> The fifth Chepang national conference resulted in 'Makwanpur declaration' which emphasised ethnic identity of the Chepangs
2005	Royal Coup	NCA started lime mine campaign to claim their rights for natural resource and settlements
2006	People's movement - 2 led by the political parties and Maoists rejected royal rule and restored democracy Seven party Alliance and New Interim constitution recognised needs for mainstreaming all social groups Mixed electoral system endorsed for constituent assembly State restructuring in favour of federal state endorsed in interim constitution	
2007	Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between the seven parties and the Maoist	Government policy established to allocate scholarships for all Chepang students at primary and secondary level as a result of advocacy



Chepang activists support application writing at citizenship distribution camp in Chitwan in 2005.



A Chepang woman in Makwanpur shares her struggle to get old age pension after obtaining citizenship certificate.

### 3-4. Milestones in Chepang community development

The Chepang came a long way along the path to empowerment through establishing their own organisation, NCA, and involving themselves in various programmes. Their major achievements are presented in this section. Other milestones are shown in Table 5 within the context of major events in Nepal's development.

#### 1) Strengthening identity, unity and negotiation power

A series of annual Chepang gatherings were initiated from 2000 onwards. At the fifth such gathering in 2004, the Makwanpur Declaration which claimed their ethnic identity as 'Chepang', and no longer 'Praja', was formally presented. The issues it raised were both about livelihood issues as well as strengthening cultural identity. An increased sense of unity through the strengthening of their own social organisation also affected the ways in which other communities began to perceive the Chepang. There were the first signs of respect towards them, and a gradual recognition that the Chepang too deserve fairer access to resources and benefits of the kind being enjoyed by others. This sense was reinforced by the philosophy of the Praja Cooperative which aimed to raise the sales prices of Chepang products to favour Chepang farmers. Since the Chepang started to grow their own Non-Timber Forest Products, their bargaining position in the market was strengthened. A greater political awareness, matched by increased confidence, also meant that political parties became more careful about how they treated the Chepang - not just as "vote banks" as had been the case after the restoration of democracy in 1990.

#### 2) Seeking fundamental rights - Citizenship

In 2004 in 15 VDCs in which the CMP focused, 6,279 Chepangs - equivalent to 58.9% of the total population in the VDCs aged 16 years and above (51.5 % of men, 66.7 %

of women) did not have citizenship which certifies fundamental rights. The intervention of CMP in securing the Chepang's rights to citizenship and land started with awareness raising activities about the legal process with which the majority of the Chepang was unfamiliar. Local NCA activists were trained to help organize local citizenship "camps" in collaboration with Chief District Officers of all CMP working districts. Moving such work from the district to the community level was an achievement in itself as it brought the procedure much closer to the Chepang. The work was challenging, not least because of the lengthy process that exists in Nepal for obtaining citizenship cards. In 2007, a total of 7,549 Chepangs in the four districts had obtained citizenship certificates. Now, they could claim allowances for senior citizens and widows; secure voting rights and qualify, themselves, as candidates for elections; feel comfortable to go registry offices for birth, marriage and death certificates; get passports; buy and sell land; open bank accounts; acquire membership of local groups and obtain any subsidised public good and service.

### **3) Upliftment of the Chepang in the national context**

At the national level, NCA developed links with political parties, other IPOs as well as other donors and the media. Alliance building work of this kind had two objectives: one was to put forward demands and requests for assistance - the other was to raise awareness of others to the issues faced by the Chepang. In addition, NCA has more recently been taking an active part in the movement for the restoration of democracy and formulated its own position on state restructuring through its affiliation with NEFIN. An indicator of individual ability and group influence is demonstrated by the chairperson of NCA having been nominated as a candidate for the Constituent Assembly elections in 2008.

### **4) Contributing to MDGs**

SNV's interventions with the Chepang community were not designed and aligned with MDGs and other current national indicators. Consequently it is difficult to apply universal indicators due to the inconsistency in data collected by different projects. However, some components contributed to achieving some current priority development goals.

For instance, MDG-Goal 1 - Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, was the core of the Chepang programmes through the food security and natural resource management components. According to the NGO consortium partner, FORWARD, households having more than 6 months sufficient food increased remarkably from 29.9% to 63.6% during the CMP period, which was unimaginable in 1990s. The promotion of root crops, home gardening, cropping system demonstration and conservation farming were the major interventions designed to improve their food security. In addition, income generation was emphasised through the promotion of

commercial fresh vegetables and fruit, vegetable seed production, goat rearing and spice crops production. Veterinary services, nursery establishment and small irrigation schemes were also developed; all of which were under-pinned by the capacity building of various groups.

The literacy rate is one of the indicators used to monitor MDG-Goal 2 - Achieve Universal Primary Education. In 2005, the literacy rate in CMP areas was 49.3% compared to 17% in the Chepang settlement in Chitwan in 1993.

As for Gender, MDG-Goal 3 - Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, the ratio of literate women to men (15-24 year olds) is applied as monitoring indicator. It increased to 0.69 in 2007 from 0.66 in 2005. Although it is still lower than the national level of 0.73 in 2003/2004, gender disparity within the Chepang communities is gradually reducing.

These changes were brought through increasing claim making and negotiation power, in addition to direct service delivery to the Chepang. An example in Box 2 shows how guardians claimed their children's right to access education.

### **Box 2: Claim against irregular teachers**

*Shree Bumrang Primary School in Dhading district was established in 1977 and now has classes up to Grade 4 with 96 students, amongst whom are 30 girls. At present, it has only two teachers, one of which is the headmaster. In January 2007, for a whole month, neither the teacher nor the headmaster attended the school although students continued to come to school. Parents discussed the issue with the Community Facilitator of CMP and organised a parents' meeting in the presence of the teachers and asked them why the school was no longer running classes. The Headmaster said he had been busy in the voter list collection process for the upcoming elections. But the teacher had no excuse. As a form of warning, the parents decided to stop his leave facility of 12 days for the rest of the year. They also decided to submit a complaint against the teachers to the District Education Office. This was the first form of action they had ever taken to protest against irregular teacher attendance at the school.*

### **5) Commercially viable and sustainable solution - Praja Cooperative**

The Praja Cooperative was established during PCDP1 to improve the marketing of agro-products and Non-Timber Forest Products at fair prices for Chepang farmers. Through service delivery and training activities, it also aimed to build local knowledge of production and sustainable harvest techniques. This development was undertaken in close coordination with the Chepang. Contacts were established with government bodies at the district level, the District Cooperative Office, the District Forest Office and the District Agricultural Office, for instance. In addition, private organisations such as the Alternative Herbal Industry were harnessed and finally also trading organisations at international level, including the Body Shop. In 2005, its efficiency and good outreach received attention and was recognised as a model co-operative by the National Cooperative Development Board under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

# 4. Success factors

Based on the experiences of the SNV's support programs to the Chepang, this chapter suggests some useful hints for development agencies to effectively programme work with excluded groups, particularly ethnic minorities. Secondly, it provides more general suggestions about working successfully in partnership.

## 4-1. Useful hints when working with excluded groups

### 1) Establish relationships of mutual trust through physical proximity and intensive interaction

Today, development agencies are expected to deliver quick results without always having sufficient time for preparation. Even in mid 1990s, it was uncommon for a six-month period to be spent undertaking a base-line survey, as was the case at the beginning of PCDP 1. It was, however, one of the most important steps for the PCDP SNV team. Carol Gribnau, Natural Resource Management and Institutional Development Advisor of the PCDP team, emphasises that the intensive consultation process with Chepang villagers and non-Chepang VDC members contributed to an increasing awareness and the establishment of a close relationship of trust and confidence between both groups and the project team.

During PCDP 1 and PCDP 2, project offices and full-time SNV staff were located in the heart of Chepang settlement areas, which enabled them to have intensive interaction with Chepang villagers. This brought a good understanding about the rich culture of the indigenous communities to the projects that had rarely been known outside. It also promoted, among the project staff, a sense of respect towards the Chepang who had previously been looked down upon by outsiders. The relationship of mutual respect between the staff and the Chepang built a foundation on which genuinely participatory development programs could be established.

### 2) Ensure rights - from community development to advocacy through proper issue identification

Though the term "Rights-Based Approach (RBA)" has nowadays become one of the most popular and misused development jargon in Nepal, it must constitute the very heart of any development program for excluded groups. This is because their development needs are, in many cases, derived from a denial of their fundamental rights, such as citizenship, land title, and so on.

One level of debate during the design of PCDP 1 was whether the programme should address the 'needs' or the 'rights' of excluded communities. Tom Derksen,

Former Country Director of SNV during PCDP 1 and interim Country Director of SNV in 2007, recalls, "There was definitely a 'rights' element to our understanding of empowerment at the beginning. We had a series of debates within the organisations about rights. But we decided not to adopt RBA at that time. But, the analytical framework



Unique demonstration on Land rights in Gorkha in 2006.

provided by RBA provided us with a clear understanding of the empowerment process". As a result of such discussions, PCDP 1 was designed without using the development terminologies of 'rights holders' and 'duty bearers'. But it highlighted the importance of changing the power relations between Chepangs and service providers, who were mostly non-Chepangs. A framework for PCDP 1 was designed combining the aims of increasing the claim making power of Chepangs - rights holders - and developing an enabling environment by improving the capacity of VDCs or NGOs to deliver their responsibilities- duty bearers.

In CMP, the citizenship certificate issue was included as a key project component and set clear targets to be achieved. Through this experience, SNV Nepal learned about the importance of a citizenship certificate as fundamental right in order to access basic services as well as political participation. Nowadays most needs have already been framed as legitimate rights to development to which all citizens can aspire. As such, struggles for the fulfilment of needs, have resulted in most needs becoming rights. In the past, poverty was considered to be a deprivation of economic rather than political rights. However, current rights-based thinking acknowledges that in conditions of disempowerment, economic rights sometimes need to be preceded by political rights.

It is a fact that over time, support strengthened the lobbying and advocacy capacity of the Chepang, which contributed significantly to their success in emancipation and claim making. Over the decade, the Chepang struggled to receive recognition as 'Chepangs' rather than 'Prajā', to obtain citizenship and land entitlement, to improve access to education and to address their rights to natural resources, e.g. the anti lime mine campaign.



Their movement against mining industries, including cement factories, is indeed a case in point. With the assistance of an NGO consortium partner, Community Development Organisation (CDO), young activists from NCA conducted action research into complex issues: decision making mechanisms relating to natural resources; entitlements resulting from land displacement relating to livelihood and employment; in addition to the cultural and social implications of mining in their settlements. Although their displacement claims are not yet settled, the findings of their research have been widely shared and have received media attention.

These are remarkable achievements due to the sensitisation and mobilization of their own people, supported by good coordination with stakeholders in the wider context, such as the mass media and members of parliament. Without its strong foundations at grassroots level with CBOs and other functional groups, which were fostered in the early days of community development, NCA could not have addressed these issues so effectively.

### 3) Support groups, CBOs to indigenous people's organisation at national level

In the Chepang story, one factor that stands out is the innovation in programme design and partnership modalities based on the changing needs of the excluded group. It was essential for the Chepang to have their own national organisation when they began advocating for their rights to the government or sought support at national level. But its foundation had to start at the grassroots level. Hence NCA is often referred as one of the few organisations which has outreach to villages.



A young Chepang woman is selected as a Joint Secretary of District NCA in Gorkha in 2007.

At the beginning, there were no organisations representing Chepangs in claiming their rights although they had their own traditional social institutions, e.g. meat consumption groups for festivals. So one of the objectives of PCDP1 was to form

a grassroots organisation of Chepang, with thematic inputs being provided to them by NGOs. The PCDP 2 established and strengthened five Chepang CBOs at VDC level. At the end of the PCDP period, the decision was taken to shift implementation responsibilities from SNV Nepal to a national level Chepang-led institution, NCA.

## 4-2. Working in partnership

### 1) Local human resources as a driving force

During the implementation of the successive programs, the role of SNV staff changed from that of an implementing agent of development projects to a capacity builder of local groups and Chepang CBOs. Their initial responsibilities were gradually handed over to the CBOs and local Chepang human resources, e.g. social mobilisers, lead farmers, community forestry facilitators and supervisors on Non-Timber Forest Product. The then warring party, the Maoists, also confirmed that this programme was truly contributing to the empowerment and development of the Chepang through the mobilization of Chepang CBOs and local people.

During PCDP 1, 'systematic social mobilisation' was launched based on local community groups and field-based community facilitators that coordinated work at the village level. This was the commencement of the development of human resources that would seek to sustain activities beyond the project period. Programmes provided opportunities to Chepangs to work in their own areas as well as important opportunities for employment. Later, the CMP-MTR added that the "involvement of local people (is) strategic since it contributes towards sustainability and efficiency as well as ownership of the programmes".

These projects certainly contributed towards developing young human resources in Chepang communities. Some of them later joined the NCA or became community leaders even after the programmes were over. Suntali Maya Chapang is one such example:

### **Box 3: Facilitating spontaneous community development - Life story of Suntali Maya Chepang, Chitwan**

*Suntali Maya Chepang was born in Siddhi VDC, Chitwan District. She was a Local Motivator during PCDP 1. She remembers those busy days with excitement. She formed local groups of 10 to 15 women and men to identify local problems, participate in training and make decisions about their own village development. Most women and even some men trusted her, so she found it easy to convince them to join the groups. Some groups continued to meet even after PCDP was closed though it did become difficult to continue their meetings due to insurgency. She is happy to see that the cooperative, in which both she and her husband had been involved as the Executive Committee members, is still functioning well.*

*Today, Suntali Maya lives on a small plot of public land together with several hundred other Chepangs in Padampur, Chitwan District. They moved there from the hills when the local Government agreed to let them occupy the land in response to agitation by landless squatters. This movement was coordinated by the NCA. Suntali Maya feels connected to both PCDP in the past and the NCA today. In her neighbourhood, she cannot stop helping form groups. Probably it became a habit engrained in her. Not only is she a member of a local squatter association, she is part of a savings group which she herself formed. She runs a small shop and enjoys meeting with her female neighbours from all castes and ethnic groups. Recently she shared her life story in an interview for a local FM radio station. She really feels that she has come a long way since her childhood in Siddhi.*

## **2) Combination of outsiders and locals**

### **- Sensitive power relations between NGOs and RHOs**

There is no doubt that one of the strategies during CMP period "Maximising local human resource(s) and minimising outsiders" was relevant and contributed to the efficiency of the project. However, Samita Pradhan, Executive Director of CAED/SEACAW observed difficulties faced by local facilitators whilst working in their own places of origin. This affected their ability to develop new relationships or to reject unreasonable requests by villagers because they were also part of their own communities. It took time for local facilitators to un-learn preconceived ideas about their own villages and start re-learning about their situations from different angles. In her opinion, development intervention needs a good balance of outsiders and local people.

Collaboration between non-Chepang led NGOs and so-called RHOs - Chepang CBOs and later NCA, was a common set-up throughout all the programmes. However, their power relations were drastically changed during CMP. SNV learnt about sensitivities in partnership and about their own responsibility as an intermediary organisation. In principle, NCA represented the interests of the Chepang and had outreach from village, district and national levels. This was important to ensure ownership and sustainability of the project.

All stakeholders agreed on the advantages of the NCA led consortium style of CMP, but most consortium members pointed out inefficiencies and weaknesses in the communication and coordination of NCA during the MTR period. All stakeholders tried to apply the recommendations of the MTR, e.g. "give priority to transferring skills to the NCA, rather than competing, to complement each other". However they often felt that they were perceived as sub-contractors rather than partners who were supposed to be respected and treated as learning counterparts. These NGOs had first hand experience of working with the Chepang or other ethnic groups, in addition to having well trained staff and resources. Sometimes they found it hard to accept their secondary status in the project under the NCA, although they fully agreed with the importance of supporting them and felt solidarity with the Chepang through their long working experience of working with them.

During PCDP 1 and 2, SNV was an intermediary between NGO partners and Chepang organisations. Sanjay Rana, Former Programme Manager of PCDP1 and 2 and later Social Inclusion Advisor for SNV supported CMP, shared his experience as follows:

*The trust among partners, including the Chepang, was strong during PCDP periods since there was close consultation and we were jointly involved in implementing the programme. There was an equal footing partnership arrangement. An informal culture of "agree to disagree spirit" was common and practiced and a situation of honest and critical interaction and backstopping existed. But (in CMP) NCA was not critical and open enough to share their experience and challenge involved partners, due to their lack of confidence and fear of speaking out against their supporters.*

NCA tried to steer the management of CMP with three NGOs in formal and vertical directions while the NGO partners tried to have informal conversations, sharing more at individual levels. But such efforts were not institutionalised within CMP. Furthermore, some partners lost trust and became defensive in order to prove their efficiency and effectiveness. This was probably due to the NCA being overburdened with administrative work and not enough capacity to lead three NGO partners. Meanwhile NGO partners also found that the demarcation of their work was unclear and the consortium style was not always conducive to movement-led work due to its rigid nature. Later, NCA decided not to form a similar consortium with multiple partners in one project again. But it still has bilateral partnerships with other NGOs and expects technical support from former NGO consortium partners in bilateral relations.

### **3) Linking with other actors**

#### **- Develop linkages at national level through process facilitation**

From the very beginning, SNV Nepal involved other actors who are specialists in sector wise issues, e.g. partner NGOs and local government bodies, e.g. VDCs. By NEFIN, NFDIN and MLD becoming members of the Project Steering Committee of CMP. NCA could develop good linkages with national level authorities, and not only local NGOs working in their districts. Both NEFIN and NFDIN were important platforms for NCA as a well organised IPO, to position itself with. They later provided financial assistance to NCA, for instance for the production of a documentary and promotion of mother tongue education. CMP was highly appreciated by government officials too. When Hira Raj Regmi, Under Secretary of the Ministry of Local Development, visited Chepang villages as a part of CMP-MTR team for the first time, he was impressed. He was convinced by the efforts of NCA and its consortium partners. Later he often referred to CMP as a model of a project led by an IPO. Such linkages and recognition boosted the confidence of the NCA.

# 5. Lessons learnt

In this chapter, key general lessons are shared at first and later some points are noted which are particularly pertinent to SNV.

## 5-1. General lessons for assessment and planning

### 1) Strengthen RHOs' core business with a long term vision

In Nepal, the notion of RHOs led by excluded groups is still new and the concept itself is still evolving within these organisations themselves. However, donors sometimes easily provide resources for short term projects without considering the overall mission and capacity of RHOs. This can result in distorting the original purpose of the RHO and the loss of a 'volunteerism' spirit. By definition, RHOs are supposed to represent the interests of their members through leading movements or developing alliances with other civil society organisations. Their remit is not supposed to be one of a sub-contractor delivering services on behalf of line agencies. Sanjay Rana realized that supporting agencies should guide RHOs as per their missions and should only provide project management back-stopping when absolutely necessary.

### 2) Align monitoring indicators with national indicators

There is no doubt that SNV is one of enablers of change in the Chepang society from very close up. However, such closeness often blinds one from seeing (and documenting) the real progress of the Chepang in the broader context. Since PCDP 1, SNV, its partner NGOs and then NCA had been trying to monitor outputs and outcomes of activities. But significantly most reports failed to indicate the changes among the Chepang in comparison to other ethnic/caste groups or analyse their progression within particular districts.

Within the education component of CMP, a baseline survey was conducted in its inception year but its indicators were not harmonized with the monitoring reports by the Ministry of Education and Sports. Although the CMP-MTR recommended an improved monitoring system, significant changes were not put in place. This was partly due to SNV advisors' weak monitoring skills and unclear demarcation of monitoring responsibilities between NCA, partner NGOs and SNV. Community Facilitators who worked for CMP were intuitively satisfied with their contribution to their own society, but did not have proof about the quantifiable difference their individual efforts had made to minimise the gap between the Chepang and others. They were also unsure as to whether their development progress remained slower than the non-Chepangs in their own districts.

Probably all actors, not only SNV Nepal, but also the NGOs who supported the Chepang, were too close and empathetic with the Chepang to assess the actual gaps between Chepang and other communities objectively. At the beginning of SNV's intervention, the Chepang was obviously the most marginalised group in their locality. But at later stages, these actors should have reviewed the basis upon which they were targeting their approaches. At the very least they should have set project goals to overtly minimise the gaps between the two communities and also contribute to the development of wider neighbouring communities. Such efforts could have resulted in all the concerned stakeholders presenting their work progress in a co-ordinated manner, against national indicators and MDGs for example. SNV should have taken a lead in improving monitoring systems to be more comparable. This might have contributed to publicising the impressive progress of the Chepang to the outer world at an earlier stage, which may have boosted their confidence still further.

### **3) Plan phase out early on**

During the period of CMP, SNV Nepal had quickly transitioned from an implementing remit to becoming an 'advisory organisation'. As explained in Chapter 2, SNV advisors were expected to play various roles: process facilitator, relationship manager, strategic developer, and expertise leader, in addition to a general advisory capacity building role. However, SNV advisors could not avoid being involved in the daily operations of CMP due to the weak operational capacity of NCA.

The relationship between NCA and SNV Nepal had matured through the continuous involvement of particular advisors over a long period of time. However, such an arrangement also fostered interdependency and later became a barrier to establishing business-like/professional relationships. For instance, the assignment contract between SNV Nepal and NCA was rather general and did not identify the responsible phasing out of SNV along with clear benchmarks. In other words, the existing management mechanisms were not used to best effect. Continuous improvement was not achieved in relation to advisory services, for example through coaching by well-experienced advisors. The processes for assessing clients' satisfaction and time recording systems were in place but were not always enough to provide meaningful feedback.

In principle, SNV was expected to provide different types of advisory services as per the demands of the client. But, in reality, it was difficult for NCA (or most other clients for that matter) to identify and distinguish one role from another. SNV advisors also struggled to adapt working modes and fulfil different organisational demands. In the third year of CMP, NCA officials gradually found that they no longer needed general advisory support in managing programmes, but rather, they needed

content support on thematic issues, such as legislative issues for indigenous people. SNV could not respond to such demands, but fortunately NCA had strengthened its linkages with other resource organisations in addition to NGO consortium partners. For example, NCA had been working on a survey about land entitlement with the Community Self Reliance Centre. By 2006, SNV Nepal was no longer the closest support of NCA: perhaps an indicator of NCA's growth and success and SNV's effective contributions.

#### **4) Sharper focusing on poor within excluded groups**

Although the SNV 'targeted' its support to Chepang as an excluded group, it did not identify the poorest in villages and the most marginalised at household level. SNV could have selected activities that would have benefited them more, based on an understanding of the reasons why they were especially marginalised and poor, although such interventions require sound analytical abilities. This requires an assessment of not only social and economic structures but also power relations relating to issues of access and control. Then initiatives that address the causes of poverty have to be put into practice and this is the most challenging step of all. It has been in translating these initiatives into practice that a review of SNVs interventions has shown room for improvement. Thus while the PCDPs made some inroads into differentiating the poor from the less poor Chepangs; later, during project implementation all activities were implemented in a more or less generic, homogeneous manner.

#### **5) Focus more explicitly on challenging gender relations**

The CMP was designed to mobilise and increase women's participation in the Chepang women's movement and in obtaining property rights and access to further education. However, the CMP-MTR found a lack of focus by the NCA on the deeper 'agenda' of gender relations. Some work on women's rights was indeed accomplished. For example, women acquired citizenship certificates, participated in political debates as a part of the indigenous peoples' movement, and also benefited from the cultural events which promoted Chepang traditions and language. Under the gender objective, the outputs of the CMP were;

- Policy designed to ensure 30 % of women representation at district and village level NCA;
- Gender sensitisation was organised at all levels from staff to community members; and
- Women organised self-help saving groups.

The emphasis really seems to have been more on increasing women's participation - though this included access to decision making. Women were perceived as a means to ensuring a sustainable household economy, rather than facilitating women to really challenge existing social norms or unequal power relations between men and women. It can be concluded that the activities in CMP, designed as a RBA,



nonetheless did not seem to branch out too significantly from previous PCDDs as far as gender was concerned. In addition, SNV again failed to link the Chepang women with other partners working more progressively on women's rights.

## **5-2. Balancing advisory work in SNV**

### **1) Efficiency versus solidarity**

SNV Nepal has developed a range of tools to aid their work: Organisational Assessment Tools for gender auditing for example. SNV advisors were well equipped in handling these tools to assess NCA effectively and identify gaps to strengthen the organisation. On review however these tools are too generic and can be applied to any client, ranging from a newly established cooperative in a district to a high profile profit making organisation in Kathmandu for example. There is little space to add local/organisational context despite these tools having been developed through a series of discussions with clients at different levels. NCA members found that these tools were not always appropriate for them to apply to their organisation. They actually expected less skill-oriented technical support and more solidarity for their movement.

SNV management expects advisors to deliver tangible outcomes through their advisory services and has been emphasising the importance of time management every year. Consequently this gradually discouraged advisors from participating in events organised by NCA or the larger Janajati movement. Social Inclusion Advisors working with excluded groups faced a dilemma as to whether to give priority to time efficiency or expressing solidarity regardless of time management. But as Tom Derksen clearly states, "More important than the technical knowledge is the attitude and behaviour of an advisor that truly tries to uplift others. However, it is always challenging for advisors to maintain a balance between efficient technical advice and indispensable human solidarity". This is a common dilemma for any paid development workers who belong to subsidised development agencies but work with purely voluntary organisations. They face and struggle with the fundamental inequality between the two different types of organisations, which brings into question, 'how much solidarity can really ever exist?'

### **2) Linking to other sector programmes**

#### **- Position of Chepang programmes in SNV**

Rajesh Shrestha, a former Regional Manager of SNV Nepal, now working in SNV Ghana, was involved at the inception stage of designing SNV's intervention in Chepang areas. He clearly remembers that SNV's motivation behind going to Chepang areas was its concern over ethnic minority issues. In the early 1990s, nobody in Nepal used the words, 'exclusion' or 'inclusion' as development terminologies and it was certainly not yet the priority of SNV Nepal at that time.

PCDP 1 and PCDP 2 were fitted in SNV's strategy although at that time more weight was given to regional programmes in comparison to the former three sector based programmes; Governance, Private Sector Development, and Natural Resource Management. From 2000 onwards, SNV Nepal gradually shifted towards a sector-oriented approach and increased programmes within the above mentioned sectors. Later in 2004, CMP was positioned as an 'Empowerment programme for Chepangs' supported by a portfolio team named 'Inclusive Governance and Basic Services'. As a result, Chepang support was perceived as a parallel effort only under governance framework although there are several overlaps with Private Sector Development and Natural Resource Management.

Some other SNV Nepal supported programmes were actually implemented in Chepang settlement areas. For instance, one of the project sites of the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme was in Shaktikhor VDC in Chitwan. The programme supported a folk museum displaying Chepang farming equipment and promoted home stay in Chepang villages. Although some Chepang certainly benefited from the programme, local Chepang organisations were not involved in its programme design. On several occasions NCA requested SNV Nepal to involve the Chepang and Chepang organisations in the other sector based work undertaken by SNV Nepal. The CMP-MTR also recommended that SNV should clarify strategic links between its support to the Chepang and other programmes and that there was a need to provide more multi-sectoral advice.

NCA expected positive changes in 2006 when SNV established the Central Terai Portfolio (CTP) regional office in the Makwanpur district where CMP was also operating. Santa Bahadur Chepang, General Secretary of NCA, expected more close coordination with other practices of SNV through the CTP. However, again, CTP did not position NCA as a strategic partner within the regions or as a cross-sector client. In 2007, CTP gave priority to replicate SNV's learning with NCA to other excluded groups, e.g. Madhesi Dalit, instead of continuing their support to the NCA in the same manner. Santa feared that SNV was gradually abandoning NCA, shifting the office which provided support to the Chepang from the Country Office in Kathmandu to the CTP in Hetauda.

To some extent, supporting the Chepang was truly unique in every aspect: close rapport with a micro-level community, not-sectoral but a people-centred approach, more process oriented and so on. But sadly, such real uniqueness was not shared effectively due to rapid and consecutive changes within SNV and is only apparent in hindsight. SNV Nepal could have utilised this unique example earlier so more advisors could be sensitised to ethnic minority issues, through strategic job rotations for example.

# 6. Replication to other excluded groups supported by SNV today

SNV was at a crossroads in 2007 whilst preparing a new strategy for 2008 to 2009. In this chapter, on-going efforts with other excluded groups, e.g. Dalit organisations, are examined to assess whether the lessons learned have been applied and how SNV advisory services have been modified as a result. SNV's support was expanded to include Dalit NGOs and other excluded groups.

## 6-1. Balancing support to advocacy and service providers

In the case of SNVs' support to the Chepang in PCDPs, advisors were primarily supporters of NCA, an excluded group although they also supported VDCs and DDCs. District Portfolio Advisors working in East and Mid-West Regional teams were trying to take more challenging dual roles. They were primarily working with local government bodies to strengthen their service delivery skills. But advisors also took on other responsibilities to develop the capacity of civil society organisations, including those formed by excluded groups to claim their right to access services. Such combinations of work by the same agency or even by the same person are unique in Nepal. This is not an easy dichotomy: advisors need to play a careful balancing role to keep good working relationships with both 'sides'.

When this working modality was introduced in 2006, advisors foresaw that this could potentially put them into controversial situations. Most of them believed that empowering excluded groups to claim their rights through lobbying and advocacy may create confrontational relations against service providers, particularly with government line agencies. This was due to RHOs having a limited understanding of the range of possible lobbying and advocacy techniques. Community action often involves locking a local government office for example. This is a common style in Nepal where enduring strikes and blockades happen almost on a daily basis. There remains a need to develop constructive ways of lobbying and advocacy through dialogue and to support pragmatic negotiation with numerical and empirical evidence. However, it is difficult for excluded groups to position themselves in such a modality because they also suffer as service users on a day to day basis from the consequences of non-existent, low volume and poor quality service delivery.

Rik van Keulen, an Organisational Development advisor working in the Mid-Western region observes the constraints for track change within SNV:

*SNV Nepal, although committing itself to both mainstreaming of social inclusion and gender equity with duty bearers and empowerment of RHOs, has itself a deeply entrenched history of service delivery. This is apparent in its recruitment of new staff, its networks, and its inclination to stay away from publicity. The organisational culture of SNV in turn influences our clients. The Dalit RHOs for example, at their current stage of organisational development are still so dependant upon us. SNV needs to find a shared internal understanding on how this affects its support to RHOs, especially if there are already other factors (e.g. constraints in funding) pushing these organisations towards service delivery.*

This is probably a common issue for all agencies working with RHOs in remote regions. Firstly, RHOs complain that they are often involved in spot-event type lobbying, e.g. one day campaigns. The lack of long term support for lobbying and advocacy work does not result in a measurable impact of their campaigns. On the other hand service delivery projects, e.g. scholarship distribution programmes, are often funded for longer periods which ensure the sustainability of their organisations. Secondly, funding opportunities for long-term support in lobby and advocacy are more available either in Kathmandu or regional headquarters, not in the field where many RHOs are located. So, they have no option but to apply for funding support for service delivery projects which is available in their own districts.

As a result of organisational development support to Dalit NGOs in both the East and Mid-West regions of Nepal, they are gradually becoming recognised as representatives of the Dalit population in their districts. They are involved in meetings organised by government led initiatives: Dalit Uttan District Coordination Committee and Adhibasi Janajati District Coordination Committee, for example. SNV Nepal has been supporting the orientation of members of these committees to their organisational roles in collaboration with the Local Development Training Academy. At the same time, SNV Nepal provided Training of Trainers for local activists. This was based on a reference book about Social Inclusion and Gender Equity prepared by a resource organisation, SAGUN, in Kathmandu. SNV expects these two training events to support both claim making by excluded groups and equitable service delivery by the government agencies for promoting equitable and inclusive society.

## **6-2. Process facilitation or mediation in multi stakeholder environment**

In addition to Institutional Development and Organisational Strengthening being undertaken with each RHO, SNV has also identified its role as a facilitator of dialogue between different RHOs and a mediator of potential conflicts arising between RHOs. In Jumla district, three Dalit NGOs started working together to claim their rights to access a Hindu temple where Dalits were denied entry due to the deep rooted cultural belief of un-touchability. Dalit NGOs are now trying to take joint action instead of seeing each other as competitors. Both vertical linkages with government sectors and horizontal linkages across RHOs are very important steps to raising their voices in a more strategic way.

At national level, SNV Nepal has been actively supporting the Dalit Support Consortium Forum, a network of both Dalit organisations and supporting agencies. In September 2007, SNV organised a joint meeting with Madhesi Dalits and encouraged dialogue between Madhesi Dalit and hill-Dalit led organisations. This initiative was well received by other stakeholders working for and with Dalits.

## **6-3. Increasing roles in brokering, networking and further links to market development**

There are few Indigenous People's Organisation who have received such comprehensive support from different parties. NCA had an exceptional opportunity which secured long-term support. In the case of clients of other excluded groups, they are still too small to replicate the NCA experience. Although NCA itself still needs to develop its skills in reporting and managing own organisation, it does have extensive outreach capacity and a strategic contact point in Kathmandu for networking and advocacy at national level.

For other excluded groups, SNV Nepal has been providing small opportunities through its programme budget in addition to providing technical assistance in organisational development and training. For instance, Dalit NGOs conducted a survey to assess the situation of the Dalit people in their own districts. This was undertaken with technical assistance provided by SNV. Dalit NGOs also managed to provide logistical support for several training courses at district level. Through this experience and the mentoring/coaching provided by district based SNV advisors, members of Dalit NGOs have gained the confidence and work experience to present themselves as professionals to others. The SNV Country Programme Evaluation 2007 highlighted

the need for continuous capacity building of small NGOs in remote districts where access to information and resource organisations is extremely limited.

To promote steps towards independence from such intensive support, the Dalit NGOs need to seek funding support. Their lack of knowledge about the donor landscape means they require support from SNV to identify funding opportunities and furthermore to develop the funding proposals. So continuous mentoring and coaching by SNV advisors remains a necessary basic support requirement for them. The SNV Country Office assists with liaison between donors and national networks of RHOs, match-making when these district-based organisations need specific support from resource organisations. For example, young leaders of Dalit NGOs in the mid west region participated in a lobbying and advocacy workshop on 'Education For All (EFA)' organised by the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) and the SNV Mid-Western Regional Office in 2006. DNF submitted a proposal for a project, "Promoting Inclusive Education" to the European Commission and together with a resource organisation facilitated a workshop. As a result of lessons learned from the Chepang experience, SNV facilitated an initial dialogue between DNF and DNF member organisations in a district. SNV does not intend playing more than a back stopping role once the initial funding has been secured, unless any dispute occurs.

In another case, as is often the case, challenges were faced beyond the general capacity building needs of organisations, with regard to developing market access for products. In eastern Nepal, SNV supported Dalits through a programme called, 'Rural Enterprise Assistance Programme' implemented by the Industrial Enterprise Development Institute. While this initiative will very likely result in improved Dalit livelihoods to an extent, it may not lead to the long term economic transformation to the extent required. Generic capacity building is strongest when it is backed up by relevant sector and content based technical advice. In addition to direct capacity building of Dalit organisations, SNV needed to support the creation of a conducive environment for newly trained Dalits through other channels, e.g. strengthening micro-finance institutes.

# 7. Conclusion and future direction

Through working with the Chepang, SNV Nepal has learnt that ensuring fundamental rights is an essential aspect to empowering excluded groups. In addition it has been observed that communities who strengthen their own village level foundations then have an indispensable network for ensuring effective and comprehensive outreach.

These points were replicated as an entry point to support other excluded groups. Although it is still in an early exploratory stage, SNV Nepal is trying to facilitate various combinations of actors in its sector based approach. For instance, Dalit NGOs are expected to claim their rights to access water while other NGOs provide support to the claim making process with technical skills. In the Chepang story, such initiatives were often limited within particular districts, but now SNV tries to link up advocacy initiatives to the national level, emphasising its contribution to national indicators.

On the basis of our experience and lessons learnt through working with excluded groups over a decade, we emphasise that such an approach needs to begin with a diagnosis of un-equal power relations in each sector (or geographical area) and often across and beyond sectors. This should be followed by designing support and interventions which address the empowerment of excluded people. SNV Nepal will listen more to the voices of excluded people to promote and increase in their choices through providing linkages across sectors. This will encourage their participation in the entire process of inclusive and equitable development. SNV clients include various stakeholders from Government sectors, Civil Society Organisations and the private sector. They are equally responsible for an accountable and transparent development process. SNV advisors will work to facilitate dialogue, develop linkages between different stakeholders and provide technical support for monitoring. This is within the overall context of national strategic plans, aligned with MDGs, which aim to increase access to quality basic services and increase the production, income and employment of poor people, including excluded communities.

# Epilogue

In October 2007, NCA signed an agreement with ICCO for two-year funding support. The new project aims to develop the capacity of village level chapters of NCA through mobilizing existing functional groups, e.g. saving and credit groups or school management committees. This will improve their outreach and to lead village development in a more inclusive manner. In short, it is a capacity building project for Chepang villagers by young Chepang trained activists.

The new project is organised around five themes managed by sub-committees:

- 1) Culture,
- 2) Education and Health,
- 3) Land Rights Campaign,
- 4) Information, Communication and Publication and
- 5) Resource identification and management.

District chapters of NCA will in turn strengthen village level chapters through well trained Chepang community mobilisers. The Resource Identification and Mobilization sub-committee aim to seek organisational and project sustainability by networking with donor agencies to mobilise resources to scale-up planned project activities..

NCA will be responsible for entire management of the project while NGOs with technical expertise in the above mentioned themes will be deployed on an assignment basis. NCA already has enough experience of working with NGOs and government line agencies, so it is confident it will effectively manage bi-lateral relations with them. Although SNV advisors were involved in the initial stage of conceptualising the project, NCA has convinced ICCO to extend partnership without the provision of SNV's advisory services. SNV advisors believe that their roles in general capacity building are over as NCA has the confidence to move ahead by itself. It is a time of celebration, although for the Chepang community there is still a long way to go. But all would agree that unshakable foundations have been successfully achieved at least. Empowerment and development are long term processes if they are to be truly sustainable.



## References

Bhattachan, K. B.; Gurung, O.; Gurung, S. M.; Kayastha, N. L.; Kirant, J. and Yonjan-Tamang, A. 2005. *Rapid Appraisal on Livelihood Analysis and Need Assessment of Highly Marginalised Janajatis*

Bhattarai, T. R.; Pradhan, S. and Ghimire, G. 1995. *Chepangs, Resources and Development*, Kathmandu: SEACOW and SNV Nepal

Bista, D. B. 1996. *People of Nepal*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pushtak Bhandar (First edition published in 1967)

CAED and NCA, 2005, *Education for All Chepangs - Where are they: Report of a survey*

CDO and NCA, 2007. *Exploratory Research on Effects on Mining Industries on Chepang Indigenous Nationalities*

Chapman, J. 2005. *Rights-Based Development: The Challenge of Change and Power*, <http://www.gprg.org/pubs/workingpapers/pdfs/gprg-wps-027.pdf> (accessed on 30 January 2008)

Chhetri, N. S.; Ghimire, S.; Gribnau, C.; Pradhan, S. and Rana, S. 1997. *Can Orange Trees Blossom on a Barren Land: Identification of Development Potentials of Praja Communities in Chitwan District*, Chitwan: PCDP

DFID and The World Bank, 2006. "Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal", Summary, Kathmandu: DFID and The World Bank

Gribnau, C. 2008. *On-line comments* (4 February 2008)

FORWARD. 2007. *Chepang Mainstreaming Programme Project Completion Report (2004-2007)*

GON/NPC and UNDP. 2006, *Millennium Development Goals Needs Assessment for Nepal*

Höfer, A. 2004. *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A study of the Mulki Ain of 1954*. Kathmandu: Himal Books. (First edition published in 1979)

Kamerbeek, S. and Rizal, K. 2000. *Challenge to Break the Culture of Silence Perception of SNV Partner Organisations on SNV's Organisational Strengthening Support*

Keulen, Rik van. 2007. *Karnali Dalit NGOs and SNV Nepal Together for G4E?*

Kirant, J.; Lama-Tamang, M. S. and Prakash, M. R. 2003. *Mid-Term Review of Praja Capacity Development Programme (PCDP2-MTR)*

Kirant, J.; Singh, K.; Regmi, H. R. and Tanaka, M. 2006. *Mid-Term Review Chepang Mainstreaming Programme (CMP-MTR)*

NCA, 2007, *Chepang Mainstreaming Programme Final Progress Report (2004-2007)*

Rana, S. 2007. *On-line interview (19 September 2007)*

Regmi, Raghav. R. and Bliet, Julie A. van der. 1999. *Mid-Term Review Praja Community Development Programme (PCDP1-MTR)*

Shrestha, R. 2007. *On-line interview (29 November 2007)*

SNV. 2002. *SNV's Advisory Practice: Emerging Lines, The Hague: SNV*

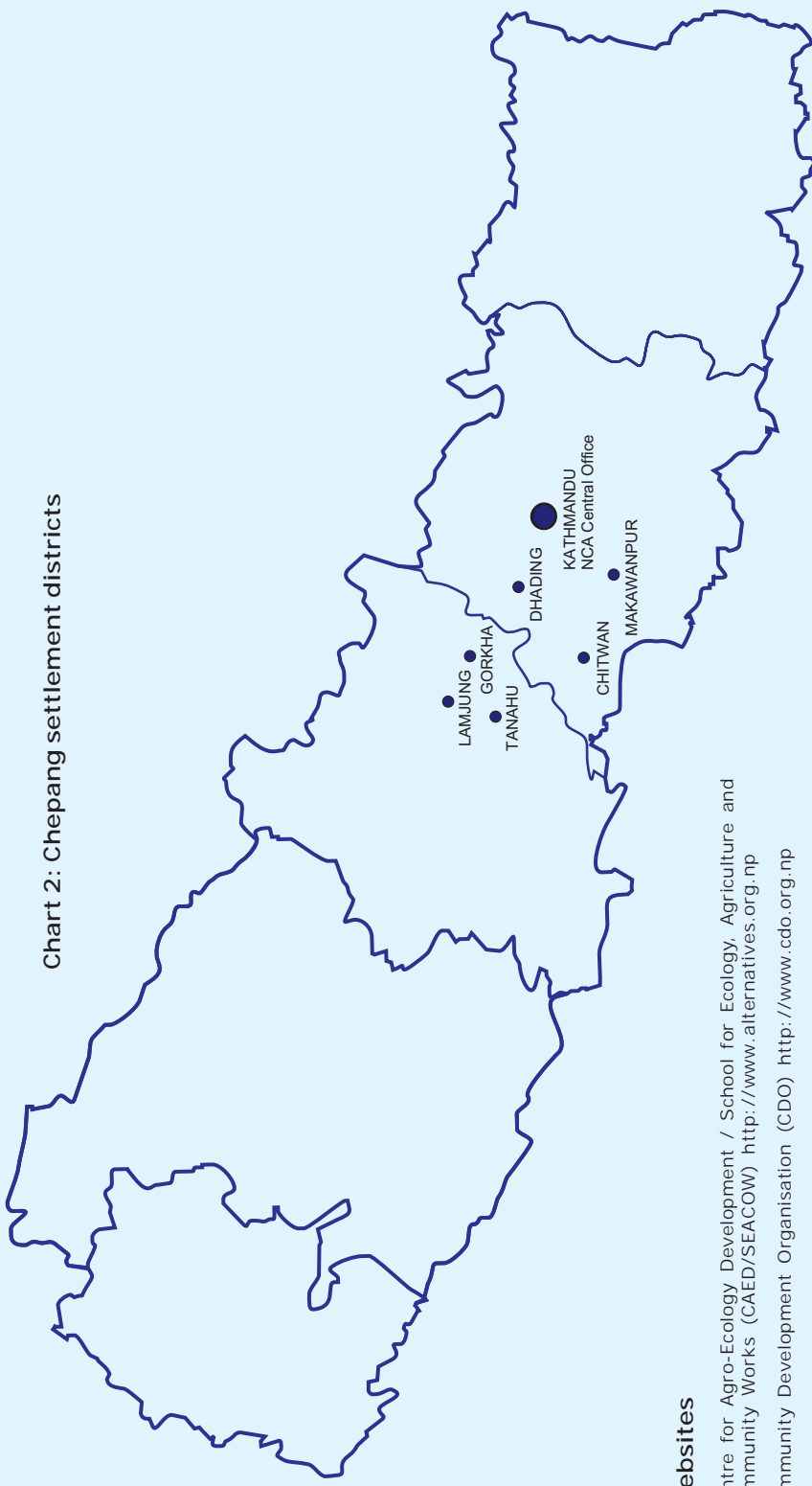
SNV Nepal. 2006. *Draft Strategy on Social Inclusion and Gender Equity (SIGE)*

SNV Nepal. 2007. *Strategic Plan 2008 - 2009*

SNV Nepal Mid West Portfolio. 2006. *Capacity Development Dalit Organisation in Karnali, Nepal: Empowerment to Exercise Rights*, <http://www.snvworld.org/irj/go/km/docs/SNVdocumentsRALG%20Nepal%20Capacity%20Building%20of%20Dalit%20NGOs.doc> (accessed on 30 January 2008)

Thornton, P.; Thapa, R. and Shrestha, A. 2007. *Country Programme Evaluation SNV Nepal 2003- 2006*

Chart 2: Chepang settlement districts



### Websites

Centre for Agro-Ecology Development / School for Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works (CAED/SEACOW) <http://www.alternatives.org.np>

Community Development Organisation (CDO) <http://www.cdo.org.np>

Forum for Rural Welfare and Agriculture Reform for Development (FORWARD) <http://www.forwardnepal.org>

National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) <http://nfdin.gov.np>

Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) <http://nefin.org.np>

SNV <http://www.snvworld.org>



**Nepal Chepang Association** was established in 1998 by young Chepang activists working for Chepang communities to promote and preserve their culture, religion and language. It is one of the Indigenous Peoples' Organisations affiliated to the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities with individual and organisational members in 6 districts.



**SNV Netherlands Development Organisation** is a Netherlands based international NGO that delivers capacity building advisory services to over 2,000 clients in 33 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Balkans. In Asia, SNV provides capacity building services to government, non-government and private sector organisations in Nepal, Vietnam, Bhutan, Laos, Cambodia and Bangladesh as well as to a number of regional organisations and networks. Our 140 advisers in Asia work with local actors, primarily those who operate at national and meso levels in strengthening their capacity to effectively realise poverty reduction and good governance. SNV aims to achieve development results in two areas: (1) Reducing extreme poverty by increasing production, employment and equitable income opportunities via our work in Smallholder Cash Crops, Pro-poor Sustainable Tourism, and Forest Products; (2) Improving the access, coverage and quality of basic services via our work in Water, Sanitation & Hygiene and Renewable Energy.

*For more information, please visit our website: [www.snvworld.org](http://www.snvworld.org)*



**SNV Netherlands Development Organisation**  
Bakhundole, Lalitpur, Nepal  
P.O.Box 1966, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Phone: +977-1-5523444  
Fax: +977-1-5523155  
e-mail: [nepal@snvworld.org](mailto:nepal@snvworld.org)



**Nepal Chepang Association**  
Pulchowk, Lalitpur, Nepal  
P.O.Box 8975, E.P.C 984  
Phone: +977-1-5539141  
e-mail: [chepang@wlink.com.np](mailto:chepang@wlink.com.np)