

Making music for change

18 May 2007

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After eleven years of civil conflict in Nepal, an interim government has just been formed which includes members of all of the warring factions. Conflict often means that development goes backwards or stops. However, in Nepal, DFID was able to continue helping local communities through the [Community Support Programme \(CSP\)](#).

CSP, which operates in over half of Nepal's districts and has a budget of £15 million between 2004 and 2008, has supported over 3,000 projects targeting poor and excluded communities. These programmes are making a real difference to people's lives, supporting them to build schools, learn new trades, develop irrigation, and for the first time since the end of the conflict, help them return to their homes.

New skills to turn a profit

The dalits ('untouchables') are the lowest and most excluded caste in Nepal and have historically faced severe discrimination. In the west of the country lives a dalit tribe called the Gandarva.

The Gandarva's lifestyle has long involved travelling from town to town, earning money by singing and playing music. This has been a precarious kind of existence, with tribe members carrying most of their belongings with them on their travels, and relying for shelter on the kindness of locals.

Now, with help from the CSP, the Gandarvas are using their musical heritage and talents to earn a new respect across Nepal. After forming a community group, members of the tribe requested support to train more people in how to make the sarangi, a traditional violin-like instrument. After two months of instruction these newly-skilled craftspeople were making extra income through the sarangis that they sold.

Dilu, the Executive Director of the community group, explains:

“Before, we lived a very marginal life, but now there is more unity. The training has promoted our traditional culture and it is seen as dignified to make instruments. We have set up stalls to sell the instruments and are selling them around Nepal.”

Dansarah, one of the women trained to make the sarangis, adds:

“It takes two days to make a sarangi. They are made of light wood, goat skin, horse hair and bamboo with plastic strings. Some of the families have used the extra income to join a micro-credit scheme and they have started small businesses rearing pigs and goats.”

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Building a stronger community

As well as supporting training to make instruments, DFID has funded the building of a well in the village. This saves the women from walking several miles each day to fetch water. Dansarah says:

“We know that safe drinking water is important and we are teaching our children this. We want them to go to school, but although the extra money means that we have full stomachs every day, we still don’t have enough to afford the uniforms and the stationery to send all of our children to school.”

Although the Gandarva continue to face real challenges, DFID money has helped them to develop a sense of unity, and the community is now working together to obtaining other important resources and facilities, such as running water and toilets.

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Key facts

- Dalits make up more than 15% of Nepal's population and are the most disadvantaged section of society.
- The poorest and hardest hit conflict regions, such as the Mid-Western, have a poverty incidence that is almost 20% higher than the Central region.
- Nepal is on track to meet the [Millennium Development Goal on water](#), with around 81% of the population having access, but is seriously off track on sanitation, with only 39% people using safe toilets.

Channels to progress in Nepal

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Related pages: [Nepal country profile](#) | [Making music for change](#) | [Spring cleaning in Nepal](#) Guptipur is a small village in the Mid-Western province of Nepal, an area badly affected by the country's recent decade-long conflict.



As well as living with daily concerns about their security (some of the younger members of the village have been taken by force to fight with Maoist insurgents), the villagers face a host of other, less violent but no less significant threats to their livelihoods.

Obtaining a reliable water supply to nourish their crops is one of these. So, after finding out about DFID's [Community Support Programme \(CSP\)](#), the villagers formed an action group to apply for money that would bring an irrigation system to Guptipur.

A healthier life

"Without irrigation we could only grow one crop of maize every year," explains local villager Sabitra Basyal. "This gave us enough food to feed ourselves for two months, but after that we had to buy everything. This was very difficult and our children were often sick."

"The women also had to walk two and a half hours every day to collect water. We then had to wait our turn in the queue, and the water was dirty."

When irrigation came to the village, however, life changed significantly. Sabitra and her neighbours are now able to grow three crops every year, even producing surplus amounts of rice and vegetables. "Our children are healthier because they are drinking clean water and eating a good diet," Sabrita says. To ensure that the newly installed facilities are managed effectively, the community selects which farmer will draw water from the irrigation channel on which day.

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Meeting the challenges that remain



However, despite the assistance provided by CSP, life remains difficult, particularly for the women of the village. With over 90% of the village's men working elsewhere for eleven months of the year to make money to send home, it is the women who must take on the extra work of planting and harvesting the two extra crops that irrigation has made possible. The women also face an increased risk of catching HIV/AIDS from their husbands, who have often travelled to work in India, where the disease is rife.

But the women of Guptipur know what they are doing and what they need. "We are using drip irrigation techniques, which means that the water isn't wasted and we can earn as much money as possible from our crops," says one villager. "We use any spare money to send our children to school. We would like to build good toilets in the future."

In Guptipur as in other areas of Nepal, DFID's Community Support Programme is allowing local communities to access the facilities and resources they need to raise their productivity, protect their health and so improve the quality of their lives.

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Key facts

- Access to safe and clean water is enjoyed by 81% of the general population of Nepal, but only 39% have access to sanitation.
- Recent statistics show that an estimated 30% of Nepalese live in extreme poverty, with a daily income of less than \$1(US).
- An estimated 70,000 Nepalis are infected with HIV, which is about 0.3% of the population.
- CSP operates in over half over Nepal's districts, with a budget of £15 million between 2004 and 2008. It has supported over 3,000 projects targeting poor and excluded communities. It supports activities including the building of schools, the teaching of new trades, irrigation development, and enabling people to return to their homes post-conflict.

Spring cleaning in Nepal

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A DFID programme that provides tailored support to some of Nepal's poorest communities is improving quality of life across the country. One important area in which the [Community Support Programme \(CSP\)](#) has provided help is in the provision of clean water.

Money for fresh water



In the village of Lawasta Guptipur, the CSP has made a huge difference to the lives of 73 households. With a grant of £1,500, supplemented by money that they had raised themselves, the villagers were able to build a shelter over their freshwater spring to keep the supply clean and unpolluted. The water now pours out of three pipes and on to a concreted area that is good for washing clothes.

The village Action Committee had identified the need to protect the spring after many villagers, particularly children, fell ill with diarrhoea. Drinking water was also shared with animals, which created a breeding ground for disease.

Parbati Sakya, the oldest woman in the village, explains:

"When we arrived in this area, it was all forest. As the village grew in size the spring water became very dirty and people were often sick. With the protected spring it is easier to collect water and there is less disease. We know this because we have to buy less medicine for our children. This means that we have more money available for other things such as sending our children to school."

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Water for the benefit of all



The protection of the village spring took three months to accomplish and over 300 people lent a hand, including the local Maoists, who helped to carry stones.

One of the root causes of the recent decade-long conflict in Nepal has been inequality between different social groups, but in Lawasta Guptipur there is an atmosphere of real harmony. Any disputes are mediated within the community and there is no discrimination against the dalits ('untouchables'), who traditionally are not allowed to take water from the same place as higher castes.

Although the grant provided to Lawasta Guptipur was small by DFID standards, the difference it has made to this village in remote western Nepal is undeniable. Locals have identified that a stronger bridge to withstand the flow of the river in rainy season is the next crucial thing that is required, and they are currently working out, as one community, how they can finance this important next step.

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Key facts

- Over 80% of all illness in Nepal is attributed to inadequate access to clean water supplies, poor sanitation and inappropriate hygiene practices.
- Over 28,000 children die each year from diarrhoeal diseases.
- Treatment of hygiene-related diseases is estimated to cost between NRs. 4 and 10 billion (£31-77m) per year.
- CSP operates in over half over Nepal's districts, with a budget of £15 million between 2004 and 2008. It has supported over 3,000 projects targeting poor and excluded communities.