IMPROVEMENT OF LIVELIHOODS IN RURAL AREAS (ILRA)

Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction
IMPROVEMENT OF LIVELIHOODS IN RURAL AREAS (ILRA)
In the strive of the Nepalese Government to create public access to the impacts of development, cooperation with national and international development agencies, donors and the private sector including industrialists and entrepreneurs has always been essential.

In the last 4 years, the program *Improvement of Livelihoods in Rural Areas* has been implemented as a joint effort of the Nepalese and German governments. The purpose was to implement developmental activities in Bajhang and Baitadi in the Far-Western region of Nepal, addressing the needs of the local people as much as possible. The compilation of the case studies in this book is an inscription itself, comprising the impartial views of the participating local people from different professions regarding the approach of the program. The Manager and the entire team of this program as well as the individuals involved in these activities are to be thanked. I hope that this book will further inspire future development activities in rural areas.

**Bharat Prasad Paudel**  
Joint- Secretary  
**Ministry of Peace & Reconstruction**  
Singhdurbar, Kathmandu
Dear friends from Baitadi and Bajhang,

Dear readers,

When I came to the districts of Baitadi and Bajhang for the first time in the year 2009, I was with a mission to assess the possibilities for a new project. The District Development Committees and political leaders, the NGOs and the local people themselves helped us to understand the major challenges in their lives.

I was personally very touched by the fact that women were practically invisible in public life, but at the same time suffering from high workloads on the fields and in their houses. So, a program concept emerged that combined the enforcement of economic power for the entire communities with the uplifting of women and other disadvantaged groups. Social balance became one of our guiding principles.

During our four years work I have spent many days and nights in the communities to capture how the locals perceive the activities. Only if they felt positive changes in their lives, an activity was considered as being successful.

This book gives an overview over the different sectors in which the program worked. All activities were interlinked and only in their combination unfolded the desired effect of getting people out of the emergency and into the development zone.

The personal stories will picture how individuals have grabbed knowledge and opportunities that the program offered and turned them into a personal strategy for their future lives. My thoughts and sympathy will be accompanying them in all their attempts in the years to come.

So, it only rests to express my heartily thanks to the Nepalese and German Governments who have accompanied and guided us over the years. They made it possible to deliver our services in the way we did and we are very thankful for that.

With the best wishes from my side and in the name of my dedicated team,
## CONTENT

**WORKING IN A TIME OF CONFLICT | INTRODUCTION**  
1

**NEW CHALLENGES IN THE FAR-WEST | ILRA**  
3

**THE CHANGE PROCESS | APPROACH**  
4

---

**BREAKING THE CYCLE | IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE IN BAITADI & BAJHANG**  
8

GIZ and the WFP | Upscaling through cooperation  
10

Paths to prosperity | New roads and trails  
12

Infrastructure projects in Baitadi & Bajhang | 674 projects completed between 09/2009 and 12/2013  
16

Building a future | New schools  
22

Adapting to climate change | Preserving natural resources  
26

Cooking health and environment friendly | Biogas  
30

Connecting people to local government | Community service centres  
32

Combining efforts | Multipurpose-use of resources  
34

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**FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGES | FOSTERING RESILIENCE TOWARDS CLIMATIC CHANGES**  
36

Building resilience to climate change
Remote areas were particularly affected by the conflict
For ten years, from 1996 to 2006, Nepalis fought Nepalis in a conflict that divided the country and left a trail of destruction and poverty – especially in rural areas. The CPN (Maoist) forces mobilised the rural poor with the promise of social justice and the end of the monarchy. Starting in the Mid-Western districts of Rukum and Rolpa, the Maoists fought the government forces in a conflict that left more than 16,000 people dead and around 200,000 people displaced. In Rukum and Rolpa, the heartland of the insurgency, the root causes of the conflict were particularly present and the goals of the Maoists were met mostly with sympathy. At the same time, people did not have a choice and found themselves caught between the opposing forces. In the Mid- and Far-Western rural areas the atmosphere during the conflict was one of mistrust and speechlessness on the part of the population. The Maoist rebels established a parallel government in Rukum and Rolpa, confining the official government to the district headquarters.

The social and economic consequences of the conflict were enormous. As the districts were isolated by the Royal Nepal Army, no goods could enter and no social and economic services were available. The food situation drastically deteriorated and the already rudimentary infrastructure was destroyed or damaged, further limiting access to markets and socio-economic services.

Under these difficult circumstances, in 2004, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (at that time, GTZ) began to work in Rukum and Rolpa. Many of the project’s social principles did not conflict with the Maoists’ ideas; both stressed the importance of gender and caste equality (about 30% of the Maoist fighters were women) and both wanted to strengthen the status of the rural population. Nevertheless, the Maoist rebels considered social mobilisation as their domain and wanted GIZ to provide ‘hardware’ only.

The first activity conducted by GIZ was the construction of a road. In this project hundreds of people received food and cash immediately for their work. The accompanying ‘software’ was the introduction of basic democratic rules, public audits and an equal wage policy in the working groups. Public audits allowed the project to demonstrate complete transparency in relation to the use of funds, which was appreciated by the local decision makers later on.

GIZ’s offices were not located in the cut off district capitals, but in the project areas, which meant that access was possible at any time for the target group, as well as the Maoist cadres. Frequent visits to the district government and the security forces established balanced communication. Practically all staff were stationed in the field and often hosted by local people in their houses. The project staff had to make a lot of sacrifices and endured much hardship during these times. At every step, the project staff were scrutinised either by the Maoists or the security forces. Each word, each expression might have had irreparable consequences for the project or the individual. Local people had to obtain the permission of the Maoists before working for GIZ. During the conflict, GIZ staff were exposed to bomb blasts and shootings and often could neither contact colleagues nor family. As the trust between the staff and communities grew, the local people started to protect the project personnel and activities by providing informal information about the situation. Over seven years the staff managed to turn mistrust into long-term ties with both conflict parties and the local inhabitants.
In 2009 in Baitadi and Bajhang the social and physical infrastructure was rudimental.
NEW CHALLENGES IN THE FAR-WEST | ILRA

Following GIZ’s successful work in Rukum and Rolpa, in 2009 the Government of Nepal asked the Government of Germany to implement the same proven approach again in Nepal’s Far-West. A large part of the population in this area was suffering from dramatic food shortages. The situation was particularly bad in two of the most remote districts – Baitadi and Bajhang. The already dire socio-economic situation in these rural areas was made worse by the civil war and has remained critical since. Food security in these districts was less than four and five months a year respectively in 2009. The main reasons for this were a lack of physical and social infrastructure, lack of means of agricultural production, and social discrimination, which hindered people from fulfilling their true potential and developing their communities.

Between September 2009 and December 2013 the Nepal-German government project Improvement of Livelihoods in Rural Areas (ILRA) was implemented in Baitadi and Bajhang under the guidance of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) and supported by GIZ, on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). ILRA was a multi-sectoral project designed to support the local people on their way towards a self-reliant life free from hunger, poverty and discrimination.

GIZ WORKED IN THE MID- AND FAR-WEST THROUGH THREE PROJECTS

The Food Security and Rehabilitation Project (FSRP) was implemented in 2004 in the districts of Rukum and Rolpa to facilitate the access of people to short-term employment and long-term income opportunities through the (re-)construction of economic and social infrastructure.

The Reintegration and Reconstruction Project (ReRe) was the successor to FSRP in Rukum and Rolpa and commenced after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2006. This project supported the social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants and returnees and strengthened social cohesion.

Starting in late 2009, the project Improvement of Livelihoods in Rural Areas (ILRA) implemented activities in the districts of Bajhang and Baitadi using the proven approach of FSRP and ReRe. It ran until December 2013.
From the beginning ILRA was built around a flexible concept based on frequent analysis and revision. The interventions, beneficiaries and staff composition were adapted according to what happened during project implementation. Staff composition reflected the project’s principles and was balanced in terms of gender, caste and ethnicity and integrated local people. The project was designed to first alleviate the urgent food crisis through Food and Cash for Work, while at the same time initiating sustainable social and economic activities to create a basis for sustainable development and to strengthen the resilience of the local people. Through the construction of roads, schools, service centres, and water supply and irrigation systems, access to services and markets, food security and the health situation were drastically improved. The project proceeded based on the assumption that socio-economic change needs three things:

1. Inclusive staff composition

A project is only as good as its project staff. ILRA decided to employ local people who speak the local language and have knowledge of the situation in the project areas. Due to the generally low level of education of women from the project areas, a trainee program for disadvantaged young women was started. Staff were trained in a fair style of communication for staff meetings: Women trainees were encouraged and given more responsibilities; male staff were reminded to give women space, help and acceptance to allow them to develop. All trainees became full social mobilisers. A number of female technicians and 50% women in the project’s leadership rounded out the picture. The representation of women and men was thus balanced, and marginalised groups were also strongly represented and fully respected within the team and the target group.

2. A network of self-help groups

The backbone of the social mobilisation and economic development processes was a net of several hundred newly established self-help groups with basic democratic rules and elected management teams. The groups, as well as the management teams, consisted of at least 50% of women and 20% Dalit. The groups provided a permanent forum for exchange and training on basic democratic behaviour.

3. Accessibility and communication

The staff were decentralised and lived within the communities. Communication in a relaxed and informal environment was the key: talking to farmers in the field, sharing a meal at someone’s home or chatting with women returning from the field. This continuous communication prevented tensions from arising and opened the doors to the heads and the hearts of the people. In all activities, GIZ stressed the need for full transparency through public audits and a permanent field presence by local ILRA staff.
People walk home on a newly constructed road. The new roads and trails in Baitadi and Bajhang improve the access to social and economic services and connect the people from remote villages to the market centres.
BREAKING THE CYCLE
IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE IN BAITADI & BAJHANG

Traditionally, public investment in infrastructure in the Far-Western districts of Baitadi and Bajhang has been low. It still takes three days to drive by car from Kathmandu to the district headquarters. To get to the most remote villages, one needs to walk another three days – often on small and steep trails. The social and economic isolation is a major cause of food insecurity, poverty, health problems and the high level of illiteracy. Thus, GIZ supported infrastructure projects in the Far-West to break the cycle of poverty and to improve access to markets and services. In the short-term, the project activities enabled local workers to feed their families and to earn money for other activities and businesses. In the long-term, the new infrastructure improved the connection to other districts as well as to public and private services. Another positive result was that transportation costs for goods and people decreased, boosting trade and economic activities. As the local people directly benefited from the infrastructure they built, ownership increased significantly.

To strengthen the position and independence of women and disadvantaged groups, such as Dalit, all participants in the construction of infrastructure earned the same wages for doing the same tasks and, due to convincing communities to accept a set quota, had the same access to leadership positions.
A school building constructed in collaboration with the WFP

GIZ AND WFP | UPSCALING THROUGH COOPERATION

The majority of construction activities were carried out in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) of the United Nations. The combined work of GIZ and WFP counteracted the acute food insecurity and created a basis for further development by constructing new infrastructure projects and improving existing ones. WFP provided the food and cash as compensation for the workers, while GIZ mobilised local communities and delivered technical drawings, training, material and technical supervision.

The Food and Cash for Work scheme rested upon two basic elements. First, it offered an opportunity to work on infrastructure projects to as many people as possible from the local communities so that they could directly earn a living. As short-term relief, local workers each received 2 kilograms of rice, 250 grams of lentils and 85 NPR per day. This gave the participants the ability to immediately feed their families, buy goods or medicines on the local markets, send their children to school and sometimes save money to start their own business. Second, the scheme constructed sustainable infrastructure to kick start sustainable development and income opportunities with a low impact on the environment.

The infrastructure was built by user groups steered by democratic user committees. These managed the building process and, in the case of roads,
This is a water pond in Baitadi, built in cooperation with the WFP. In total, 67 ponds were constructed in the project areas.

Irrigation systems and drinking water schemes were owned and maintained by the local government. Schools and community service centres were handed over to the local government institutions. In many cases, the local government bore part of the costs. Other partners of ILRA included, among others, the state-run and World Bank-financed Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA) and the local non-governmental organisation Support Activities for Poor Producers of Nepal (SAPROS).
Baitadi and Bajhang each have only one paved road in the whole district and many villages are hard to reach. Therefore, as the backbone of the project, over 44 km of rural roads were constructed and 28 km of trails improved. The new roads facilitate trade and access to socio-economic services, lower food and transportation costs, and create new business opportunities, enabling local people to diversify their income sources.

The ‘Rural Road Construction Strategy’ used by ILRA and WFP is based on the ‘Green Road Concept’, jointly developed for Nepal’s hilly districts by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and GTZ (one of the GIZ predecessor organisations) in the 1980s. The strategy promotes environment friendly techniques based on manual labour. It seeks to avoid the use of explosives and heavy equipment for road construction. This approach was suitable for both Baitadi and Bajhang to protect the fragile and landslide-prone mountain environment. The local communities provided labour and materials such as sand, stone and timber. ILRA employed managerial, technical and social staff, provided on-the-job training, salaries for skilled labour and materials such as gabion boxes and tools. A welfare and maintenance fund was set up to provide aid should accidents during work occur and to repair monsoon damage. ILRA paid 1 NPR per distributed kilo of rice into this fund. At the end of the project the fund contained 2.65 Mio. NPR. Potential road tolls can also be saved in this fund for future use.
Bharat Prasad Paudel, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, Nicole Menage, Country Director of the World Food Program and Roland Steurer, Country Director of GIZ inaugurate the newly constructed road in Baitadi
A breaker removed the hard rocks when manual work ran into its limits
Workers prepare gabion boxes to stabilise a slope on the roadside.
INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN BAITADI & BAJHANG
674 PROJECTS COMPLETED BETWEEN 09/2009 AND 12/2013

ROADS & TRAILS
• 44 km of road constructed
• 28 km of trails improved

IRRIGATION
74 Irrigation Canal Systems
• 909 ha irrigated
• 5,558 benefitting households
67 Water Harvesting Ponds
• 41 ha irrigated
• 680 benefitting households

SCHOOLS
• 104 schools
• in total 317 rooms
• 7 schools upgraded
• over 23,000 benefitting students

SANITATION
• 178 household toilets
• 68 school toilet units
• 8 community toilets
• 1,059 compost pits

FOOD SECURITY & SOCIAL BALANCE
• 7,831 metric tons of rice & pulses earned
• 332.8 Mio. Nepali Rupees earned
• over 20,200 men and women employed
• over 3.3 Mio. person days worked
• over 50% of all workers women
• over 23% of all workers Dalit
• equal wages independent of gender or caste

DRINKING WATER
• 177 community taps
• 37 drinking water schemes
• 2,010 benefitting households
• 120 watersource protection projects
• 3,003 benefitting households

WATER MILLS
• in 6 different locations

BIOGAS
• 90 biogas plants
• in 2 communities
“I was happy to drive on a road dug by myself and to help hundreds of other entrepreneurs by transporting their goods”

Karna Bahadur Malla drove the first jeep on the road in Bajhang

The project built the road together with the people from the communities. The road is more than 15 kilometres long.

“When the road was about to be finished, I bought this jeep to transport people and goods. Nowadays I earn between 3,000 and 6,000 rupees a day. Now it is very easy for people from the villages to buy and sell vegetables.”

Transportation has become fast and easy and new market centres have developed. In total, six Village Development Committees (VDCs) have benefitted from the road in Bajhang.
A jeep transports passengers from one market centre to another
THERE ARE STILL MILLIONS WHO DREAM OF
An old man reads the message written on a new school
When ILRA began its work in the area in 2009, the number of, and access to, schools in both districts was inadequate. Insufficient school facilities and long distances to schools impacted on both the quality of education and attendance rates. In 2009, only 17% of schools had sufficient classrooms and girls made up only 41% of students. Within the ILRA-framework, the project completed a total of 104 schools catering for over 23,000 students. The project also constructed sanitation facilities, kitchens and rooms, especially for small children (built in cooperation with WFP). Similarly, the project supported the construction of pre-school child learning and development centres in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF.

At the end of the project, almost 100% of school-aged children in the project area went to school. The reasons for this are more schools, better accessibility and children working less in the fields due to higher family incomes. The new school sanitation facilities have also had a positive impact on attendance rates, especially for girls during menstruation. As an added bonus, all schools are earthquake resistant and can serve as shelters or health posts in times of catastrophe.
New school buildings reduce the walking distance for the children

SHELTER AGAINST EARTHQUAKES

All buildings constructed by the project – schools, health posts, buildings of the Village Development Committees (VDCs), agricultural cooperative buildings – are earthquake resistant. These buildings can be used as shelters if a disaster occurs. Other protection measures include flood protection walls and gabion walls, which reduce possible damage during the rainy season.

COOKING STOVES

Furthermore the project supported 54 cooking stoves for schools so that the school staff can prepare a daily meal for the children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of rooms</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of toilet units</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of school water taps</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of students benefited</td>
<td>23,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of project supported schools upgraded</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The foreground shows a school building constructed by the government in Bajhang. To boost the access to education, locals constructed two new school buildings with support from ILRA.
School boys do their homework in front of a school building.
ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE | PRESERVING NATURAL RESOURCES

Managing water resources efficiently is crucial for healthy and productive communities. Due to the steep slopes, where water flows away quickly, and a long dry season, water scarcity is common in Baitadi and Bajhang. ILRA supported the construction of irrigation canals and ponds, safe drinking water and sanitation systems, and rainwater harvesting and filtering systems. These ensure the accessibility of water for agricultural production, consumption and sanitation. To avoid pollution, the drinking water sources for humans were protected against animals. With drinking water sources close to their houses, especially women can now spend more time on income-generating activities like vegetable cultivation. The irrigation systems, together with the introduction of new agricultural techniques like the System of Rice Intensification and improved seeds, have led diversified crops and higher yields.

The project built rainwater harvesting systems in a total of 40 schools across both districts. These systems collect the rainwater from the school roofs and store it in tanks with a capacity of up to 15,000 litres. The pupils use this water in the toilets and to wash their hands, thereby improving overall sanitary conditions, even after the rainy season. Additionally, portable filter systems make the water drinkable and boost water available in dry times, improving the health of the school children.
## ACCESSIBILITY OF WATER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of water source protection projects</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting households</td>
<td>3,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of drinking water schemes</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting households</td>
<td>2,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of community taps</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting households</td>
<td>2,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of ponds</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha irrigated through ponds</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting households</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of irrigation systems</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha irrigated through irrigation canal systems</td>
<td>909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting households</td>
<td>5,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Rainwater Harvesting Schemes</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefitting people</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Water tanks – like this one in Bajhang – store the flowing water and make it available for the local community.
In Baitadi the new road connects 7 VDCs, in Bajhang 6 VDCs
In Bajhang where a lot of wood is cut and burnt for cooking, ILRA introduced biogas as a pilot scheme in two villages. As this technology reduces deforestation, it contributes to climate change mitigation. Furthermore, it reduces daily workloads and health risks, especially for women and children.

A 2013 survey by ILRA showed that every household in Deulekh in the district of Bajhang burnt on average 14.4 kilograms of firewood per day. In the community of Moyal it was 12.3 kilograms per household per day. In addition, women in Moyal take about four hours to collect a head load (approximately 45 kilograms) of firewood, while women in Deulekh take almost six hours per head load.

To limit the health risks, especially for women, in the kitchens and to protect the valuable wood resources, ILRA supported the construction of 90 biogas systems in the two villages. For biogas systems farmers put animal and human dung and water into an airtight container. During the process of its decomposition a gas develops that can be used for cooking. In addition farmers can use the digested slurry as compost. This type of compost has high nutritional value and increases agricultural
The new implemented biogas is health friendly by reducing the smoke in kitchens and preserves the valuable resource wood. All 90 biogas systems have toilets attached to them. This increases the system’s efficiency and contributes to clean sanitation. If the farmers maintain the system well and carry out minor repairs, then there is no specific time limit on how long these structures will function. For the system to work, the selected households had to have at least two animals.

The local people from these communities built the biogas structures under the Food and Cash for Work scheme and earned cash, rice and pulses by doing so. ILRA collaborated in these activities with WFP and the District Energy Promotion Centre. Biogas not only has health advantages, as there is no smoke produced in its use in kitchens, but it also significantly reduces women’s workload. Furthermore, it protects the shrinking number of trees in the area, thereby contributing to the mitigation of climate change.
To aid the capacities of the government and to further support the local farmers in the communities 27 Community Service Centres were constructed. These buildings serve as VDC buildings, agricultural cold stores and collection centres, cooperative buildings and health posts.

One of the hurdles in selling agricultural produce is the perishability. Therefore, ILRA supported the construction of 2 cold stores, which enable local farmers to store their products in times when demand is low or to speculate on higher prices later in the season. In each site up to 3 tons of oranges in Baitadi for up to three months and in Bajhang 4 tons of potato can be stored for up to 4 months. This opens up more economic options for the farmers by increasing their flexibility and lowering their risk.

In the face of the rudimentary health infrastructure in the project area the project supported the construction of 4 health post buildings. They and further 3 health posts were also supported regarding equipment for birth rooms and one for further technical equipment like a computer and solar panels to generate electricity. The people from nearby communities can now receive important treatment for diseases like diarrhoea, stomach pain and headaches, as well as contraceptives. Furthermore, these posts lower the risk of child and maternal deaths by offering hygienic facilities for child delivery as well as medical staff.
In this Agriculture Product Collection Centre farmers can safely store their produce
During daytime the irrigation channel supported by ILRA waters the fields; when it gets dark it powers the hydropower plant.

**COMBINING EFFORTS | MULTIPURPOSE-USE OF RESOURCES**

In many areas of Baitadi and Bajhang resources are scarce. Water, in particular, is becoming a more and more valuable good. Changes in rainfall patterns due to climatic change are negatively impacting on the situation. To strengthen resilience, ILRA assisted locals to use resources as efficiently as possible by encouraging initiatives that provided more than one benefit. The project supported communities to design and construct water systems so that the water can be used for multiple purposes. Ideas for the multipurpose use of resources originated in participative meetings, where collaborations were as well identified. For example, near the village of Deulekh in Bajhang, ILRA constructed an irrigation channel wider than necessary for the simple irrigation of fields. The local government funded an attached hydropower plant, which was powered by the water in the channel. One resource, water, was thus used for agriculture and to generate electricity. Water was also used to power six flour grain mills, from which the people generate additional income. Overall, the construction of multi-purpose schemes improves the cash-benefit ratio and strengthens the interest to maintain them properly. ILRA constructed these structures either in one go, such as the biogas schemes, which were built between autumn 2012 and spring 2013, or in two phases. Construction in two phases allowed staff members to re-discuss the needs and interests of the local people before starting the second phase.
**IMPLEMENTED INITIATIVES WITH SEVERAL BENEFITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Multipurpose-use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation channels</td>
<td>• irrigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• small hydropower plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• flour mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainwater harvesting in schools</td>
<td>• toilets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• washing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• drinking water (after filtered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recharging ground water (from overflow from the tank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Water Systems</td>
<td>• drinking water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• kitchen gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water conservation ponds</td>
<td>• irrigating small fields and watering livestock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cemented ponds</td>
<td>• irrigating small fields and watering livestock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthen ponds</td>
<td>• recharging ground water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree nurseries</td>
<td>• production of various tree species including fruit trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• saplings and seedlings sold on the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio-engineering</td>
<td>• bio-engineering on road sides establishes soil and protects slopes from landslides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• sapling planted also used for firewood, timber, branches, leaf litter and fodder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>• rendering governmental services in health, education, administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service Centres</td>
<td>• offering space for community meetings and social events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• serving as shelter in case of earthquakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• storing of agriculture products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Learning Centres</td>
<td>• forum for women’s groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• education and discussion of personal, social issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• development of action plans and social campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biogas structures</td>
<td>• produces gas for cooking and lighting the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• toilets attached to biogas plants improve sanitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dung</td>
<td>• reduces firewood consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recycles waste dung in a hygienic way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• digested slurry used as compost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• improves kitchen sanitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reduces health risks due to smoke free cooking</td>
</tr>
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*Water conservation ponds not only provide benefits to humans and animals, but also recharge the ground water*
People living in Nepal’s hilly areas are very vulnerable to climatic changes and often face water shortages, landslides, floods and soil degradation. The area is also prone to earthquakes. To strengthen the resilience of the local population and to mitigate the possible effects of natural disasters, ILRA supported activities that mitigate the effects of climatic changes and strengthen disaster preparedness in Baitadi and Bajhang.
BUILDING RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

To address water shortages, ILRA placed high importance on integrated watershed management schemes. The project supported 67 water conservation ponds, benefiting over 300 households. These ponds collected flowing water and made it accessible for humans and animals. These and other water source protection schemes have increased the period in which water is easily available in the project areas. In total 120 water source protection schemes have decreased the risk of water contamination from humans, animals and the decomposition of plants. In total, 37 protected drinking water schemes and 177 community taps were constructed. With drinking water sources close to their houses, especially women can now spend more time on income-generating activities. Irrigation channels have increased the area of land that can be kept fertile.

The project also introduced water efficient agricultural techniques to local farmers, such as the System of Rice Intensification and drip irrigation. These techniques increased the efficiency of water use while at the same time increasing yield. Furthermore, community-based seed production of improved varieties and seed preservation of selected local varieties proved to be effective in raising production and lowering the risk of seed shortages. Some of the varieties produced are more resistant
to adverse climatic conditions as they are traditionally grown in special locations and highly adaptable to a wide range of climatic conditions. During the whole process, the farmers gained awareness about the special characteristics of different crop varieties. They became active in producing and preserving seeds locally in the district, making them independent of supply from outside. Additionally, six new storage facilities increased the selling span of produce. As a result, farmers in the project area now have more flexibility on what to consume and when, as well as when to sell the surplus on local markets. This longer availability of agricultural products has decreased the need to import them, especially from India.

By diversifying their crops, farmers have significantly lowered the risk of complete harvest failure in case of drought. At the same time, community-based commercial farming further reduces the individual risk of the participants.

The project built rainwater harvesting systems in a total of 40 schools across both districts. These systems collect the rainwater from the school roofs and store it in tanks with a capacity of up to 15,000 litres. The pupils use this water in the toilets and to wash their hands, thereby improving overall sanitary conditions, even after the rainy season. Additionally, portable filter systems make the water drinkable and boost water available in dry times, improving the health of the school children.

To further diversify income sources and support landless people, the project also encouraged non-agricultural income generation activities. Training organised by the project included tailoring, repairing mobile phones, driving, hair cutting, pickle making, tea and snacks shops, and other businesses close to the newly constructed roads. The additional income generated by such activities further lowers the risk for participating households in the case of natural disaster (if they have land), as well as strengthening the position of landless households.

An innovative way of protecting resources is biogas. The inhabitants of two communities (90 households) in Bajhang constructed resource saving and health friendly biogas systems in their homes. In another intervention, seven forest nurseries were established, which produced in total about 50,000 saplings of various species. These plants were used for bio-engineering on the newly constructed road to stabilise slopes against landslides. The forest nurseries also produced saplings of various fruit and fodder plants for local communities. Due to the high demand, the nursery farmers gained a new source of regular income from the forest nurseries.

18 communities in the project area were supported in community plantation activities. 450 households were involved in planting 54,000 multipurpose tree species on over 38 hectares. The monitoring of community plantation in the year 2013 showed, that on average, 75% of saplings survived. Most of the farmers in Baitadi and Bajhang traditionally own some fruit trees (mainly citrus fruits), which is one of the sources of seasonal income. However, lack of care over time had led to a decrease in production and an increase in the tree-dying rate. To bring change, the project provided technical inputs in fruit orchard management through on field training events. When production soared during the main season, the farmers had to sell their produce at a low price. To overcome this problem, two communities were supported to construct cold stores where the farmers could store citrus fruits and potatoes for an additional 3 and 4 months respectively after harvest. This allowed them to sell their produce in the off-season at a higher price.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHALLENGE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>RATIONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water Shortage</td>
<td>Water Conservation Ponds</td>
<td>Collecting unused water for people and animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water Source Protection Scheme</td>
<td>Decreasing the risk of water contamination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>System of Rice Intensification, Drip Irrigation Technique</td>
<td>Increasing water efficiency while producing a greater yield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of improved seeds</td>
<td>Generating a greater yield with the same inputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deforestation</td>
<td>Biogas</td>
<td>Saving wood that would otherwise be used for cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooking Stoves in Schools</td>
<td>Requires less wood than traditional cooking facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community plantation</td>
<td>Increasing the forest quality and ground coverage, benefiting local people in the long run Regulating open grazing in the newly planted areas and decreasing soil erosion in the grazing land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Resilience</td>
<td>Diversification of agricultural production</td>
<td>Decreases risk of an overall bad harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training for non-agricultural income generation</td>
<td>Giving people additional means of generating an income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solid Degradation</td>
<td>Irrigation Channels</td>
<td>Increase of the land that can be kept fertile easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flood</td>
<td>Flood Wall to protect a school</td>
<td>Ensuring the safety of the students and teachers and the durability of the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landslides</td>
<td>Gabion Boxes</td>
<td>Stabilisation of slopes, especially on the roadside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bioengineering</td>
<td>Stabilisation of slopes, especially on the roadside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquakes</td>
<td>Construction Design of all buildings built by the project is safe in an earthquake</td>
<td>Ensuring the safety of the people using the buildings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the time between October and May rain falls only on rare occasions.
Nepal’s Far-Western hilly areas have always been a tough environment for local farmers. Poor seeds, unfavourable climatic and soil conditions, and obsolete farming methods have contributed to widespread food insufficiency. Traditionally, farming in Baitadi and Bajhang was restricted to rice, wheat and maize exclusively for household consumption. However, in 2009 food sufficiency in both districts was less than four and five months respectively a year. Food insufficiency strains the economically and socially marginalised rural population in Nepal, where every second child under five is stunted by malnutrition. As a result, many men left in search of jobs: In 2009, ILRA’s baseline showed that 89% of households sent at least one member to India to earn additional income.

To increase the food sufficiency and resilience of the local population with regards to climatic changes in the long term, project activities were clustered in different phases. In the first one and a half years, the project concentrated mainly on increasing agricultural production. In the second phase, the project focused on diversification and the commercialisation of farming activities. Improved seed, cash crops and more efficient farming methods were the pillars of these interventions. Community-based farming enabled landless people and members of so-called lower castes to participate as well. As a result, the 1,450 participating households earned an additional 12,400 NPR per year on average, which equals an additional food sufficiency of 80 days.
Farmers in Nepal’s Far-West struggle to produce enough food for their families. Commercial Farming promises relief, but the costs and risks are often too high for an individual to bear. Therefore, between 2010 and 2013, GIZ and WFP supported Community-based Commercial Farming groups for one year to produce and market high-quality products to improve food security and generate additional income.

The goal was to make local people financially independent after the first crop season, thereby improving living conditions in the long term. The seeds for the second crop season could be purchased using the income from the first crop yield. With the additional income from cash crops, farmers could buy sufficient basic food from the Terai plains, where cereals are produced in high quantities at reasonable prices.

Promoting a socially and economically inclusive approach, Community-based Commercial Farming in the Far-West built on basic democratic practices regarding decision making and the sharing of benefits; consequently, it strengthened the capacity of the beneficiaries in a sustainable way. The bonds between members of the participating communities grew stronger as they worked together, shared ideas and the fruits of their labour. The mixing of men and women and people from different castes boosted social cohesion, which has been a successful aspect of GIZ and WFP’s work in Nepal.
Community-based Commercial Farming was introduced in 25 VDCs in Baitadi and Bajhang, covering over 2,300 participants in total. Each farming group consisted of 15 to 25 farmers, with each individual farmer cultivating approximately 0.5 to 1.5 hectares of land. The land was leased, which enabled landless people to participate; 12% of participating farmers were landless. ILRA supported group mobilisation and provided technical inputs and training on cropping cycles, crop maturity periods, harvesting techniques, product sorting, and the drying and storing of crops to ensure a high standard. As a production cycle generally lasts three to five months, WFP provided farmers with a minimum wage for the first 40 working days, consisting of 3,400 NPR per farmer, 80 kilograms of rice and 10 kilograms of lentils. The food improved the food security of farming families, while the money was jointly saved and used to purchase seeds and pay the rent on leased land.

As a first step, each farming group defined its own norms and procedures for cooperation. Then they identified a suitable area and negotiated a lease for at least three years (six cropping cycles). The District Agriculture Development Office (DADO) advised on crop and variety selection. Other district government agencies were also closely involved in the monitoring of activities in the field.

The farmers involved in Community-based Commercial Farming...
acquired substantial knowledge about new crops and farming techniques; they also experienced the benefits of sharing responsibilities and rewards. This increased their confidence in themselves and their abilities. The production of Community-based Commercial Farming groups is 75% higher on average than the production of individual group members before the concept was introduced. Community-based Commercial Farming has provided each member family with an additional two months of food security in a year. After the first harvest, all Community-based Commercial Farming groups had earned enough money to invest in subsequent crops. Now most Community Farming groups in Baitadi and Bajhang have worked together for several seasons and gained valuable experience. This is a big step towards independence and sustainable food security.

The social benefits of Community-based Commercial Farming are already apparent. Community-based Commercial Farming has created short-term local job opportunities. As a result, fewer families are sending members to work in India and other countries. According to ILRA’s Impact Monitoring Report of 2011, the percentage of households with members migrating for work decreased from 89% in 2009 to 40% in 2011. The trend continued throughout 2012 and further decreased to 35% in 2013.

Community-based Commercial Farming reduces the individual risk taken by each group member. The financial burden is shared and members jointly profit from each other’s knowledge and labour, making members more courageous in their private planning. With the extra income, some farmers have started to invest in other income activities, such as livestock.

Potatoes marked ‘A’ are for sale; ‘B’ are damaged potatoes for animal consumption; ‘C’ are seed potatoes; ‘D’ are for household consumption.
Members of a Commercial Farming Group harvest chilli after a particularly successful season. In total there are 83 Commercial Farming Groups with 2,074 participants.
Devi Datta Joshi, member of a Commercial Farming Group, is physically challenged due to polio. When he received support through the project, he started cultivating vegetables using improved agricultural methods and constructed three polyhouses. Selling vegetables at local markets became the main source of income for his family.
Members of a Community Farming group are delighted about their rich harvest in Moyal, Bajhang.
EARNING MORE; SPENDING LESS | SRI – SYSTEM OF RICE INTENSIFICATION

Until recently, farmers in Baitadi and Bajhang relied on traditional methods to plant their crops, which yielded comparatively low results. The simple and cost-effective System of Rice Intensification (SRI) produces higher yields with fewer inputs and, therefore, promises sustainable relief.

Fewer inputs; more output

Conventional, large-scale farming requires vast external inputs, in particular, large quantities of water, agricultural chemicals and fertilizers. These are often unaffordable or inaccessible to small producers. Intensive use of water and chemicals can also contribute to yield stagnation and environmental degradation including soil salinisation, water pollution and the lowering of groundwater levels. SRI, on the other hand, requires significantly less water, fewer seedlings, and uses environment and health friendly compost instead of chemical fertilizers.

In June 2011, GIZ experts brought a group of farmers to an SRI test area run by the Forum for Awareness and Youth Activity (FAYA) in Kailali to observe the feasibility of the concept in the Far-West. After encouraging results, the technical staff and a group of farmers decided to test the SRI method in four small areas in Bajhang to determine its potential.
A local farmer inserts a rice paddy into the soil during a test planting with the innovative SRI method. The results showed that this approach needs less external inputs like water and fertilizer and increases the harvest. It thereby proved to be an efficient instrument to strengthen the resilience of local farmers towards the impacts of climatic changes.

In the beginning, the four participating farmers were worried about lower production. However, during the harvest they became more and more enthusiastic, generating interest in SRI among more farmers. At the end of the test period, the harvest per hectare in the SRI areas had increased by 89% on average. On top of that, all participating farmers reported an early maturing of their rice compared to rice planted using conventional techniques. The plants were also found to be more stable, resistant to wind and less likely to be damaged by insects. During the next growth season (summer 2012), a total of 24 households used SRI. Their yields increased on average to 6.82 metric tonnes per hectare, compared to yields using traditional practices of 3.12 metric tonnes. Once news of the demonstration results spread, demand for technical inputs from GIZ spiked. In total 38 households started to apply the SRI method and increased their harvest by 75% on average.

SRI has great potential to improve food security in the Far-West. However, individual on-farm participatory assessments with farmers must be conducted to determine suitability and risks.
“TODAY THE HARVEST WILL BE SIX TIMES MORE”

“GIZ introduced us to new crops and we learnt about new techniques step-by-step. Once the chilli started to bloom, we were amazed as we had never seen such a good yield. At first, the neighbouring villagers laughed at us. They wondered why we planted chilli when we had no cereal to feed our families. But then we started to sell our chilli in the local markets. We also learnt how to dry and store it. Over time, our chilli became popular for its high quality; in the end we sold our whole harvest.”

The Salleri Agriculture Group made a good profit from the chilli and deposited 330,000 rupees (EUR 3,300) in the group’s fund. The group would like to use this money to increase local income opportunities in such a way that the whole community benefits. The farmers are currently considering either the construction of a multipurpose community house with an agricultural drying facility or the improvement of irrigation facilities.

“Finally, we have found a way to avoid migrating to India. If we join forces and continue to explore ideas for self employment in our own community, the days of scattered families will be over.”

Farmers from a settlement near Moyal have already asked GIZ for similar support. A local man stated: „We want to develop our village just like Moyal.”

Bishnu Bista
is a farmer from Bajhang

“I used to produce maize on my own and harvested not even enough to feed my family for one month. Today we are cultivating chilli and garlic together and estimate that from the same size land the harvest will be six times more.”

At the start of the ILRA program, GIZ staff and the villagers of Moyal discussed the feasibility of introducing new crops on community fields. In the beginning, villagers resisted the idea, as they were not familiar with these crops.
While conventional rice growing techniques are based on high-density planting of crops to raise production, SRI promotes the planting of seedlings individually in clearly defined spaces. The rice does not grow in flooded paddies, but in moist soil with intermittent irrigation. Mechanical rotary weeding aerates the soil aiding growth. The substitution of mineral fertilizers and other chemicals with compost lowers costs, increases accessibility and reduces risks for farmers and to the environment.

The major factors influencing the suitability of SRI are:
- availability and controllability of irrigation water
- soil characteristics, particularly moisture
- availability of labour (high labour inputs are needed)
- access to markets and a degree of commercialisation
“When other farmers saw how much I harvested, they also wanted the new seed”, says Bhakta Bahadur Singh.

GIZ gave Bhakta Bahadur 32 kg of improved wheat seed, which he multiplied to 700 kg. This seed, used with the newly established irrigation system, doubled his harvest.

“Before, we produced vegetables only for ourselves, now we go to the nearby market once a week to sell excess seasonal vegetables. Every time we go to market we earn 400 to 500 rupees. With this money we buy school books for our children and pay for health care. We also bought a goat, some hens and new vegetable seeds.”

Bhakta Bahadur was impressed with the results of the new seed. He continued multiplying it for personal use and sold some to other farmers and wholesalers. Demand for improved seed has increased and people now pay him up to twice the price of ordinary seed. Now he preserves the seed for multiplication and buys wheat for food consumption cheaply on the local market.

Together with others, Bhakta Bahadur has built a water wheel in the irrigation channel to grind cereals. He has been using the new seed for all crops and sharing this technology with other farmers in the community.

“WITH THE MONEY OF THE SOLD VEGETABLES WE BUY SCHOOL BOOKS FOR OUR CHILDREN AND PAY FOR HEALTH CARE”
Locally produced quality seed increases harvests and income for many farmers
Between March 2010 and August 2011 ILRA collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations to expand both partners’ agricultural interventions to a wider population. Through this partnership the target group for agricultural inputs increased to almost 35,000 households. The goal was to provide agricultural inputs (improved seeds, fertilizers and training) to directly address the needs of food deficit and vulnerable households in Baitadi and Bajhang. The contribution was funded by the European Union Food Facility (EUFF) under ‘Support to mitigate the negative effects of high food prices on local rural populations in Nepal’.

The first step was to identify the benefitting households in an extended project area. From 34,922 selected households 3,003 (9%) were led by women and 5,708 (16.3%) were led by Dalit. The next step was to provide seed on a large scale, for which 170 Local Resource Persons (LRPs) were trained and 36 Farmer Field Schools (FFS) established with 455 participants to ensure technical backup in the future. From the LRPs in the project’s core area, 32 became key farmers (67%). These key farmers have developed action plans and established demonstration plots where they conduct practical agricultural training in consultation with ILRA staff. The FFS provided seasonal training on crops and improved
agricultural techniques. In the project core area, 17,074 families received small amounts of vegetable seeds, especially for the winter and rainy season, with which they produce on average 116 kg per family, mostly for home consumption.

In addition, 22,700 kitchen gardens were established to diversify the diet of the local people. A total of 34,922 households received subsidised seed and 16,958 households received training, to guarantee the long-term use of the improved agricultural techniques and kitchen gardens.
A polyhouse consists of a frame, often made of bamboo, with a roof and sides made of polythene. It allows farmers to grow vegetables in adverse climatic conditions in the monsoon or winter. Farmers concentrated on the production of high value crops, commercial vegetables and spices. This way they could sell their produce even in the off-season and earn additional income. The polyhouse structure prevents damage to plants from rain and keeps them warm in winter. The frame and polythene generally last three to five years.

ILRA supported farmers to construct 155 polyhouses in Baitadi and Bajhang. The project especially assisted key farmers (i.e., farmers who are then able to supply saplings to their local communities). Especially Dalit and households with low incomes were chosen as beneficiaries.

Farmers built polyhouses at both high and low altitudes. The polyhouse construction was adapted to the specific conditions at each location. At high altitudes the plastic at the side of the polyhouses remains closed to conserve the warmth in all seasons. At low altitudes, farmers only have the side plastic in place during the rainy and cold season. In general, polyhouses were constructed in rather dry areas. Farmers usually built polyhouses near their home so they could monitor them daily. From the beginning, the local people saw that intensive work, even on a small area
Due to polyhouses farmers plant a high variety of vegetables during the off-season for sale and consumption of land, can lead to high production. ILRA provided technical input for a year after the construction. The staff advised what to plant, when to harvest and how to maximise production. They encouraged farmers to plant crops a few weeks before or after the main season. This enabled farmers to sell their harvest at a higher price. The impacts of polyhouse production included increased vegetable production and improved community services as farmers with polyhouses supplied small plants and seeds to the community. Farmers were particularly successful in growing cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage and cauliflower. On average, they earned an additional income of about 25,000 NPR per season, diversified their income sources and became more resilient regarding changing climatic conditions.
In Bajhang and Baitadi where water is scarce, ILRA has supported the installation of 30 drip irrigation facilities. Drip irrigation needs less than half the amount of water usually required for watering plants. In drip irrigation systems water runs from a container placed high up through a plastic pipe with small holes and regulators directly to the roots of the plants. The distance of the holes varies from 20–60 cm according to needed input and plant distance. The water flows through the pipes using gravity. As the drops of water reach the plants directly, far less water is lost due to evaporation or run off than with other irrigation techniques. To give an example: 40 litres of water is generally enough to water 80 plants at a time, compared to several times that amount with traditional irrigation. Liquid fertilizer can also be supplied by the same system. With drip irrigation, most crops only need to be watered on alternate days. This technique reduces the workload and time needed for irrigation as the farmer only needs to fill the container and turn the valve on and off, rather than water every row of plants individually.

The technique was used all year round in polyhouses in Baitadi and Bajhang. Otherwise, drip irrigation was used only in the dry and hot season, as it was not needed in the rainy season. Drip irrigation is simple and can irrigate many plants at a time with comparatively less attention.
A family prepares drip irrigation pipes on their field in Deura, Bajhang

However the farmers using drip irrigation need to pay attention to the quality of water they use. Despite the filter in the container, the plastic pipes and holes can get blocked if there is mud or sand in the water. From time to time the farmer needs to check whether all the holes in the drip line are fully functional and flush them out if necessary.

At present this technology is not yet common, but its use is increasing in rural areas. Although drip irrigation can be used for any kind of plant, in the project area it was used mainly for high value crops such as tomatoes and cucumbers. Drip irrigation was found to be very useful, especially in dry areas with difficult conditions to grow these crops.
ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE | PRESERVING NATURAL RESOURCES

Managing water resources efficiently is crucial for healthy and productive communities. Due to few natural water sources, the steep slopes, where water flows away quickly, and a long dry season, water scarcity is common in Baitadi and Bajhang. In addition, the already low forest coverage further decreased in some areas during the implementation phase, which lowered ground water levels. Furthermore, while the annual monsoon is intense, in recent years it has been fluctuating more and more – making it hard to predict. The steep slopes and strong fluctuations in rainfall patterns have also elevated the risk of landslides.

Water shortages can lead to soil degradation and the outbreak of disease. ILRA supported the construction of 74 irrigation channels and 67 water harvesting ponds. These ensure the accessibility of water for agricultural production and in some cases animal consumption. The irrigation systems, together with the introduction of new agricultural techniques like the System of Rice Intensification and improved seeds, have led to diversified crops and higher yields.
Through irrigation channels water reaches fields even far away from water sources.
To support landless people and households that cannot benefit from agricultural income generation activities, ILRA provided training and business start-up support in many areas like construction, furniture making, hair cutting, mobile repair and tailoring.

In the projects of ILRA not every household owned land. This was especially true for people from the so-called lower Dalit caste. To support them he project offered initiatives in non-agricultural income generation. The main pillar in these measures were training schemes in areas like mobile phone and radio repairing and radios, tailoring/sewing, carpenter, plumber, mason. Such courses are very rare in the districts of Baitadi and Bajhang.

In the framework of the project people only received training when there was an estimated specific. One member per selected household could take part in the activities. ILRA paid particular attention to the inclusion of Dalit in the training schemes since they in general had the least alternatives to generate an own income.

Training initiatives were based on discussions about needs and feasibilities between the local community and the social mobilisers. In an open forum people explained the situation in their area, possible trainees, markets and demands.

Sher Bahadur Neupane participated in a tailoring training and now together with his father runs a shop in Bajhang
BECOMING INDEPENDENT | TRAINING SCHEMES

Training schemes usually lasted one and a half months, sometimes even up to three months. They took place either in the districts, Dhangadhi or Nepalgunj in the Terai, or in Kathmandu. The carpenter, plumber and mason training took place while the project constructed schools in the districts. They were conducted in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of the United Nations. Private institutions carried out the mobile/radio repair, driving and advanced sewing courses. Upon completion the participants received course certificates. ILRA paid the course fees and provided a daily subsistence allowance to the participants. Furthermore, in several cases the project subsidized equipment needed to start an own business, for example sewing machines.

Up to half of the amount for the procurement had to be provided by the training participants to ensure their motivation to start generating income.

People have been particularly successful after the tailoring, hair cutting and mobile repair training. In several cases advanced training courses were organized to boost the capacities of the participants further.

New businesses opened up especially along the newly constructed roads. Here, not only many participants of the trainings started owning their own income. Also a high number of people from the surrounding communities started working as shop owners and began transporting goods and people with newly acquired jeeps and tractors.
“Most people tell me I am doing fine. I am satisfied with how things are.”

“I opened this shop about five months ago. Before I came back to my village I lived and worked for about eight years in the People’s Liberation Army. I came back about a year ago. In the past, this kind of work was not available here. When I heard about the opportunity to participate in a training I first considered other occupations. I was especially interested in tailoring, but as there were already a lot of tailor shops, I decided to learn to be a barber. The training was organised in Dhangadhi and lasted for three months. On some days, due to family obligations, I don’t have time to open the shop. But when I open it, I can earn up to 300 rupees a day. I never earn less than 100 rupees a day. In the future I plan to learn new haircuts and improve my skills. Most people tell me I am doing fine. I am satisfied with how things are.”
“I have been doing business in this area for six years. Until the beginning of last year there were no vehicles in this area. Now that the road is here, cars have come and everything is here. Women and men worked to build the road together. It took over one year to construct. Before the road came there were no shops in this community – now there are 30 to 35 shops. I also sell goods here and these days my business is better than before. I earn about 4,000 to 5000 rupees per month. I pay 1,000 rupees a month for rent. I am happy.”
Rewati Bohora is busy in her new profession

"I CAN NOW MAKE PETTICOATS, BLOUSES, AND CHILDREN’S CLOTHES"

“My husband died during the conflict. When the project started I began to work on the road. Then the project started to offer training opportunities. I participated in a three-month training. We learnt how to work with sewing machines. At first it was difficult for me, but now I am perfect. Over time, more and more women started to work on the road. Today, more women than men work on the road. Four or five of us in this training are planning to open a shop in the market centre. I can now make petticoats, blouses, and children’s clothes. I want to start a small business and then build on that.”
“I started this business one year ago. Before that I worked on the road. In the past I also repaired TVs, watches, and radios. Over time the demand for these items decreased significantly but then the mobile phones appeared. I asked GIZ for support and they provided me training through which I now earn most of my livelihood. In the beginning, I participated in a three month mobile repair training. Later on, I took part in an advanced training that lasted one month. Now I get 10 to 15 mobiles to repair each day and I earn between 500 and 800 rupees daily. I’m quite satisfied today. If I could participate in further training I would buy some computer parts. I took up a loan to start this shop and to raise my children. If my livelihood continue to improve through this business, I will be able to learn further skills.”
Bhawana Shrestha gained independence through a beauty parlour training.
STRIVING FOR EQUALITY
BOOSTING SOCIAL COHESION

Nepali society is still largely governed by patriarchal norms. Particularly in rural areas, social exclusion and discrimination of women and so-called lower caste people is entrenched through mostly unchallenged traditions. The different manifestations of exclusion in Nepal and the resulting high rates of poverty and unemployment, unequal distribution of resources and food insufficiency were among the root causes of the armed conflict which was fought in Nepal from 1996–2006. Even though the caste system was legally abolished in 1963, members of lower caste groups in Baitadi and Bajhang still face widespread discrimination in their daily lives. Strict codes of conduct, including reproductive rituals, hinder gender equality and thereby development at the local and national levels. The *Global Gender Gap Report 2013* of the World Economic Forum ranks Nepal 121st out of 136 countries. Nepal ranks 157th out of 186 countries in the *Human Development Index* (2012) and is one of the poorest nations worldwide.

To close the gender gap and mitigate the root causes of any future armed conflict, ILRA prioritised boosting social cohesion as the most important crosscutting issue of the project. This means that all activities had to either foster social balance in communities or, at least, must not be counterproductive. Social balance within the rural communities was also essential for the integration of ex-combatants after the end of the conflict and for sustainable peace in general.
Traditionally temples are prohibited for Dalit; nowadays everybody is allowed to enter the temple in Moyal.
Social Cohesion

SOCIAL BACKBONE | A NETWORK OF SELF-HELP GROUPS

The backbone of the social mobilisation process was a network of newly established user and self-help groups formed with basic democratic rules and an elected steering board. The groups, as well as their boards, consisted of at least 50% women and 20% of the members of the groups were Dalit. Widows, who are often isolated in their communities, were also encouraged to join these groups.

Of utmost importance overall was the introduction of free expression and discussion in all self-help groups – the opposite of the culture of speechlessness that was so common during the conflict. In all project activities – and especially in the Learning Centres and self-help groups – marginalised groups were overrepresented. These women soon became the main forces for change and received the full support of the other members and their communities.

Today, people from the project area have taken many steps against caste discrimination; now, people of all castes eat, work and live together. This new solidarity is giving people the courage to raise their voices and the strength to face new challenges – including holding the district government accountable – which is how civil society is supposed to function.
Laxmi Karki and Hemanti Syanda motivated and supported women and other disadvantaged groups of the society as social mobilisers.
Especially women, Dalit and the youth are often marginalised in the rural communities. Building on the positive experiences in Baitadi and Bajhang, informal Learning Centres proved to be effective instruments for boosting social inclusion. These informal Learning Centres were the pillars of the project. Already, during the conflict, women in Rukum and Rolpa were encouraged to form groups, which over time evolved into self-governing advocacy forums. These forums strengthened women’s voices in a time when a whole society ran out of words.

Learning Centres are forums where 20 to 25 people – mostly women – gather after their day’s work to learn and discuss and solve important social and personal issues. They addressed the needs of women, people from so-called lower castes, and people with disabilities and offer them opportunities for social and economic empowerment.

A total of 35 Learning Centres with 1,014 members were established in Baitadi and Bajhang. Of the members, 35% were Dalit and 8% single women. Aided by a facilitator the participants learnt to read and write, received training in income generation (e.g. agricultural activities), and discussed and solved social issues. Learning Centres also conducted social campaigns on domestic violence, alcoholism, health, hygiene.
Women in a Learning Centre discuss and develop solutions for local problems

and discrimination. The Learning Centre facilitators received 12-days basic training and a financial incentive of 2,500 NPR. All training facilitators were female and from the same community where the LC was established. The facilitators were responsible for the group and ensured (in collaboration with GIZ) that the required equipment was available. Each group identified needs and solutions based on community resource maps and developed an action plan for how to reach their goals and how to address social issues.

With their new skills the participants started earning money. Part of the income generated went to savings and credit schemes established by the Learning Centres. As time passed, the Learning Centre participants also conducted small community improvement projects and, in this way, gained the respect of the villagers. Upon the request of the villagers, they started intervening in local disputes and received dispute resolution training from the project. During these activities, women trained for the leadership roles in a protected space.

Once a sufficient level of trust was established, the Learning Centres began to help solve local issues within their communities and became driving forces for future development. These centres had far reaching impacts on lives of their women members including short-term and long-term impacts.

**Short-term impacts**

Women took on tasks that were formerly taboo for them, such as ploughing fields. The general perception was that women were only capable of handling sickles. This changed when the women in the project areas started using shovels and hammers to construct roads, schools, irrigation channels and drinking water taps. Initially, men regarded
women as inferior in terms of their ability to do physical work, but, while working together, they found themselves complimenting each other.

From the beginning, women were paid and treated equally to men. They had the same chance to become leaders in the work groups and self-help groups and improved their social status by earning income and improving their communities. Their elevated economic status paved the way for raising their social status. The food and cash earned by women from these activities helped to mitigate the urgent food crisis and laid the groundwork for longer-term measures.

**Long-term impacts**

Parallel to the food and cash for work-measures, sustainable social and economic activities were conducted. The newly constructed roads, schools, service centres, and water supply and irrigation systems allowed women to expand their economic efforts and send their children to school. They gained independence from their male family members and invested their income in school supplies or health services, and even starting saving to start their own businesses. Drinking water and irrigation schemes drastically improved access to clean water and enabled women to irrigate their fields and kitchen gardens. Instead of fetching water, women were able to use their time and energy for income generation.

After entrepreneurship training, women started businesses like commercial farming activities. After the road opened, women started running restaurants and shops. Mothers felt encouraged to upgrade their formal education and many enrolled in adult literacy classes. A lot of the new schools received approval from the Ministry of Education (MoE) to run higher classes, which offered many poor children – and especially girls – access to higher education. Learning Centre members functioned as ‘multipliers’ within families and communities and, as a result, the educational, hygiene and health situation improved significantly.

**Stable achievements in a fragile environment**

During the first two years, ILRA supported Learning Centres intensively. The third year was a phase of group consolidation and of linking Learning Centres to permanent service providers. During the last year of the project, all Learning Centres prepared a three-year plan in which they decided on future goals and activities. The Learning Centres were linked to, and registered at, the respective government agencies (District Agricultural Development Office, Women Development Office, Poverty Alleviation Fund and VDCs). In this way, Learning Centres can officially request support and financial resources to conduct future activities. Through Learning Centres, marginalised groups in society have improved their social and economic status, gained income of their own, as well as independence, and are able to continue to advocate for disadvantaged persons and for the development of their communities.

Not only the local Learning Centre members, but also female project staff, evolved a lot over the project period. Slowly, they took on more responsibilities according to the monthly working plan, on which they had to report back. They grew with their responsibilities and became self-assured and vocal. In total, 995 women reached leadership positions in Baitadi and Bajhang. Most Learning Centres have started savings and credit schemes, which provide cheap loans to members.

Nowadays, the participants of the Learning Centres are respected members of their rural communities and continue to motivate others to move ahead jointly in development.
In Learning Centres as a first step participants learned how to read and write
Meena Mahar is a member of the Dalit caste and proved herself as a leader of a road working group consisting of 10 women and 2 men.
“When my husband went to India and married another woman, my life became really hard. I didn’t have a job and I was left alone with my four children. I really struggled to make a living. I only had one kilo of rice per day to feed my children. I tried to earn some money by chopping wood and selling it. I also sewed some clothes for others. Despite this, I could not pay my children’s school fees.

Now I have joined a Learning Centre and have become the group’s informal leader, because I often raise my voice. In the Learning Centre I was taught to write my name and was chosen by the other Learning Centre members to participate in the advanced tailoring training. I am very happy that I got this opportunity, because it has given me the possibility to see Kathmandu – no one else from my generation has had this chance. Because of this trip to Kathmandu with GIZ, I have learnt that I can go anywhere. The training improved my skills and now I know all the instruments required for tailoring. I have learnt to make a proper coat with a nice collar as well as pants, shirts, daura suruwal and kurta suruwal (traditional clothes). When I am back in my village of Bhairavnath in Bajhang, I will open my own tailoring business and teach other Learning Centre participants what I learnt. Then I can earn more money and better support my family.

I am sure that in four or five years everything will be good, that I will live happily with my children, and that they will have good opportunities.”
For centuries Nepali women have had a subordinate position in society compared to men, which has affected their access to food, education and decision-making. In the Far-West, ILRA supported women to gain equality through social and economic empowerment.

Between 2009 and 2013, ILRA organised various training for women including agriculture training, vocational training and training on local dispute resolution. 60% per cent of participants in the agriculture training schemes were female. They learnt how to grow different plants (chilli and ginger), in order to diversify their harvests, and how to use new techniques (e.g. the System of Rice Intensification).

59% of those who started to earn money through new agricultural income generating activities were female. These women generally did this as participants of commercial farming groups. The members of these groups earned money from the produce sold by the groups. Some members invested this money to buy goats, chickens or buffalos; others have saved it or invested it in small businesses.

For non-agricultural vocational training, the percentage of female participants was about 40%. These workshops taught skills like pickle
Women appreciate being involved in decision making, snack preparation, and beauty parlour training. Partly due to the skills learnt during these training schemes, 1,926 women started a new business.

Through Food-and-Cash-for-Work activities, over 10,000 women (more than 50% of the workforce) earned their first salary. Workers were paid the same wages for doing the same tasks – regardless of gender. This money directly benefitted women members, strengthened their independence and raised their socio-economic status.

52% of the members of user committees and management committees, which were responsible for the different projects and road sections, were female. In these committees, women worked and interacted with others and were integral parts of the groups. In this way, women were able to gain more influence over the decision-making processes in their communities.

The monthly salary for the members of the users committees and management committees needed to be collected by two representatives in the VDC headquarters. As over half the members of these committees were female, it was decided that at least one of the group representatives collecting the payment should be female. As a result, many women travelled to the VDC headquarters for the first time in their life and were able to gain valuable experience in dealing with money and banks.

The majority of social mobilisers and many members of the technical staff employed by ILRA were women. As part of their work, these women observed the progress of activities in the villages within walking distance of their homes. If a villager wanted to request support from the project, for example, to construct an irrigation channel, they had to discuss their idea with the social mobiliser. This practice increased the standing of these women in their communities and increased their confidence to express their opinion publicly. Female social mobilisers also served as role models for other women and girls.
FULL STOMACHS AND JOINED HANDS | OPENLY EATING TOGETHER EVENTS

Traditionally, Nepali society has been divided into so-called upper and lower castes. Even though the caste system was officially abolished in 1963, social exclusion is still prevalent, especially in rural areas. However, during the past few years in Baitadi and Bajhang, more and more people have become active against caste discrimination. To aid their struggle, ILRA supported Openly Eating Together events in both districts.

When the project began in late 2009, members of the so-called untouchable Dalit caste were, generally, not allowed to take on certain forms of employment, including those related to food. Dalit were not permitted to enter the houses of high caste people or most temples and had to use separate drinking water taps or fetch water from far away. Dalit were considered impure by many people. Experience in other countries has shown that a vibrant economy is closely linked to an inclusive society – and inclusion begins in everyday life. ILRA promoted the participation of all groups in society in all aspects of social and economic life. In all project activities all participants had equal rights and received the same salary for doing the same tasks.

Openly Eating Together events were an innovative pillar of ILRA’s
Social campaigns – often linked to festivals or events like the International Women’s Day – raised awareness about social issues and gave a voice to marginalised groups within the society.

inclusive approach in the Far-West. In total, seven events were organised between 2011 and 2013. Each time, hundreds of women and men from all castes and ethnicities took part. They cooked and ate together and socialised, often for the first time. Key political, religious and social persons and journalists were invited and publicly denounced caste discrimination, which quickly made the events known beyond the district borders. The positive feedback on these events, especially from young people, give hope that attitudes towards gender and caste-based discrimination in rural Nepal might be changing.
The small village of Moyal is an ordinary community in Bajhang. However, on a hot and dry day in mid-April 2013 it was the location for a very special event: a public meal from, and for, all castes and ethnicities and both men and women. The event was organised by the local Learning Centre in collaboration with the local Youth Club and supported by ILRA. To ensure genuine approval for the event in the community, absolute transparency was required. The Learning Centre and Youth Club, together with project social mobilisers, organised a public discussion with the residents of Moyal to decide on whether or not to hold such an event. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Local youth, teachers, women, and community leaders were all in favour of the idea. Naturally, there was some opposition. A number of older people said they would not participate in the event because they were brought up differently. Nevertheless, they did not speak out against the event or stop their family members from taking part. Each person was asked to freely decide whether or not to join the gathering.

On the day of the feast more than 500 people from all groups of society came together peacefully. A local Hindu priest was among the first to publicly accept food prepared by a Dalit. This important symbolic gesture had a big effect on people inside and outside the village. People sang, danced, and recited poems against discrimination. There were speeches by local women leaders, teachers, and political representatives – among them the District Local Development Officer and the Chief District Officer. The event was a huge success. The Hindu priest announced that he would spread the idea among his fellow priests and even appoint Dalit at his temple. To share this experience of a community that stood up to publicly take a stand against discrimination, ILRA made a film about the event and organised a screening together with the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction people from Moyal, politicians from Bajhang and other stakeholders. The innovative approach of Openly Eating Together was regarded as a big success story and has raised awareness about caste discrimination on a local and national level.

OPENLY EATING TOGETHER IN MOYAL, BAJHANG
Jay Bahadur Malla, a Hindu priest says a poem against discrimination at an Openly Eating Together event.
Kalpana Nepali, a social mobiliser, together with other women shouts slogans against caste discrimination before an Openly Eating Together event.
Case study from 2010:

“I can’t understand why there is a Dalit caste” says Ramba Devi B. K. from a Dalit settlement in Far-West Nepal.

“We cannot go to the temple where higher caste people pray. We are not allowed to touch their food and cannot use the same water tap as them.”

For the last six months, Ramba Devi has been studying every evening at the Learning Centre in her village. Together with 30 other women she discusses caste discrimination, nutrition, reproductive health and many other topics concerning her daily life. She wants to raise awareness about the situation of Dalit and talks passionately about what she has learnt. She smiles as she says how much she enjoys attending the class. Ramba Devi is sure that with GIZ’s support she and her classmates will change society, but much remains to be done.

Defying traditional norms, she recently drank from a public tap in a nearby settlement where a higher caste member of the community lives. She felt liberated.

“Unfortunately there is only change in villages with Learning Centres; in the other villages we are still discriminated against.” She adds, “but I won’t give up. Recently someone from an upper caste group wanted to come to my house. I told her: You can’t come into my house if I’m not allowed to enter yours.”

Ramba Devi laughs proudly as she says this. It is as if she has broken the chains that have bound her and many of her fellow Dalit for centuries.
Laws forbid Dalit to receive education, use public spaces or marry a person from a higher caste.

King Mahendra abolishes caste discrimination, but this has no practical impact.

The Constitution of 1990, which is based on democracy and equality, rejects the caste system, talks of human rights and guarantees Dalit equal rights.

The Maoists make caste equality a top priority. Many Dalit support them politically and during the insurgency.

A Dalit Development Committee under the Ministry of Local Development is installed, but is ineffective.

The Maoist insurgency commences; one of the root causes is the exclusion of large segments of society – including Dalit – from education, decision making and prosperity.

Dalit are still socially and economically excluded and have little chance of earning an adequate living.
To see the social change that took place in Ramba Devi B.K.’s village watch the documentary: “Everybody’s Blood is Red – Openly Eating Together in Nepal’s Far-West”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JA0C0x8q-_g
Experience in other contexts has shown that economic and social reintegration can pose serious challenges for ex-combatants and for the communities they choose to settle in. In Nepal, many ex-Maoist combatants fought against their neighbours or family members. Some were traumatised by what they experienced and will carry physical and emotional scars for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, many joined the People’s Liberation Army at a young age and, therefore, did not have much work experience or a life to return to when the conflicted ended. Many ex-combatants had to build their lives from scratch. Especially Nepal’s rural areas, where few job opportunities exist, posed serious difficulties for them. Female ex-combatants generally faced more hardships than their male counterparts, as they abandoned the traditional role of women by joining the People’s Liberation Army.

A crucial factor in gaining social acceptance and, eventually, becoming fully-integrated community members is economic integration. Successful reintegration into communities strengthens both the returnees and the society by giving it new productive members. In contrast, failed reintegration may endanger peaceful development. In all project activities ILRA strived to integrate ex-combatants and give them equal opportunities to take up leadership positions. ILRA supported the communities and the former fighters in finding their way to become accepted community members in the Far-Western districts of Baitadi and Bajhang. The project employed several former combatants to support social mobilisation processes in Baitadi and Bajhang.
Hemanti was 16-years old when she joined the women’s wing of the People’s Liberation Army in 2002. She had heard about Maoist ideas from a Maoist woman who had come to her village and spoken about gender and caste-based discrimination. “I immediately understood her as we witnessed the same problems every day around us. Then I decided I wanted to be a part of that movement”, says Hemanti. She became an Area Committee Member. Instead of fighting, she visited communities and talked about women and Dalit’s rights and about the change that the Maoists wanted to bring about. She led a double life: during the day she lived in the traditional way, but at night she visited the surrounding villages. This posed a great danger to her family and the other villagers: “When the people in my village and my family found out that I was a Maoist they became very angry.” Eventually, the police came to her village and burned down her family’s house.

Hemanti was regularly trained for two or three days in a row. The topics included mostly political orientation and sometimes the use of weapons. It was a hard way of life: “We had to mistrust everybody because there were many army informants around. We did not know whether people...
were on our side or not. I carried a rifle and a hand grenade to defend myself, but I never had to fire a shot, even though I witnessed two battles.” After three years in the movement, Hemanti was appointed vice president of the district’s Maoist women’s wing. At one point, she realised she was pregnant. She had married when she was 14-years old and her husband was also with the Maoists. She was still visiting villages during the late stages of her pregnancy. One night, while coming back from a political event, she went into labour. The people around her were afraid to be in contact with her, a Maoist, so she had to give birth outside the village. She brought a plastic sheet and a knife into the woods. A girl from the neighbouring village joined her to assist during childbirth, but the girl became so nervous that Hemanti had to comfort her – even while giving birth. “I cut the umbilical cord myself and washed my child. That was the moment when I realised that I can do everything if I am prepared for it. During the whole time, I had to plan my movements very carefully. It was very difficult, but my child and I survived these horrible conditions”, she explains.

At the end of the conflict, Hemanti and her husband left the Maoist movement to seek medical treatment for her husband in India. Upon returning to Nepal, Hemanti’s husband went into politics with the Maoists, while she concentrated on finding work to take care of their two children. “When I got the chance to work for GIZ as a social mobiliser, my whole world brightened. I thought, this work is related a lot to my former work, but uses only peaceful means”, says Hemanti about her work with GIZ. She elaborates: “I speak to those on the fringes of society, to the women, Dalit, disabled people and youth about ways to improve their lives and their communities. We jointly find ways to solve problems like the isolation of women during menstruation or the ‘untouchability’ of Dalit. We discuss health, sanitation, nutrition, domestic violence and alcoholism and develop action plans to make others aware of these issues. We also teach women and Dalit how to read, write and calculate so that they have more opportunities to work, earn their own income, and gain status and independence from others. We are determined to bring social balance to the villages.”

“Doing this work, I am able to make a peaceful change for the better in my surroundings. With GIZ I don’t have to hide anymore. Neither does my family. I truly believe that this way is the best way.”

“DOING THIS WORK, I AM ABLE TO MAKE A PEACEFUL CHANGE FOR THE BETTER IN MY SURROUNDINGS. I TRULY BELIEVE THAT THIS WAY IS THE BEST WAY”
ILRA TEAM | 2013

Anil Pal
Anita Luhar
Bhakta Bhandari
Bhawani Datt Bhatt
Bhim Kumar Budha
Bikash Kathayat
Binod Bahadur Singh
Bishnu Thapa
Chandra Kala Oli
Claudia Maier
Dal Bahadur Luhar
Dhan Bahadur Thapa
Dharmand Joshi
Dil Kumari Mahara
Dominik Langen
Ganga Bahadur Tamang
Gauri Raj Joshi
Hari Thapa
Hemanti Kumari Syada
Jaya Bhandari
Janak Raj Bhatta
Jivan Kumar Basnet
Kalpana Kumari Damai
Karan Singh Khatri
Keshari Prasad Bhatta
Khagendra Chamling Rai
Krishna Singh Thagunna
Kumar KC
Kumari Hira Dhami
Lalita Kumari Awasthi
Laxmi Kumari Parki
Madhavi Devi Bista
Mamta Susaling
Man Bahadur Khadka
Man Kumari Bista
Nabin Lal Shrestha
Pal Sang Tamang
Parwari Bohara
Pramod Neupane
Prasad Bhatta
Purna Bahadur Budhathoki
Pushpa Kumari Singh
Puskar Raj Joshi
Raj Kumar Rai
Raj Singh Saud
Ram Bahadur Lama
Reena Bhandari
Samjhana Shah
Santosh Bahadur Malla
Sher Bahadur Bohara
Shushant Tuladhar
Shushila Lama
Suman Maharjan
Sundar Singh Pun
Tika Ram Oli
Til Bahadur Saru
Verena Flörchinger