The goal of this project was to start commercial cash crop production in the rural village of Necha in Northern Nepal. During the civil war era (1996-2006), Necha was one of the most affected regions. Many youths began to move away from the village to city areas or abroad. The tendency of leaving the village for economic opportunities is still prevalent in Necha. New economic opportunities haven’t been explored. Kedar, the one and only Higher Secondary School of the village was also badly affected due to civil war. The qualified teachers moved to urban areas and as a result, the quality of education that the students used to get degraded. The school also lacks educational materials like computers and library. Keeping in mind these economic and educational problems in Necha, I planned to start cash crop production in commercial manner by taking land in lease and forming a committee to foster the initiative. The main aim behind the project was to make villagers participate and get them trained on how to plant cash crops in their own land so that they don’t have to seek for job opportunities in city areas or abroad. Also, the annual profit of the cash crop production could be used in introducing and developing computer education in the school.

The project was started on 9th of June immediately after I reached the village. I did not carry out any additional fund raising efforts. Since I’m the permanent resident of Necha, I did not have any language or cultural barrier. First of all, I called for a meeting where the principal of the school, the members of the School Management Committee and some of the villagers were invited. In the meeting, all were informed about the project and what was intended. They suggested that we should form a management committee in the beginning and the land for production has to be decided. They expressed their gratitude to Davis Projects for Peace, MIT and the student Fellow for the initiative. In the next meeting, with a consensus between school members and the villagers, a management committee of nine members was formed. We tried to balance the membership so that everyone in the village could feel that they also have a share in the project. For example, the chair person of the committee was a parent and the secretary was the principal of the school.

We continued with the meetings for few more days and issues such as arrangement for agricultural trainers, pipes and tanks were discussed. The members of the management committee were very enthusiastic and cooperative. We also spent a week to form a seven page long agreement letter which would act as the constitution of the project. The letter was signed by the chairperson, principal of the school (the secretary) and Uddhav K Sharma (the fellow student). The letter discusses the issues like the aim of the project, the rights and responsibilities of the members of the committee, the areas where the profit of the project should be used and the re-formation of the committee after the tenure of the existing committee ends. After these paper works and formal discussions in the meetings, we finally took the land in lease for five years. The land which we leased was located nearby Kedar School. However, initially deciding which land should be leased was a challenging task. One of the villagers had agreed to provide the land in discounted price but the land was not located in a feasible area and was quite far from the school. There were other people in the village who were willing to provide us the land and so, the process of selection of land became tough. Finally, we all agreed that the land should be located in the center of the village and should be nearby the school area so that it would be easier to carry out the project and make this project as the model for the villagers. However, we were not able to lease the same amount of land as it was proposed (7800 sq. metres) in the same price as the land was quite expensive than expected. Therefore, we leased approximately 5200 sq. metres of land in $1500.

The land that we chose, already had some other crops growing in it and we had to wait for two more weeks for it to be harvested. In those two weeks we arranged water pipes, plastic water tanks, fertilizers, seeds and other materials like spade, water sprinkles. These materials were bought from the district headquarter, Salleri, and were transported to the village. Although the road transportation has recently been linked to the village, due to the monsoon season, the roads were very muddy. Thus, it was very hard for us to transport the required materials. Initially, it was planned that we would take two agricultural experts under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture. But due to the small number of
experts available, we were able to hire only one trainer. However, when field work started, we hired one more expert from the district headquarter.

After two weeks, when the crops from the leased land were harvested, we started the field work in a full swing. First of all, the field was ploughed and was prepared to be planted with chilly, onion, cauliflower, turmeric and cabbage. The villagers were really supportive and they participated in the work with great enthusiasm. The works like preparing tunnel for saplings and off-season crops, preparing irrigation system, putting fertilizers in land were started simultaneously with the help of a trainer. Around four villagers were trained each day on how to plant different cash crops. The work they did was voluntary thereby reducing costs. In about 15 days time, we were able to provide training to 45 villagers. Since it was a monsoon season in Nepal, building irrigation system was interrupted. We then planned to keep the water tank and the pipe underground for safety purposes. We dug holes manually for water tanks but this work was not completed as weather was not particularly helpful. Irrigation was not a problem in monsoon season and so we postponed our plan of building the irrigation system. It has been agreed that the remaining process for irrigation system would be completed after the monsoon season and the budget has been saved for the work. The management committee will take care of it. For the time being, the allocated fund has been invested for short term loan to the committee members at 18% interest rate.

In this way, the work for this season was completed. The management committee will take care of arranging labor for the necessary works like weeding, harvesting and marketing of the crops as well as managing and controlling of funds and profits. This project is sure to work as a model for the whole village as many villagers have already participated in the project and some villagers have already started planting some cash crops. The enthusiastic participation from villagers not only brought them together but also fostered the sense of unity and brotherhood among the villagers. Furthermore, anticipated profit of $2000 per year is a good deal of fund to introduce and develop computer education in Kedar School.

This project experience has taught me a lot. I learned that it is not easy to carry out a project. Some of the villagers were not happy about the project. They advocated that the total fund should be used to buy computers and solar panels for the school rather than starting cash crop production. They thought that starting the cash crop production was a waste of time. Also, sometimes people didn’t show up on time for meetings. During monsoon season, everyone is busy working in their own fields and hence people found it difficult to manage time for the meetings or training sessions. Similarly, management of the fund was another challenge. It was risky to keep the whole amount at my home and hence we put the money in a bank. But the bank was very far from the village. Therefore, everytime we needed fund, we had to travel to the district headquarter to withdraw the money. However, these challenges made me more aware and confident on what I was doing and what I will be doing. I’m now well aware that we do face challenges but they prepare us well for future works. The most important thing for me is that I got to work in my own village, share my experiences and do something meaningful for my own people to foster peace.

I believe ‘peace’ refers to a state in which the mind is without fear and worries. Peace refers to the harmony among the people. I believe that this project has greatly contributed towards establishing peace because many villagers from different caste groups came and worked together. One day, there were 40 people working together which I believe is itself a success of the project. The villagers were enthusiastic to make their village better. I learned that this was the first time villagers worked together for a social cause. This would act as a model for the whole village and the people who are thinking of migrating away will see how economic opportunities could be created in the village itself. Furthermore, the war affected school will have better facilities like computer lab and library and we hope better teachers will be attracted to the school. On the final days, the school organized a program in which local media persons were invited. In the program, I talked about Davis Projects for Peace and the objectives of my project. The news was broadcasted in local FM radios. Now the whole village is talking about the project and the noble initiative.

We have agreed to take this project forward in a sustainable way. The committee would take land in lease again after 5 years and the process will be continued. We hope similar projects with the involvement of community members would be really beneficial in other rural villages in Nepal. I would like to thank Davis Projects for Peace and MIT for providing me this wonderful opportunity. I could never have been able to carry out this project without their help and support. “Davis Projects for Peace is the most valuable thing in my life so far as I was able to initiate meaningful steps to foster economic and educational development in my war-affected village and, furthermore, I learned that we need a strong desire and commitment to achieve something meaningful.” – Uddhav Sharma, Nepal (MIT’15)
Carrying out meeting with villagers and school members

Villagers’ enthusiastic participation in field work and training sessions

A scene from cauliflower plantation with villagers’ participation

Figure 1: Meetings

Figure 2: Field work and training

Figure 3: The work is almost done