

Title: KWD 100 Projects for Peace: Nepal Project
School: Lake Forest College
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1. Project Summary

The goal of our project was to encourage the women of Nepal to begin healing from the suffering engendered by the decade-long insurgency and to help them start a new life by providing them with job and money management skills that would make them economically independent. This project worked towards peace by inviting women from both sides of the conflict to come together so that they could exchange stories about their experiences, learn that they have all suffered as a result of the conflict, and begin the process of working together to build a better future for all.

We implemented our Nepal Project at Chainpur, situated in the Chitwan district of Nepal. The project was completed in 18 days during the month of July. However, a great deal of work took place before we even arrived in Nepal, as we established communication with the committee members of the local Red Cross Society and negotiated their help with our project. We also had to recruit participants from different regions of Eastern Chitwan. The participants were from 11 Village Development Committees (VDCs). A total of 40 individuals participated in the project. Of that total, 25 were from families who had had a family member, usually the breadwinner, killed as a result of the conflict. The rest of the participants were from families who had experienced having family members injured, maimed, jailed or tortured during the period.

The project provided participants with training in locally-appropriate income generating skills and then established a micro-credit fund to encourage them to use their skills and take initiative to start their own business. The trainings were agriculturally based, and participants learned how to raise animals and grow vegetables for profit, a new practice for people who have been mostly subsistence farmers in the past. Participants also learned about micro-credit and gained general knowledge about account keeping (bookkeeping), loan systems, and saving and funding procedures. Moreover, after the trainings were finished, we visited each group in their village and provided basic knowledge on how to run meetings and make decisions. During these visits, we bought goats for many participants and gave cash to some, to make it possible for them to buy goats for themselves. We also arranged for regular follow-ups of their progress, which will be handled by Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), Chitwan branch, and INSEC with technical support from the Chitwan Livestock Services Office. The follow-up reports will be sent to us on a quarterly basis for one year.

In addition to the grant from the KWD 100 Projects for Peace, we received a gift of \$1,000 from Margie Hart, a supporter of Lake Forest College who has a special interest in Nepal. Part of Ms. Hart's donation was used to cover extra expenses associated with the project; the remainder will be used for an on-campus exhibit in the College's library and other presentations about the project. Heather and Shirley Brown provided a video camera, which we used to document the project. A copy of the documentary film we made from our footage will be forwarded as soon as it is completed.

2. Project Results:

We experienced many challenges with our projects, especially once we arrived in Nepal. As a result, we had to make changes to our program design in order to meet our objectives. For

example, we had originally planned to provide 28 days of training. Unfortunately, summer is the busiest time of the year for farmers, and as a result, we had to reduce the number of training days to 18 so that participants could spend more time working. We did hold classes for more hours per day, however, so that they could still learn the same skills they would have learned during the longer period. In addition, we had planned to train participants in cotton weaving as well as animal husbandry. However, once we arrived in Nepal, we learned from local experts that there was no market for cotton threads made by human hands. This kind of thread has been totally replaced by factory-made nylon thread. So, after discussing the situation with the Red Cross committee members and the participants, we decided to train participants in vegetable farming. We found that vegetable farming had a greater positive impact on the local market than cotton weaving. Most villages were already working cooperatively to sell surpluses of locally-grown vegetables, leading to faster returns and larger profits. We did have one participant who learned sewing and knitting skills at her request, as she was unable to keep goats or do vegetable farming.

We had also planned that the project would work only with women. However, some of the men didn't want their wives to be left alone, so they also participated in the training. A few men who had lost all the female members of their families in the conflict also participated. As a result of this challenge, we actually ended up serving five more individuals than we had originally planned.

The individuals participating in the project ended up being from several small villages throughout the district. Therefore, instead of having one large group that meets in a central location to circulate and collect micro-credit funds, we formed six groups based on location so that participants do not have to travel long distances. Without this change, it would have been difficult to ensure the operation of the micro-credit fund in the future.

Despite the challenges, the project was successful. We provided vital skills training to over 40 men and women who were pleased and satisfied with the trainings and our support. Before we left the district, we were able to work with many of them to actually purchase their goats and hold their first meetings about the micro-credit fund. The participants also showed a lot of enthusiasm for the project and promised to utilize the knowledge gained from the trainings to not only improve their own lives but also work to enhance the micro-credit fund and help others learn the skills that will help them build a brighter future.

3. Implications:

We believe that people can not think of establishing peace until they are able to fulfill their basic needs. Since the participants in the project are very poor, the amounts of money they will earn from farming and raising goats will make a tremendous difference in their ability to provide for their families. By learning to work together to circulate credit, the project participants have set the stage for the future economic development of everyone in their communities.

More importantly, however, the project provided people who have been damaged physically, emotionally, and financially by war the opportunity to come together, share their experiences and begin healing. The participants now realize that, no matter what side they or their families were on during the conflicts, they can turn their shared suffering into determination to work for a future in which all of them not only survive but thrive.