

A Small support changed the life of Dumsikharka

Considered as a golden triangle for farming marijuana¹, Dumsikharka and surrounding villages had very limited livelihood options before. Its remoteness had made it a perfect site for such illegal farming. Many farmers who were unable to pay 'share' of their income to the police often ended up in jail, serving terms for many years. And the story repeated every year.

Now the case is different. The people have begun farming potatoes and vegetables, and leading a dignified life, without the fear of police intimidation.

With the support of NRs 3.50 million from Poverty Alleviation Fund, the community people constructed 4.5 km to connect the nearest market centre at Dandabas with their villages. This has brought new hopes to the lives of the poor villagers. Now they have switched to many varieties of vegetables that have more commercial value.

"Previously, we used to walk 5-6 km to reach the nearest road and market and it cost us more than 5 rupee per kg if we use the labourers to carry our produce." Sun Bahadur Lama, 40 says. It is obvious for the villagers that the production cost of any agricultural products is higher than its return. Therefore, the people were engaged in marijuana farming which was one of the sources for the income.

"Poverty was the sole reason why we used to grow marijuana as cash crop and maize as cereal", Mr. Lama added. The other reason behind farming marijuana was due to its high return from low labour cost. The buyers from India used to come to their homes to collect the marijuana.



Farm land with vegetables where people used to farm marijuana

Because of the high poverty prevalence and equally high population of ethnic people, PAF selected Makawanpur district for support under its special window program in 2006. PAF with its working partner selects the communities with high density of ethnic communities which is excluded from the development mainstreams, geographically remote and under extreme poverty.

Among many communities, Dhumsikharka, inhabited largely by ethnic *Tamang* community, was once rated an inaccessible village. The nearest road head and market

¹ Cannabis used as a psychoactive drug

centre was more than 5 km away and it took them about one and half hours walking to reach it. Additionally, it took more than 2 hours to the villagers who took their produces to sell at the market.

Manohara Development Institute (MDI), a working partner of the district started to implement program activities through community organizations in three Village Development Committees (VDCs) i.e Agra, Gogane and Dharakharka from 2007. During the social mobilization process, the community people concluded that they need to establish link with the market centre to take the maximum return of their produces.

The nine different community organizations agreed to form 'Pakanikharka Rural Road Users' committee' to expedite the construction of the lifeline two years ago. The local political leaders and representatives of the Constituent Assembly inaugurated the road. And finally, they succeeded in constructing the road link with the nearest market centre.

Individual villager is now earning NRs 80-90 thousand a year in an average because of road connectivity. "I have expanded vegetables farming in all 7 *Ropani*² of land I own. Before it was only in 3 *Ropani*" says Chiring Thing, 45, a resident of Dumsikharka. This has increased Mr. Thing's earning to more than NRs 20,000 from NRs 5,000 in the past. The increased income is helping him to raise his 7 children.

This has also enabled some villagers to send their kids in Hetauda and Palung Bazaar to get better education. "This has contributed significantly to my children's education. I don't need to borrow loans from the local moneylenders at an exorbitant interest rate as well", Mr. Thing pointed out.

The road alignment also connects three districts namely Makawanpur, Dhading and Chitwan. It injected new life to the villagers, more than 80 percent of whom have ethnic origins (Tamang, Chepang, Magar and Gurung) and are living in extreme poverty.



A section of Rural Road

The project is benefiting more than 8,000 people directly. The number of people enjoying benefits indirectly is more. Villagers are now farming potatoes, beans and different kinds of green vegetables after the road link was constructed.

"We want to make this village 'an ideal village'," says Jit Bahadur Moktan, 61.

Inspired by the present benefits, the villagers want to connect the road to other villages of Chitwan district. They are hopeful that enhanced connectivity will open new avenues and increase prospects to their living standard.

²Ropani = 0.05087 hectare or 74*74 Square Feet