

Vocational Training to female Mukta Kamaiya and Kamlari and deprived women in Tikapur Kailali  
Nepal  
Hood College  
Anubhooti Regmi (Nepal)  
United World College in Mostar

### **Project Goals:**

To empower freed female bonded labors by providing them employment opportunity. This project aimed not only to impart skills necessary for income generation but also to free them from practice that hinders them from running their life in dignified manner primarily through dialogs that encourage cross-cultural understanding and also by making them economically empowered.

### **Other Funding:**

Apart from the Davis Peace Project Grant there were no other additional contributions made towards this project.

### **Idea Origination:**

Growing up in western plains of Nepal, the practice of Kamaiya and Kamlari pratha were not foreign to me. While brainstorming I knew that I wanted to empower women who are still reduced to second-class citizens by society and their own family, and work with conflicted groups to promote cross cultural understanding. Integrating these dimensions into a holistic ideal I came up with the idea of providing vocational training to female victims of Kamaiya and Kamlari pratha while also including other vulnerable women of the area.

### **Issue addressed by my project**

Even though the Kamaiya system of bonded labor was abolished by the Nepal government in the year 2000, it is still found to be prevalent primarily because of scarce resources and alternatives. Due to shortsighted relief programs and lack of awareness, progress has been sluggish. Thus, I wanted to start a project that not only helps victims of such practice to be financially sufficient but also to educate both victims and former landlords about the urgency and significance of the cross-cultural communication that is pivotal in shaping a harmonious society.

### **Reasons for choosing Tikapur as my host site**

When I visited my grandmother during my break, I saw several of such freed women who were still taking up the role of bonded labor. Having to feed plenty of mouths and to look after the family they were compelled to work as bonded labor. It has already been almost two decades and Kailali is still plagued by such practices. Thus, I chose Kailali as I knew that it would allow me to work with the most vulnerable groups of people. Likewise, I was already familiar with the societal structure of Kailali and was aware of silent divisions between Tharu community and the former landowners. Following the Tikapur incident of August 24, 2015, the division between Tharus and Pahadis (group of people who moved from hills) was laid bare. The killing of eight people, seven police officers and a two-year-old boy, the Tharuhat movement invited further division in Tikapur. Thus, promoting healthy dialogs while also imparting skills for ensuring economic empowerment was very important to ensure social harmony.

### **Working in Tikapur**

From getting around the town to coping with the harsh summer temperatures, working in Tikapur is always a little adventurous. At the outset of the project, everything seemed to go as per plans. I went along with the volunteers for a field trip for selection of socially and economically disadvantaged group of women. By having conversation with former landlords as well as consulting the local administrative organs of Tikapur we came up with the list of two different groups. However, a day later some of them informed us that they would be unable to take part in the training because their family thought that it would hamper their domestic duties. Thus, in order to fill in the spaces we talked to few more women who agreed to join the group. Later, the individuals who indicated earlier they would be unable to participate in the training wanted to join. Since we were on a tight budget, I could not provide additional participants with the daily allowance but helped them attend the training.

This last-minute addition to the groups required us to re-work our plans. However, I was very fortunate to have local volunteers who time and again with their dedication and perseverance worked against the odds and served as an integral part of the project. During the project, I also came to learn that for a lot of the women it would be their first ever class. Thus, we improvised and tried our best to make it seem like a formal class, with a local approach. Our instructor Mr. Chaudhary played his part as a teacher, rewarding the participants for their questions and inputs while also giving positive punishments to the late comers.

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### **Uncertainty**

Following the Tharuhat Movement, it was almost impossible to bridge the gap between Tharus and Pahadis. There was a constant fear that they would refuse to learn and work under the same roof. However, in the end this project played an important role in bridging two conflicted groups.

### **Challenges**

This project came with inevitable challenges. Firstly, mushroom farming requires specific temperature and other physical conditions like humidity. Due to high temperature that crossed the upper bound of favorable temperature for mushroom farming we had to find a way to control the temperature. Luckily, monsoon came as our project unfolded which dropped the temperature to the optimum level. This allowed us to maintain favorable temperature. However, along with the monsoon came flooding which hindered this project as the flood crept into our farming huts.

Even though, Nepali is widely spoken in Tikapur, it was difficult communicating with the Tharu women as they only spoke Tharu language. Thus, making them understand the nitty-gritties of the project was a challenge in itself. However, with the help of our instructor and local volunteers, we were able to communicate despite the language barrier.

### **Peace and my Project**

Peace to me is being able to lie under a roof feeling safe, respected and valued, and sharing the mutual feeling of love and respect with others, while also ensuring that basic life surviving amenities are always easily available.

The long-standing Kamaiya and Kamlari pratha contributed in a way to Tharuhat movement. Tharuhat activists protested to demand a province comprising areas with sizable Tharu population.<sup>1</sup>The incident of August 24, 2015 was built up long time before this date. Tharus claimed the incident had happened because of the atrocity of police, the hold of Pahadis in the security force, support of the police to the integrated Far-west. It led Tharus to fight for autonomy, self-determination, identity, equality, inclusion and rights.<sup>2</sup> Following this incident the area remained divided and social bitterness rooted itself in Tikapur.

This project required both Pahadi and Tharu women to receive training under the same roof and share ideas. The intermingling of these women not only united Pahadis and Tharus but also promised to further bridge the broken trust and respect for each other. Likewise, our resource person who comes from the Tharu community worked together with pahadi volunteers and ran the project smoothly. This project proved to be a platform to forget the old scars and to work hand in hand for the peaceful future. Similarly, the deprived Kamaiya and Kamlari victims will not get a chance to run their livelihood via making use of the training provided. This will empower them and thus ensure better peace within their selves and with others.

### **Personal Growth**

We have constantly relied on the power of shared actions and we have always sat behind waiting for someone to start working so that we can lend our hands. Through this project, I have learned about the power of individual action and the power of love and compassion to free the unprivileged groups from the shackles of fate and pave the path to a better future.

### **Personal Statement**

“Compassion is the only intangible tool we can and need to equip ourselves with to further the lives of those less fortunate.” Anubhooti Regmi

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<sup>1</sup> “8 Killed in Tikapur Clash.” *The Kathmandu Post*, The Kathmandu Post, <https://kathmandupost.com/miscellaneous/2015/08/25/8-killed-in-tikapur-clash>.

<sup>2</sup> LAHURNIP, Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples. *Tikapur Incident Human Rights Monitoring Report*. 2016, [https://www.lahurnip.org/uploads/articles/Tikapur-Incident-Human-Rights-Monitoring-Report\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.lahurnip.org/uploads/articles/Tikapur-Incident-Human-Rights-Monitoring-Report_ENG.pdf).

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## Section II: Photographs



Figure 1: Visit to Tharu Village to select Eligible Candidates



Figure 2: Training given by Mr. Chaudhary



Figure 3: Mushroom Farming Huts flooded by Monsoon Rain



Figure 4: Post Training Picture with entire Team