



Tiwari Bhanjyang: Road to Recovery



Community people contributing for construction of new Sub-health Post building, Tiwaribhanjyang, Bhojpur

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Background

Tiwari Bhanjyang is a small settlement, which is about 20 Km away from the headquarters of Bhojpur district. Located on the hill ridge, Tiwari Bhanjyang, can also be reached by seasonal-dusty motorable road from Hile Bazaar of Dhanakuta district. This hinterland, though named after the Brahmin clan - Tiwari, is also populated by the people belonging to other ethnic groups such as Chhetri, Rai, Magar, etc. besides the Brahmins. Even until recently, Tiwari Bhanjyang was an area of public service center of Bhojpur and was fortunate to have influential inhabitants. However, the armed conflict that began in Nepal in 1997 also affected this place and gradually Bhojpur district as a whole turned into a killing place by 2004. On 3 March 2004,

the district headquarters was attacked by the rebels resulting in the death of 32 security personnel and detention of 10 others as prisoners of war. Besides, at least 16 rebels were also killed and properties worth Rs. 25 million were said to be destroyed by the attack.

After the destruction of Bhojpur district headquarters, Tiwari Bhanjyang could not protect itself from the effect of district headquarters. The settlement that is located on a trail used to witness frequent mobility of the rebels and the army during the conflict. Soon, the Area Police Post of Tiwari Bhanjyang was abandoned after the threats from the rebels. As soon as the police abandoned the office, the building was set ablaze by the rebels. Similarly, the office of Nepal Bank Limited was also evacuated, and moved to headquarters

A Case Study: Nanda Kumari in Sustainable Peace

Ms. Nanda Kumari Rai, (31), an inhabitant of Khartmchha, Bhojpur, is a conflict affected woman. Her husband was kidnapped and murdered during the armed conflict. Nanda lives in a tiny house with mud floor and thatched roof. At the back of the house, she has a little plot of field, where she grows maize and tomatoes. Nanda Kumari, who lives with her two children and an old mother in-law, is the only bread winner of the family. Being the head of the household poor Nanda Kumari has to manage everything by herself.

Nanda Kumari never went to school on a regular basis during her childhood. She has only the faded memories of her school days. At present, she is a member of Suminma Sagarmatha Mothers Group in Khartmahha Village Development Committee of Bhojpur. Being an active member of CBPO, Nanda Kumari, got trainings on Gender and Social Inclusion, Conflict Management, Participatory Organizational Capacity Assessment (POCAP), networking, advocacy and lobbying etc. Now Nanda Kumari is capable of making decisions that affect her life and development of her community. " RRN has empowered and inspired me in peace and development. Now, I can talk about the village development issues with donors, project staff and government line agencies myself and I can facilitate the local level conflict issues,' says Nanda Kumari. Because of her honesty and contribution to the community, she has been elected as the treasurer of Sumnima Sagarmatha Mother Group in Khartmchha. 'I enjoy in contributing to development and peace-building in my village and I will spend my life in peace-building because I lost my husband in the armed conflict and let there be no armed conflict in Nepal again' says Nanda Kumari.

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due to the insecurity. Cross-firing between the rebels and the army was common in the village. The rebels were operating their own court called as 'Peoples' Court at the local level. At least two people were killed, hundreds of them were abducted, tortured, arrested and forced to leave the village either by the rebels or by the state security force. The displacement brought about by the war caused innumerable children to migrate other places such as Dharan, Biratnagar and Kathmandu where they were compelled to work in poorly paid domestic situations.

Post conflict Context

The peace process started after the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Communist Part of Nepal - Maoists (CPN -M). With this agreement the 13-year long insurgency of Nepal came to an end in November 2006 with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the SPA. However, the situation in the rural villages in Nepal was still fragile. Like many other Nepalese rural villages, Tiwari Bhanjyang was completely broken down, and the total environment was like without basic rule of law and security for common citizens. Residual violence still prevailed in the village resulting from the extreme dislike and mistrust between the people of conflicting parties. The people were always negative, helpless, depressed and suspicious with each other. The schools did not have enough classrooms and furniture. The available rooms in the school were congested with larger number of students. The health

post was in operation in a leased building with minimum equipments for the treatments. The public buildings and security posts were ruined in the villages. The village was not connected with road and telephone networks. The out migration of people was at an alarming rate as a result of loss of livelihood opportunities in the village. The out migration or displacement of men affected the women to a higher extent, as the house hold work burden of women doubled.

PBB/RRN Intervention

With the aim of helping the local communities to ease from the physical and mental pain of the conflict, Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) started working in war torn Tiwari Bhanjyang since 2009 under the project 'Peace Building from Below' (PBB). Initially, RRN identified and selected seven existing Community Based Peoples' Organizations (CBPOS) as working partners. The CBPOs so selected supported RRN to identify conflict affected people, poorest, excluded, marginalized ethnic groups and downtrodden castes. Secondly, the project provided psycho-social counseling and humanitarian support such as 'in-kind' cash support, scholarships to the families of victims and poor people who were under shock from the long-term war, and in need of external support. On the one hand, these support from RRN enabled the victims to cope with the shock of the loss caused by the war, and on the other hand, it helped RRN to build a good working relationship with the conflict affected people.

Thirdly, the project also started training programs for the Community Based People's Organizations (CBPOs) on such subjects as gender and social inclusion, conflict management, need identification, local resource mobilization, etc. RRN's approach to peace building from below is based on the fact that the economic, social, cultural and political marginalization of a vast majority of people at the local level, are the root causes of conflicts.

Fourthly, the project provided training on income generating activities as well as the seed money to support the livelihood of the poor. Building sustainable peace at the local level does mean securing the livelihood of the poor. This is because for rural poor people, peace and happiness are related with the fulfillment of their basic needs such as food, water, land, education health, security, etc. Additionally, the project also supported the micro infrastructure development projects such as drinking water, irrigation, rural roads and community buildings as per the demand of CBPOs to address the immediate needs of the people as well as to create a common platform for connecting various conflicting parties. Similarly, the capacity of CBPOs was further enhanced for preparing proposals, making demands and implementing micro projects from and through various agencies, preparing action plans, managing revolving funds and managing local level conflict and Participatory Organizational Capacity Assessment (POCAP) etc. The CBPOs were facilitated to build linkage with the service providers operating at the district headquarters. With the active participation of various stakeholders, the local people were also educated on peace building, reconciliation, coexistence and social harmony through workshops, media mobilization, mass rallies, etc.

Project Effects/Impacts

Slowly and gradually, Tiwari Bhanjyang started recovering from the breakdown. Seven CBPOs have started operating revolving funds with the support from RRN. The conflict affected people have started borrowing money from the revolving fund to initiate micro enterprises such as raising pigs, tailoring, vegetable farming, raising goats, etc. At least 40 children of the conflict affected people are receiving books, school uniforms, notebooks, bags, shoes and tuition fees from RRN. Several youth and women are obtaining long-term and short-term vocational training on such subjects as goat farming, pig farming, masonry, carpentry, etc. When the training is complete, a small grant is provided as seed money to start a



*Newly constructed Tiwaribhanjyang Sub-health Post building
(Inset) Old building*

micro enterprise. Most of the trainees who have completed their training have found employment and/or have started their own micro enterprises.

At least three out of Seven CBPOs operating in Tiwari Bhanjyang are chaired by the leaders affiliated to various political parties. This indicates that the people representing various political ideologies work together by respecting the differences in each other. The CBPOs make plans and request projects with various organizations by themselves. With the financial and technical support from RRN, they have constructed buildings for activities related to health, postal, communication needs, and education to which the ex-combatants also contributed by providing their skills and labor. 'In the beginning, when I looked at the people I did not find them communicating with each other. Then I used to think that they were hostile to me. But when I started working with them in construction of health post, they behaved with me like a normal people in the community. So I started to build a good relationship with them. I am overjoyed to be back to my village' says Naresh (name changed) an ex-combatant. 'Before, I was studying in Grade 5 in the school, but I do not want to go back to school again. I wanted to acquire a new skill that would enable me to earn a living in a decent way,' he adds. They are constructing a post office building with the support from the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) after completing the health post and school building.

'We do not define ourselves by class, ethnicity and political ideology' say Ramesh Tiwari, a local political leader from Tiwari Bhanjyang. 'There is no political conflict with regard to

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Newly constructed Tiwaribhanjyang Secondary School Building

Tiwari Bhanjyang is an example of how development rarely takes roots without security; it is also true that security does not exist where human beings do not have access to enough food clothes, shelter, education, medicine to survive.

development of Tiwari Bhanjyang. The political parties work together and have decided to invest most of the budget of the village development committee in the improvement of motor track and payment for the teachers in the high school,' he adds. A local resident reported that ex-combatants who have returned to the village are earning their livelihood in a decent way through the skills they have learned. They are no more hostile to the local community, while the local community also does not judge them by their activities undertaken during the insurgency. Recently, the CPN Maoist party returned the confiscated property of a displaced family at Pyauli, a neighboring village of Tiwari Bhanjyang. It was reported that the family was going to start a restaurant soon.

Presently, Tiwari Bhanjyang is no more a killing field. The village is peaceful, enriched with agro forestry and terraced paddy fields, which form a mosaic of authentic rural hilly settlements of Nepal. The village has been connected to a motor track now and the lower secondary school has been upgraded to a high school, and the local people have a desire to further upgrade it to a higher secondary school. The Area Police Post Office which was lifted during the conflict has now come to regular operation again in the village. The new enterprises such as private boarding school, groceries establishments, hair dressing, tailoring shops, etc are in operation with the increment in self employment opportunities. The local people want to have a bank and are demanding the return of Nepal Bank Limited.

Conclusion

Tiwari Bhanjyang is an example of how development rarely takes roots without security; it is also true that security does not exist where human beings do not have access to enough food clothes, shelter, education, medicine to survive. It is not only Tiwari Bhanjyang that has benefitted. The Peace Building From Below (PBB) project initiated by RRN also reaches 45,000 beneficiaries of 150 Community Based Peoples Organizations of 20 Village Development Committees of two conflict prone hilly districts of Nepal, with the vision of developing a new peace building (conflict recovery) model that can be replicated across the country.

Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), established in 1989, is a Nepali non-government, social development organisation involved in rural development, action-oriented research and policy advocacy focusing on peasants, poor women, dalits and indigenous nationalities, and other vulnerable communities through the process of facilitation, social mobilisation, empowerment and self-organisation. RRN's work is based on the four-fold approach to rural reconstruction covering: education to combat illiteracy and empower people to access their rights; sustainable livelihood to fight poverty; health to prevent disease, and self-government to overcome civic inertia.

Peace Building from Below (PBB) is implemented by Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) in 20 VDCs of Bhojpur and Sankhuwasabha districts of eastern Nepal. The project is funded by Government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency-CIDA. The goal of the project is to contribute towards sustainable peace building in Nepal.

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