

Underlying Causes of Poverty Analysis and Contributions Towards a Program Approach



By: Brigitta Bode
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INTRODUCTION

CARE is transforming itself into a rights based organization that will identify and work to address the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice. To enable this shift, the organization is committed to work through programs – ‘coherent sets of initiatives that involve a long-term commitment to specific marginalized and vulnerable groups’.¹ CARE has been working through diverse geographically scattered initiatives, such as health, education, governance, livelihoods, that address one or two aspects of income and social poverty with limited impact on the larger dynamics that perpetuate various forms of discrimination, exploitation, and poverty. CARE recognizes the need to create development portfolios that address the multiple causes of poverty and contribute to forms of civic engagement through building deliberative processes that include the poor, and enable them to engage and participate in socio-economic development and governance.

This new approach, however, requires a deeper understanding of the forces that shape social, political, and economic processes. What is needed is social analysis that identifies geographically marginalized spaces and the poorest population within these, and explores the conditions and dynamics around their life worlds – social structures and forms of discrimination (around class, caste and gender), access to public resources and state funded entitlement schemes, land tenure relations, and the larger political culture. With this view, CARE Nepal is now integrating social analysis into its ‘program’ activities. During the past year, staff conducted analyses to explore the underlying causes of poverty in over 40 village development councils in the inner, eastern and central Tarai.²

These systematic investigations with program participants have not only highlighted the conditions of the people that CARE wishes to work with, but also the ways in which the challenging reality that structures the day-to-day lives of these people can be transformed. Through a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the ability – or inability – of people to procure sufficient food, negotiate with power holders to access key services and entitlements, and participate in community as well as local governance decisions, CARE and its partner staff have been able to assist program beneficiaries to devise strategies and tactics to improve their economic condition and address their social marginalization. This paper outlines the analysis process and the social action that has emerged, as well as the larger organizational implications of mainstreaming social analysis in the context of learning and knowledge sharing. The report also highlights the findings of the local level studies that have been conducted and places them into a larger context by linking them to the macro level.

THE ANALYSIS PROCESS

1.1 Units of Analysis

In January 2008, CARE Nepal engaged in an analysis process in its CHULI³ working area in the eastern Tarai and Chure areas. This work was facilitated by staff from CARE Bangladesh’s Social Development Unit and brought together around 20 CARE Nepal and Partner staff from various levels – senior to field facilitators – within CHULI’s working area and key persons from the country office in Kathmandu.

¹ CARE, 2008. *What is a Program Approach?*. CARE USA: Program Impact, Knowledge, and Learning Team.

² The analyses have been conducted in the working areas of the CHULI program, and JIWAN, SAKCHAM, SAMANATA and SHAKTI projects.

³ CHULI refers to the Churia Livelihood Improvement Program that integrates a diverse range of projects such as JIWAN, JANSEEP and SAKCHAM into a program approach.

A first step was to determine the geographic unit (hamlet, village, village development committees, and district) to study in the context of the larger working area. In light of decentralization policies in South Asia, local government is an important conduit through which public sector rural development efforts are carried out. During the past few decades, however, Nepal has done poorly in its decentralization efforts and for the past six years, there have been no locally elected bodies. Rather, village development committees (VDCs) – the lowest unit of government in Nepal – are administered through an appointed official, VDC secretary, and administrative departments, chaired by the Local Development Officer (LDO), who in turn coordinate with an advisory board that consists of the VDC-level chairmen of the political parties that are represented in parliament. CARE Nepal recognizes that governance is a key area that needs to be addressed to ensure that marginalized and excluded groups are able to access entitlements and public resources, as well as basic services. Further, CARE Nepal recognizes that democratization processes involve public cooperation and forms of engagement in the political arena.

VDCs were thus selected as one of the geographic units that need to be studied. During the research process, staff visited the District Development Office and held discussions with key officials to take into account the perspective of the district level administration to identify the poorest VDCs. Since then, staff in CARE Nepal's CHULI program have created a set of criteria for VDC selection, based on the findings of the UCP analysis. This consists of a mix between the District Development Committee's indicators and CARE's indicators (extent of landlessness, disaster vulnerability, population of dalits and janajatis and conservation sensitivity).⁴

Once the VDCs are selected, staff arranges a meeting with members of local government and informal elites. Collectively, this group works to construct a map that outlines the main roads, rivers, canals, forest lands, and then notes the villages, key resources (such as schools, temples, mosques, health posts, etc.) as well as the residential locations of key elites (present VDC board members, formerly elected members, or other influential actors). This map visually illustrates power centers (concentration of resources and powerful actors) and poverty pockets (few resources, poor infrastructure). Finally, the group is asked to mark the communities with the highest number of dalits / janajatis. This process produces a map that points to the 2-3 poorest communities that can then be explored in more detail through field visits.⁵

2.2 Streams of Inquiry and Methods

A next step is to collectively explore the purpose of analysis and the types of analytical categories that needed to be considered. The areas of inquiry that emerged through this process include resource distribution, land tenure relations, including remuneration for work, access to resources (e.g. loans), caste and gender dynamics, and forms of exploitation. The analysis begins through the use of methods that allow the facilitator to understand how the community is spatially organized in terms of neighborhoods, resource distribution within neighborhoods, and the types of houses that people live in. At the same time, a group of facilitators engage elderly persons to construct a time matrix, or village history, that captures defining moments, beginning with the first settlement of the community. The time line captures key internal and external events that have had a transformative effect (positive or negative) on the community. A key activity is the transect walk, an important method to gain a sense of the neighborhoods within a community, introduce

⁴ CARE Nepal, 2008. *Ranking, Prioritization and Selection of Working VDCs for CHULI, Dhanusha District, Janakpur Program Cluster: CARE Nepal.*

⁵ During the UCP analysis that was conducted for the purpose of capacity building and learning, we selected the poorest and richest communities. This provided us with a comparative in terms of the lived conditions of the residents of the area in communities where powerful actors resided and brought key resources (roads, schools, etc.) as opposed to communities in which powerful actors were absent.

oneself and the work ahead to residents of all neighborhoods in the community, discuss the availability of people during the next few days and identify neutral spaces in which to hold meetings. In the following days, the facilitators meet with various groups in the community and explore class, caste and gender relations through various PLA methods, such as well being, dependency, discrimination and exploitation analysis. In the initial UCP analysis ⁶, considerable emphasis was placed on key methods:

Transect Walk	Identifying neighborhoods, land types, agricultural and other activities, problems and opportunities. Closely linked to resource map.
Resource and Social Map	Identification of key resources and location of households. First step to understanding resource allocation and politics and in identifying interest groups, relationships and differential access to resources.
Time Matrix	Identifying and classifying key events and exploring how they are connected. May be used at national, organization, community and personal and many other levels.
Well-being Grouping	Identifies peoples' perceptions of the different classes in their community. Critical first step in establishing interest groups
Dependency Analysis	Used in conjunction with well being grouping. Identifies the relationships between classes and explores financial arrangements (loans), sharecropping / share-rearing practices, and remuneration (wages)
Seasonal Calendar	Shows how various types of human activity and problems are shaped by the seasonal climatic cycle. Helps identify needs and appropriate timing of activities for various interest groups and the community as a whole. Also identifies the periods during the year in which the poorest households do not have work and can be used to generate discussions around coping strategies.
Caste Analysis	Identifies the caste groupings in the community and lays out the practices and rules associated with caste
Gender and Socialization Exercise	Explores how gender inequalities are embedded in socialization
Exploitation and Discrimination Analysis	Explores forms of economic exploitation and social / gender discrimination
Wage Matrix	Identifies wage rates / contract arrangements for different crops and activities

The findings of the initial UCP analysis were written up in a detailed report that was shared across the organization. Staff from the program cluster, in which the analysis was situated, carefully went through the report and in a workshop setting discussed the underlying causes of poverty that had been identified and the types of strategies they would employ to assist the beneficiary groups to address these.⁷

⁶ For discussion on these methods see: Bode, Brigitta. 2007. *Power Analysis in the Context of Rights-Based Programming*. Atlanta: CARE USA; and Bode, Brigitta, 2007. *Disaggregating Community through Social Analysis*. Atlanta: CARE USA.

⁷ This is not to say that CARE Nepal works to address underlying causes of poverty at the local level, without considering macro forces that create / perpetuate the conditions of poverty in communities. CARE Nepal also works through advocacy initiatives on a national level with key development actors, such as NGO consortiums that work on land reforms and women's rights.

UCP ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL ACTION

The materials that are generated through discussion, analysis and self-reflection capture the causes of and dynamics around inequity, discrimination, and exploitation and they are a powerful method to negotiate access to resources. In each of the areas that analyses were conducted, the program participants used the materials they had worked up through analysis – maps, seasonal calendars, wage matrices, exploitation analysis – to bring to light the social injustices that they face. For instance, in the CHULI working area, people used the VDC level resource map to gherao⁸ the Village Development Committee Chairman and the political party leaders to demand electrification of the poorest communities.

In SAMANATA, the local change agents organized a public meeting in which they presented the findings of the poorest community and a well off community.⁹ Social maps, well being analyses and seasonal calendars highlighted the extent of discrimination and the economic poverty of the community that periodically faces hunger. In the beginning of this session, each Chairman of the political parties present had been asked to share his party's political platform around poverty alleviation and following the village presentations the chairmen collectively, with the VDC secretary, identified resources (e.g. public ponds) under the control of the VDC that could be accessed and used by the most marginalized households in the poorest community to assist these women and men to abolish hunger and extreme poverty. At the end of this meeting, the VDC secretary and the political party chairmen made a commitments to hand over a pond to the poorest community, ensure electricity to light the pathways of the tole (hamlet), and repair existing and install additional public water points. The pond had been taken on contract by local powerful actors and the VDC secretary and the chairmen of the political parties had to negotiate the release of these resources and return the fees that had been paid by the contractor to the VDC for its lease.

In SAKCHAM, a group of women have used the maps and well being analyses that they had worked up in the communities to illustrate to district level officials that their communities have been excluded from the larger development process, as resources had been channeled to communities that are far less needy than their own. District officials listened and diverted resources earmarked for dalits and women to these communities.

SAKCHAM – Better Governance of the School Management Committee

CARE Nepal's SAKCHAM project works with marginalized women from ethnic and caste minorities to assist them to realize their potential in society. The project works through the 'Reflect' method, an empowering approach that enables women to analyze their conditions and act upon the causes of their marginalization and discrimination.

The women from Phaparbari in Makwanpur realized that school resources were not properly used called an 'open budget' meeting that included the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and other social leaders and demanded that the principal show its income and expenditures. The women had mobilized all interested parties to attend and during the 'open budget' meeting it became apparent during the meeting that the funds (NRP 48,000) the school had received had been appropriated for personal use by the principal. With the involvement of the VDC board and the PTA, the principle had to return the funds and work with the school management committee to allocate the funds to build latrines and make other improvements to the school.

⁸ A traditional form of protest in which a large number of people 'encircle' a government installation and restrict the movement of officials, unless their demands are met.

⁹ In this meeting, held in front of the VDC office, under a large banyan tree, there were roughly 150 people, the majority of whom were dalits.

In the SAMANATA working areas in the central Tarai districts of Nawalparasi, Kapilvastu and Rupandehi, the poorest households are addressing hunger through collective savings of rice and money and improved management of private and public resources. The well-being and dependency analysis, as well as the seasonal calendar highlighted that a significant number of households face lean periods in which they reduce food intake. Some of the women told that they consumed roti and salt clumps and spend a large part of the day in bed to avoid using energy. A transect walk through the community with a large number of people revealed that spaces were being 'wasted' in which seasonal vegetables could be cultivated. One woman told that she saves a 'fistful of rice' each time that she prepares a meal and that she uses this stock of food during the lean period. This created a discussion around others saving rice and as of January 2009, 15 quintals (15,000 kg) of rice have been saved and 38 savings groups have collected a total of NPR 3 lakh (300,000). The poorest groups have also been able to access ponds and engage in fish cultivation to supplement their food supply.

In all three working areas, the dependency and exploitation analysis, wage matrices and calculations of monetary losses on a daily, weekly, and annual basis, have been used by agricultural wage laborers to negotiate for increased wages. In many instances, this has led to a solidarity movement, whereby laborers from nearby communities have agreed to support their peers and deny work at wage rates that lie far below the government minimum standards. This has been an activity that has crossed the caste divide and has the potential of improving inter-caste relations among the poor.

SAMANATA's Wage Initiative in Kapilvastu, Rupandehi and Nawalparasi

CARE Nepal's Samanta project, implemented by the Dalit NGO Federation (DNF), is working with dalits to address the multiple forms of discrimination, marginalization and exploitation that they face on a daily basis. A key initiative in their work is the issue of 'unfair' wages. The project has been able to assist hundreds of laborers to increase their wages through multiple strategies that include collective bargaining and strikes.

Wage analyses in SAMANATA's working area have highlighted that seasonal daily agricultural wage laborers, on average, earn NPR 40 – NPR 80 per day and, in some cases remuneration is provided in kind (grain), clothing, or food. These wages lie far below Nepal's minimum wage of NPR 110, as well as below the subsistence levels of families. As a result, many laborers take wage advances or consumption loans during the lean season. This in turn leads to 'unfree labor relations', forcing the laborer to provide unremunerated services during weddings and other ritual ceremonies, as well as complete menial tasks, such as cleaning cow sheds. The lack of alternative employment opportunities in the immediate locality, the prospects of hunger during the agricultural off season, and the indebtedness of laborers to landlords forces them to accept the terms and conditions imposed.

A key issue that SAMANATA addresses is the issue of wage advances and consumption loans. This is being achieved through the re-introduction of collective grain banks through savings of 'fistful of rice', a traditional practice that used to be widespread across the northern Indian subcontinent, and collective cash savings. SAMANATA has provided the savings groups with a NRS 1,000 seed fund, as an initial savings pool. The grain banks and cash reserves allow households in need of food during the lean season to access rice / cash and avoid taking wage advances or loans, has enabled a large number of laborers to have greater bargaining power vis-à-vis landlords.

SAMANATA and labor leaders organized VDC level wage discussions in its working areas to raise the issue and gain support from the political parties to negotiate wage increases. These meetings were attended by the VDC board – chairmen of the political parties and the VDC secretary, a large number of laborers, as well as landlords. In six VDCs, where the political parties supported the initiative to implement the minimum wages set by the Government of Nepal, the landlords agreed to increase wages to NPR 110 and their commitment was recognized by local media. In Shivapuri VDC of Kapilvastu, the laborers from all communities within the VDCs (SAMANATA does not work in all communities in the VDCs), organized a khet jagaran abhyian in which laborers raised awareness of the minimum wage set by the state and explained their planned social action. A VDC mass gathering attended by a large number of residents from each community, the VDC board, and landlords, was used to raise the issue of unfair wages and landlords agreed to pay NPR 110. A key challenge that remains, however, is the willingness of laborers from India to work at daily wage rates of NPR 40 and thereby undermine the struggle of local labor.

The UCP analysis in SAMANATA has pointed to discrimination amongst members from various dalit communities. To reduce the intra-dalit discrimination, SAMANTA'S local change agents and local leaders have organized social interactions between various groups that include 'get togethers' in which people collectively prepare and share food, an important gesture that breaks down the notions of untouchability, which is based on rules around purity and pollution. In SAKCHAM, women from the poorest communities selected their own facilitators and mobilizers, who are applying the action research methods that are used in the UCP analysis in their own and neighboring communities. The findings from the well-being analysis have been used to select 218 women from the extreme poor category as beneficiaries of the project's livelihood schemes. Similarly, the women have exposed a large NGO scheme (NRS 36 lakh) that was to provide drinking water schemes to the poorest households, but had excluded the poorest communities. Through their solidarity, the women have also been able to challenge misappropriations of funds and resources by a school management committee and the Community Forestry User Group (CFUG). The efforts are supported by the Federation of Community Forest Users and networking organization that links more than 11,000 CFUGs.

SCALING UP AND INSTITUTIONALIZING UCP ANALYSIS THROUGH LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Following the first UCP analysis, CARE Nepal sent a team of facilitators from the eastern and central Tarai areas, some of whom had participated in the initial study, to Bangladesh to learn from the activities of the Social Development Unit. Here, staff were able to observe a community led development approach that places the poorest women and men at the center of activities, mobilizes interest groups (agricultural labor, rickshaw van pullers, and widows) within communities to build federations of natural leaders. The Nepal group learned how social research methods are used to trigger social action and how the approach is linked to local government. This was an important experience for the team, as they were able to see the ways in which collective analysis that encourages dialogue, self-reflection, and collaboration amongst CARE's impact groups within a locality can enable people to effect positive changes in their day-to-day lives. Such forms of analysis engage women and men in dialogic processes through which 'feeling and experiencing' social and income poverty, becomes 'knowing and understanding' why it exists, how it is perpetuated, and possible course of collective action towards its eradication.

Upon their return to Nepal, the CHULI staff who had participated in the UCP analysis, conducted additional analysis in their working areas. Shortly, thereafter, they also worked side by side with SAKCHAM staff to share the methods they had learnt. A significant difference, however, with CHULI, is that SAKCHAM, a project that works with women through the REFLECT method, taught the action research methods in their Popular Education Centers and worked with women from the poorest strata of society to become researchers and facilitators. The women from the SAKCHAM project are applying the methods and mobilizing their peers in 25 Village Development Committees.

In June 2008, CARE Bangladesh staff returned to Nepal and assisted the SAMANATA project in the central Tarai to conduct UCP analyses with around 15 change agents from the partner organization. Staff from the Bharatpur cluster, including the SHAKTI project and its partner staff, also attended. Facilitators from the CHULI area, who had experience in using the methods, and CARE Nepal's Social Analysis and Action Research Specialist co-facilitated the study. With a significant number of staff who had experience in using the social analysis methods, it was possible to engage the poorest community in one of the VDCs studied in collective action and work with local government to provide support.

In January 2009, staff from CHULI, SAKCHAM and SAMANATA held a workshop to discuss the findings of the UCP analyses across the three working areas and share the various initiatives that had followed. Most of the field staff had never met, but because of the consistency of the methods used, they had a common understanding of key issues and were able to share ideas, approaches, successes and challenges. It was agreed that each project could learn from the other through cross visits to observe and learn about specific initiatives that had succeeded.

In March 2009, the CHULI program team conducted a UCP analysis in Tulasi VDC in Dhanusha district. This five day rigorous process represented an opportunity to build capacity of the staff of six new partner NGOs and expose their executive members to the UCP process, its methods, analysis and application. By now, CARE Nepal has adapted the approach to include the political party leaders, civil society actors and marginalized members of local society.

“The Tulasi UCP analysis has helped partner staff and executive members to open their eyes. They were encouraged, motivated, and realized that this is a sound process to identify poverty pockets and reach “Poor, Vulnerable and Socially Excluded” groups. This is the beginning of our work to reach our goal and continuous follow up is required. UCP analyses will be conducted in over 10 new VDCs and this has now become an entry point for our work in VDCs in all CARE ongoing and future programs. I have visited so many villages in the Chure range, but without hesitation I can say that I have not seen such chronic poverty in my life.” Santosh Sharma, CARE Nepal's Social Analysis and Action Research Specialist, who has worked with the organization for 13 years.

CARE Nepal has now extended the UCP analysis into its third geographic cluster, Doti, in the western and far western region of Nepal. In March, 18 CARE Nepal staff participated in the UCP analysis in Tikapur VDC in Kailali district. Staff took an innovative approach and integrated the vulnerability dimensions into the analytical framework to facilitate the mainstreaming process of Disaster Risk Reduction that was initially promoted by the DIPECHO/SAMADHAN-II project. This capacity building process, in which staff from different projects participated will enable

UCP analysis to be mainstreamed in the Doti working area. Thus the VSL project will use the UCP process to identify the poorest areas in the regions and the most marginalized households within these; whilst the CSP / ASHA project will employ the UCP analysis process to support the VDC planning process. The analysis will further enhance CARE Nepal's understanding of the underlying causes of poverty and enable the staff to work with local communities and government to address these.

SELF-REFLECTION (CARE and Partner NGO staff)

The analysis process and the findings have demanded that CARE and partner staff reflect on their own attitudes and behavior, as well as their biases, towards the poorest. In Nepal, CARE implements its activities through Partner NGOs, with field facilitators being drawn from the locality in which the initiatives are located. Depending on the type of project, field facilitators may be upper, middle or lower caste or janajati, whilst 50 percent tend to be women. The analysis methods raise issues that involve not only the physical poverty of the poor, but also elucidate the various forms of exclusion associated with caste and gender. During the UCP analysis, teams work in groups in the field and then return to a workshop setting where they process the data and present their findings. Field facilitators who are dalits/janjatis/women are able to place the discriminatory practices into a larger context. They may also challenge the ways that staff from better off/higher castes present the information, pointing to paternalism and/or caste system. Finally, analysis and discussions around access to resources or wage remunerations of agricultural labor may highlight the class interests of the Partner NGO. For instance, we found that senior staff of the partner NGO tended to argue in favor of landlords and their plight to ensure sufficient income from agriculture, rather than concerns around the hunger situation that we had encountered in our study.

ENDING ELITE CAPTURE

The deeper understanding has changed the ways that CARE and its partners locate their activities. Earlier, CARE and partner staff used to engage with local society through gatekeepers – local formal or informal elites – who guided the staff in terms of where to work. This strategy is to some extent a reflection of field staff's own backgrounds and biases. CARE Nepal works through local partners and the majority of the field based facilitators come from the areas in which they work. Many staff find it easier to work in the communities that reflect their own (caste/class) backgrounds; however, it is likely that these communities are not the most excluded and marginalized. Further, it is customary to meet with formal or informal elites prior to the start up of any field activities to share the intent of the work and gain their support. To ensure a good rapport and support for the project activities, field staffs are likely to follow the suggestions of elites where their work should be located.

Allowing locally powerful actors to influence the decision where to locate program activities is problematic for several reasons: a) it creates potential for the activities to be 'captured' by elites and may be used in the future to gain political mileage; b) there is a likelihood that powerful actors may exert control over the types of activities that can or cannot be conducted; and c) it

raises concerns among the intended beneficiaries that CARE and its Partner NGO are aligned with the prevailing power structure.

For instance, in SAKCHAM's field area in the buffer zone of the inner Tarai, CARE was working over the past few years implementing Natural Resources Management projects. In Garibas VDC, CARE's partners and other NGOs were concentrated in ward number 3, a relatively well off area with roads, schools, a health post and a radio station. The residents' access to services was evident in that most people had been able to obtain land certificates for their homesteads. Ward number 5, however, had no roads, no drinking water sources, with its residents largely comprised of janajatis and dalits. The mapping process in which all communities and resources within the VDC are visually displayed on a map that is constructed with residents from different parts of the locality and double-checked, has ensured that CARE's activities are not captured by elites and reach the neediest.

It is interesting to note that in some instance, the final stage of the mapping process where formal elites, the VDC Board members, identify the poorest communities may involve considerable disagreements between the members, some of whom vie for resources. It is good to let such arguments ensue and see how the members are ultimately able to resolve their differences (or not). It yields important insights into the dynamics of local government and helps the staff present to identify key allies and/or difficult personalities in their work ahead. Generally, the resource/power maps are clear and point to the poorest localities and staff can physically verify which of these is the most disadvantaged in terms of location, ethnic/caste composition, access to resources, etc.

IDENTIFICATION OF UNDERLYING CAUSES OF POVERTY

The analysis has identified locally specific causes of poverty and pathways to address these. The distinction between local causes of poverty and larger macro issues that can only be addressed through advocacy and/or broad social movements at the national level is an important one. For instance, access to public resources (e.g. roadside and canal side lands, state-funded entitlement schemes, funds for dalit, janajati or women's groups), as well as participation and sharing of benefits from natural resources management schemes, access to key services, such as land and citizenship certificates, participation in the management of schools, as well as access to schools by dalits and other marginalized groups, etc. are important issues that can be addressed at the community/VDC level to significantly improve the lives of the poor over the long term and re-gain (self) respect. Forms of discrimination and exploitation can also be addressed within the communities. For instance, in all of the three working areas in which UCP analyses have been conducted, project beneficiaries have collectively negotiated better wages to reduce the exploitative practices that were identified during the analyses. Macro-issues, such as unequal access to land for cultivation requires land reform and needs to be addressed from the center. Similarly, representation of dalits and women in the elected and appointed state system requires legislative measures.

A Note on “Communities”

The analyses in the Tarai/Chure areas have pointed to key issues across the region: high incidence of landlessness, unequal access to public lands, poor governance, discrimination on the basis of class, caste and gender, poor social development (education, health, sanitation), and in the Chure and inner Tarai areas, poor stewardship of natural resources. As discussed earlier, this work has focused on ‘the local’ and needs to be contextualized (see below). At the same time, it is important that the more detailed discussions of the institutions and practices that perpetuate poverty and marginalization are considered in relation to the notion ‘community’.

Scholars and practitioners have repeatedly noted the importance of being more critical of the concept ‘community’. (Watts, 2004; Bennett, 2005) In the development sector, there is a tendency to see ‘community’ as spaces of participation, self-organization, and pluralism. Yet residents of such ‘communities’ do not form a homogenous group, rather they are divided along ethnic (caste), class, and gender lines. For instance, some communities have a large number of different caste groups, whilst others have just few. Some have a relatively low equity divide, with the class difference between the poorest and richest households in the community being less pronounced. Some have a relatively large number of rich households, who own considerable assets, are influential locally as leaders of kin groups/tribes and members of important committees and governance bodies, and have connections to local, regional, or even national networks which provide them with access to knowledge, resources, and services when needed. In some communities, elites are less influential politically (this could be by choice), yet control considerable assets and resources, and are concerned mainly with maintaining and accumulating wealth; whilst in some communities, elites have little political influence beyond their immediate locality or community. These dynamics have important ramifications for the work in terms of social analysis and action.

From Micro to Macro Level Causes of Poverty

High Incidence of Landlessness and Income Poverty

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world. The Human Development Index ranks Nepal 142 out of 177 countries and more than 30 percent of the population live below the national poverty line (UNDP, 2009). Poverty in the Tarai region of Nepal is particularly pronounced, with nearly 50 percent of households in the Tarai owning less than 0.5 hectares of land (1.3 acres). In light of the lack of regional economic development, agriculture constitutes the backbone of the rural economy and more than 80 percent of the population is involved in this activity. Further, most land poor households have few secondary skills through which they can substitute their livelihood. Access to and control over land and remuneration for agricultural work are therefore key to understanding households’ ability to earn sufficient income to secure food throughout the year.

Across the communities studied in the eastern and central Tarai, the UCP analyses found that in the poorest communities, between 50 - 90 percent of households fall into the poor and extreme poor categories, with poor households having access or owning < 0.5 hectares (1.3 acres) and extreme poor households owning no land at all. Food security for these households ranges

anywhere from 1 – 3 months. In light of the lack of non-farm employment opportunities within the Tarai region, this forces household to sell their labor power to local landlords and many households supplement their income through migration to India, where they work as seasonal agricultural laborers. In some communities, few are able to find work locally, carrying stones, moving earth, or building public schemes, such as embankments. This work, however, is seasonal and not available throughout the year.

The poor in Nepal's eastern and central Tarai live in unhygienic conditions, uncertain of how the next months' needs will be met. They are predominantly dalit. They reside segregated from the higher castes, are often denied access to public facilities, such as water taps or temples. In local society they are 'untouchable' and their relations to the higher castes are defined through notions of impurity and pollution.

The similarities of the households that fall into the poor and extreme categories in the poor communities in the eastern Tarai and in the central Tarai are striking. They are predominantly dalits, lack education and skills, have large families, and are entangled in bonded labor relations. Except for the households in the Chure areas, where women and men collect fuel wood for sale to supplement their incomes, all face hunger during the lean season. The same characteristics were noted by CARE and partner staff in the subsequent studies that looked at a large number of communities.

The dependency analysis has highlighted that the poor and extreme poor households take advanced wages and consumption loans to purchase food and obtain medical treatment from landlords. The interest rates are often as high as 10 percent per months and people tend to remain indebted, unable to extricate themselves from the cycle of poverty. Similarly, landlords provide advances in wages, which are generally taken during the lean season when there is no work in agriculture and households cut back food intake. Indebtedness to landlords through loans or advances decreases the bargaining power of the poor and forces them to work at wage rates that are often half the rate that is generally paid the peak agricultural season.

Discrimination

Caste

Nepalese society is stratified along caste lines. Caste refers to an endogamous group with a common name and origin where membership is hereditary and linked to one or more traditional occupations. Castes are hierarchically ordered and being a member of a caste imposes certain obligations and restrictions in terms of social interactions. At the bottom rung of this social hierarchy are the 'untouchables' with the lowest social and economic status, subject to social and civic disabilities that range from prohibitions to use public facilities, such as water taps, to residential segregation.

Many state and civil society actors continue to use a discourse that ascribes this group to the lowest rung of society: 'untouchables, backward classes, low castes, etc.', or worse use the caste appellations that signify the status within the caste hierarchy, e.g. 'musahar' (rat-eaters) and 'chamar' (sweeper), rather than using the term 'dalit'. The term dalit – downtrodden, oppressed

– implies a conscious decision that rejects the caste system with all its inequalities and entrenched forms of discrimination.

The segregation and discrimination that dalits face on a day to day basis need to be addressed at the community, as well as the national level. Although, civil society organizations and NGOs have increasingly been working to raise awareness and address the marginalization and discrimination against dalits, much work remains to be done. The UCP analyses in different parts of the Tarai and Chure, as well as the inner Tarai, has highlighted that multiple forms of untouchability in rural areas continues to be widespread in multiple ways. These include physical segregation of residential spaces, denial or restrictions of access to public facilities, such as wells and water taps, and denial of access to services or requiring the use of separate utensils. During weddings or other ceremonies, dalits generally sit separately and are given the left-over food, after all others have eaten.

Dalits also face political discrimination. For instance, during the 10 year civil war, dalits were accused of siding with the Maoists, as their stated 'class' interests and the abolition of untouchability, were perceived to coincide with the interests of dalits. During this period, dalits faced increased abuses by higher castes and were denounced as Maoist sympathizers. In early 2005, when then King Gyanendra took control of the state, following the dismissal of the government, 'village defense forces' were formed, and with support of the government and security forces, they took up arms to 'flush out' the Maoists.¹⁰ Dalits were among the targeted population of these 'vigilante' groups.

In the context of 'vote bank' politics, dalits represent numbers, and during election time, candidates of the political parties visit dalit residential areas to make promises, distribute alcohol, and plead for their votes. Once elected, they rarely return to Dalit communities and fail to distribute public resources for infrastructural development. Dalits are usually excluded from any local level organizations, such as school management committees, and are treated as illiterates and drunkards, who cannot contribute to the welfare of society.

The state's commitment to the abolition of untouchability and the discrimination of dalits is not clear. Although the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1955 prohibit discrimination on the basis of "religion, race, sex, caste, tribe, ideological conviction or any of these", the 1963 Country Code creates ambiguity through a provision that argues for 'the protection of traditional practices' (World Bank, 2006). The Nepali state has only recently created provisions that ensure inclusion of dalits into central state mechanisms. Thus the Constituent Assembly Member Election of 2007 has mandatory provisions for all political parties to ensure proportional representation of various groups, including dalits (Kisan, 2007). At the district and VDC levels, the representation of dalits in governing bodies is virtually absent. The 1999 Local Self-Governance Act has prioritized members of the 'backward and downtrodden communities', but does not have a proportional representation clause to ensure their inclusion.

The lack of representation of dalits in elected government is a direct outcome of the failure of political parties to field dalit candidates (World Bank, 2006). Further, none of the constitutions of the major three political parties (Nepal Communist Party (Maoist), Nepali Congress, Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist-Leninist) have a provision to include dalits in their central committees, and only the Nepali Congress has a compulsory provision for dalit representation in ward and district level committees (Kisan, 2007).

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/172/>

Gender

Gender ideology figures prominently in all spheres of Nepali society. Women's rightful place in the home and those men are responsible for women's emotional and physical welfare is important component of this ideology. In day to day life, this principle of male responsibility informs not only marital relations, but also the exercise of power in multiple domains. In particular, the 'political' sphere is regarded as a male domain that excludes women, despite statutory provision for their inclusion at the local level.¹¹

The power of gender ideology stems from its reference to abstract qualities – strong/weak, rational/emotional – defined as masculine and feminine. Through this reference to biology and nature, gender representations are often used to naturalize inequalities and to preclude dissent within as well as beyond the household. In other words, contestable issues are often consigned to what Bourdieu¹² refers to as 'doxa' – that which is taken for granted. Gendered norms and roles, however, are changing. NGO participation and particularly women's entry into the labor market, although earning less than their male counterparts, have improved women's position as their ability to contribute income undermines the (perceived legitimate) domination by men on the basis of their provider's privilege.

Much work, however, remains to be done. Studies have highlighted that only a small percentage of women have legal ownership of assets (house, land, and livestock) (World Bank, 2006). Women are not only unpaid family labor, but when they are employed, they are generally underpaid. For instance, a 2005 World Bank study highlighted that women working in the agricultural sector were paid NPR 47 per day, whereas men received NPR 63 per day for the same work. (World Bank, 2006).

The UCP analyses have highlighted that gender patterns in the rural context of Nepal differ based on class. Amongst the extreme poor and poor households women (widows and married women) sell labor working in agriculture or others' homes. Given the purdah norms set by the better off in the communities, these women are likely to be subject to gossip and slander (character assassinations) and are vulnerable to sexual exploitation (the intersection of class and gender).

Our interviews with women and our observations indicate that better off and poor households from certain castes (e.g. the Yadavs in the eastern Tarai) practice strict forms of purdah in the home, whereby newly married and childless women have restricted interactions (e.g. veiling their faces) with male relatives in the husband's home. These restrictions are relaxed as women get older, yet they have important implications around women's ability to interact with the outside world and equally important, these practices set a standard by which other women (from the poorer classes) are 'judged'. The UCP analysis found that poor women from lower castes have generally greater mobility than their better off or poor counterparts from higher castes, but still require asking for permission to go to the bazaar or attend social festivities. Women all from all class and caste backgrounds have limited influence and control over allocation of resources and important decisions, such as education and marriage of their children.

This discussion highlights that women's powerlessness is mediated by their gender, as well as their class, age, and caste. Power – expressed in the social relationship between groups that determine access to and control over the basic material and ideological resources – lies at the heart of transforming gender dynamics. Enabling women's empowerment – a process that

¹¹ The 1999 Local Self Governance Act (LSGA) introduced mandatory representation of women in local government. However, such interventions are absent at higher levels of government (World Bank, 2006).

¹² See Bourdieu, P. and L.J.D. Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

changes the nature and distribution of power in a particular cultural context – must take these multiple dimensions into account.

Civil society organization and NGOs are working to bring about a transformation of gender relations at the household and community levels, but this work requires support at the policy level. The state's response to gender discrimination has been limited. Whilst the constitution does not permit discrimination based on gender, the state has failed to change existing laws that discriminate against women. At the same time, Nepal has ratified the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), requiring it to change 85 laws and 137 legal provisions that are discriminatory (Bennett, 2005). Further, although there is mandatory representation of women in local government, women are far outnumbered at the higher governance levels. Women are also under-represented in higher decision making positions in the political parties, making it difficult for women's interests to be addressed.

Governance

Nepal is in a state of political and social transformation. The 'people's movement' (jana andolan), mobilized by the Nepali Congress and leftist parties toppled the party-less panchayat regime in 1990 and ushered in a new era.¹³ The jana andolan had far-reaching implications as it transformed the political landscape by introducing a democratic process and restoring a multi-party system (Hachhethu, 2007). In the 1991 elections, The Nepali Congress (NC) emerged as the most powerful party with the Unified Marxist-Leninists (UML) as the major opposition party. At the same time, the new constitution maintained the constitutional monarchy and Nepal continued to be a Hindu Kingdom. Although the constitution granted equal rights to all citizens and prohibited discrimination based on religion, caste, or ethnicity, Nepal's upper and lower house, as well as the state administration continued to be dominated by higher castes. (Cailmail, 2008). Further, the new constitution barred political associations based on religion, community, caste, tribe, or region. As late as 1999, the 'Caste-Hill Hindu Elite' (CHHE), constituting 31 percent of the population, had maintained their dominance over the legislature, judiciary, parliament and top administrations holding 70 percent of the key positions (Lawoti, 2007). The Nepal Human Development Report 1998 pointed to the 'astonishing' continuity of the dominance of high castes in the state administration. In 1854 high castes held 98 percent of the posts and in 1998, 92 percent of the special class and first class positions in the civil service were still held by the same groups (NHDR, 1998: 145-146).

Initial accomplishments of the post panchayat state, e.g. the creation of new democratic institutions, were essentially meaningless, as the new state emerged as a centralized entity in which power was concentrated in the executive. A unitary state was able to concentrate political, fiscal and administrative functions. (Lawoti, 2007). With little space for the opposition parties within the democratic structures, extra-parliamentary means – such as strikes and protests – became the primary means of opposition politics. In 1996, the Maoists launched their 'people's war' in the western parts of the country. Within a few years, they were able to curtail the state's control over large areas of the country, limiting its power to urban areas and district headquarters (Lawoti, 2007). Among their 40 point demands were the creation of a secular republic, an all-party government, and elections of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, an end to untouchability, land reforms, and equal property rights for women.

¹³ This is not to deny that individuals from other political parties contributed to the Jana Andolan and its success. (see Uphadya, S. 2002. A dozen years of democracy: the games that parties play in Dixit, K.M. and S. Ramachandaran. (eds.) 2002. The State of Nepal. Lalitpur: Himal Books.

After a decade of a violent civil war that claimed over 13,000 lives, the Maoist ended the armed conflict. In the April 2008 Constituent Assembly Election, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) secured 229 out of 601 elected seats and emerged as the largest block in the Constituent Assembly, followed by the Nepali Congress with 115 seats and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) with 108 seats. The Madeshi parties of Nepal, who have long been opposing the domination of the state apparatus by the Pahadis (hill people), collectively secured over 75 seats and formed a powerful block in the new government. On May 28, 2008, the Constituent Assembly, in its first session, declared Nepal a federal democratic republic, and abolished the monarchy.

In May 2009, Prachanda, Chairman of the Unified Community Party of Nepal (Maoist) resigned as Prime Minister, following the refusal of the President of Constituent Assembly, Ram Baran Yadav (Nepali Congress), to dismiss General Katawal, the Chief of Nepal Army. The UML walked out of the Government. These events have again created great uncertainty about the peace process and the drafting of a new constitution. It has placed the Maoists back into the opposition and has opened the door for a political conflict that is likely to make it difficult for the needed reforms to be carried through.

Local Governance

In 1999, the government passed the Local Self-Governance Act, designed to accelerate the pace of decentralization. In 2002, the tenure of locally elected representatives was not extended, as the national parliament was suspended. Many donors and NGOs have continued to work towards 'good governance' at the local level, arguing that at minimum such work would strengthen local bodies' service delivery. This approach, however, is questionable, as local government is not elected. VDCs are now run by district level appointed secretaries and, who work with an "all party development and cooperation committee' (locally referred to as a VDC board), in place of elected local bodies. The UCP analyses have pointed to a high potential of resource capture by elites. The VDC political party chairmen are selected by party officials at the district level through a process that is neither clearly articulated nor transparent. There is no formal accountability mechanism of the VDC Board to the local constituency. Instead, the VDC Board is accountable to and overseen by appointed officials at the district level, with relatively little understanding of the micro-politics within the localities.

It is presently uncertain when elections at the local level will be held. Without democratic structures, and given the 'culture of political parties', i.e. the prevalence of patron-client relations that determine access to leadership positions, it is important to consider how much time and effort is invested in the present political process at the local level. It is probably wise to strengthen civil society groups and forums to better demand services and democratic decision making and to carefully assess the various actors (party chairmen) involved in order to build deliberative processes at the local government level that involves representation of women and dalits.

Social Development

Rural health services are keys in preventing and treating diseases. Health care centers tend to be concentrated in urban areas, whilst rural centers are understaffed (World Bank, 2006). Further, health care workers carry the same biases that prevail in larger society, making it difficult for dalits, who are viewed as impure, to receive services. The World Bank cites caste discrimination in the health care centers as a major factor that prevents dalit women from obtaining treatment (World Bank, 2006). There is also a lack of women practitioners amongst health care workers and in light of the purdah restrictions that women face, they are unlikely to undergo examinations to seek preventative care. The state has recognized the need to improve health care services, but has done little in practice to ensure that the poorest households can be reached.

The sanitation conditions in Nepal is a key factor that contribute to the extent of health problems among the rural population. In the Tarai, wells are often polluted and the quality of water is affected by the presence of arsenic. 73 percent of the population do not have access to sanitary facilities, forcing the majority of people to live in unhygienic conditions (Water Aid, 2006) The UCP analyses have pointed to abysmal sanitation conditions in both the Tarai and Churia. Open defecation is widespread, leading to contaminated water and food.

Over the past decades, the government has vastly expanded the number of schools in rural areas, however, the quality of education leaves much to be desired. Public education compares poorly to private schools, where 85 percent of the children pass the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination, as opposed to 15 percent in government schools (World Bank, 2006). There is also a need to ensure that children from poor and marginalized groups are able to attend schools. The research in the Tarai has found that in some instances, dalit children were prevented from attending school, in fear that they would pollute 'upper caste students'. There is a need for interventions that work with school management committees to include dalits and women in key committee positions so that the needs of children from underprivileged groups can be met. The UCP analysis also found high degrees of functional illiteracy amongst poor and marginalized adults and there is a need for adult education schemes. Literacy is an important way for adults to gain more confidence and prepare them to better engage with the world around them.

Stewardship of Natural Resources

In 1978, Nepal reversed its forest nationalization policy of the 1950s and recognized community ownership and management of forests in the hills to reduce the decline of forests and prevent the chances of 'Himalayan degradation' (Gilmour and Fisher, 1991). This opened the way to a participatory approach with the potential of democratizing natural resource management by allowing forest users to re-negotiate access to and control over natural resources and to participate in making the 'rules' by which natural resources are governed.

There have been a number of initiatives towards the decentralization of forest management, including community forestry (CF), collaborative forest management (CFM), leasehold forestry (LF), conservation areas (CA) and buffer zone community forests (BZCF). Community forestry is the most widely practiced in Nepal and as of 2005, 13,300 Community Forest User Groups

(CFUGs) had been established across Nepal, the vast majority of which are located in the hills (Pravat, 2006). CFUGs cover 70 percent of Nepal's forest area.

Forests in the Tarai¹⁴, constitute 10 percent of the total forests in Nepal and are of high-value, unlike the more sparsely, subsistence-based forests in the hills (Ghimire, 1998). The Tarai still hold over 480,000 ha of forest land with high value hardwood species, such as Sal (*Shorea robusta*) (Pravat, 2006). The state (forest department) continues to maintain control over these valuable forest resources and makes active forest management impossible. Illegal logging and cross-border smuggling is widespread and leads to forest degradation. The UCP analysis (in 2008) in the Chure area found dalit communities adjacent to high value forests living in abject poverty. Few of the households from dalit communities were listed as part of the CFUG that was formed in 1997, but had not been able to complete the registration process. CFUG members were fearing to enter the forest area, as local elites associated with the Maoists had been involved in smuggling and were patrolling the forests to exclude 'legitimate users' from 'stealing'. The DFO noted that forests in the Tarai were not handed over because of the complex issue of distant users that was difficult to resolve and predicted that there was a limited chance of registering the CFUG and handing over the 13,000 hectare forest area in the near future.

The nearly 14,000 CFUGs include nearly 10 million beneficiaries of a total rural population of 17 million.¹⁵ They have had an important role in building leadership capacity amongst the rural population. More than 11,000 CFUGs are organized through a network organization, the Federation of Community Forestry Users (FECOFUN) that represents 8 million forestry users, and was the largest civil society movement that participated in the democracy movement of the 1990s.¹⁶ There is no doubt that CFUGs have played an important role in Nepali society. At the same time, CFUGs do not always include the poorest and most marginalized groups, and even when they do, key committee level positions are usually held by upper and mid-level castes.

CARE Nepal's Contribution (at macro level through its work at micro level) and evidence based influence at macro level

Given CARE Nepal's strengths lie in its strong connection to local communities and its understanding of the causes and conditions that perpetuate poverty in rural communities, through its on-going work at the grass roots level, CARE Nepal will be able to contribute evidence based knowledge at the macro-level and thereby amplify the voices of the poor and marginalized to inform development practices and debates. CARE Nepal has identified and is committed to focus on three program areas that have emerged through the analysis process: Women's Empowerment, Natural Resources Environment and livelihoods, and Justice and Equity for Dalits and Janjatis.

Despite the recent events – the dissolution of the elected CA assembly and the formation of a new government – which have created a set-back in the democratization process, there remain tremendous opportunities for CARE Nepal to engage and influence newly emerging state- and national level institutions, by contributing its vast micro-level experiences from various regions of the country. To this view, CARE Nepal has joined like-minded organizations and coalitions at the national level.

¹⁴ In this paper the term Terai includes the plains, the Chure/Shivalik hills, and the Bharbar.

¹⁵ Personal Communication with Charla Britt, November 2007.

¹⁶ Retrieved from www.fecofun.org

In the area of women's empowerment, CARE Nepal has joined hands with the National Women's Commission, the inter-party Women's alliance, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights(OHCHR) and the Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) network. The organizations share CARE's vision to ensure women's access and control over resources, increase their decision making power at the community and household levels, and put an end to religious beliefs and practices that undermine women's dignity and reduce their status to second-class citizens. Further, CARE Nepal is linking women's groups in its project areas with the Constituent Assembly to ensure that the issues that affect women from rural communities in different parts of the country are considered during the drafting of the new Constitution.

To improve the position of Dalits and Janjatis, CARE is working with the Dalit Federation at the national level to strengthen its efforts at the district level and ensure that resources allocated for the dalits are properly channeled and that district and VDC level officials represent the interests of this 'neglected' population. CARE also works with the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) to improve the lives of three highly marginalized janjati groups in several districts of Nepal.

Similarly, CARE's work to define 'poverty pockets' using multiple criteria of selection based on economic, social, and physical vulnerabilities to ensure that development interventions, after decades of NGO presence in the larger locality, are finally reaching the poorest of the poor in a systematic way. CARE is monitoring its work by focusing on 'impact groups' that are clearly defined to ensure that development programs reach those who are generally left out. CARE's impact groups are: "Women and girls from lowest strata of dalits, endangered and highly marginalized Janajatis, single women, migrant women workers, wives of migrant men living in poverty pockets of rural and urban areas of the country". 'Poverty pockets' include "economically poor, socially vulnerable people, generally excluded from development processes and opportunities and those living in disaster prone areas and with poor access to basic services and resources"

In its Natural Resources Management programs, CARE has shifted its focus to the impact groups defined above and is working to ensure that forest resources are utilized to include the well being of the poorest and most vulnerable. This process has highlighted the need to improve governance in the management and utilization of these natural resources. Through engagement at multiple levels – communities, CFUG areas, district level, and center – CARE is in a position to bring the various actors together and review the progress and identify shortcomings that continue to exist, particularly in terms of reaching the poorest areas and communities and involving the poorest and most marginalized households in the management and benefits from forest management and conservation.

CONCLUSION

The UCP analyses and the methods that have been used across CARE Nepal's working areas have enabled the field facilitators and program participants to collectively begin the process of transforming power relations at the local level and have allowed the poorest women and men to begin to take control over their lives. At the same time, the work has highlighted that poverty cannot be addressed at either the local or macro level, but instead requires a multi-pronged approach that involves analysis and self-reflection, and social mobilization and collective action within and across communities, as well as advocacy with other like-minded organizations at a national level to bring about the fundamental changes in laws and policies that are needed.

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