



Children in Dhamaura village

Hope (it's not just a buzzword)

(Abridged from Sarah Winterburn's Article published in VOX Magazine Oct- Dec 2016)

After a lifetime of hearing stories about Nepal from my parents, who spent the first years of their married lives together there, I visited last July. My purpose? To meet people and capture some of their stories, hopes and dreams. I stayed at Lalgadh Hospital – the busiest leprosy hospital in the world – set up by Nepal Leprosy Trust (NLT), a Christian organisation inspired by Jesus' compassion to serve the poor and sick. NLT's aim is to empower those affected by leprosy and other disadvantaged people.

I visited villages that had been through

NLT's Village Alive Programme (VAP), as well as those up for consideration to start the programme. There was an immense difference. VAP focuses on empowering untouchable (Dalit) villages – communities of people who are on the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system and often considered worthless by those of higher caste. In villages that had not been through the programme, there was a weariness about the people. Their families, for generations, had been treated as outcasts from society, discouraged from coming to school, paid minimally for hard labour. They saw no

hope of change. The women hid their faces, the men seemed defeated.

The villages that had been through the programme were totally different. The women had confidence, a spark of hope. They had seen change in their lives and those of their children, and they knew that they had the right to a better standard of living. They knew that their lives were worth just as much as anyone else's. They were willing to stand up for their children, to fight barriers against their children's education and future. Conditions are still poor, but now they have toilets and understand the necessity of good hygiene. They have saved money and have started small businesses.

Those who work with NLT are inspired to help by the hope that they have in Jesus. This hope changes how they view people who are

“untouchable”, who are “cursed by the gods” - the poorest of the poor. It fuels them to continue in situations so desperate that others would never have started. We, in Ireland, sometimes feel conflicted about our interactions with those in ‘developing countries’. If we can, we want to help but we don't know how – we don't trust charities, we don't want to do more harm than good, we don't want to impose. The best thing that those who want to help can do is to give hope to those who have none, to show the love of Jesus to those who have been utterly rejected. Empower people to take control of their own situations, give them the ability to realise their own dreams. Our burden, our duty is this; that we who have hope must share this hope with others.

More details on www.nlt.ie or contact info@nlt.ie



Harsahi village meeting in relation to VAP with Mike Winterburn, chairman of the board of directors of NLT Ireland and Dr Sarah Jay, University of Limerick (UL).

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”. Jeremiah 29.11. NIV

Village Alive ticks all the boxes - and a few more besides

Village Alive Programme (VAP) 3 was implemented by Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital Services Centre (LLHSC) in 2 low-caste villages of the south-eastern Terai region between 2014 and 2016. Supported by NLT Ireland, Irish Aid and Effect: Hope, the project goal was to improve the health and wellbeing of low-caste and poor people. Below is an excerpt from the evaluation report of VAP 3 by Kerstin Beise, Consultant for Inclusion and Disability, DARE THIS cooperative, www.dare-this.com



Chepkat village women's group discussion

VAP has been successful with very positive outcomes and impacts. Almost all expected outcomes have been achieved and a number of other positive findings can be added.

Strong and active village groups have been established in two villages, Chepkat and Harsahi, with the participation of 122 women and 46 men. The main impact can be seen in the increased self-awareness, self-efficacy and confidence of the villagers to change their own lives. The example of toilet constructions shows that the entire community participated in problem solving. Supported by intensive guidance and assistance of the VAP team and the Self Help Groups (SHGs), the communities have attained increased health, better education and better earnings.

The local government as major stakeholder is well aware that the village groups are

important local partners for their development strategies. While the path out of poverty remains long, the close future collaboration between government and newly empowered Dalit communities will probably still need some, at least moral, support by LLHSC.

The compassion of the SHGs as development facilitators has been highly valued both by the Dalit communities and LLHSC. Based on their partnership, participatory community development has been made possible, in which all sides contributed their expertise. It is hoped that this successful concept will be continued and extended, a wish that has been expressed by all stakeholders. To do so, LLHSC will have to find ways to ensure future SHG support, despite their members growing older, and continue to promote independence of the village groups after the project support ends.

From curse to cure

The link between social standing and stigma elimination has long been recognised by NLT, and continues to direct the charity's work to empower some of the poorest people in Nepal. As those affected by leprosy learn ways to help themselves and others, their self-esteem and status grow. The success of this synergy will now be measured in a research project run by the University of Limerick (UL). The year-long collaboration between Professor Orla Muldoon (UL), Dr Sarah Jay (UL), Psychology department and Mike Winterburn (Limerick Institute of Technology) will gauge the success of NLT's community projects in overcoming the stigma of leprosy in 4 rural areas of Nepal.

Using different research methods, the study ties in with the UL psychology department's work on how social identity can help cure social problems. It will explore the Village Alive Programme, in which villagers are empowered to improve the health, literacy levels, economic wellbeing, agricultural and other skills of their community, thus growing in status themselves.



Research data collection, June 2017. NLT is very grateful to the funders, the Irish Research Council New Foundations Scheme

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to build a life, a family, a community and a nation through a regular donation.
Support a child's education



Upasana, aged 4 years, in her new school uniform. We are very grateful to an Irish family who, just this month, confirmed their support for Upasana's education in Nepal.

If you would like the chance to support a child's education, to journey with a family such as Upasana's, contact Vera by email at info@nlt.ie

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