

# From Looking to Lalgadh to Self-Reliance

At a VAP review meeting, a villager stood up and said, 'Lalgadh is like a parent looking after its children. We are very thankful.' Arbind Sah from Lalgadh responded, 'Lalgadh won't always be here. You must work with government and other stakeholders yourselves to help the village.'

This has always been one of the principle aims of NLT during VAP: to have a working relationship with the Nepali government and to encourage villagers to lobby them to support change in their communities. This idea is taking root in each of the villages. In Gourishanker, the vice mayor told villagers to immunise their children and said that the government will pay for transport to the health post for pregnancy tests. In Manara the government health representative has committed to visiting the

new community building (below) 3 times a month: for immunisation, MCH clinics and general health visits. A government official in Odraha promised, 'If all children from the village go to school, I'll give funds for education - food and books etc. I'll also arrange a teacher to give afterschool lessons in the community building.'

The mayor Bechan Das (pictured below left) is also keen to build on NLT's successes in Itarharwa. Determined to fight for low caste people, he tried to run for government but did not secure enough 'tickets' to stand. Instead he ran as an independent and won, vowing to fight government corruption. '752 out of the 753 mayors in Nepal got a big car as part of their job. My wife wanted a big car but I used the money instead to buy a motorcycle and a JCB tractor to use in the villages for public work.' He is currently negotiating with the government to build 53 'pukka' (concrete) houses for the village.

With the government on board in these five villages, nothing can stop them!



Text and images by Ruby Thomas



## Nepal Leprosy Trust News

Beating leprosy, breaking stigma and building lives

Winter Newsletter 2019 Issue 20



Clockwise from left: Sewing classes in Odraha, Rural Health Facilitator Somani Devi Sadha in Manara, and a woman washing her face in Gourishanker.

### Village Alive Brings Women Alive

Thanks to the Village Alive Project (VAP), communities have been rapidly improving in the areas of education, sanitation and economic growth. Another significant, though less quantifiable, benefit is the changing role of women in these communities. No longer confined to their homes, women have been spearheading improvements such as securing grants to start their own pig or goat-keeping; planting mushrooms, and receiving sewing training so they can start small businesses.

Young girls are now attending school, which this was previously discouraged.

Women are also being promoted to positions of leadership. Somani Devi Sadha (above) is proud to have been elected as her village's Rural Health Facilitator. 'I can talk to others comfortably and frankly, so I can speak up for people.' She has been trained to recognise dengue fever, malaria, TB and cancer, as well as how to promote good nutrition. 'Before, I had no identity. Now people trust and respect me. I have to trust them too

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## Not a Hostel but a Home

Another brilliant project of Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital has started this year: a hostel that accommodates girls in need. 10 residents (pictured below) aged between 7 and 14, now enjoy safe, healthy, loving accommodation during term time while attending school. Visiting the girls' homes in surrounding villages, it was clear how much hope their education and provision have given their families.



Twelve-year-old Champa now stays in the hostel during term time. She has lived with her grandmother Vishna Maya (pictured right) in a house built partly of cardboard since she was 5 months old when her father was killed by an elephant. Both Champa and her grandmother have been treated for leprosy at Lalgadh. Now Vishna Maya is full of optimism for Champa's future.



Chandrika, aged eleven, is another term-time resident of the hostel. Previously she slept on a mud floor with no mattress alongside her mother, father, 2 brothers and sister. Every July the family goes to the Punjab to pick rice. They are paid in cash, which they prefer to the food they receive for their labouring work in Nepal. Thanks to the hostel, she will be able to focus on her studies without constant worries about food and safety. Her family (left) are excited to see Chandrika gaining an education.



*If you would like the chance to support Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital's girls' hostel, contact Vera by email at [info@nlh.ie](mailto:info@nlh.ie)*



Clockwise from left: a woman in Itarharwa lifts her veil, young girls in Odraha attend school, a woman in Itarharwa with a young child.

*"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with an ever increasing glory" Corinthians 3:18*

and bring people together to help the village. The hardest thing about my job is how to manage all the diseases and people's requests for help.' Before VAP, she says children were wandering around the village, dirty and not going to school. 'Lalgadh taught us why education is important and why we must keep clean. Now we must help ourselves.'

Lalita Labh, a community worker at Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital, is a passionate advocate for women's rights. She says the village of Itarharwa has been transformed by the VAP. She describes how, before the project began, women would keep their faces almost completely covered with a scarf and were afraid to voice their opinions or even talk. Yet now, women in Itarharwa are ready to speak up and have a say in the development of their community, breaking the veil of silence both literally and physically.