

DFID Nepal Rural Access Programme (RAP3) Monitoring,
Evaluation and Learning Component

REALITY CHECK APPROACH (RCA) MIDLINE REPORT 2016

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Submitted by Itad
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Disclaimer

The work is a product of Itad Reality Check Approach team. The findings, interpretations and conclusions therein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department for International Development (DFID) or the Government of Nepal.

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Acronyms and Glossary

ANM	Assistant Nurse Midwife
Brahmin	Higher caste Hindu (formerly regarded as priest caste)
Chettri	Higher caste Hindu (formerly considered as warrior/ruler caste)
Dalit	Lowest caste Hindu (formerly referred to as untouchable)
Dashain	15 day long national festival in Oct/Nov
DFID	Department for International Development, UK Aid
ECD	Early Childhood Development (centre)
FHH	Focal Households (i.e. neighbours of the HHH)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
GON	Government of Nepal
HHH	Host Households; where members of the study team stayed with families
IC	Indian currency (the colloquial reference to Indian rupees (INR). 1.6 NPR = 1 INR (April 2016))
JTA	Junior Technician Agriculture
Khukuri	Nepali term for knife with inward curving blade
lakh	100,000
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPR	Nepalese rupee
ODF	Open Defecation Free
ORS	Oral rehydration salts
Quintal	A unit of measurement of weight usually (but not always) equivalent to 100kg
Raksi	Alcoholic drink made from millet
RAP	Rural Access Programme
RBG	Road Building Group
RCA	Reality Check Approach
RMG	Road Maintenance Group
Ropani	A Nepali unit of measurement of area; 1 ropani is approximately 0.13 acre
SED	Socio economic development
SG	Super (building) groups; name used for small groups of usually young and fit men who undertake the harder physical work on roads under RAP 3
Terai	Southern plains of Nepal extending from west to east
VDC	Village Development Committee

Executive Summary

This report presents the main findings of the Midline Reality Check Approach (RCA) study conducted in April 2016, two years after the baseline study was conducted in 2014. The RCA contributes to the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning component of the Rural Access Programme 3 (RAP3) as the main qualitative element of the mixed methods approach to impact assessment, which also includes a quantitative household survey. The midline RCA study involved researchers **returning to the same households and communities** with which they had lived in the baseline: Humla (1 location), Bajura (2 locations), Accham (1 location) and Doti (2 locations). The Reality Check Approach differs from most other approaches to research in that it is not theory-based so that there are no preconceived research frameworks or research questions. Through informal interaction with the wider community, the researchers sought to understand what changes had happened in the interim two year period. The findings are presented in terms of how people living in communities in the project areas see change and how they generally perceive the relevance of the RAP interventions.

As indicated in the RCA baseline study in 2014, with the exception of the study location in Humla, the main source of income in the study locations is from remittance with a long tradition of working abroad. Farming, we noted in 2014, was not seen as a means to make a living but as means to feed the family only. So when people talk about being farmers or returning to farming (for example when RAP employment ceases) they refer to being subsistence farmers and few people have aspirations for their children to continue farming and stay in the villages.

The relevance of the road for people is mixed. Where the roads have been completed some time ago and are being maintained under the RAP3 programme, there has been a noticeable increase in vehicle use since 2014, mostly for passengers and to bring goods **into** the village thereby diversifying what can be bought conveniently and locally (albeit at a higher price than in town). For many, trails are still preferred as being quicker and less costly than using transport and in some places bridges are still needed to realise the potential of the road access. Although people are pleased that there are more passenger vehicles, shorter journey times, less hazards and more comfortable journeys because more Boleros are plying the improved routes rather than tractors but journeys are infrequent and they consistently maintained that it was primarily shopkeepers and transport providers who benefitted most from road maintenance. In road construction areas the relevance of the road is harder for people to imagine, especially in Bajura where the roads are not perceived as linking anywhere important and since land is infertile and un-irrigated they do not see any potential for selling agricultural produce.

In both 'build' areas, people living in the study villages questioned the relevance of using labour-intensive methods to build the roads. In the Humla study locations, people noted that the work is slow, can be very hard and shared safety concerns. They reasoned that RAP uses labour-based methods because they want to *'improve people's livelihoods'* but most people we talked with said they did not need the work as there are lucrative alternative income earning opportunities in this area and the main motivation to work on the road is as a social service *'for our children and grandchildren, not for the money or savings'*. Similar to Humla, people in Bajura also told us *'the money (from RAP) is insignificant'* compared to their alternatives of earning abroad. Their main motivation to work in a RBG is because it means they can stay at home with their families, albeit temporarily.

RAP construction work for women is seen quite differently and earning cash for women whose husbands are working abroad is hugely significant, improving relationships with in-laws because they

contribute cash to the family and for those living on their own having regular cash means they are less worried about the timeliness of remittances and can manage household finances more easily. They also shared that they like this freedom to make their own decisions about personal spending and have the confidence to involve in other family investment decisions. Employment in maintenance work is significant, mainly because this is targeted to those who are needy and for a variety of reasons have constrained options for earning income. They comprise widows, divorcees and others living in difficult circumstances or unable to participate in work abroad. The maintenance workers we met all indicated that the cash incomes they received were very important to them and worried about what would happen when their contracts ended.

The socio-economic activities which have ceased during 2015 are not really missed. Poor access to irrigation made growing cash crops unattractive and unpredictable prices and inadequate marketing systems makes migration for work always the preferred option. Very few people were able to point out anyone who had achieved with support of the programme and a few exceptions were described as persistent, hardworking and protective against competition and most had been 'self-starters' who had already begun their enterprises before the RAP initiated SED activities. None of the vegetable and produce collection centres set up under RAP were active in any of our study locations.

Conversations were undertaken to understand what other changes over the last two years were important to people and place connectivity and road building and maintenance in context. The drought over the last two growing seasons was the most talked about change and has led people to rely more on migration as people need cash to buy food as their own stocks are too little to support them. The trend towards cash-based economies had already been established before the 2014 baseline but is now greater because of the extra need to purchase food and pay for electricity as more households get electricity connections. Access to drinking water was a major concern in Accham villages. The diversity of food consumed has changed as a result of the drought, especially consumption of vegetables. As well as increasingly wanting to work abroad, families shared their aspirations to own land in and eventually move to the Terai.

Cash is needed for electricity, mobile phone credit, education costs (a major drain on income), health costs as well as to buy food because of prevalent food stock shortages. Cash is also needed to support the growing trend of snacking and demands for pocket money are increasing especially where children know their parents now have cash (from RAP wages). In addition in Humla there was increased consumption of other convenience foods including milk powder and instant coffee. Alcohol consumption is increasing in both of the Doti locations and men in the RBG groups in both Humla and Bajura drink alcohol every day after finishing work.

Better roads have increased numbers of vehicles and importantly decreased use by tractors which further added to the problems of maintenance. Passenger transport fares have decreased slightly but people shared that the fares vary depending on one's bargaining power and tariffs fixed by the district were not complied with. In the Humla study locations there has been a marked increase in provision of development assistance since 2014, both by Government and NGOs. People say this is because of the road construction, the provision of electricity and the plans to develop markets here. People feel that development is a long way off, *'perhaps tens of years away'* but there is a new sense of optimism.

RAP is well known in the 'build' locations and project staff respected and appreciated because, unlike other programmes, they live in the village. They like that it pays cash and regularly, like the mandatory

savings (although amounts are considered too small to invest), like that the roads are strong and well-constructed and mostly appreciate that the RAP rules are strict but nevertheless accommodate seasonal aspects of providing work. There remains some confusion on how wages are calculated. Insurance is better understood than in 2014 and people understand that substitutes are not covered by insurance but the procedures to process insurance claims were said to be very difficult. First aid training was regarded as useful but first aid boxes are not replenished frequently enough. Road workers continue to complain about the boots they are supposed to wear which are both hot and often too big. They know that RAP requires them to wear these and gloves but some people think that wearing ill-fitting boots and gloves poses a greater hazard.

The report concludes with a number of study implications presented as observations made by people themselves.

In RAP maintenance areas, people noted:

- Shopkeepers and drivers are the main beneficiaries of better road maintenance while people say they like that there is more choice of goods to buy in local markets.
- Timetables and fixed fares for passenger transport would enhance usability
- Disappointment that there are no ambulances stationed at their local health centres
- They have no influence on the nature, timing or quality of road maintenance efforts as they feel it is all decided in the District.

People in road-construction areas noted

- That men do not need the road work as they have alternative and more lucrative work opportunities.
- That women benefit from having access to regular cash through RAP employment especially as they increasingly need cash for food, utilities and education costs rather than relying on irregular and unpredictable remittances but women with young children would also like to have opportunities to work with RBGs or RMGs
- More clarity on the calculation of wage payments and insurance procedures for RBGs and SBGs is needed.

On SED activities, people noted

- They were on the whole not concerned about the cessation of SED activities but felt there should have been more information about the closure of SED activities and any future plans.

Executive Summary

यो प्रतिवेदन अप्रिल २०१६ को मध्यावधी अध्ययन अन्तर्गत वास्तवीकता मुल्याङ्कन विधी (आर.सि.ए) को मुख्य निष्कर्ष हो । उक्त RCA २०१४ को आधारभुत अध्ययनको दुई बर्षमा गरिएको थियो ।

ग्रामीण पहुंच कार्यक्रम-३ को अनुगमन, मुल्याङ्कन र सिकाईका लागि अपनाइएको मिश्रित अध्ययन प्रणालीको गुणात्मक अध्ययनमा RCA विधीको महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका छ । यस बाहेक पारीमाणात्मक अध्ययनको लागि सर्वे विधीलाई समेत लागु गरिएको छ । मिड-लाइन RCA अध्ययन अन्तर्गत अनुसन्धानकर्ताहरुलाई आधारभुत अध्ययन गरिएको समुदाय र परिवारहरुमा पठाइएको थियो : हुम्ला (१), बाजुरा (२), अछाम (१) र डोटी (२) । अध्ययनको कुनै निश्चित सिद्धान्तमा आधारीत नहुने भएकाले यस RCA विधीको कुनै पुर्वनिर्धारित ढाँचा हुँदैन तसर्थ यसलाई अध्ययनका अन्य विधिहरु भन्दा केही फरक समेत मानिन्छ । अध्ययनकर्ताहरुले समुदायसँगको अनौपचारिक कुराकानीका माध्यमबाट गत दुई बर्षको समयमा भएका मुख्य परिवर्तन र उपलब्धी बारे जान्ने प्रयास गरेका थिए । यस प्रतिवेदनमा पेश गरिएका निष्कर्ष तिनै समुदायको परिवर्तन तथा यस पारीयोजना र यसले गरेका काम प्रतिको दृष्टिकोणका आधारमा तयार पारिएको हो ।

२०१४ को आधारभुत अध्ययन प्रतिवेदनमा उल्लेख गरिए जस्तै हुम्ला बाहेक अन्य अध्ययन जिल्लाहरुको मुख्य आय श्रोत भनेकाइ वैदेशिक रोजगारी हो । अध्ययन जिल्ला हरुमा प्रायः कृषि व्यवसायिक नभइ निर्वाहमुखी रहेको देखिन्छ । तसर्थ अन्तर्वाताका क्रममा स्थानीयहरुले RAP रोजगारीको समाप्ती पश्चात कृषिमा फर्किने योजना भएको बताए पनि उनिहरुको आशय व्यवसायिक कृषि नभइ निर्वाहमुखी तर्फ नै हुन्छ । त्यसबाहेक एकदमै कम स्थानीयहरु आफ्ना छोरा-छोरीलाई गाउँमै रहेर कृषि गरेको देख्न चाहन्छन् ।

स्थानियहरुबीच सडकको महत्व बारे फरक-फरक अनुभव देखियो । RAP 3 परियोजना अन्तर्गत चलिरहेका केहि समय अघी निर्माण सम्पन्न भएका सडकहरु अधिकतम प्रयोगमा आएको पाइयो । गाउँमा आवत-जावत गर्ने तथा सामानहरु ओसारपसार गर्नका लागि सडकको प्रयोग हुँदा ग्रामिण भेगका वासिन्दाहरुले गाउँमै बजारमा भन्दा केहि महंगोमा खरिद गर्न सक्ने वस्तुहरु बढेका छन । साथ-साथै, केही स्थानिय वासिन्दाले भने मोटर बाटोको प्रयोग धेरै खर्चिलो तथा ढिलो हुने भएकाले पुरानै पैदल मार्गहरु प्रयोग गरिरहेको पाइयो । सडकको उपायोगको लागि पुल निर्माण आवश्यक रहेको पाइयो । मोटरबाटाहरुमा चल्ने बोलेरो गाडिले सवारी आवागमन र ग्रामिण जीवन निकै हद सम्म सहज बनाए पनि स्थानिय बासिन्दाहरुले यस्ता गाडी एकदमै कम र समयमा चल्ने नगरेको बताए । उनिहरुका अनुसार, यातायात र स्थानीय व्यापारीहरुले सडकको सबै भन्दा बढी फाइदा लिएका छन । बाटो निर्माण भैरहेका केही ठाउँहरुमा भने सडकको सार्थकता कम रहेको समेत पाइयो । जस्तै, बाजुरामा निर्माणाधीन सडकले गाउँलाई उल्लेख्य बजारसँग जोड्ने सम्भावना कम देखियो भने, उक्त ठाउँमा उर्वर जमिनको कमीमा कृषिको सम्भावना कम भएकाले गाउँलेहरु सडकले उनिहरुको जीवन-स्तर उकास्ने कुरामा खासै आशावादी छैनन ।

सडक निर्माण-स्थलमा अध्ययन जिल्लाका स्थानीयले सडक निर्माणमा अपनाइएको श्रम-केन्द्रीत विधिमा आपत्ती जनाए । हुम्ला जिल्लाका अध्ययन स्थलमा स्थानीयबासिहरुले श्रम-केन्द्रीत सडक निर्माण एकदमै ढिलो, गार्हो र असुरक्षित रहेको बताए । RAP परियोजनाले श्रम-केन्द्रीत विधी अपनाएर ग्रामिण भेगमा आय-श्रोत बढाइ जीवन-स्तर बढाउन खोजेको देखिए पनि स्थानीय बासिन्दाका अनुसार सडक निर्माण मा भन्दा धेरै कमाई वैदेशिक रोजगारीमा हुने गर्छ । आय-श्रोतका लागि अन्य वैकल्पिक उपाय हुँदा हुँदै स्थानीयले सडक निर्माण लाई सामाजिक सेवा र सन्तानको भविष्य उज्वल बनाउने एउटा माध्यमका रुपमा लिएको बताए । हुम्लामा जस्तै बाजुराका स्थानीयले पनि RAP परियोजना अन्तर्गत सडक निर्माणमा उपलब्ध गराइने ज्याला एकदमै थोरै रहेको बताए । विदेशमा गएर धेरै कमाउने विकल्प छँदा-छँदै गाउँमै बसेर सडक निर्माण गर्दा आस्थायी रुपमै भए पनि परिवार सँग बस्न पाउने उनिहरुले बताए ।

RAP अन्तर्गतका निर्माण संबन्धी काम महिलाहरुका लागि उल्लेखनीय रहेको पाइयो । श्रीमान वैदेशीक रोजगारीमा भएका महिलाहरुले RAP परियोजना मार्फत कमाइ गरी परिवारमा ल्याउँदा उनिहरुको सासु-ससुरा सँगको पारिवारिक संबन्धमा सुधार आएको पाइयो । त्यसका अलावा श्रीमान विदेशमा भएकाले एकलै बस्दै आएका महिलाहरुलाई समेत यस्तो नियमित आय श्रोतले पुर्णतः श्रीमानले पठाउने पैसामा निहित हुनु नपर्दा धेरै हद सम्म सहयोग गरेको छ । उनिहरुका अनुसार यस्तो कमाइले उनिहरुलाई आर्थिक स्वतन्त्रता दिन्छ जसले गर्दा परिवारको अरु मुख्य निर्णयमा समेत उनिहरुको भूमिका बढ्न जान्छ । तसर्थ सडकको मर्मत्-सम्भार संबन्धी रोजगारी समाजको विपन्न र बेरोजगार वर्गमा पुग्ने भएकाले एकदमै उपायोगी देखिन्छ । आय-श्रोतको लागि एकदमै थोरै विकल्प भएका यस्ता विपन्न वर्गमा एकल महिला पनि पर्छन । अध्ययनका दौरान भेटिएका सबै श्रमिकहरुले सडक निर्माण तथा मर्मत्-सम्भारमा पाएको रोजगारीले उनिहरुको आर्थिक स्थिती उकास्न विशेष मदद गरेको बताए । सडक निर्माणको काम सकिएपछी के गर्ने भन्नेमा भने उनिहरु निकै चिन्तित देखिन्छन ।

२०१५ ताका रोकिएका समाजिक-आर्थिक कृयाकलापहरुमा खासै बदलाव नआएको पाइयो । सिंचाइमा राम्रो पहुँच नहुनाले व्यवसायमुखी खेतिमा खासै आकर्षण छैन भने अस्थिर बजार मुल्य र कमजोर बजार व्यवस्थाले गर्दा स्थानीयहरुका लागि कृषि भन्दा वैदेशिक रोजगारी सजिलो र लाभदायी विकल्प बन्न गएको छ । परियोजनाको सहयोगबाट राम्रो उपलब्धी गरेका स्थानीयहरु एकदमै थोरै संख्यामा भेटिए । RAP अन्तर्गतका तरकारी तथा अन्य कृषि-जन्य वस्तुहरुको संकलन केन्द्रहरु चारै ओटा अध्ययन स्थलमा संचालनमा नरहेको देखियो ।

स्थानीयबासिलाई परियोजना अन्तर्गतका सडक निर्माण लगायतका बिषयमा गत दुई वर्षमा भएका महत्वपूर्ण परिवर्तनका बारेमा सोधिएको थियो । गत दुई वर्ष यताको खडेरिले निम्त्याएको बढ्दो वैदेशिक रोजगारी मुख्य एउटा परिवर्तनको रुपमा भेटियो । वैदेशिक रोजगारी बाट भएको कमाईलाई स्थानिय हरुले मुख्यतः खानेमा खर्च गर्ने गरेको पाइयो । यस्तो नगद-आश्रुत अर्थतन्त्र २०१४ अगावै सुरु भैसकेको भए पनि २०१४ पछीको खडेरिले यसलाई अझै ठुलो रुप दिएको पाइयो । खानाको खर्च बाहेक विजुलिको बढ्दो पहुँचले पनि ग्रामिण खर्च बढाएको छ । तस्तै खानेपानीको समस्या अछाममा एकदमै तिब्र रहेको पाइयो । खडेरिको फलस्वरुप खपत भैरहेको खाद्य वस्तु तथा तरकारीमा विविधता पाइयो भने वैदेशिक रोजगारीप्रतिको रुचिका अलावा अधिकांश परिवार तराईमा घर बनाई बसाइ सर्न चाहेको भेटियो ।

अध्ययन जिल्लाहरुमा नगद प्रायः विध्वयुत खपत्, मोबाइल फोन, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य तथा खाध्यान्न खरिदमा प्रयोग हुने गरेको देखिन्छ । बजारमा उपलब्ध बिस्कुट, चाउचाउ जस्त प्याकेटमा पाइने खाद्य वस्तुको खपत तथा RAP बाट परिवारमा आमदानी भैरहेको देखेका किशोर-किशोरीहरुको पकेट खर्चका रुपमा पनि नगदको खपत भएको पाइन्छ । हुम्लामा पाउडर दुध र कफिमा समेत खर्च बढेको पाइयो भने डोटि, हुम्ला र बाजुरामा रक्सि-जन्य पदार्थको खपत समेत बढेको देखिन्छ, जहाँ पुरुषहरुले हरेक दिन काम सकिएपछी रक्सी सेवन गर्छन ।

मोटरबाटोमा सुधार आए पश्चात गाडिको संख्यामा वृद्धी भएको छ भने बाटो बिगार्ने एक प्रमुख कारक ट्याक्टरको प्रयोगमा कमी आएको छ । गाडि-भाडा पनि पहिले भन्दा केहि घटेको पाइन्छ तर स्थानिय हरुले गाडी सन्चालकहरुले समय-समयमा मनपरी भाडा उठाउने गरेको बताए । उनिहरुका अनुसार भाडा दर यात्रुको मोलमोलाई गर्ने क्षमतामा समेत भर पर्ने गरेको छ । हुम्लाका अध्ययन स्थलहरुमा विकासका कार्यक्रमहरु २०१४ पश्चात दुवै सरकार तथा गैर-सरकारी निकायबाट उल्लेख्य रुपमा बढेको पाइन्छ । स्थानियबासी यसको श्रेय सडक, विजुली तथा बजार व्यवसायिकरणलाई दिन्छन । स्थानिय बासिहरुले "बिकास दशकौँ पछी परी सकेको" भए पनि केहि सकारात्मक परिवर्तन हुँदै गरेको बताए ।

RAP स्थानिय स्तरमा परिचित छ र यस परियोजनाका कर्मचारीहरु समेत गाउँमै बस्ने भएकाले सम्मनित छन । RAP मार्फत हुने आमदानी, यसको अनिवार्य बचत्, बलियो सडक निर्माण र केहि कडा नियमका बावजुत पनि RAP मार्फत उपलब्ध हुने मौसम अनुसारको रोजगारीलाई स्थानियले बिशेष रुचाएको पाइन्छ । यद्वपी मजदुरिको ज्याला कसरी निर्धारण हुन्छ भन्नेमा केहि अन्यौल भेटिन्छ । वीमा संबन्धी ज्ञान स्थानिय स्तरमा २०१४ भन्दा केहि

बढेको पाइन्छ । वीमाले अतिरिक्त तर्फका सबै कुरा नसमेट्ने कुरा स्थानियले बुझ्न थालेका छन । तर वीमा माग गर्ने प्रकृयागत अन्यौलता भने अझै कायम छ । त्यस्तै प्राथमिक उपचार संबन्धी तालिम रुचाइए पनि प्राथमिक उपचारका सामग्रीहरु समयमा नफेरिएको भेटियो । सडक निर्माणमा खटिएका कामदारले कामका बखत प्रयोग गर्ने जुत्ता असजिलो, धेरै तातो, र गर्हुंगो भएको बताए । यस्ता जुत्ता तथा पन्जा अनिवार्य प्रयोग गर्नु पर्ने आफुलाई थाह भए पनि प्रयोग गर्दा नमिल्ने र गार्हो हुने जुत्ताले झन ठुलो असुरक्षा हुन सक्ने कामदारहरु बताउँछन ।

यस अध्ययन प्रतिवेदनका निष्कर्षहरु स्थानीयकै निम्नलिखित बुझाइ र भोगाइमा आधारित छन ।

RAP सन्चालित स्थलहरुमा:

◦ नयाँ बनेका सडकहरुको लाभ सबै भन्दा धेरै स्थानीय व्यापारी तथा सवारी चालकहरुलाई भएको पाइयो भने अन्य स्थानीयवासीहरु किनेर उपायोग गर्न सकिने वस्तुहरुको विकल्प गाउँमै बढेकाले खुशी छन ।

◦ निश्चित समयतालिका तथा भाडादर सडकको सदुपयोगको लागि आवश्यक देखिन्छ ।

◦ गाउँका स्थानीय प्राथमिक उपचार केन्द्रहरुमा एम्बुलेन्सको व्यवस्था नहुनु धेरै चासोको विषय बन्न पुगेको छ ।

◦ सडक संबन्धी मर्मत्-सम्भारका कामहरुमा स्थानीयबासीका अनुसार जिल्ला स्तर बाट निर्णय हुँदा अपनत्वमा केहि समस्या देखिन्छ ।

सडक निर्माण स्थलमा:

◦ पुरुषहरुलाई सडक निर्माणको काम उचित देखिएन किन भने उनिहरुको आय आर्जनको लागि अन्य आकर्षक विकल्प हरु छन ।

◦ खाध्य वस्तु शिक्षा तथा दैनिक आवश्यकताका वस्तुहरुको खरिदका लागि विदेशबाट भित्रीने पैसामा पुर्णतः निर्भर हुनु भन्दा RAP रोजगारी मार्फत हुने आमदानीले बिशेष गरी महिला सशक्तिकरणमा योगदान दिएको पाइन्छ । साना बाल-बालिका सहितका महिलाहरुले पनि RBGs र RMGs मा कामको अवसर चाहेको देखियो ।

◦ कामको ज्यालादर तथा RBGs तथा SBGs का वीमा संबन्धी व्यवस्थामा थप स्पष्टता आवश्यक देखिन्छ ।

SED कृयाकलापमा:

◦ स्थानीय स्तरमा SEDको समाप्ती प्रती कुनै ठुलो आपत्ती देखिएन । तर स्थानीयवासीका अनुसार SEDको समाप्ती बारे सुचना समयमै प्रवाह हुन सकेको भए उत्तम हुने थियो ।

1. Introduction

This report presents the main findings of the midline Reality Check Approach (RCA) study conducted in April 2016, almost exactly two years after the baseline study was conducted in 2014. The RCA study is the main qualitative element of the impact assessment being undertaken by Rural Access Programme 3's (RAP3) independent monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) component. MEL and RAP3 are supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The RCA is part of MEL's mixed methods approach to impact assessment, which also includes a quantitative household survey. A scoping RCA was conducted in December 2013 in Kalikot and Dailekh and used to help inform the design of the household survey. The baseline RCA was conducted in April 2014 in parallel with the baseline household survey and a joint synthesis report produced. However, the RCA study can also be seen as a stand-alone study and the analysis of the RCA findings and production of this stand-alone report is an important contribution to triangulation of overall MEL findings as it was completed before the findings of the quantitative household survey were shared and therefore was not influenced by these findings. This report should be read as people's perspective of change. The companion synthesis report which combines the analysis of the household survey and the RCA findings presents a more interpretive account.

The midline RCA study involved researchers returning to the same households with which they had stayed in 2014. The researchers spent extended periods of time living with the host households, as they had done before and, through informal interaction with them and the wider community, sought to understand what changes had happened in the interim two year period. Five of the sixteen original researchers could not join in this study due to other commitments but hand over was ensured through careful detailed interactions between the old researchers and their replacements. The team was guided by the same international team leader as in 2014, who once again took part in field research directly. Overall management of the team and logistic arrangements were undertaken by the Foundation for Development Management (FDM).

1.1. Structure of this report

This report begins with an overview of the Reality Check Approach (RCA) methodology, as well as study limitations (section 2). The following section 3 presents the findings related to change and begins by providing insights into the relevance of the road, road work and socio-economic development for people (section 3.1). This is followed by a section (section 3.2) detailing the changes that have happened generally to people in the study locations over the previous two years and discusses each one from the perspectives of people themselves. The elements of change are presented in order of what people felt were most important. A shorter section (section 3.3) takes a closer look at change at the household level as experienced by the twenty four host households specifically. Section 4 presents the perspectives and experiences of people with RAP itself both generally in the communities where RAP works and specifically by direct beneficiaries. The final section (section 5) provides some implications which emerge from the study from the perspectives of people in the villages.

2. Methodology

The Reality Check Approach (RCA) is a qualitative research approach involving trained and experienced researchers staying in people's homes for several days and nights, joining in their everyday lives and chatting informally with all members of the family, their neighbours and others they come into contact with. This relaxed approach ensures that power distances between researcher and study participants are diminished and provides the enabling conditions for rich insights into people's context and reality to emerge. By building on conversations, having multiple conversations with different people and having opportunities for direct experience and observation, confidence in the insights gathered is enhanced compared to many other qualitative research methods. RCA is often used to understand longitudinal change through staying with the same people at approximately the same time each year over a period of several years and this is what this particular study seeks to do by staying with the same families at baseline, midline and endline of the RAP3 programme.

The Reality Check Approach differs from most other approaches to research. Firstly, it is not theory-based so that there are no preconceived research frameworks or research questions. This is deliberate as the approach seeks to enable emic (insider) perspectives to emerge and to limit etic (outsider) interpretation or validation. The premise for researchers is one of learning directly from people themselves. Secondly, RCA is always carried out in teams in order to minimise researcher bias and to optimise opportunities for triangulation. Thirdly, and importantly, RCA teams are independent and make this explicit with the people who participate in the study. Our objective is to ensure that the views, perspectives and experiences of people are respectfully conveyed to policy and programme stakeholders. The researchers become a conduit rather than an intermediary. This is why RCA studies do not provide recommendations but promote the idea of sharing implications which are grounded in what people themselves share and show us. As this RCA study is part of a suite of methods used in the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) component, it is intended that it can provide these insights but also provide an interpretative lens for the household survey which is conducted in parallel.

The approach builds on and extends the tradition of listening studies (see Salmen 1998 and Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012¹) and beneficiary assessments (see SDC 2013²) by combining elements of these approaches with researchers actually living with people and sharing their everyday lives in context.

RCA is sometimes likened to a 'light touch' participant observation. But while it is similar in that it requires participation in everyday life within people's own environments, it differs by being comparatively quick

¹ Salmen, Lawrence F. 1998. "Toward a Listening Bank: Review of Best Practices and Efficacy of Beneficiary Assessments". Social Development Papers 23. Washington: World Bank.

Anderson, Mary B., Dayna Brown, Isabella Jean. 2012. *Time to Listen; Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*. Cambridge MA:CDA.

² Shutt, Cathy and Laurent Ruedin. 2013. *SDC How-to-Note Beneficiary Assessment (BA)*. Berne: Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation.

and placing more emphasis on informal, relaxed and insightful conversations rather than on observing behaviour and the complexities of relationships. It also differs by deriving credibility through multiple interactions in multiple locations and collective pooling of unfiltered insights so that emic perspectives are always privileged.

Important characteristics of the Reality Check Approach are:

- **Living with** rather than visiting (thereby meeting the family/people in their own environment, understanding family/home dynamics and how days and nights are spent)
- **Having conversations** rather than conducting interviews (there is no note-taking, thereby putting people at ease and on an equal footing with the outsider)
- **Learning** rather than finding out (suspending judgement, letting people take the lead in defining the agenda and what is important)
- **Centering on the household/place of residence** and interacting with families/people rather than users, communities or formalised groups
- **Being experiential** in that researchers themselves take part in daily activities (helping out in the fields; cooking and house chores with the family) and accompanying people (to meetings, to market, to place of work)
- **Including** all members of households
- **Using private space** rather than public space for disclosure (an emphasis on normal, ordinary lives)
- **Accepting multiple realities** rather than public consensus (gathering diversity of opinion, including ‘smaller voices’)
- **Interacting in ordinary daily life** with people (accompanying people in their interactions with local service providers as they go about their usual routines)
- **Taking a cross-sectoral view**, although the each study has a special focus, the enquiry is situated within the context of everyday life rather than simply (and arguably artificially) looking at one aspect of people’s lives.

2.1. Study participants and locations


2.1.1 Locations

The study was implemented in exactly the same locations as the baseline RCA in 2014. These had been purposely selected using the same frame as the quantitative survey. In this way three of the six locations were in ‘build’ areas: Humla (1 location) and Bajura (2 locations); and three were in ‘maintenance’ areas: Accham (1 location) and Doti (2 locations). Within these locations, actual households were mostly selected within the ‘inner buffer zone’ (along the road corridor) and some within the outer buffer (some distance

from the road corridor). The following table was constructed by the research team for the baseline, with locations listed in order of assessed public poverty levels (based on an assessment of access to services, perceived quality of services, remoteness, income diversity and extent of economic activity conducted post field work by the research team).

Table 1: Study Locations

Poverty	Village Code	Location	Remoteness	Ethnic Mix	RAP Intervention Update
Poorest	C	Humla	3.5 days trek to district town	Brahmin and Chettri (few Dalits live segregated)	New road under construction since 2014
	D1	Doti	2 hours walk to district town. RAP road access (1.5 hours)	Chettri and Brahmin with about 20% Dalit	RAP road built 12 years ago. Road maintenance ongoing
	B1	Bajura	1.5 hours from sub district town but difficult access to VDC	All Chettri	New road under construction since 2014
	A	Accham	Along main road, thriving market area & growth centre for 6 VDCs. Some hamlets up to one hour walk to this sub district town.	Chettri majority – 20-40% Dalit- some hamlets Dalit majority.	RAP road built 7 years ago. Road maintenance ongoing
	B2	Bajura	7 hours walk to sub district town	Predominantly Brahmins	New road-under constructions since 2014
	D2	Doti	Small market town with VDC office and other government offices, 3 hours walk to district town.	Chettri and Brahmins majority in most villages. Some with equal number of Dalits	RAP road built 12 years ago. Road maintenance ongoing



Least poor

2.1.2 Host Households

A total of twenty five households were selected for the study in 2014 through informal discussions with villagers on the basis that these were households likely to be targeted by ‘RAP employment generation programmes’ and which were generally i) comparatively poorer and ii) had different generations living in the house including school age children. All but one of these families (in Humla) participated in this midline study.

As in 2014, each team member discreetly left a ‘gift’ of basic food items, torches and stationery for each family on leaving, to the value of about NPR 1,000 to compensate for any costs incurred in hosting the researcher. As researchers insist that no special arrangements are made for them, they help in domestic activities and do not disturb income-earning activities, the actual costs to ‘hosts’ are negligible. The timing

of the gift was important so people did not feel they were expected to provide better food for the researchers or get the impression that they were being paid for their participation.

2.1.3 Neighbours and other community members

In addition to the twenty four host families, researchers interacted with and had detailed conversations their neighbours and the wider community, including shopkeepers, teachers, health workers, transport providers, postmen, village leaders using the same approach of informal conversations, (see annex 3 for the list of people met). Overall, this study included the views of at least 870 people.

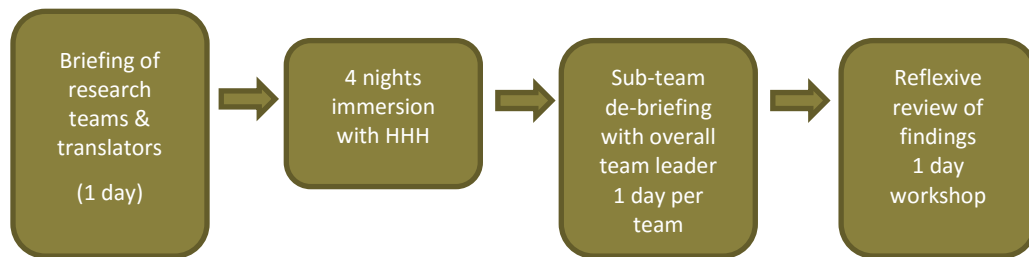
2.1.4 The study team

The study team was composed of seventeen researchers, including two international researchers (see Annex 1). Each international researcher was accompanied by a Nepali researcher/translator. Both researchers and researcher/translators have participated in a full Level 1 RCA training. The researchers comprised five sub teams each led by a sub team leader. The overall lead was provided by Neha Koirala and quality assurance and technical advice was provided by Dee Jupp.

2.2. Training, immersion and debriefing

All the researchers and translators had previously participated in mandatory five day training (RCA level 1) on the core principles and techniques of RCA, led by experienced RCA trainers. This training concentrates on researcher behaviour and seeks to reduce researcher bias by getting researchers to recognise and work through their biases and build good practice of reflexivity vital to promote rigour in the execution of RCA studies.

As this study was the midline in a longitudinal study, a shorter briefing process was conducted as the graphic process flow indicates below. This involved briefing on the purpose of the midline as a means to understand contextual, household and project change that had happened since 2014.



Five researchers from the 2014 team could not join in the midline so they were replaced by five³ other level 1 RCA researchers. Each spent several hours with their replacement either in face to face interaction

³ In fact six as one replacement was an international researcher who was accompanied by a translator/researcher

or, in the case of those now living abroad, skype interaction to share details of the host families. The replacement researchers were also provided with the 2014 field diaries, household information and photographs as part of the efficient hand over process. In total eight host households had different researchers staying with them this time.

Researchers returned to the same 24 families⁴ as in 2014 and gathered insights over a period of four days and four nights immersion with an emphasis on understanding change from people's own perspectives.

As noted above, RCA is not a theory based research method. It does not have a pre-determined set of research questions relying as it does on iterations from insights gathered *in situ* and building on progressive series of conversations. However, as part of the briefing process for researchers, areas for conversations were developed to act as a guide to ensuring that conversations were purposive. The outcome of the deliberations with the research team are provided in Annex 2: Area for Conversation.



Grandma looking at the photos from 2014 and updating us on changes, Bajura

Each team member kept their own field notes but they never wrote these in front of the people they were conversing with. To illustrate context and findings, photos were taken with the consent of the people concerned and sometimes by them directly.

⁴ One household in Humla was dropped



2.2.1 Post-field processes

Whilst researchers never take notes in front of people, they do jot down quotes and details as needed. Each sub-team spent a full day de-briefing as soon as possible after they came out of the village. These sessions ran through the areas of conversation (annex 3) and required that researchers share their conversations, observations, experiences and photos related to these as well as expanding the areas of conversation based on people's inputs.

The de-briefs were recorded in detail in written and coded notes combined with other important archived material providing detail on the households and the villages where they lived. The archives kept from the earlier baseline RCA study involving these families were also consulted to understand more about the families' context and situation.

Following completion of all the de-briefing sessions, the researchers met together in a one day sense making workshop. They were asked to take the position of study participants and identify emerging narratives from their locations. This process ensured that researchers do not overlay their own interpretations on the findings.

The team leader then used established *framework analysis* procedures to review the detailed debriefing notes, the sense making workshop notes and other supporting research material. This involves three of the typical four-stage process i. Familiarisation (immersion in the findings), ii, Identification of themes (from the sense-making workshop and from the data directly) and iii. Charting (finding emerging connections). The conventional fourth step is 'interpretation' which we purposely eschew. As a further means to minimize any bias a second reviewer went through stages (i) and (ii) to add credibility to the emergence of findings. Both reviewers worked independently so that resonance in their conclusions could be construed as conferring credibility in the emerging findings. The key emerging narratives from these processes were used as a basis for the report writing. Quality assurance was carried out through internal peer review with special concern to ensure the research retained positionality of people themselves.

2.2.2 Ethical considerations

RCA teams take ethical considerations very seriously, especially considering the fact that it involves living with people in their own homes. Like most ethnographic-based research, there is no intervention involved in RCA studies. At best, the study can be viewed as a way to empower study participants in that they are able to express themselves freely in their own space. Researchers are not covert but become 'detached insiders'. People are informed that this is a learning study and are never coerced into participation. As per the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics, RCA adopts an ethical obligation to people '*which (when necessary) supersedes the goal of seeking new knowledge*'. Researchers '*do everything in their power to ensure that research does not harm the safety, dignity or privacy of the people with whom they conduct the research*'.

All researchers were briefed on ethical considerations for this study and Child Protection Policies before their field visits (irrespective of whether they had previously gone through this). All researchers signed Code of Conduct on Confidentiality and Child Protection Policy declarations as part of their contracts. All data (written and visual) was coded to protect the identity of individuals, their families and communities. As a result the exact locations and identities of households and others are not revealed in this report.

2.2.3 Study limitations

As with other primary research methods, this study has a number of limitations as follows;

- The study was conducted at the height of the wheat harvest season and so families were busy in their fields often all day but in some cases all afternoon. While researchers accompanied them and helped in the harvest, conversations were sometimes limited by their pre-occupation with these tasks.
- The study coincided with school holidays for New Year which provided both opportunities (to interact more with children and adolescents) and challenges (less interaction at schools and with teachers). Similarly, many men return from working in India for New Year and celebrations are often timed to

coincide with this, resulting in a few cases where atypical food was consumed (e.g. meat) and more cash was used.

- In all locations local dialects are used and this inhibits easy conversation especially with the older generation. Most people could speak Nepali but side talk between family members was not picked up by researchers when it was in local language.
- We had to replace five researchers from the original 2014 team. Although detailed briefings were provided by the original researchers to the replacements, the host families themselves had to get to know the researchers and build their trust before they felt fully at ease. Some comparison observation will have been lost.
- RAP has a permanent physical presence in the 'build' study locations and our researchers felt that people were sometimes more guarded in how they conversed with us than in 2014. People were either told of our research specifically or were told what they can /can't say to outsiders.

3. Findings: people's perspectives of change since 2014

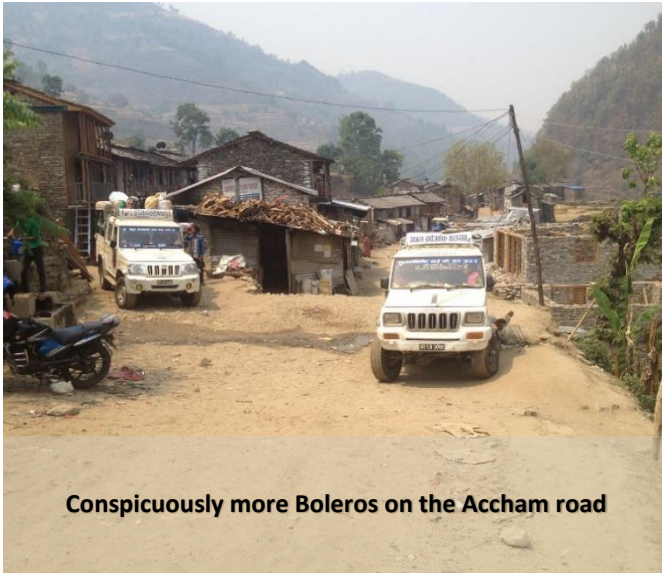
The findings for the baseline RCA study completed in May 2014 were presented in line with the 2014 RAP Theory of Change⁵. The findings at mid-line follow a different structure as the emphasis in this study was to **understand change** from the perspectives of people in communities themselves. This in effect reverses the process and allows emergence of narratives from the ground up. The first section looks at how people living in communities in the project areas generally perceive the relevance of the RAP interventions. The second section takes the position of people living in communities in the project areas regarding what they feel are significant changes in their lives that have taken place since the baseline in 2014 and sequences these insights according to the priorities people shared. Over 900 people in six study communities shared their views openly through informal conversations which were supplemented by our own experience and observations from living with twenty four specific families living in poverty within the study villages and with whom we had had stayed in 2014. The views and perspectives of villagers and host household families are presented as faithfully as possible as the analysis of findings purposely sought to avoid use of existing evaluation frameworks or researcher interpretation.

3.1. Relevance: How important are roads to people?

This section brings together insights from interactions with people in the community (direct and indirect beneficiaries) as well as our host families and their neighbours and so can be regarded as findings from interaction with about 150 people per location.

As indicated in the RCA baseline study in 2014, with the exception of the study location in Humla, the main source of income in the study locations is from remittance with a long tradition of working abroad. Farming, we noted in 2014, was not seen as a means to make a living but as means to feed the family only. Few people have aspirations for their children to continue farming and stay in the villages. A sign of doing well is to be able to send one's children into town or Kathmandu for education and once they get an education, *'there is no intention to get work back in the village'*. Consistently across the study locations, except in market hubs, only the older generation actively wants to stay in these villages although there were scattered examples of new house construction. In one of the Bajura locations (B1), for example, which is accessible to a rapidly growing market hub, a few people are investing money saved from working in India in housing; but further away from the market hub in B2 there is no new construction and some evidence of increasing permanent out-migration as families leave to join their husbands working in India.

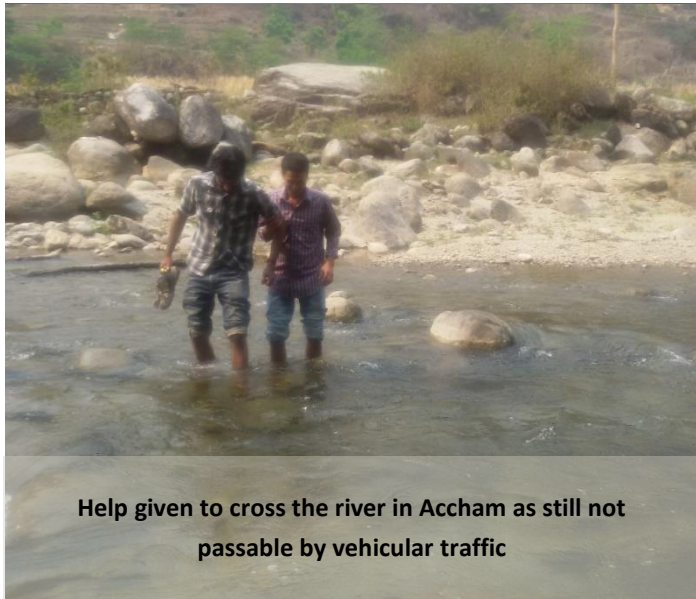
⁵ The Theory of Change has since been revised, June 2016



Conspicuously more Boleros on the Accham road

In the two study areas (Accham and Doti) where road construction was completed some time ago (7 years and 12 years respectively), we observed and people confirmed that there is a clear increase in vehicle use since 2014. For example, at least 2-3 Boleros carrying passengers ply regularly every day on the Accham road and more than ten per day on the Doti road. In both places there is also an observable increase in vehicles carrying goods, in both cases *into* the communities not out from the communities. The 2014 baseline indicated that people appreciated greater

market access in terms of their own consumption and convenience and not at all to export produce or goods out of the villages. This is further confirmed in 2016 as people shared their enthusiasm regarding the variety of goods now available in the villages.



Help given to cross the river in Accham as still not passable by vehicular traffic

However, people still question the relevance of parts of both roads in terms of greater accessibility; in Accham the non-completion of a much-needed bridge⁶ over the river still hampers all year accessibility and in the other in Doti, the lower portion of the road is avoided except for a few days per year in the rains as there is a quicker alternative (see Box 1). In Accham, those living nearer to the main road felt the road had little value or relevance for them as they walk to the nearest market town and take buses from there costing NPR 50 to the district town. In villages along the Doti road, people said it was still quicker to use trails

than the road and, since transport is irregular and unpredictable, they prefer to walk as it saves at least NPR 150 on fares and takes more or less the same time. The increase in vehicular traffic primarily benefits shopkeepers, they say, whilst appreciating that there are more and greater variety of goods for sale in the

⁶ Some progress has been made in its construction since 2014 but it has taken over three years and people think it will take at least one more year

local market hubs. But with prices higher than in town, the benefit is described by people as *'for convenience'*. The growth of these hubs is discussed further below and is important for some but for others the road, transport availability and market accessibility makes little difference in their day to day lives. People did sometimes talk about the roads being regularly maintained and acknowledged that there were more passenger vehicles, shorter journey times, less hazards and more comfortable journeys⁷ as a result but journeys are infrequent and they consistently maintained that it was primarily shopkeepers and transport providers who were interested in road maintenance. Their views of the changes in road maintenance are discussed further in section 4.7.

Box 1: Unused RAP road

Drivers and local people told us that vehicles do not use the lower part of the RAP road as it is longer by about 3km than an alternative through the forest. The longer road means higher fuel costs and even though part of the alternative road is very steep and means the vehicle has to be in first gear, it is still cheaper to use than the RAP road. We decided to drive down the largely unused portion of the RAP road to experience it for ourselves. It was in better condition than in 2014 and the driver suggested this was because it is rarely used. People came out of their houses to see the vehicle as it is now so rare for a vehicle to ply this route. We saw not a single vehicle on the way down. People in this area told us that if they need transport, they have to reserve a vehicle by phone as there are no regular transport providers on this stretch and it costs them between NPR 1800-2000 to hire a vehicle. The only time this stretch is used is during heavy rains in the monsoon when the alternative route becomes impassable. But the drivers told us this is only for a few days per year.

Combined field notes, D1 and D2

In the other areas (Bajura and Humla) where road construction is ongoing, people say they can only talk about aspirations which relate to anticipation of the road completion. In Humla, people continue to be (as they were in 2014) very excited about the road. People are more ambivalent in Bajura. Here, although some could visualise the road being linked up eventually and open to vehicles, others were less sure of the benefits that may accrue from the road as the following comments typical of others illustrate; *'We are building a road where nobody lives'* and *'It is a road through forest and not benefitting villagers'*, *'We only use about 1km of the road'*, though others thought *'Only businesses will benefit'* and *'If the big market comes to us, prices might go down- but probably not as shopkeepers will want to make more profit'*.

'I have a dream...we will have our own local services and people will come here... but only if the bridges are built'
Man, Humla

⁷ As much because Boleros have largely replaced tractors as passenger vehicles.

People in Bajura told us that roads make it easier for *‘People like you, development workers and students from Kathmandu to get around as you are not able to walk (in the mountains)’* but added that *‘we don’t need them (roads) as we use trails’*. Throughout this area people told us that trails are easier and shorter than the road but the road is yet to be open to vehicular traffic so the perception may change and people find it hard to imagine this change. In B1 there are only trail bridges linking the village to a rapidly growing market hub and people shared that the hopes that these would be replaced by road bridges are fading, they say *‘because the volume of traffic in the dry season over the river is too small’* to justify the investment. People say there is no indication that a trail which currently provides an important connection between the RAP road and neighbouring villages will be upgraded and people also shared that there seems to be no connection between the RAP road and the agricultural road which is currently being built. Furthermore, the road falls about 4km short of the VDC Office at the other end. People are confident that the road will expand in the future to link to an important shrine and think this extension will fall *‘under RAP 4’*. But this is a further 60 km of new road and anyway, people say, pilgrims travelling to the shrine take a traditional circular route and would use the route only one way so income from this may not be as lucrative as some suggest.

In addition to accessibility, there was an assumption that new markets would open up with road construction but people in B2 told us *‘the land is not fertile here... it is unproductive’* and so they say there is little potential for agricultural markets even after the road is finished. They share that their only option is to migrate to India for work and they are not despondent about this as wages are considered much better than in Nepal. *‘It’s a tradition to migrate. It’s not a bad thing’*.

Table 2: Summary of people’s perceptions about the roads

	Construction	Maintenance	People’s perception of the road	People’s further expectation of road work	People’s perception of who benefits from the road
A1/A2	n/a		Road (originally constructed in 2009) is better maintained, potholes filled and new gabion baskets installed.	Still need a link to the Health Post. All say there is a promise that local government will gravel the road (there was a promise made by the District Development Committee over a year ago). Bridge over river still needed for this road to realise its potential as it is impassable in the monsoon. Road is being extended by 29 km to a religious site of significance and they expect this to finish in 2017	Transport providers Shopkeepers

	Construction	Maintenance	People's perception of the road	People's further expectation of road work	People's perception of who benefits from the road
D1/D2	n/a		Better maintained than before and journey time to town said to be reduced by 30 minutes, but complaints that the maintenance is sometimes only superficial (some explain that this is because they think it will be black-topped soon). An alternative route is preferred except in the rainy season.	Anticipating black –topping of the road and extension further uphill (promised with political funding)	Businesses in D2 Transport providers
B1/B2		n/a	Construction is ongoing and people think it is due to be finished in April 2017. Currently supports no vehicular traffic but people say it is <i>'a good quality and strong road'</i> but the way it is being built, people say, is <i>'very slow'</i>	They are confident that a further 60 km will be built under RAP4. Without the bridges over rivers (only one is listed in the Red Book ⁸), accessibility is still limited. They say <i>'a project'</i> will build them. They prefer the progress with the new agricultural road which is being built using mechanisation.	Remains an aspiration only. Currently like that road workers are paid in cash not kind.
C1/C2		n/a	Construction is ongoing (predicted completion 2018) and currently no access to vehicular traffic.	They say a 65 km extension has been agreed with RAP4. To be fully functional a bridge is needed	Road work is viewed as a social good not for the cash <i>'RAP is pass time work'</i>

3.2. Relevance: How important is road employment for people?

As section 3.1, the findings shared emerge from conversations with people living in the communities in general and provide a perspective on road work in general.

In both road construction areas, people living in the study villages questioned the relevance of using labour-intensive methods to build the roads. In the Humla study locations, people (both those working in RBGs and the community) noted that the work is slow, can be very hard (see photos) and shared safety concerns but nevertheless recognised that it would be very costly to bring in bulldozers. The only way, they say, would be by helicopter and they speculated that bulldozer drivers would have to be paid a lot, (*'He would have to be paid NPR 800 per day, and be provided with alcohol at night and his meal–this would be very expensive'* (men, Humla)). And some in the Humla villages felt that the heavy machines might

⁸ The so-called Red Book is the Annual Development Plan which happens to have a red cover. We have not been able to confirm the inclusion in the Red Book but local rumour indicates it is included.

damage their land. People in Humla locations reasoned that RAP uses labour-based methods because they want to *'improve people's livelihoods'* but most we talked with said they did not need the work as there are lucrative alternative income earning opportunities in this area. As one young man told us, echoing others, *'RAP work is just time pass. I can make NPR 1 lakh by collecting herbs and yet make only NPR 15,000 per month from RAP'*



Large rocks have to be heated to break them up, Humla



Moving large boulders by labour only, people say is very hard, Humla

People in the Humla villages say they have food stocks for at least 7 months and a range of ways of earning cash so they can afford to buy food. Others shared that even for local construction of homes workers are paid more than double RAP rates: *'RAP work is merely supplementary'*. The main motivation to work on the road for these people in Humla is as a social service, as a man echoing others said, *'We work on the road for our children and grandchildren, not for the money or savings'*. In Bajura they also said the road construction takes a long time using labour-intensive means. Similar to Humla, people in Bajura also told us *'the money (from RAP) is insignificant'* compared to their alternatives of earning abroad. People told us that in B2 none of the Road Building Groups (RBGs) have the full complement of 20 members because people do not need the work. *'We don't replace people (who leave) as everyone is busy'* contrasts with what was said here in 2014 when people were eager to participate in RBGs, *'now people don't want to do this'*.



Many Households have very large stocks of lucrative herbs ready for sale, Humla

Box 2: Relevance of road work in Humla

People have conspicuous cash, have large cash savings in their homes as well as investments in gold. The biggest income is from collecting and trading in herbs and mushrooms, gathered from the forests. For example, one of our host households has 43 quintals of stored herbs with a selling price of about NPR 1.5 million (£9,500) but this is considered quite small scale with many others having about nine times this amount. The smallest family operation is said to earn at least NPR 1 lakh per season (£650). There are other ways to make money including trading in animal hides and much illegal cross border trade. People shared that it is not the money which motivates them to work on the road but that they are contributing to their village's development and their children and grandchildren's futures.

Field Notes, Humla

But some men in Bajura said they like to work for RAP because it means they can stay at home with their families, albeit temporarily. Earning on average about NPR 15,000-20,000 per month, people said was enough to live on (but not to save) and enabled them to enjoy family life *'for a short while'* and *'be there to send their children to school every day'*, before returning to work abroad.

'We are proud to have built the road, even if there is no other benefits'
Man, Bajura

RAP work for women is seen quite differently. The 2014 Baseline study noted that people did not think that there would be much difference in women's status resulting from the project as they felt women who had lived essentially as household heads while their husbands worked abroad made key decisions anyway. However, earning their own cash through RAP work has made a difference. For example, in Bajura, women whose husbands are working abroad (mostly India) either live with their in-laws or independently with their children in their own houses. Road work, women tell us provides an opportunity for those living with in-laws to contribute to the in laws family and, they say, this often improves relationships with the in-laws⁹. For those living on their own, having regular cash means they are less worried about the timeliness of remittances and can manage household finances more easily.¹⁰ They also shared that their own income is usually used for their own needs, especially non-essentials such as jewelry¹¹, *'nice clothes'* and accessories, personal savings and house decoration/renovation. They shared that they like this freedom to make their own decisions about personal spending (see Box 3). But it has wider significance as women shared that their ability to earn cash on a regular basis as well as their participation in NGO

⁹ In one family it was significant that the daughter in law who can contribute wages, now eats together with the whole family whereas in 2016 she ate after everyone had finished.

¹⁰ In the pilot RCA in 2013 women shared that they regularly pawned their wedding jewellery to manage household cash flow when remittances came late.

¹¹ Not as savings but rather for fashion reasons

savings schemes had given them more confidence and they were able to contribute to making significant family spending decisions.

Box 3: Deciding for herself what to spend money on.

I struggled trying to open the lock on the window, when my ‘mum’ offered to help me. *‘This window is new that’s why you find it hard to open. I bought it last month from my RAP wages’*, she explained cheerfully. She told me she was really glad that she had a job and could spend her earnings in the way she wants. Her husband is a migrant worker in India. Earlier, she was dependent on his earning for everything. Now, after she started working on the RAP road, her husband's earnings are spent on household expenses and their children's education. She is able to spend her earnings from the road work exactly the way she wants and she enjoys this independence. She showed me two gold lockets she bought and wooden doors and windows for the house. She also supports her younger brother's education. He still lives at home in another district. She plans to buy a new water tank with her next wages. When I asked if she has any plan to invest her savings, she told me there is no profit at all to invest in her village. *‘It is like trying to catch a fish in a sea without water’* (*‘pani bina ko samundra ma macha tipne kam’*)

Field notes, Bajura

While the road building work is seen more as a social contribution than a means to make money, the maintenance employment is significant. People say this is because those selected for road maintenance groups (RMGs) are, with few exceptions, the really needy. They comprise widows, divorcees and others living in difficult circumstances or unable to participate in work abroad for range of reasons. The maintenance workers we met all indicated that the cash incomes they received were very important to them and worried about what would happen when their contracts ended. They have come to depend on this income and the security of knowing they have contracts has made them feel less stressed. Although road maintenance work is considered to be low status and others do not want this work, the RMG members we met feel that having the orange jacket and daily work has given them some pride and sense that they can support their own families.

3.3 Relevance: How important are socio-economic development (SED) activities for people?

Box 4 provides a typical example of why people in the Doti study locations were not interested in growing vegetables because of the poor access to irrigation. We noted in 2014 that people wanted help with dealing with pests such as the rampant red ants that attack potatoes not information about other vegetables. People told us in 2014 that there were several NGOs trying to promote vegetable growing and they provided free seeds. While they miss this free seed distribution since it stopped towards the end of 2015, all were only growing for their own consumption. A local Junior Technician Agriculture (JTA) confirmed that growing vegetables here in the Doti study villages is very challenging and the soil fertility is decreasing, but, he said, anyway people were not interested as their priority was to use their land for staple crops such as rice and wheat. And, he added, they have good jobs abroad.

Box 4: can't grow potatoes without irrigation

In D2, potato production has increased since 2014 but this is almost entirely for home consumption. An agricultural extension officer we met explained that someone had tried to grow them and was successful and so others tried to as well but that this was not due to any efforts of the agriculture office or NGOs. Even though production for some was quite good they are not selling, even to the neighbouring village, where there is no potato production and only rather poor quality potatoes brought in from over 50 kms away are available for sale in the roadside shops. *'We cannot source potatoes locally, only a little from the Magur community up the hill'* explained one shopkeeper. The main problem is the lack of irrigation. Just

one farmer in D1 shared that he thought potatoes had potential. He currently gets two harvests per year and *'I think I can get four'*. While he thinks others are just 'not interested', they say that *'he has access to water and we don't'*. People shared that vegetable farming is a risk, not just because of water shortage but unpredictable rains, hailstorms and pests (especially red ants which are prevalent and attack potatoes)



lack of irrigation meant this old man was watering his plot continuously using buckets, D2

Field notes, Doti

Box 5: Benefits from increasing production

I met a man who keeps a general store beside the roads built by RAP. He has run this successfully now for five years and had built up a reputation for his home made lemon syrup, which he has made for some time. Although he was not poor as the shop was doing well (and other villagers we met said he is one of the *'most wealthy in the village'*), he was selected by RAP 3 for further support because he is a Dalit and was known to the RAP staff who stayed near to his shop during the construction period. He was given training on seed collection and selling by an NGO which he could not name but knew it was supported by RAP. But most importantly he was given equipment for his lemon syrup production. *'I sold lemon syrup before but having the equipment has helped me enlarge the business.'* With the larger production he now trades in the main town as well as a number of local villages.

Field notes, Doti

Despite the anticipation of farming vegetables on a large scale shared widely in 2014, when the SED beneficiaries in Humla heard that the programme had stopped and they would get no more seeds or training (in August 2015), they said *'it did not matter'*. Some members of RBG groups had benefited from

new rain water ponds which provide water to small plots where they grow onions, cauliflower, okra and cabbages for their own consumption and they had retained seeds to plant in subsequent seasons.

They were not impressed by the training they had received on organic fertiliser or organic pesticides, *'We tried the mugwort but it just made the insects drowsy for a few days'*. Besides, there are other programmes organized by others providing very similar inputs. There was much skepticism around the use of poly-tunnels for vegetable growing, *'it won't work here as people will steal the produce'*. Indeed, one of the ponds provided by RAP SED was already leaking and unused, *'because people stole the tarpaulin lining and used it for themselves'* (see another similar example in Box 6) Others in other villages had not been offered any RAP supported programme *'as it was decided based on whether you had irrigated land for vegetables or not'*.

Box 6: Disappointing SED

When constructed, the pond was to be used by 44 households for irrigating vegetable plots, but there were more households which used it. The pond was fenced in, but there were huge gaps so hens and jackals were able to get through and some drowned. People were also afraid that small children would pass through the gaps and fall into the pond. Nobody felt it was their responsibility to fix the fence. There is no water in the pond now, because there is a crack and neither the villagers nor RAP fixed this.

Field notes Humla



One of several ponds built for rain water irrigation but leaked within a year, Humla

People in the Accham study location shared that agriculture has never been productive here as there is no irrigation. They felt that vegetable production would encroach on their staple crop production and it would not be possible to grow commercially. Besides, they always felt it was much easier to migrate for work (particularly to Mumbai as security guards). Nevertheless, we came across a few successes but in each case they said themselves that they were the exception; persistent, hardworking and protective against competition and most had been 'self-starters'. One had a vegetable nursery which he started more than a decade ago with help from GIZ and

says he earns NPR 1.5 lakh per year. He said that others felt he did well because he was located close to the RAP road but he was glad others had not copied him, *'if others had done this there would have been no market'*. But he added *'nobody wants to do this work now. I can't get people to work on my farm'*. Another who was supported by RAP SED decided to grow chilli on 1.5 *ropani* of land he had previously

devoted to wheat and rice and made NPR 1lakh during the first year (see Box 7). But we also saw many abandoned poly tunnels and those who still grow tomatoes or chillies say it is just for their own consumption. Most agree that it is very difficult because of the shortage of water.

Box 7: Spice production success

One of my neighbours is an exception. He was selected to become a lead farmer by the NGO working under the RAP 3 programme especially to develop spice production. He received training and participated in an exchange programme to East Nepal which he said he found really helpful. He was provided a subsidy towards the purchase of spice grinding equipment. He has turned his entire productive land (some 1.5 ropani) to chillies, ginger, onions and tomato. He processes and packages turmeric and cumin. He told me he and his wife (they have no employees) earned over NPR 100,000 last year and is happy with his decision to stop producing just wheat and paddy and will continue in this enterprise. He says others come and look at what he has done but he never actively encourages them to follow his example.

In fact his claimed success has not been replicated by a single other person in the area. While some do grow some vegetables for family consumption they shared with me that do not see potential in what he is doing and prefer to continue to grow wheat and rice.

Field notes, Accham

Box 8: Benefits for an Agro-vet

The sign post outside the shop has the RAP logo and indicates that the owner of the shop has had support for his agro-vet business. He says he got some important training on testing for disease and prescribing and people trust and use his services. Although there are two new commercial goat rearing centres he says most of his work comes from private individuals. He says there are more people rearing goats than before but all for home consumption. He is the only agro-vet in the area and is confident his work will continue.

Field Notes, Accham

In Bajura we met up with the commercial vegetable farmer we had met in 2014. His success pre-dates RAP3 and in the last two years he has expanded his farm by a further 2 *ropanis* to a total of 5. His brother has started a similar enterprise recently. Only one other in the village has followed their example to try to grow vegetables commercially, it seems with some support of RAP. Box 9 illustrates the challenges especially with accessing water for vegetable growing. Others, members of RBGs who were already vegetable growers, had received some training from the RAP SED component but, like in Doti, grow only for their own consumption. Some commented that they were surprised at the varieties of vegetables which could actually be grown in Bajura but other than this, they felt their existing knowledge of vegetable growing had been honed by years of experience not through recent training. Besides, people told us,

'even if the road is built, the land round here is unproductive so there is no market potential – our only option is to migrate to India'.

Box 9: Getting round the water shortage to grow vegetables

One man I met told me that he thought hard work and determination always pay off, but added that a little bit of cleverness helps too. He said he has been passionate about growing vegetables for a long time. He told me, *'I grow garlic, onion, tomatoes, pumpkin, cabbage, potato, bitter melon and cauliflower.... And make NPR1-3000 per month. Once I even took NPR 10,000.'* He has always liked to experiment *'it is trial and error—I keep trying out what works'*. Others had failed at this and they tried to convince him that he would too. *'But I never lost hope'*. He and several others from the village attended the RAP training but only one other continued to grow vegetables. The training was *'encouragement, ideas and information only'*, he said. But the shortage of water is the main problem here. He said *'the secret of my success is that I steal water at night'*. While everyone is sleeping at night, he collects water from the community tap to water his vegetables. He shared, *'I know the programme from RAP didn't really work very well for most people but I am happy I got the training and can make some extra cash. Sometimes, it is a few hundred rupees a month while there have been times when I made a few thousand. It may not be a lot but doing what I do keeps me active.'* He told me he is considering leaving his office assistant job at the school as he is hopeful that once the road is built he will be able to sell his vegetables in villages nearby. But he adds, *'Not everyone is happy with my success though...some of my neighbours are mad at me because I steal water at night.'*

Field Notes, Bajura

Others in Bajura had received other support to develop their trade but their needs, potential and futures of their businesses had not been well thought through. Box 10 and Box 11 provide two examples where the project signposts do not represent what the people themselves feel was provided to them and what they are able to do as a result.

Box 10: Help with goat rearing

Abijit and his family have been rearing goats for decades. Together they have raised and traded hundreds of goats. Currently, they have around 70-80 goats and a billy-goat and this is their main livelihood. In the past couple of years, several goats have died or escaped as they roamed free in the vicinity of the house. Abijit has now built a metal cage for the goats with money provided by RAP3 and told me, *'I am grateful to RAP for helping me keep my goats safe and keep my business going'*. There is a signboard outside loaded with logos declaring NPR 105,350 support for the project, *'but I only got NPR 80,000'*. The sign also states this is a goat rearing and resource centre where you can get *'information on treatment of high quality goats, billy goat breeding and selling kids'*. But, Abijit said he only got the money for the building and was not invited to any training. He said his expertise comes from breeding goats for a long time and

he could not explain how he had been selected for this 'gift'. 'All I do is sell goats and have just one billy-goat' and does not see himself as running a resource centre.

Field Notes, Bajura.

Box 11: Not able to establish the trade in the village


I met a man who worked 25 years in India but returned about six years ago. Through membership of the RBG group he was offered skills training two years ago. He is from a Dalit metal worker family but because he lived in India he did not take up this trade. So in the month long training he learned to make *khukuri* and agricultural tools but the one thing he really liked to make was 'Rambo' knives. After the training he set up a small forge which he constructed and paid for himself. He asked the NGO partner of RAP for tools such as a sharpening machine and materials such as iron but didn't get these so he cannot make the 'Rambo' knives he wants to make. He was not aware that the NGO no longer works in the village and nobody had explained this to him. There are other established blacksmiths in the village who do a better business than him. We noticed his forge was never open during our stay and others said '*he just went for training and did not learn anything*'. He does help to repair the tools used on the road construction by his fellow workers and is pleased that he has the RBG work in the mornings. He gets paid for both works (construction and tool repair) through the RBG facilitator. But once the road is finished there will be no construction work and no more tools to repair.

Field Notes, Bajura.

None of the vegetable collection centres set up under RAP or indeed other programmes, were active in any of our study locations.

4. Changes and issues since 2014 that matter to people

This section presents findings based on conversations with the wider community as well as host households. These conversations were natural and often un-prompted as people were keen to share and update us on the changes that had occurred since our last stay in 2014. These represent changes which people think are significant and place connectivity and road building and maintenance in context with other issues which are important to them. As these emerges naturally, it has made it possible to put these changes in order of significance to people, with the most important changes discussed first, as detailed below. Some of these are intimately linked; for example the drought has had an impact on the increasing reliance on migration as people need cash to buy food as their own stocks are too little to support them. The trend towards cash-based economies had already been established before the 2014 baseline but the extra need to purchase food and pay for electricity since more houses have metered electricity connections means that it was further emphasized by people in this study.

	Most talked about	Drought (and increasing disinterest in farming)
		Increasing reliance on migration for work/return to migrant work
		Electricity
		Increasing need for cash
		Development of market hubs and access to goods to buy
		House renovation and upgrading
		Road transport (maintenance areas only)
		Road maintenance (maintenance areas only)
	Least talked about	New social services
	Talked about negative change	Access to VDC services
		Road disruption
		RAP effect on local wages

4.1. Changes noted by the wider community

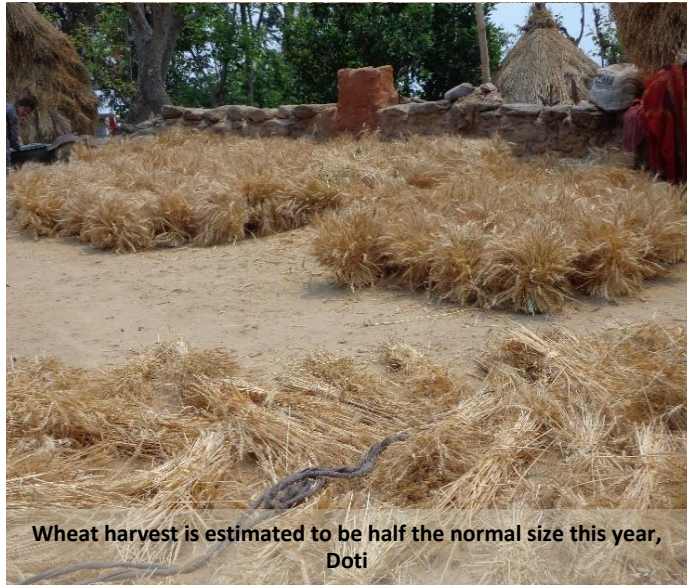
4.1.1 Most talked about change; Drought and the increasing disinterest in farming

In Doti, people were very concerned about the ongoing drought. It had been bad in 2014 but worse in 2015. They said there had been no proper rain since August 2015 (more than seven months) and rains were exceptionally late this year. They estimated that production of wheat would be less than half compared to previous years and pointed out fields of shrivelled and dry plants. They shared their real concerns about a repeat of this in 2016 and another poor harvest in 2017. In Bajura, two people estimated that the harvest would be down by 50% because of the drought. They told us they will have to buy staples and worry that the late rains mean that delayed maize planting will also lead to low yields this coming

year. While this prospect concerns them, as most have members of their families working in India they were not unduly worried, after all the lack of good irrigated land here was what prompted them to seek work abroad in the first place.

In the Accham study locations, people also depend on migrant workers rather than farming so the drought was seen more as a problem of drinking water shortage. People say that while water shortages are usual (and we observed this in 2014 with long queues at water taps and water being exhausted by early morning), the drought is compounding the problem.

In the Humla study locations, their high cash earnings from gathering herbs and other income earning means that the drought is more an inconvenience than a crisis as they are able to purchase rice. They have not really ever been interested in commercial farming (despite some optimism in 2014 when RAP tried to create interest) and many shared they are planning to move to Surkhet for better education opportunities for their children.



Wheat harvest is estimated to be half the normal size this year, Doti



Wheat harvest is much reduced in Accham too, but people said they can buy it. Drinking water shortage was a bigger problem.

As we found in 2014, young people in all the study locations tell us this are not interested in farming. But the drought in 2015 has fuelled this disinterest. Of those who want to return to the village after their higher education at some point, they saw working in India or elsewhere as a means to raise capital to invest in trade or services, especially as a passenger transport or truck driver or in land in the Terai not to invest in agriculture in any form. There is a definite shift too towards a preference for dependable waged employment in the service sector rather than working in

agriculture. However, we also felt palpable growing frustrations that getting an education was not enough to secure a job outside farming and some shared that they *'want to learn to farm'* as *'even if I study to 12th Grade I will not get a job'* (youth, Accham). In Humla parents shared, *'What is the point of education if they keep failing all the time? We need to bring them back to get used to village life again'*. This reversal of aspirations was not apparent at all in 2014.

The drought has had an effect on the food we consumed with the families we stayed with. While all but four families take three meals per day as they did before, the diversity has changed and although most took vegetables every day the range and volume was conspicuously less than in 2014 for five of these families. They said that they had not been able to grow or buy vegetables because of the drought. All the Humla families ate rice at least twice per day reflecting their ability to purchase as local red rice production had been affected by the drought. Whereas in Accham, Doti and Bajura, our families tended to take only one meal of rice each day (usually lunch) and ate roti/chapatti at other meals. Two families took rice only once during our four day stay with them and ate chapattis at all other meals. The Accham and Doti families tended to eat about twice as many meals with chapatti/roti than meals with rice whereas in Bajura these were more equal. Lentils or beans were eaten either at lunch or dinner in all but five households. Fourteen of the families consume milk in some form or another (in tea, as curd, buttermilk or as milk itself) at least once per day and the drought has not hit milk production. Meat (chicken or goat) was eaten on one occasion only during the four days in only seven households but three of these families said it was unusual to eat meat and was because of the New Year and Mini Dashain celebrations. No families in Bajura ate meat during our stay. Eggs were only eaten in two families (one in Humla (twice) and one in Doti (once)).

4.1.2 Increasing reliance on migration for work

‘There are no opportunities here’ young men, Accham

Migration for work, especially to India, has been a livelihood strategy for generations for families in the study locations. But people wanted to share with us how this has increased and how more families had actually left the villages for good recently. Migration for work is so embedded as the norm nowadays that nobody we chatted to in Bajura described themselves as farmers. The households without migrant workers comprise traders, shopkeepers, civil servants, contractors and commercial vegetable growers; all others have migrant workers, mostly working in India. In the Doti study locations people told us that there are increasing numbers going abroad to work especially since climate is less predictable and agriculture is considered risky. They shared that migration is the least risky option as *‘we can always get a job in India and know that cash is coming in’*, something increasingly important as harvests decline due to the drought.

Those we spoke with have at least one member of their household working abroad. In the Accham study locations too migration for work is common but recently

Asking women what they do, usually elicits the answer, ‘My husband is in India’
Field notes, Bajura

there is a growing trend away from work in India to more lucrative employment in Malaysia, Korea and the Middle East and growing networks of contacts to facilitate this. Young men say they see their peers returning from overseas with smartphones, cool haircuts and clothes and are attracted by this. *‘We want the city life’* (young man, Accham) and the cheaper costs to get to India and the networks of relatives to help them get work makes it much more attractive than trying to get work in Kathmandu or the Terai.

When men migrate, women are left to do the farming but those in Doti tell us that this is not really a change from the past, *‘men are only needed for ploughing’*. However, we observed ourselves and women

told us that *'lots of women plough these days.... And do it better than the men'*, although traditionalist men often try to deny that women plough. Men had indeed come home from India ostensibly to help with the farms, but women said they only came for New Year celebrations and sit around, drink and play cards, *'they don't know how to cut wheat- this is women's work'*. Men, in their defence, said they were waiting for the delayed rains, but several said if the rains still did not come they would return to India soon. In Accham, men acknowledged that the burden on women to run the farm is greater than in the past and they may need to call for help in the fields but they share the work between them and are *'as tough as men'*. Some men in all areas have decided not to worry too much about growing their own wheat and rice anymore and say there is a growing trend to purchase these commodities with income earned in India (or locally in Humla).

As well as increasingly wanting to work abroad, families in Doti shared their aspirations to own land in the Terai and explained that this too is a growing trend. This was noted in 2014 but people tell us the trend has accelerated. Even some who were making a relatively good living before have decided to pack up and leave recently. As an example, in just two of the wards in D1, fourteen families have moved out to the Terai in the two years since we last visited. There is also an increasing trend for families to join their husbands who are working in India. We found more young people talking about their intentions to pursue higher education than in 2014 outside the community. Then and now they often shrugged when asked why they wanted to do this saying they did not know what they wanted to do next, but that they did not intend to return.

'We used to hold farewell events when people migrated for work in India, but it is so common and easy now.' And another said, *'we encourage people to do whatever is best to earn an income. If they think India is best, this is good'*
Accham

In Accham, young people did not share the older generation's perspectives that electricity and road had had significant impact on development and felt that the villages were remote and their only options are to migrate. In the Accham study location, as in Doti and Bajura, nearly every household has at least one migrant worker (*'there is always more than one going to India- we use a kind of rota system'*) and like Doti,

people use Indian currency most of the time rather than Nepali rupees. Also like Doti, people say that people returning from India with cash and consumer goods motivates others and fuels *'competitiveness when they see others doing well'*.

In the Humla study location, families were constantly interested to talk with us about how to get their children to school, to work or to stay in big cities. The one remaining gold shop owner said that, *'people these days spend more on education and less on gold'*, partly explaining why the other gold shop in the community had closed. People in the Humla study locations share that they expect their relatives who already live in towns to take their children in and facilitate the networks needed for employment. For example, one of our households had already sent four of their children away to live with relatives *'for their education'*. Even though the money earned here in Humla is very good compared to our other study

locations, people rarely shared that there is a future for their children here. Similarly, in the Accham study locations sending children away to school was a much shared aspiration. *'I am very happy to spend all my money on education'* (HHH father, Accham) and *'We are always positive about supporting education. We want our boys to finish education before they go to India.'* (a different HHH mother, Accham). Parents and young people shared that the only way to compete with others from the *'big cities'* was to be schooled outside the village.

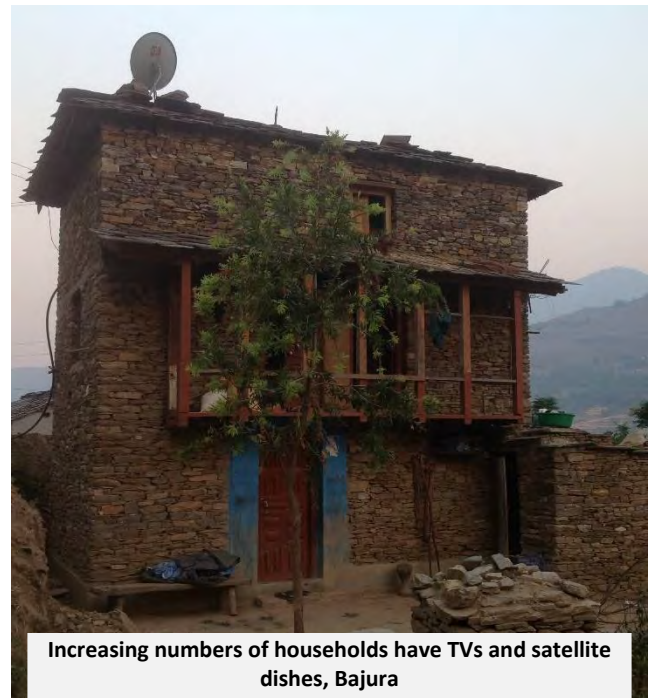
Box 12: Attraction of migration

In the Doti study locations it is more likely that people use Indian currency rather than Nepali for their everyday transactions. This is a place where nearly every household has at least one migrant worker. They mostly work as cooks, in restaurants, care homes and as security guards. They talk of bosses who pay for their transportation, accommodation, sometimes their food, medical expenses and *'treat us very well'*. *'When we take leave they phone us every day to find out when we are coming back'*. Remittances are sent through relatives' accounts with the bank in the district town or carried in cash by friends. *'There is always someone returning... and relatives don't charge to do this'*. People told us that getting work in Nepal was really difficult, *'even if you have qualifications it is difficult to even get a peon job'*. And jobs in India are always better paid *'even the lowest paid job you can earn 10,000 IC per month'*.

Field Notes, Doti

4.1.3 Electricity

Another important change since 2014 highlighted by people is the increase in household electricity connections and more reliable power supply. Six of our host households (in B1 and D2) have been connected to mains electricity in the last two years so all but one house in B1 and the houses in Humla now have metered electricity. In Humla families mostly have solar panels at present but tell us they are eagerly anticipating a new micro-hydro power plant for which each household is contributing either cash or labour. People say they will have their own household connections and are excited about owning TVs¹², running electric mills and opening new shops including electronics shops.



Increasing numbers of households have TVs and satellite dishes, Bajura

¹² In anticipation of electricity connections within 3 months, people are already including TVs and mobile phones as part of dowry expectations.

'Once we have roads and electricity our village will be heaven' sums up what others in the Humla villages told us. But families do worry about the bills.

The improvements in electricity provision in Bajura are due to the installation of new hydro-electric power plants which supply 24 hour electricity to nearly all the houses in B1 and 19 hours per day in B2 (with regular and predictable load shedding at night). Our families in Accham and Doti who had electricity before and all suffered long periods of power outage were excited to share with us that these days there is little load-shedding and they get electricity for long periods of the day. This has made significant changes to their lives. People were able to work longer days under the light from outside lamps during the busy harvest period during our stay which meant less worry about getting the work finished before the rains. Mobile phones, which every household owns, are always being charged. Many have Smart phones (said to be the first thing migrant workers buy for their families and often included in dowry demands). Some had purchased TVs and we noticed that women, in particular returned from harvesting to watch TV serials until late at night in D2 where the reception is very good.

People pointed out that better access to electricity in D2 has led to an increase in electronics shops in the market centre selling bulbs, mobile phones and chargers. There are now four general stores which have fridges and sell cold soft drinks. These, the shopkeepers tell us, are very profitable with Fantas and Cokes selling for about NPR 80 (30% more than prices in Kathmandu). Shops also offer music download services which are very popular among those living here. One shopkeeper here told us that women, in particular, come to download Hindi songs and often spend as much as NPR 400 at a time and this is a very profitable side to his business.

4.1.4 Increasing need for and use of cash

People have shared in other recent RCA studies conducted in the region as well as this one that the daily demands for cash have increased and that a subsistence lifestyle is no longer possible. Cash is needed for electricity, mobile phone credit, education costs, and health costs as well as to buy food because of prevalent food stock shortages. These latter have been particularly acute this year, as mentioned above, with all locations experiencing exceptional drought and with many telling us they expected their current wheat harvests to be less than half the usual harvest. In the Humla study locations, people were eating more white rice than in 2014 rather than the local rice varieties. They purchase this with the cash that they earn from selling herbs.

'We need cash'
Grandma, Accham

'If people have cash, they don't need to farm'
Man, Bajura

People shared that bartering is now very rare and people expect that goods and services are paid for with cash, even the traditional reciprocal labour arrangements now require cash payments. The installation of electricity meters in most of the study areas has made people a little more cautious about their electricity consumption than before. For example, in some of our families in Accham we were told to *'please switch off the lights as we have a meter'*. In Doti, people told us that TVs have been sold or given away because

they use too much electricity, *'when women watch all night when their husbands are in India'*. For example, people told us that monthly electricity costs to run a TV were in the region of NPR 1500 whereas it was about NPR 250 for light and a radio. Mobile phone costs can be quite considerable. While most of our families indicated costs in the region of NPR 200 per month those with migrant workers said it could be five–six times this amount. As mentioned above, large amounts of money were being spent in general stores in the main market in the Doti location on downloading music onto mobile phones.

Cash is also needed to support the growing trend of snacking. In both Doti locations there is a lot of snacking and people say it is increasing, especially of cooked and uncooked instant noodles. In the Accham study location, our team observed the same level of snacking on 'instant noodles' as before but increasing snacking on crackers. In the Humla study location there was a noticeable increase in snack eating compared to 2014, but also consumption of other convenience foods including milk powder and instant coffee. They also use increasing amounts of sugar in drinks and the preference for milk powder is because it *'tastes sweeter than real milk'*. Children complaining of toothache was common and people said it was because of the increasing consumption of sugar. In both road construction areas (Humla and Bajura) people said the heavy road work made them hungry and they had to spend more on food. In our Humla villages, we observed families sometimes taking as many as four meals per day. In Bajura we ate better than in 2014 as families said they spend their RAP earnings on food, especially instant noodles. We often observed RBG workers snack on noodles after work. Children in the households we stayed in pestered for money for chocolates and biscuits more than before, knowing that their parents now have cash.



Large amounts of alcohol are consumed in all the study locations; this picture is discarded bottles in D1

Alcohol consumption is increasing in both of the Doti locations and the few tractors which still ply this route all brought stocks of alcohol. Teashop owners along the road openly indicated that alcohol sale was

their most profitable item. As well as serving locals, people trekking on the road, Bolero drivers on their return journeys to town and the now less frequent tractor drivers all stop for drinks at these stalls. In the Humla villages, consumption of bottled alcohol has increased since 2014 with families drinking most nights. Men in the RBG groups in both Humla and Bajura drink alcohol every day after finishing work. In the Accham study locations, people complained that there were many drunks, who mostly consume local high alcohol content '*raksi*' and worried about their security when drunks get into fights. One local policeman told us there is not a problem with theft here and the '*only problem is drunks*'.

Box 13: Alcohol is the most profitable

The new owner of the only general stores in the village took over in 2015 from another man who has since made good money from growing bamboo. It is a gathering point for people in the village who stop here for tea and to play cards and eat snacks. But the owner, who is Brahmin says his biggest sales are from alcohol. Pre-empting any judgement on cultural grounds he says, '*it is all about the money*'. He sells quart bottles of alcohol at twice the price they are in town. His most popular lines are local *raksi* sold in plastic bottles and Virgin Gin.

Another small shopkeeper on the RAP road also shares that her main sales are alcohol and there is a large pile of empties stacked beside the shop as well as boxes of stock pushed under her bed in the back of the shop.

Field Notes, Doti

School costs are considered a major drain on household finances irrespective of whether the children go to local Government or private schools. In addition to admission fees and uniforms, there are always many cash demands made by schools throughout the year referred to somewhat vaguely as '*support school costs*', '*furniture costs*', '*maintenance costs*', '*Saraswati (Goddess of education) Pooja costs*' In D2 a new boarding school has been established in addition to the existing one and another is thriving in B, as well as brand new private Kindergarten. People tell us that this is because parents prefer to send their children to these schools rather than the government schools because they feel the quality of education, especially English language teaching, is better. RAP RBG members in Bajura shared that they were pleased that they are now able to send their children to the local private school where they have to pay NPR 800-1000 per month but were concerned that they might have to move them back to what they perceive as inferior Government schools when the RAP work ceases. The Principal at one of the Government primary schools here told us that the RAP wages have helped parents to purchase textbooks for their children.

In the Bajura study locations, people noted that the steady cash flow emanating from the RAP road work has helped a lot. It smoothes possible gaps in remittances and covers day to day expenses. But some see that their consumer habits are changing, *'with the income from RAP we consume more and develop a habit. This means we will want more cash in the future'* shared one political leader. But he sees this as a good thing for the future as he anticipates it will fuel entrepreneurship. As it is well known that the RBG groups have cash payments, others have been quick to exploit this. In Humla, young teens have stated selling fish and tobacco to the RBG groups and travelling sales people target RBG workers on payday in Bajura.



After school, girls sell tobacco to RBG workers

'with the income from RAP we consume more and develop a habit. This means we will want more cash in the future' shared one political leader. But he sees this as a good thing for the future as he anticipates it will fuel entrepreneurship. As it is well known that the RBG groups have cash payments, others have been quick to exploit this. In Humla, young teens have stated selling fish and tobacco to the RBG groups and travelling sales people target RBG workers on payday in Bajura.

4.1.5 Development of market hubs and access to goods to buy

All the changes in markets are related to increasing consumer behaviour of the people living in the study locations and not to increasing sales of produce. Produce collection centres which we saw in 2014 are moribund or closed. In the Doti locations, the few tractors which still ply the road continue to go down the mountain empty while bringing supplies (mostly alcohol) up the mountain for sale in shops.

In 2014 the location in Humla had only three shops but now there are five more including three new pharmacies. These are all run by health professionals and are well-stocked and sell contraceptives and pregnancy testing kits as well as a good range of medicines and fill the gap created by the poorly stocked and inefficiently run Government Health post. The market hub just 20 minutes' walk from B1 has grown enormously over the last two years and has had a significant impact on the community. It has quadrupled in size since 2014 and now comprises more than 100 shops and services and people say *'there is no need to go anywhere else now'*. While the market in D2 has increased very little in size there is more variety in shops which now include electrical shops. The general stores sell a wider variety of goods than before. There are new residential lodges catering mainly to drivers and people on their way to attend marriage ceremonies further up the mountain. One also provides a venue for NGO facilitated training and health programme training. Several shops opened with optimism in D1 in 2014

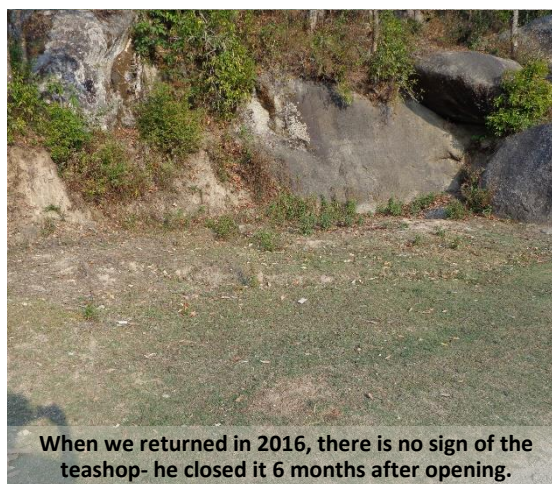


Products collection centre established under RAP in Doti has never sold any of these baskets and is now not functioning.

along the RAP road have closed. One had been run by a former migrant worker who told us he wanted to settle back down in his village. There is no trace of his teashop now and people told us, *'he could not make a profit, mostly because he sold alcohol on credit. And, of course, he was a drinker himself'*. He closed down within six months and is now back working in India.



The teashop owner returned from India to set up this teashop on the RAP road in 2014



When we returned in 2016, there is no sign of the teashop- he closed it 6 months after opening.

The owners of the other have moved to the Terai so the shop is closed all year except in Dasain when the road is busy with people returning to their family homes. A woman who runs another new shop is planning to close very soon too. Although she was less explicit about her reasons, she too had had to sell to people on credit and found it hard to manage a cash flow. A widow, she too plans to return to work in India.

Table 3: Price of sugar

Location	April 2014 (NPR/kg)	April 2016 (NPR/kg)	Change
C	160	160	none
D1	80	80	none
B1	100	80	Decrease (possibly because more competition in market hub)
B2	105	110	increase
A	N/A	90-100	-
D2	80	80	none

Box 14: New mood of optimism among retailers and businesses

Two years ago, my host household father explained that years ago during the RAP road construction many small businesses set up responding to the needs of construction workers, especially for clothes, shoes, food and medicines. He himself left agriculture to set up a clothes shop and medicine shop. These small commercial enterprises thrived and enabled many owners to purchase land in the Terai. But when we chatted two years ago, he felt that business was falling off especially as the road was now being extended up the mountain. New shops were being established along the newer part of the road and he feared they would take trade away from them as people further up the road would not bother to come to this market any more. He and his fellow tradespeople vented their frustration and there was a general mood of pessimism with many sharing that they were contemplating selling up and moving permanently to the Terai.

But two years later in 2016 the mood has changed. There are new shops and new construction including expansion to businesses throughout the market. 'My' family's clothes shop and medicine businesses were busy throughout the day and, by 'my' father's estimation their sales have increased by 1.5 to 2 times the 2014 rate (*'I sell about NPR 15,000-20,000 goods per day now'*). His demeanour has changed and he no longer talking about moving to the Terai. He has a new motorbike which he uses to make home visits for selling medicines. He cheerfully shared his plans to construct a concrete house and sees the family remaining here now. A tailor neighbour has expanded his business from four to eight sewing machines which are kept busy every day. A micro-finance company has just opened and the Co-operative is flourishing. Plans to open a community run 'boarding school' are in the pipeline. All I spoke with have hopes that this small market will now become a small business hub for the area.

So what had caused this change? People explained that the shops anticipated to be established further up the road did not materialize in substantial numbers and people living in villages further up the road still need to come to this market. The better maintained road has encouraged the establishment of transport businesses so that there are at least two Boleros plying regularly and offering lower fares than before. There is now a collective sense of optimism and willingness to invest in developing the area by the business people there.

Field Notes, Accham (A2)

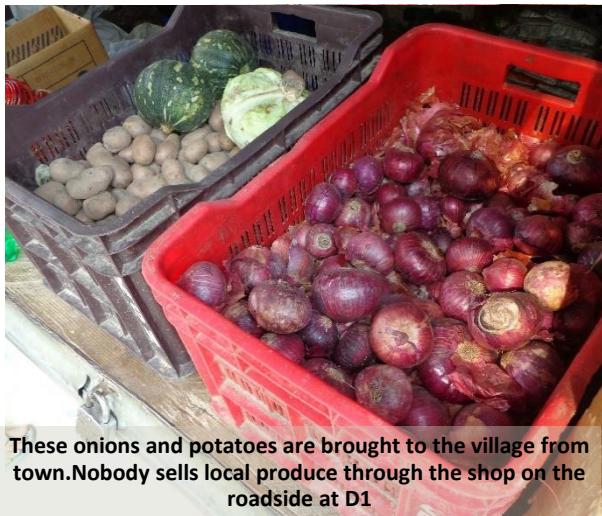
The market hub comprising more than fifty shops in the larger Accham study location (A2) is now thriving. In 2014, people told us they were considering moving out and starting businesses in the Terai because they felt business was stagnating and feared the competition from markets further up the road. But their fears seem to be unfounded and business has improved. With this turn around, and local shopkeeper we spoke with said they felt confident and happy these days (see Box 14). People say that land prices have gone up, as much as two times the 2014 value, especially the flat land along the riverside. Some say the price of land is now the same as in town. People from other districts have started to invest in the land whereas they cautiously only rented before. But there are limited financial services and money transfers are still made only through relatives' bank accounts with banks in the district town so that this still takes

people about three hours. A new micro-finance office has been established but is not yet operating, but people say their biggest need is a money transfer office.

Box 15: Market conundrums

Along the Doti RAP road, you can get eggs, onions, tomatoes. But they are all carried up from the town. In fact the eggs come from this town via a middle market 50 kms away. That means they travel over 100 kms before reaching the shops here. They sell at NPR 25 for two eggs or NPR 25 each if cooked. Almost nobody keeps chickens here (curiously only one Brahmin shopkeeper keeps chickens and his are for eating not laying). People say that chickens are difficult to keep because of disease and predators but others say people are lazy and are happy to buy when they need.

Field Notes, Doti



These onions and potatoes are brought to the village from town. Nobody sells local produce through the shop on the roadside at D1

In both road construction areas, there has been a notable increase in purchasing goods on credit. In the Humla study location, the local general stores are willing to sell on credit nowadays because they feel secure that people have RAP wages. On the day they get paid the shopkeepers expect them to repay their credit and keep a list ready for this. In Bajura study locations, travelling sales persons specifically target the villages when the RBG workers get paid. They sell factory seconds clothing, utensils and lottery tickets. They tell us they like coming to remote places because people are *'more ready to pay'* and shared that women are their

main customers especially RAP workers *'because they have the cash'*. But they also noted that their profit margins are low because people in the villages are well informed about prices because *'relatives travel to India'* and refuse to pay higher prices

4.1.6 House building and upgrading

In the Humla study locations, there has been a noticeable trend to replace traditional wooden roofs with CI sheets. This is seen largely as a status symbol (copying what people have seen in Mugu) but also to reduce fire risks. These sheets cost NPR 700 and further costs to transport so a typical roof replacement costs in the region of NPR 56,000. In Bajura only a very few new houses are being built in villages near the growing new market hub but not elsewhere.

In one of the Accham study locations there has been a marked upsurge in construction in the market area compared to 2014. Many concrete buildings are under construction and land prices have increased recently.



lots of new construction in Accham study location....



new sense of optimism

In D1 families continue to leave the village, a trend which was starting in 2014. People told us they leave because farming is unprofitable and they want to have access to better services, especially education, in the Terai. At least fourteen families have recently moved out of just two of the wards here. Their houses are mostly left for other family members and land is left barren or sometimes rented out. Out-migration is also evident in D2 despite it being a relatively thriving hub and outweighs any in-migration to set up new businesses. Here, wives are leaving to joining their husbands who are working in India. There are conspicuously more CI sheet roofs on homes than in 2014 and people say *'thatch is for poor people'*.



conspicuous new blue CI sheet roofs in the Humla study villages

A major difference in D1 from 2014 is the construction of toilets¹³ with every household now having one. People told us they were threatened with fines if they did not build them. In Humla the VDCs have declared the study villages as Open Defaecation Free (ODF) since 2015. Resonating others' comments a man told us, *'every step you walked (before) you could see faeces... now the dogs do not have enough to eat'*. We noticed there were less flies on this visit than in 2014 and people said that this was entirely due to the new ODF status.

¹³ Researcher observations: although every house now has its own toilet, use is less consistent with much open defecation still in evidence.

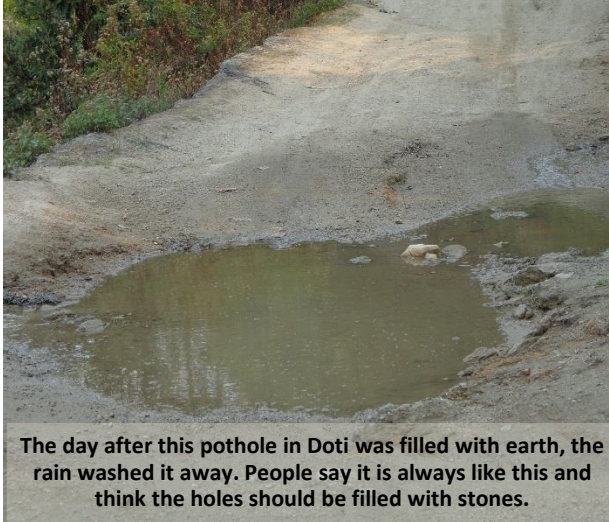
4.1.7 Road maintenance

The shopkeepers in the Accham study location told us they really appreciate the better maintained roads. For example, one successful shopkeeper echoing others said *'there is now at least one bus going through each day and the maintenance groups are doing a good job. They clear small potholes and sort them out before it becomes a bigger problem'*. But others in the community hardly mentioned this. Those living closer to the main road did not note this as a change at all largely because they don't use this road but walk on trails to the main road to catch buses or other forms of transport. The improved maintenance mentioned was attributed to the maintenance groups which people told us was organised from the district. *'The VDC is not concerned about the road because it is all done by the District'* (HHH father). People confirm this because the identity cards and payments are issued, they say, by the District. For those who discussed this, this arrangement seemed remote and there was no local involvement although there is a road committee formed by their own initiative to lobby for the extension of the road to the Health Post.



Noticeably more passenger transport (Boleros) along the Doti road and always packed like this

People in D2 told us that the RAP road is better maintained than before. And like in Accham, shopkeepers are especially pleased that they can get goods sent in regularly and more easily than before. But people in D1 where there were only a few shops anyway noted that while maintenance work was happening every month they were not very happy with the quality of work being done. *'They just fill holes with mud... and then it gets washed away as soon as the rain comes'*. Even children here shared that they thought the work was very poorly done. Chatting with various people along the RAP road over a distance of several kms, they said that the potholes should be filled with stones rather than mud and grumbled that the maintenance groups kept claiming that they were doing hard work *'when they do very little'* and, they feel, get paid well.



The day after this pothole in Doti was filled with earth, the rain washed it away. People say it is always like this and think the holes should be filled with stones.

People shared that although the Ward Citizen Forum is supposed to be the problem-solving forum they do not concern themselves with the road *'as this is all decided at district level'*. In some conversations, people shared that before the current system of maintenance groups, shopkeepers organised maintenance by pooling funds to hire people to do this. Some felt that this was better than the current system as the shopkeepers had an interest in keeping the road passable. We chatted to shopkeepers themselves who confirmed this and said they would be happy to do this in the future. Despite

guidelines to the contrary, people in the community told us they experienced another problem with the current system as the maintenance groups only worked over the first few days of the month, so if something happened such as heavy rainfall in the second half of the month there would be a delay in rectifying it. RMG members themselves confirmed that they needed to inform the District Office which twelve days they would be working each month in advance, it seems to cover themselves if there are spot checks and they always work the first half. They said they volunteer to do more if there are problems on the road but other people in the community said *'this was a lie'*.

Five men in a teashop reacting to the explanations given by the RMG President of their recent work after he left. *'He talks about taking minutes. Minutes, minutes? So what? The road repair will not last as soon as the rain comes.... Why don't they do a proper job with stones? These people are all words and don't work hard. But a minority of others defended the RMG, 'They are only supposed to do menial work and they will work extra days if needed because they are local people'.*

Field Notes, Doti

4.1.8 Road transport

In both Accham and Doti study locations, we noticed a decrease in tractor use and an increase in Boleros plying the roads. People said this was because the roads were better, partly, of course, because less

'I am so happy seeing a motor vehicle although I have never been in one'

Woman, Accham

tractors are using them. Whereas in 2014, we noted an average of ten tractors using the Doti RAP road per day, we saw none throughout our 4 day visit until the last day when a convoy of four passed taking supplies up to a forestry products company. Similarly in the study location in Accham, taking the RAP road, we saw

a single tractor whereas there had been many in 2014. The increase in Boleros using the RAP roads is very noticeable and something people themselves commented on spontaneously as a change since our last

visit. In the Accham study location, people no longer use tractors as passenger transportation and only use Boleros. There had been a fatal accident involving a tractor carrying passengers since our last visit which has contributed to the preference for Boleros but it was also because of the discomfort and slowness. All the Boleros are crowded in either direction, carrying as many as 25 people at a time. *'We rarely get a seat and often have to travel on the roof'*. Whereas in 2014 in Doti people said that about 16 would routinely travel on the Boleros, now they nearly always squeeze in more people and there are more Boleros plying the route. Teashop owners along the RAP road in Doti wistfully shared that they get less custom as the tractors were more likely to stop and passengers would have tea and snacks but *'the Boleros are in a rush'*.

People talked about a very small increase in motorcycle use in both Accham and Doti study locations, but for those who live off the road, there is always the concern about safe storage as they cannot get them close to their homes. Shopkeepers conspicuously have motorbikes and they tell us this is to enable them to re-stock small amounts items quickly and efficiently. They told us they purchased them outright with savings from working abroad.

Box 16: Still grumbling about access to the RAP road

In 2014, we met an old man who was frustrated at the route the RAP road took as he wanted it to be closer to his house and to be able to provide road access directly to his village (38 households). He has been cultivating bamboo and sold much of it this year, saying he got NPR 3 lakh. *'But I had to pay NPR20-30 per bamboo pole to carry it up to the road side'*. Men were employed to do this, earning about NPR 140-210 per day, but the owner was upset that this cost ate into his profits.

Field Notes D1

In 2014, people told us they were not optimistic that transport fares would decrease because of better maintained roads and suggested that benefits would be confined to less time consuming and more comfortable journeys. But Bolero drivers we talked with on the RAP road in Doti said that because there were so many Boleros plying the route nowadays the fares had gone down. And this was confirmed by passengers who noted a drop from NPR 300 to NPR 250 for a one way journey to the town. However, people laughed that the fares vary depending on one's bargaining power, *'a pretty girl will travel beside the driver for free , teachers get charged the most'*. Although people said that the District has fixed transport fares in Accham and Doti, these are not complied with. *'The fixed price one way here is NPR 135, but we get charged 300... what can we do?'*, people told us on the Doti road. They also shared that the fares always increase in the monsoon (as much as 60% more), partly because the longer route is taken and conditions are more difficult. Drivers are not local to the area.

Table 4: Price of transport

Location	Transport cost to nearest sub-market Cost (NPR)/kg		Passenger fares to nearest sub market (one way)	
	2014	2016	2014	2016
C	35 (by mules)	30 (more competition as more building work)	No transport available	Same
D1	3-4 (tractor haulage)		200	150-300
B1	7-8 (mule) 10-12 (porter)	6 (mule) 12-13 (porter)*	No transport available	Same
A	5 (tractor haulage)	No change	600 (by tractor)	300 (by Boleros which newly ply)
B2	7-8 (mule) 10-12 (porter)	No more mules 8-10 (porter)*	No transport available	Same
D2	4-5 (tractor haulage)	2-3 (cheaper than before because now brought by Bolero)	300	250 (less because more competition)

*People say porters are difficult to find nowadays since RAP work pays more.

4.1.9 New social services

In the Accham study locations, people noted the new birthing centre as an important change. This was funded by the VDC and people from three of the nine wards can access this using the RAP roads while those from the remaining six wards have to walk. The health workers said the health post is better stocked



Increase in use of mules in Humla & decrease in costs as a result

than before and attributed this to the road and better planning but others said that people prefer the pharmacies in the market as they complain the Government Health Post does not have stocks. The road does not actually extend to the Health Post and this still poses a problem for delivery of supplies which have to be portered. It is however better staffed (five staff compared to two in 2014) Neither study location in Accham has ambulances and in A1 the provision of an ambulance ranks among the top three priorities for people along with irrigation and small market development.

The Health Facility in the market hub in the Doti study location (D2) also has more staff now and people say there are more activities taking place here than there were in 2014 including a youth-focused programme and HIV/AIDs programme. But, just like Accham, people prefer the local medicine shops, which anyway are owned and run by the Government

Health Facility staff. Health workers say that the better road access has led to a decline in patients as people prefer to go into town. They too feel that they should have an ambulance stationed there. The Health Post in D1 has lost staff (from 5 to 2 (one Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and a sweeper, who has not been paid for more than four months) and people told us they do not come to this post any more as they do not trust the ANM and *'it only has ORS and paracetamol'* and choose instead to go to private clinics some 45 minutes' walk away. The Health Post in the B1 study location is difficult to access and is a 2 hour trek uphill for most people. The staffing here is the same as before and, like D2, it also has a new youth programme. However, people once again say they prefer to use local pharmacies for minor ailments (and will hire a vehicle to take them to the NGO hospitals in Acham or hospitals in Nepalganj if their condition is more serious) and those living close to the newly expanding market hub say there are many more medicine shops to choose from which offer good and competitive services. Only those who live in the proximity of the Health Post actually use it. A new outreach centre has been built at the Health Post in B2 but, like D1, the staff numbers have reduced. With a new medicine shop constructed just across the road,



people once again indicated that they prefer to use this rather than the Health Post.

In the Humla study location, people said the Health Post in C1 was nearly always closed, there are no supervision visits and the *'ANM does not do anything- he is either at home, in his fields and only leaves his phone number for people to call him'*. In C2 the Health Post constructed in 2014 is locked often although it has more staff than before. On our visit it had almost no medicines and the staff said it had been out of stock for about six weeks. Nobody knew where the person was and it was

supposed to be his job to collect the medicines. Sitting in the out patients clinic one morning we observed more than 20 people were seen but all were sent away without medicines. Most of the staff have homes in Nepalganj and spend months at a time there, leaving the post with only one assistant health worker. There have been no births in the new birthing centre here. Although there is a Health Facility Management committee people say it never meets and since there are no supervisory visits from outside, the service is in decline.

In the 2014 baseline report we noted that *'roads bring medicine shops'* and at that time on locations in Bajura (B2) and Humla did not have. Two years later, Humla study location has three medicine shops and B2 has one. In all cases these have been established by health workers and people in both locations commented on these important new changes.

People refer to the medicine shop owner as *'doctor'*. He is really popular and always busy. He tells us that people don't use the government health post because it does not have medicines and *'people don't trust them'*. He has just purchased a new motorbike so that he can make home visits at any time. Business is very good.

People tell us in the Accham locations that teenage pregnancy is quite high and access to family planning advice is not particularly good. In the Bajura locations, we noticed very high numbers of small babies, significantly more than before. There is some speculation that this may be because more men are staying at home while the RAP construction work is ongoing. As people had shared with us before in 2014, migration for work serves a family planning function too. However, family planning is readily available in the Health Post here and injections (Depo-provera) are preferred

School construction funded by the Education Department in Humla, Accham and Bajura were noted by people as changes making secondary schooling more accessible, but preferences for education outside of the village still prevail, even in Humla where the costs of educating children outside are huge. Staffing remains a challenge as schools in these study locations are seen as remote. This combined with what people perceive as poor quality of teaching, frequent teacher absenteeism, irregular supervision and limited subject choices (e.g. In Accham locations young people said they could not study science in the village and maths teaching¹⁴ was particularly poor) further fuels aspirations to send children to the terai for education, even from as young as seven years old. Teachers too send their own children away to school: *'...the environment (for learning) is not good here. Students are not interested and cannot compete in national exams against students from Kathmandu'*.

In the Humla study locations there has been a marked increase in provision of development assistance since 2014, both by Government and NGOs. People say this is because of the road construction, the provision of electricity and the plans to develop markets here. People feel that development is a long way off, *'perhaps tens of years away'* but there is a new sense of optimism.

4.1.10 Accessing services of the VDC

An assumption for the RAP programme is to increase access for people to their Village Development Committee Office, where various services are available especially birth and death registration and which issue citizenship, residency and other key documents. However, for the people we chatted with this remains difficult as either the road does not reach the office or where physical access is improved the office is often closed or understaffed. The VDC office for the Bajura locations is difficult to access as it is high above both study locations and there is no access road or plans for the RAP road to extend there. On our visit (a trek out of the village for several hours), as before in 2014, the VDC secretary was not present. In the smaller of the two villages in Accham (A1), too, people say the VDC secretary is *'never there'* and is always *'busy in town'* and in the larger village (A2) the office is *'always closed'*. The only VDC social mobiliser for the entire Doti study area lives in D1 and people say they get good (preferential) treatment from her. She tells us she opens the office which is in the market centre in D2 daily and is busy mostly registering births and helping with identity documents. She is usually there on her own. In the Humla

¹⁴ There is a national shortage of maths and science teachers, so they can exert their preference for urban placements.

study location C1 there is no VDC presence at all and in C2 the VDC secretary resides in town, a two day trek away and comes to the village just twice per year to hold an open budget meeting and distribute pensions.

4.1.11 Road work disruption

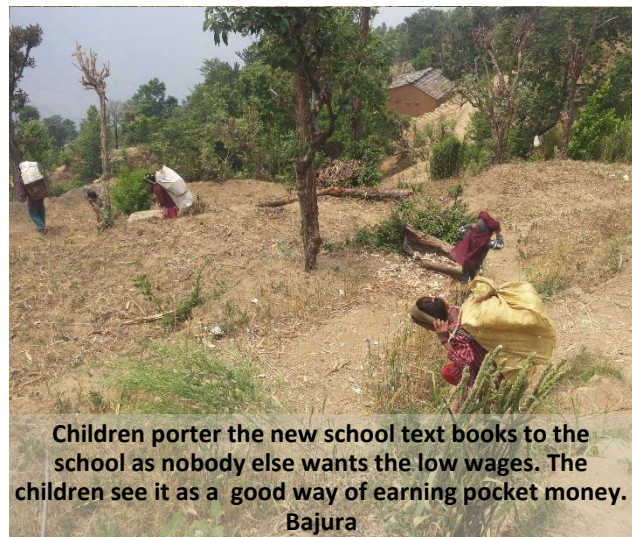
In both Humla and Bajura study locations, people told us that the RAP road works have caused some disruption to traditional access routes. In Humla nobody is using much of the road yet but have to take what they refer to as ‘scary *detours*’ where the trails are precipitous and liable to landslides. There are notice boards warning people not to use parts of the road because it is dangerous but the detour requires walking a further 1.5 hours and, although people mostly knew the dangers, most are illiterate and could not read the warnings. In B2 people said that the detours caused by road works made access quite hazardous in places (see photo). *‘If anything it is more difficult now to pass—there are detours and difficult places—but we are used to it’* was typical of how people shrugged the inconvenience off. A number of landslides were created by the road construction. In the Bajura locations people also complained of the dust created from the road works. Our own team members suffered chest infections from the dust and people said they suffered this much of the time. Women complained that they need extra soap to wash clothes because of the dust and dust contaminated their food. In the Doti locations people complained about the very high level of flies and some said this was because of the road, suggesting they come up from the valley in vehicles. A similar explanation was provided in Accham.



Our researcher takes a hazardous detour around the roadworks in Bajura,

4.1.12 RAP effect on local wages

In both Bajura study locations, people in the community shared that it is now difficult to find someone willing to porter goods for cash. They said this was because RAP pays about NPR 600-800 per day and a six hour portering job (carrying about 40kg) earns only NPR 500. The school teachers in B2 complained that they could not find anyone willing to transport the school books for the new school year and, although the books had arrived in time at the main town they worried about getting them to the school in time. They persuaded schoolchildren to carry the books for



Children porter the new school text books to the school as nobody else wants the low wages. The children see it as a good way of earning pocket money. Bajura

pocket money. A local builder complained that since RAP, he has had to increase wages for construction workers, *'Otherwise I can't find workers'*.

In the Humla study location, people used to be paid NPR 500 for carrying people on stretchers to medical facilities but the rate has trebled as people say that to do this they miss four days of RAP work. As families in Humla have cash this does not necessarily present a problem but it was discussed in relation to the effect RAP wages have on the local economy.

4.2. Changes since 2014 at household level

Whereas the previous section looked at the changes which people in the community discussed with us during informal conversations, this section focuses only on the households where we actually stayed, all of which were the same as in 2014.

Out of the twenty five host households with whom the RCA team has close interactions, nine felt they are better off than in 2014. Of these three families attribute this, at least in part, to RAP roads.

Positive change attributed to the road....

- One of these families operates a shop in the now thriving market hub in the larger of the two study villages in Accham (A2). He feels that since the road is better maintained there are more regular vehicles, especially Boleros which bring people to the market.
- Another is a family in Bajura who say that the RAP wages for the father who is in his 60s sustains him and his wife, particularly as he has recently sold his farm land as he feels he is too old to manage it now. In 2014 he had to look after his grandson and support his education but the boy has since moved back to live with his mother and their youngest daughter who had lived with them before now works in her brother's stationery shop. He has also benefited from renting out the two now empty rooms to RAP project staff.
- Another household which also attributes improvements in their family to the road also lives in one of the Bajura study locations. This woman in her 40s effectively lives on her own as her husband works in India and her children are living away. She also rents out her spare rooms to RAP project staff. Her earnings from working on the road, she feels, are hers to spend as she likes and she likes to spend it on clothes, wearing more fashionable clothes than she did in 2014. She says she is more confident and has savings in six different savings groups.

Apart from the shopkeeper, none of the other three families from the Accham study locations felt better off, with two saying nothing had changed and one feeling worse off because of high education costs and supporting a son who had lost his business investment. Two of the five Doti families feel slightly better off but in both cases this is due to the contribution of teaching salaries. The two families in Humla who feel better off attribute this to their own efforts; one has become the local broker for herb sales and the

other also collects herbs and has started to invest in goat rearing. He has further ambitions for opening a hotel as the road opens up.

In total seven families felt worse off compared to 2014, five of which are in the Bajura study locations. Of those who feel worse off, one family in Bajura attributes this to RAP. The father decided to return from India where he usually earns at least NPR 13,000 per month. During this last year working for RAP he has only been able to earn NPR 5000 per month on average and feels this is an unacceptable drop. He plans to return to India later this year. Others in Bajura struggle with changed family circumstances such as death in the family and increased number of dependents, increased education costs and increased debts. As already noted one family in Accham struggles with education costs and the seventh family to feel worse off is an elderly couple in Doti who longer get remittances and manage only on their pension. They increasingly worry about their future especially should they get sick.

5. What people think of RAP

This section describes what people know about RAP and their perceptions and experiences of RAP. It includes the voices of ordinary villagers and road users as well as direct beneficiaries such as members of RBGs and RMGs.

5.1. What is RAP?

In the Humla study locations, the presence of RAP is well known and children in the road construction area chant, *'RAP 3, RAP 3, RAP 3'*, especially at any stranger to the village. But people believe it is a NGO, with some suggesting it is funded by *'old age pensioners in the UK'*. Here people say they really appreciate that RAP staff stay in the village permanently while staff from other development programmes only visit occasionally. They shared stories of poor supervision by other projects resulting from infrequent visits and how projects just *'pack up and leave'* without completing the work whereas RAP supervises well and tries to solve disputes (which here, people say, are often politically motivated) as they occur. In Bajura study locations, some people knew the road construction is funded by the UK but others were vaguer suggesting it was a three year programme funded by *'a country'*. The new road is referred to as the *'RAP road'* but people do not know what RAP is. But here, like Humla, the project itself is highly respected and trusted. This is significant given the distrust people shared about other organisations *'which come short term, from the cities, try to do something and then just leave without saying.'*

While the name 'RAP' was ubiquitously associated with the road construction in the study locations in Accham and Doti which took place many years ago, people were less clear about who organises the current maintenance work. People told us about small groups *'with orange vests'* who do minor maintenance work but often thought these were contracted by the District or by contractors. Only where the RMG Chairperson is well known in one of the Doti locations are people clear that the maintenance is supported by RAP. People explained they know this because *'he brags all the time'*. But even here RAP was described as an international NGO and the funding source was unclear.

Comparing RAP with other road programmes, people said they like RAP because it pays cash rather than *'in kind'*. But people say they think these are expensive roads (people in Bajura study locations calculated that they are about three times the cost of other local roads). They shared that they appreciate that the roads are *'strong'* especially because of the gabion baskets used in construction. People also felt that the *'RAP rules'* are strict, such as those preventing minors working. As one under-16 told us endorsing others, *'we can't work if we are under 16 in RAP, but in other projects we can'*. In the Humla study locations, people told us they liked how RAP accommodated their seasonal commitments and were flexible about the timing of the road work. So, for example, road workers work in the morning in the hot season and afternoons in the winter, slow down during planting season (June /July) and during the months when they traditionally collect herbs from the forest. They can negotiate breaks when the workers are needed on other development projects (for example, to complete a drinking water project recently) and allow the building groups to decide among themselves when they will work. In Humla, in particular, people talked

about the *'strict accounting'*. Unlike other projects where users committees are seen as a *'way to make money'* by fiddling receipts and accounts, this, they say, is not possible in RAP.

In the Doti study locations, people talked about their dissatisfaction with other development programmes where they were given vegetable seed, goat cages and random training (for which they got allowances *'nobody will go (attend) without an allowance'*) but were not appropriate (see Boxes)

Box17: Goat cages; 'some development projects are pointless'

'You have of course noticed all the goat cages?' The older man was responding to my interest in changes in the village since my last visit. There were indeed many new cages and it turned out to be part of a local government initiative. But nobody was using them as goat cages. A few were using them to dry clothes or store firewood. But everyone said that they were goat cages and they had constructed them to reduce diseases in goats. So why was nobody using them? *'It is too cold in winter', 'tigers will get the goats', 'snakes will attack'* and with more probing they said that actually *'our goats rarely get sick'*. People had agreed to construct the cages as a way to earn cash. They got NPR 10,000 and the cage cost only NPR 2-3000 to make. So there was a good profit.

Field Notes, Doti

Box 18: Vegetable seeds

'We were given seeds... onion, chilli, spinach', the young women explained while we were discussing changes in the village. *'But I can't see people growing these'*. Others around her laughed. I asked why they laughed. *'We have no water here'* said one. *'We have very little land to grow such things'* another pointed to tiny triangles of land between the houses. And another said *'then there are pests'*. *'Why would we want to grow vegetables?'*

Field Notes, Doti

5.2. Peoples' views of RAP processes

This section mostly contains the views of RAP direct beneficiaries working in RBGs and RMGs but includes triangulation with other community members especially from conversations held at teashops and informally in the evenings.

5.2.1 Quotas and selection for women and disadvantaged groups

People in all the locations were familiar with the *'rules'* relating to inclusion in RAP work groups, especially the quota for women which was repeated to us often (sometimes in English, *'there have to be 33%'*). In RMGs, they say this translates into two women out of a group of five or three in a group of seven. In RBGs, the minimum, people say, is seven women in a group of twenty. However, in all but one RBG in one of the Bajura study locations there are less than seven women and sometimes as few as two in the RBG.

Members of this particular group said , *'we are worried we cannot finish the work in time if there are more women and anyway they are busy with household chores'*, so they have substituted with men, they say with the blessing of *'seniors'*. In Bajura study locations men grumbled that *'women do much less work but get paid the same (as the groups gets paid as a whole and the income has to be shared equally) - this is not fair'*. But an old man, echoing others, said he likes it that everyone gets the same pay, especially as he cannot manage hard work, *'It is inclusive'*, he says. Besides, say others, *'Some men are lazy too and we can't do anything about it'*. In the Humla study locations, people said that although there were complaints that the women get paid the same as the men even though *'everyone knows they do less work'*, this were the *'rules'*. *'It does not matter if they can work or not, we have to have this many women'*. When there is heavy work to be done, such as felling and lifting trees, men are seconded to the building group. In the maintenance areas, there were no complaints about women working less hard. In the Accham study locations, people said the women *'work well, the hard work is carrying stones so the women cut the grass and sometimes ask their husbands to help.*

In the Bajura study locations, some complained about the special privilege for Dalits. Members of the Dalit-only RBG got cash transfers to purchase goats but others said, *'Dalits are always favoured. Actually the real poor are us. They all have family in India. They can afford to send their children to the private school. It would be better if this support came to us'*. Similarly, in the Humla study locations, people said that they might have agreed with Dalits being prioritised in the past as they had little farmland but *'now they have more cash than us'* (especially since there are no longer barter arrangements and only cash payments for services) and objected to them continuing to be provided with *'special privileges'*. In Doti study locations, too, people grumbled about the special provisions for Dalits as they *'have money'*. Like others, a teashop owner on the RAP road shared what he really thought. He began the conversation about who is included in maintenance groups noting affirmatively that it is for widows, the very poor and Dalits. Only much later in the conversation did he refer back to this and said, *'most of us think the Dalits are often rich because they work in India. They earn good money. They spend it on alcohol and useless things... it is not fair that they get the preferences for this sort of work'*.

Where there were consultations on who should be included in the road maintenance groups, people felt these had been the right decisions. For example in a village in Accham, ward members had actively consulted and suggested that women might need the work most. One RMG member here told us she got the work because *'everyone thought I deserved it as my husband has re-married and left for India and I have little food stock and land.'* Other younger women said they too would have liked the offer of the work but with their husbands working abroad and young children to look after this was not really an option. People still complained in some study locations about political appointments which they say prevail particularly among office-holders in the road groups, especially as these people get incentives and training. In D2, people told us that since RAP engineers had lived in the community they knew who needed work and might want to be part of the maintenance groups. But in the Humla study locations, every house was required to send a representative to work in the RBG, even those holding civil service jobs. While people felt that working on the road was more of a social good than to earn money, they questioned the

inclusion of civil servants who cannot work every day and so bring the productivity (and therefore the earnings) of the group down.

5.2.2 Cash payments and wage rates

People told us how important it is that RAP pays them cash. Those in Bajura who normally migrate to India would not even consider staying behind for a short while to work on the construction of the roads if it was not paid in cash. In the Humla study locations which experienced a severe drought this year affecting their rice harvests, some said the cash was specially appreciated, *'we could buy rice in bulk. Without RAP we would have suffered'*¹⁵. Similarly, in Bajura where harvest were said to be down by at least a half this last year because of the drought people say they will have to purchase rice. As noted above, women in the Bajura study villages shared how important having their own cash to spend was. They can make their own decisions on what to buy and young women tell us that being able to contribute to the family means they can delay marriage. In the Accham study locations, RMG members told us that earning *'cash in hand'* is really important for them *'it is immediate and regular'*.

Although pleased that payments are made in cash, people nevertheless felt that the wage rates are low. There remains some confusion on how wages are calculated but, for example, in Bajura where everyone was mystified by the calculations in 2014, some could explain it a bit better but not as well or in so much detail as the workers in Humla. In Bajura, they simply know it is paid for the work the whole group has done, then somehow divided into twenty depending on how many days a worker actually contributed. Only the RBG facilitators we spoke with knew that there were different rates depending on the nature of the work. Those who break up rocks felt the calculation for work done was sometimes unfair as it was based on the weight of the rocks but *'some drops away and is not weighed'*. Others complained that if there were mistakes made in the construction they were not paid and had been often being told that they *'did not follow instructions'* but were frustrated that the supervisors still got paid. In the Humla study locations, road workers could explain the wage calculation consistently and confidently this time whereas in 2014 there was lots of confusion. But they were not happy that they get less wages than they say they were told they would get *'we get NPR 300 rather NPR 500 per day we were supposed to get'*. They say they try to work 6 hours per day (they had worked 9 hours in 2014 but said this was too much, although some who do *'soft work'* still manage 8 hours) in the mornings in the hot season and afternoons in the winter. They could explain the different wage scales which depend on the nature of the work done (*'soft soil'* NPR 250, *'hard soil'* NPR 300, *'soft rock'* NPR 400 and *'hard rock'* NPR 6-700 while filling gabion baskets is calculated by the size of the basket; 1.5 m³ at NPR 800 and 2.0 m³ at NPR 1000). The payments are made to the group as a whole and individuals get paid according to the work they have done and number of days of work.

¹⁵ Researcher comment: This may seem a little strange since households made it clear to us that they had savings. However, people indicated that a lot of their cash is used to pay for education and stocks of, for example, herbs, are kept until the prices go up. The RAP cash provided *'cashflow smoothing'*.

Since 2014, people say there have been a large increase in special building groups comprising '*strong young men*'. People described the composition of these (all formed, they say, within the last year in Bajura) as having twenty members like the conventional building groups but required to do heavier manual work and who are paid more. Some members of these groups in Bajura had returned from India for this work but others had worked on major district roads before and so had some experience of this type of work. We spoke with some and they were not sure how much they would get paid, with estimates ranging from NPR 500-1000 per day.

5.2.3 Savings

In the Humla study locations, people shared that they were mostly pleased that there were mandatory savings deducted from their road work wages (usually 10% or a minimum of NPR 500-1000 per member), especially as many do not traditionally have a savings habit, although some have substantial sums of cash and stocks of produce kept in their houses. Some have aspirations to take out loans to invest in shops and guest houses in the future. However, for those who joined the road group because they had to have a representative from their households but have salaried work, it is hard to work enough days to make the minimum savings contribution. For example, a health worker told us she can only manage to work on the road a few days per month (*'the most I have ever worked is ten days over the entire 3 years'*) so earns less than the amount she is required to save.

In the Bajura study locations, the RBGs also talked about mandatory savings and the minimum quoted here is NPR 1000 per month if the worker earns NPR 10,000 or a mandatory NPR 500 if the worker earns less. Some shared that this is no longer strictly applied. Women liked the fact that savings were theirs and they could make their own decisions regarding their use. For example, one woman whose husband works in India plans to use her savings to support the education of her younger siblings, '*because these are my savings*'. Another has bought false teeth. Nobody in either Bajura location talked about whether they got any interest on these savings and these savings were not regarded as a source of future investment in income earning activities. They shared that they view them as savings for paying off debt, for house repairs and education, but also like to invest in gold and jewellery and, anyway, they say these savings are '*too small for investment*'. The groups knew their total savings accrued but no other details or terms and conditions of the savings scheme. Little was known about lending arrangements from these savings except that they were intended for very short term loans and some said with 2% interest each month.

5.2.4 Facilitators, supervisors and accountability

People explained to us how each RBG in Humla has a facilitator who '*makes sure people are paid, keeps attendance records and the first aid medicines*'. But in the Bajura study locations people worried because there were no written records although they say the '*facilitators monitor each day*.' They say the '*RAP people*' come and evaluate the work and then go. As a result some believe the facilitators are cheating them because they are the only ones who know what the payments are, '*even the RBG Chair does not know*'.

Box 19 RBG Facilitators

'Our facilitator keeps records and makes sure we are paid. He has been on seven trainings; mostly technical such as how to make gabion baskets. He also went on first aid training. He takes someone else with him most times. There is a committee of facilitators (from other groups) and they have a chairperson and treasurer who go to the district town to collect our wages. They get an allowance for this and food. It takes them two days.'

Field notes Humla

Records are maintained in English. One RMG Chairperson in Doti spontaneously showed us his records but although he was confident in all that he recorded his understanding of English was weak and he got confused explaining some bits to us. In the Humla study location, people said that the engineers record the work completed in English and so *'we depend on him to get it right'*. They say he does not explain things clearly.

In both Accham and Doti study locations RMG members felt their supervisors were very supportive and sensitive. They provide helpful guidance and visit regularly. *'With only one day training I thought I might forget things but my supervisor helps a lot and explains things to me'* (RMG woman, Accham) and *'The supervisor was always on my side, even when I was unjustly dismissed for a while. He would come to my house and reassure me that I would get my job back'* (RMG woman, Doti). In the Bajura study locations, RBG members said their supervisors often backed them to get better pay *'when we have worked really hard'*.

5.2.5 Insurance

By contrast with 2014 when people were quite confused, people were proactive to explain their understanding of the *'RAP rules'* to us this time, especially regarding insurance. People talked often about the practice of substitution within the building groups and unlike in 2014 were very aware that anyone who substituted for another was not covered by insurance. They say they understand and accept this. But they also say that it *'is impossible to avoid substitution'*. People in Accham said that the practice of substitution was accepted by the district as long as people realised they would not have insurance cover. In the Bajura study locations, we met several young men who were on leave from their jobs in India and were substituting for their fathers, basically to give them a rest. In the Humla study location a daughter in law was working instead of her father in law who had injured his hand working on the road and all the family was well aware that she would not be insured.

However, although people are clear about who is entitled to insurance, they shared in Bajura and Humla that the procedures to process insurance claims were very difficult (see Box 20). In cases shared in both locations victims got less insurance pay-outs than they expected but did not know how to follow up with complaints. In Bajura there is a common belief that death insurance is NPR 1.8 lakh but people think this

is little, especially as funeral costs alone inevitably exceed NPR 50,000. Insurance for RMG workers in Doti was quoted to be NPR 3 lakh.

Although there is insurance cover for people working on the road, an incident in the Humla study location raised the issue of whether working animals should also be covered. A mule was killed by a boulder fall and the RBG group was made to pay NPR 1lakh compensation. This, they feel, was unfair and they want a clearer system of settlement.

Box 20 Confusion over what medical treatment is covered

I was at the health post when a man came to have a wound on his leg treated. As the health post had run out of antibiotics, the on duty health worker used tincture of benzoin for the wound. We got chatting and he told me that he had injured his leg while working on the RAP road. A boulder had rolled down the side of the road initially leaving only a flesh wound. This had been cleaned with water and tincture of benzoin by his RBG facilitator, but it began to fester after a week. Here he was at the health post, but was disappointed that, *'All they could give me was tincture of benzoin'*. He explained that he could get antibiotics at the local pharmacy, but he was hesitant as he is not sure of who will pay for them. *'RAP had told us that they will pay for treatment of injuries, but we weren't told if we had to claim the money first or show them the bill to be reimbursed. I don't even know if they will pay for my antibiotics, since it was just a flesh wound which my facilitator had treated at the road site'*.

Field notes, Humla

'I had my hand crushed by a rock ten days ago, while working on the RAP road. The Health Assistant treated it that day. The wound was deep so the Health Assistant had to stuff it with a gauze. But now I think my finger bones are broken. I cannot move any of my fingers except the thumb. Look at it, you will see that my hand is swollen and the fingers are turning black. I am confused whether or not I should go to Surkhet or Nepalgunj for a checkup; I haven't even gone to Gamgadi. I am not sure if I will get reimbursed for medical expenses so I am waiting for my insurance money. RAP gives us money if anything happens to a registered worker on the road. I am waiting for that money, I have filled a form and also talked to the supervisors at the RAP office. I am not sure if I will get the money if I bear the expenses now and give them the bills. They paid for the Mallam (Ointment) and also provided medicines but my hand is not better yet and the Health Assistant said I need to get it x-rayed. Let's see what happens, I will wait for about a week more after that I will go myself. When I return I will give them the bills, if they give me the money, it will be great, if they don't then what can be done? It's God's will. No matter what, I will tell my grandchildren that I had my hand crushed making this road so to make their life easier, and I will do so with pride'

One of the members of the RBG got his hand crushed under a stone. He told me he knows very little about RAP's policy on the provision of medical insurance. He went to the nearby health post but got no medical help as there was no medicine. So he went to get first aid treatment from the private clinic where he was advised to go to district hospital or he might lose the hand. Frightened, he took loans from relatives and went to Mugu district hospital for further treatment. He spent NPR 8000 on treatment and medicine and returns back with the advice that he should take three months rest. I met him as he was

back at work after the three months rest. He was angry that he lost three months of work and had had to pay NPR 8000. He has tried to claim insurance but despite producing the necessary papers from the hospital, he had been told that there are items which cannot be refunded. *'They asked me to take NPR 1000 only but I refused to take it. What will I do with that amount as I have NPR 8000 loan to pay and my hand is still not right, can you see my two fingers are withering every day. I need further treatment but I can't afford it. I don't have any other option than working here again.'*

Field Notes, Humla

5.2.6 First Aid, equipment and facilities

Both RBGs and RMGs we interacted with talked about having first aid training and first aid kits. First aid training was often mentioned as the most useful and important training people had received from RAP. However, in one location an ex-trainee claims to the village that he is now a *'health expert'*. While we were there he advised a man we knew quite well that he had high blood pressure. The man was very



Maintenance tools get stored near the site but first aid kits are only replenished once a year

frightened by this and went next morning to the private hospital in town to be checked where he was told there was no problem whatsoever except he should drink more water in the heat. People told us that the first aid kits were often left at home and shared that they had little supplies. One RBG facilitator in Humla shared that he brings the medicine box to the worksite every day but it comprises *'just bandages and iodine'*.

Road workers continue to complain about the boots they are supposed to wear which are both hot and often too big (they tell us there is only one size) and *'keep coming off'*. People in Humla study villages wear their RAP caps consistently but rarely the boots or gloves. They said they use the boots when they go to collect firewood or work in their muddy fields (*'they keep my sari clean'*, woman, Humla) but not when doing road work. One woman in Humla shared that she had asked for better fitting boots more than three times but never got them. A couple of people who had suffered injuries said that wearing boots or gloves would not have made any difference to the impact of these injuries sustained by falling boulders or being trapped by boulders. People also complain that it is difficult to use the road tools when wearing the gloves issued. They are thin and offer little protection except to prevent blisters and, like the boots, people say they are hot. In the Accham study location, RMG members also complained about the boots, *'I don't like wearing them as they are too big and hot in summer'* though others conceded that they *'are good in winter'*. They tell us that the RAP project staff say that *'it is for your own safety to wear these-do you want your insurance money?'* but sometimes people think that wearing ill-fitting boots and gloves poses a greater hazard. In Doti, RMG members said they can get a waiver on wearing boots or hats or not working a particular day if their

Chairperson writes a letter in advance stating this. For example, he himself explained *'I can write to say it is too hot to wear boots at the moment so if there is a spot check we will not get into trouble'*. People also complained about the tools, especially the length of handles on the hoes.

In Humla toilets for workers are provided and we were told by people that, *'RAP had insisted on this in each building site'*. These are tented separately for men and women. In one case the construction had taken seven people four days and they had expected to be paid for this but have yet to be paid. People tell us that the provision of work site toilets as well as observation of RAP project staff use of toilets has increased their own use of toilets at home. In the Bajura study locations we saw toilets for the workers which we had not seen in 2014 but there are still very few. Like Humla, people shared that they have adopted hygiene practices such as washing hands and dishes from observation of the RAP project staff staying in the community. One of *'our mothers'* said that she likes the smell of the soap she uses and now she has cash to buy soap she likes to emulate the RAP families who stay in the village.

5.2.7 Participation

Efforts to involve communities in decision making are viewed variably. People in the Bajura study locations told us about *'public hearings'* that they say are called by RAP twice per year in the community. But they say they don't really know what the accounts mean and how much they earn, *'we just nod our heads'*. In the Humla study location, there have been a number of public consultations and lots of people still feel that there were better routes that could have been selected. People here are speculating that there will be further work for at least another four years on the new 65 km stretch of road now planned. They assume that as there are few villages along this stretch able to provide workers, they will continue to work and will have to camp along the road. This, they said, will mean that fewer women will be able to participate in the work and so *'their sons will work instead'*.

People shared that despite the public meetings, they were still puzzled about the basis for compensation for land used in road construction. They were pleased that the final road alignment had taken in forest land rather than areas where houses or farm land would have had to be destroyed and noted that RAP was actively re-planting forest areas it had had to destroy. However, those who have lost farmland say they have no news about any compensation and expect it as they have heard rumours of other road construction programmes in the district *'where people have been compensated for this'*. Others are philosophical about this, *'To go to Heaven you have to die, so if I don't get compensation I don't really mind'*¹⁶ one man told us who, anyway, says he can farm government land elsewhere. And others with land beside the road are confident that land value will increase so compensations for them is less important. They think they will rent the land to shopkeepers or open shops themselves.

¹⁶ Meaning that the land has to be lost to get the road - it is inevitable.

Box 21: 'Public hearings'

There was a what people referred to as a '*public hearing*' planned just after we left the study location which they say was to review the routing of the 65 km Humla to Mugu extension to the current 14 km road. There have been disputes about where the road should start but RAP, people say will share a preferred route linking the hilly regions. The meeting will involve people from four VDCs. For us, the journey to the meeting venue took 2 hours. People told us, '*obviously women will not go because they are very busy. One member from each household is expected to go, so these will be men*'. When we arrived three days earlier we had been welcomed with a big signboard and garlanded. It was a case of mistaken identity as people thought we were Constituent Assembly members and the community was anxious to get us to explain to RAP what the villagers really wanted regarding the road alignment. There have been previous disagreement about road alignment. For example, people thought that the existing road has too many loops in it and too many trees were cut down to accommodate the '*two unnecessary loops in the road*'. We heard the same story many times that the RAP engineer was a Maoist supporter who provided work only to fellow supporters following the election defeat, '*these two extra loops were just intended to give more work to the Maoists*'. People complained that only the Maoists villages were consulted about this. They hope the new hearings for the new road will be more inclusive and they will be listened to.

Field Notes, Humla.

In the Bajura study locations, people told us that they have not been told that the SED activities have ceased and shared they were bewildered that they had not seen the project people since last year. In Accham study locations too people said they had not been officially informed but '*we have not seen them for 6-7 months so maybe they have left?*' Although some group members said there have been efforts to re-distribute the savings money but they knew little about how much they were due and how this process would be carried out. In Doti, too people say there has been no information shared about the cessation of SED activities.¹⁷

¹⁷ RAP3 says that they explained the situation with all political party representatives in the District annual review meetings in July/August 2015. Our study suggests that this information has not been transmitted to their constituents.

6. Study implications

This section provides some implications that emerge from the conversations and interaction with the study participants. They are presented as observations made by people themselves and purposely not as interpretations of the research team.

In RAP maintenance areas, people noted:

- Shopkeepers and drivers are the main beneficiaries of better road maintenance and highlight the ease with which they can get goods delivered to their shops since the roads are better and ply the routes more frequently and profitably. Community people say they like that there is more choice of goods to buy in local markets. In Doti study areas, people suggested that funds for maintenance should be raised by those with an interest in keeping roads maintained, i.e. shopkeepers and transport providers, and past experience¹⁸ had indicated that this worked.
- Although transport is more frequent, its usefulness is sub-optimal as people cannot predict what time passenger transport will be available. People opt to walk often out of frustration that there are no vehicles. They are also frustrated by the varying and inconsistent fares charged. A timetable and fixed fares would, people say, greatly enhance usefulness of the transportation.
- People also are disappointed that there are no ambulances stationed at their local health centres and have to call vehicles from town at great expense in case of medical emergencies.
- People share that they feel they have no influence on the nature, timing or quality of road maintenance efforts as they feel it is all decided in the District. People feel that they could have a role in demanding accountability and providing community supervision of work done.

People in road-construction areas noted

- That men do not need the road work in any of the study locations as they have alternative and more lucrative opportunities in India or other countries or, in the case of Humla, locally.
- In areas where migration is the norm, women benefit from having access to regular cash through RAP employment especially as they increasingly need cash for food, utilities and education costs. Relying on irregular and unpredictable remittances had been a problem for women managing on their own in the past. Having access to their own cash has contributed, they say to building their confidence and enhancing their status especially when living with in-laws. Women with young children do not have

¹⁸ A toll exists on a non RAP forest road for maintenance and the drivers we spoke to felt this was appropriate.

opportunities to work with RBGs or RMGs and feel they would also benefit from this access to cash earnings.

- There still needs to be more clarity on the calculation of wage payments for RBGs and SBGs. We acknowledge that this is a technical and complex process but people will continue to feel disgruntled if satisfactory answers cannot be given by the road technicians
- There needs to be more clarity on procedures to access insurance claims, when accidents occur special legal advisors could be mobilised to assist them through the process. Accidents involving animals need legal insurance provision.
- In the Humla study location, people noted that the Government Health Post was inadequate to support them if they have roadwork related accidents and felt a more reliable system of health care should be supported
- There needs to be more attention paid to minimising the disruptions caused by the road construction such as to traditional access routes and dust pollution.
- There needs to be more discussion and consultation on future road planning including embracing local knowledge. Furthermore, people need information about the long term (twenty year) horizon so that they can plan for their future investments. There also needs to be more clarity in how RAP3 engages in local dispute resolution processes which involve road construction.

On SED activities, people noted

- They were on the whole not concerned about the cessation of SED activities. Those who were already self-starters and risk takers may have benefitted from some SED inputs but these are very few in number.
- There should have been more information about the closure of SED activities and any future plans

Annexes

Annex 1: RCA Study Team members

Annex 2: Areas for conversation

Annex 3: List of people met

Annex 4: Village profiles

Annex 1: Study Team members

Team A (Achham)

Bhupadas Rajbhandari

Ram Chandra Adhikari

Prakash B.K

Samin Rijal

Vishal Gadhavi + Diksha Mahara

Team B (Bajura)

Pooja Koirala

Bikram Sherchan

Bom Rawal

Subita Pradhan

Jailina Mulmi

Team C (Humla)

Neha Koirala

Arya Sarad Gautam

Toran Singh

Kshitiz Khanal

Team D (Doti)

Dee Jupp + Abijit Sharma

Bhupadas Rajbhandari

Ram Chandra Adhikari

Samin Rijal

Jhakka Bista

Annex 2 Areas for Conversations

Family

Changes in the family; births, deaths, moved out/in, education, working/caring roles
 Changes in house & assets; house additions/renovations, new assets (bought/gifts), sold, broken, loaned. Land & livestock changes. Utilities and fuel. Reasons for change.
 Changes in main and supplementary income sources, new sources. Change in 'personal poverty' (annex 3 baseline report) Food consumption (quantity, quality, regularity, seasonal issues), food stocks.
 Changes in access to facilities such as school, market, health centre (improved/less good, walking time)

Social services

Health Changing trends in health, (aging population, emerging problems), changes in diet (positive /negative in food/drink consumption (people's views)) Drivers of these changes (better market access, local production, outside influence, lifestyle, TV)
 Health service provision; GON-changes in physical infrastructure & accessibility (ambulance, time), staffing (nos. & qualifications), retention of staff. Diversification of health provision (private medicine shops, mobile facilities, outsider providers) Changes in maternity services (house visits, institutional births, home births - preference and practice. Changes in family planning accessibility. Drivers of these change.
 Health issues related to road (negative-traffic accidents, dust, worker accidents; positive; easier access, more comfortable journeys, vehicular access)

Education Diversification of school choices (state, private, coaching). Changes in physical infrastructure, staffing (nos. & qualifications), staff retention, contact hours, absenteeism (teachers/ students). Changes in accessibility, all weather accessibility. Perceptions of the local schools, choices & adequacy.

Livelihoods

Livelihoods which have not changed- relevance /importance of these. Changes in ways to make living. Importance of earning cash. Diversification of income earning. Trends (preferences for self-employment, waged work, agriculture, trade, service, migration). Seasonal aspects of livelihoods (highs/lows & coping strategies). Informal, formal, 'under the radar'. Speculation investment e.g. Purchase land along road corridors
 Drivers of changes in livelihoods. Influence of road on changing livelihoods (push/pull factors & migrations, access to markets (inputs/selling), road work itself, new opportunities e.g. shops, trade, transport services because of road). Displacement of work because of roads (portering, traditional trades/crafts). Evidence of SED activities, achievement/sustainability.
 Road as contributing to change in access to financial services, access to information, changing aspirations) Other influences (non-road) for change.
 Changes in dependency e.g. on remittances, loans. Extent of out-migration e.g. to other villages, town. Changes in who supports who. Attitudes towards local work opportunities/ prospects/status.

Road work:

Nature of work (building, maintenance (routine/spot), who gets, who doesn't? Participation of women in road work (problems/benefits). How significant for livelihood, who needs/wants this work? Views round this work, status, and stigma/pride.
Wages (amount, regularity, fairness, comparison with other work). Other benefits (bank account, training, savings), deductions
Conditions; number of days, work hours, hardship, fairness in distribution of work, supervisor attitude and behaviour, provision & use of safety equipment, tools,

Roads

State of roads. Perception of road upgrades, relevance/importance (were these priorities?), attribution. Perceptions of road work/maintenance – adequacy, standards, speed, process. Responsibility for maintenance. Visibility/adequacy of maintenance, maintenance committees.
Changes resulting from road improvement; positive (economic activity, tourism, police access, health access, extension services, lifestyle, time savings (what do people do with time saved?) etc /negative (insecurity, theft, out migration, lifestyle). Transport availability, costs (compare with table 7 baseline report; fares & transport of goods). Prices of goods (use some specific markers e.g. cost of sugar, cost of fertilizer) and services, availability/ diversity of goods and services. Significance of extended season access.

Community; governance & participation

Organisations operating in the village (changes), composition, roles, perceptions of usefulness. Opportunities to interface; influence decisions, raise complaints, make demands. Participation in community decision making (especially concerning roads).
 Accountability; information shared (e.g. about road costs, road employment opportunities, road construction progress, maintenance activities), transparency. , feedback.
Poverty & Social cohesion; inclusion/exclusion, tensions, reciprocity, self-help and voluntary work (changes in this since road work). Changes in poverty-overall trends, increasing /decreasing vulnerability (e.g. elderly living on own). Village poverty ranking changes (see baseline report; (access/quality of services, remoteness, income diversity & range of economic activity, social capital). Changes in public poverty (see baseline Table 3)

Chat, explore, probe, present scenarios 'what if', introduce debate 'some people think', listen, draw, explain, dream, play

Annex 3: List of people met

	Men/boys	Women /girls
Host families	61	57
Neighbours	154	139
Students	64	48
RMG/RBG	51	31
Others in community	161	
Shopkeepers	49	
Local government	20	
Health workers	14	
Teachers	41	
Tradespeople	19	
NGO workers	3	
TOTAL	912	

Annex 4: Village profiles 2016

The following profiles are compiled by the research sub-teams and specifically seek to identify change since their first visits in 2014.

Build areas

Village B1

Village B1 is a rural location, about two hours' climb from the district vehicular road. The ethnic makeup is mixed, with mostly Chettri and a few Giri households living in different settlements. Most of the houses are built in a style traditional to the area with the main structure made up of stone and mud with slate roofs. Access to services like the VDC office and the health post is about two hours' uphill climb, while the primary and secondary GON schools are relatively nearer (30 minutes). All households in the village use spring water for drinking. While earlier the village was dependent on solar power, construction of a micro hydropower plant, a year and a half ago, has resulted in almost half the households installing TV and DTH connections (satellite service). People in the village describe themselves as farmers but their major cash income source continues to be remittance from male migrants who go to India for short or long term, depending on the prospects there.

As B1 is a RAP 3 building site, at least one person from every household is employed in building groups. A considerable portion of the RAP road has been completed and another agricultural road is being expanded which is expected to connect to the RAP road. Due to this, people seem more optimistic about the roadwork this time around. One visible change that people attribute to the roadwork is the opening of more shops in the village and along the road corridor. Researchers also observed that consumption of instant noodles and other packaged snacks, which are sold at these shops, had increased among those who work on the roads and their family members.

Village B2

Village B2 is situated 5-6 hours uphill from the main market. The ethnic composition is varied with majority of Brahmins. The lower belts have clustered Dalit households. Most of the houses are made up of mud, stone and slate. Few of the houses have CI sheet roofs. The village has access to public taps for drinking water, with four to five households sharing a single tap. Access to VDC office, health post and the only higher secondary school in the area is an hour uphill. As before, the village is dependent on micro hydro-power for electricity. At the time of the baseline, there were frequent power-cuts as there was a conflict about electricity distribution to neighbouring district, but as this is now resolved, the village now has a continuous supply of electricity.

Migration is still the primary source of income in B2. Majority of men from Dalit households continue to go to India to seek employment. Although all households are involved in agriculture, this is for home consumption only. People are even more disinterested in agriculture than two years ago. This has been catalysed by the drought, which has persisted over two years. Low agricultural production has further pushed people towards migration or work in the service industry.

Being a RAP building site, B2 has a good number of people employed in road building groups. There have been landslides in two/three places in the road corridor, which have resulted in an obstruction making the road difficult to use by the people. However, people anticipate that the commute to the nearest market will be easier after completion of the road. Additionally, where people would have to walk one hour uphill to the health post, or 5-6

hours to the nearest market (in the case when medicines were unavailable at the health post), now buying medicines has become easier as a new medicine shop has opened on the road corridor.

Village C

Village C is a three days' trek from the district headquarters and includes two Village Development Committees (VDC) which fall on either side of the RAP road which is being constructed. The village has a mixed ethnic population, made up of Chettri, Brahmin and Dalit households, living in separate clusters. People farm for their own consumption but collection and sale of medicinal herbs for two to three months each year continues to be their primary source of income. While portering with mules had just taken off at the time of the baseline study in 2014, a lot more households have started keeping mules for this purpose, and people pointed out that these families were able to make more money and theirs' were the houses with the new CI sheet roofs. The physical infrastructure (schools, health post) is in place, but the quality of service continues to be poor in terms of contact hours, supply of medicines, teacher/health worker absenteeism.

Households are dependent on solar panels for electricity, but as a micro-hydropower plant is under construction in the area, most people are hopeful about having a steady supply of electricity in the near future. The RAP road is still under construction, and people anticipate that with the road and electricity, the area will develop in a few years' time. One significant change observed was the opening of three pharmacies in the local market centre over the last one year. As the health post is either closed or does not have the required supply of medicines, people say they now have an option to go to the pharmacy.

Maintenance areas

Village A

Village A is located near a river and situated next to a RAP road that was constructed seven to eight years ago. Majority of the families in the village are Chettri with some Dalit households. All the houses are made of mud and stone with tin roofs and a separate toilet. Some households have a shed underneath the main living area, while others have a separate structure for livestock. Access to basic facilities like water is available at the community taps, which are shared by people in the village, but drinking water is in short supply. The health post is 45 minutes to two hour's walk from the RAP road, depending on the location of the host households and while those nearer to it prefer to walk the trails to reach there, households further away use available public transport. The VDC office is further uphill from the health post but the absence of an officer means people have to wait for the officer for their work to be done. There is one private and one Government school near the health post. Most families grow paddy, wheat, maize and some vegetables, mostly for own consumption. However, seasonal and long term male migration to India is the primary income source for most families.

More shops have opened along the road side and in areas closer to the road compared to 2014, and a few people who were thinking of moving to the terai expect that once the market grows over the course of time, they will not have to move. Public vehicles are also more frequent, though the timings and fares are still not regular. Seasonal road access is still an issue but people anticipate that once the bridge, which is under construction, is completed, vehicles will be able to ply the road throughout the year.

Village D2

Village D2 is located alongside the RAP road, which is two and half hours' drive from the district headquarter. The ethnic composition of the place is mixed with a majority of people who are Chhetri. Most of the houses are

constructed of stone and mud with slate roofs, with a few made of CI sheets and wood. The village is a market centre for several adjoining VDCs with the police station, health-post and schools, both Government and private, located in the market.

The RAP road has attracted several entrepreneurs who have recently acquired fridge as a result of which, the consumption of ice creams and cold drinks have increased in the village. Likewise, new electronic shops have come up which cater to popular demand for memory cards to store songs and videos. People say that the trend of out-migration is steadily increasing, especially among the younger boys who leave school to find work in India.

Village D1

Village D1 is about an hour and a half drive from the district headquarters on the RAP road. The place has ethnic population of Brahmins and Dalits, who live in separate clusters. Most of the houses are constructed with stone and mud with slate roofs while a few of them have CI sheets. While the locals buy items of daily use in the local shops, they go to the district headquarter for big purchases. There are two shops, both selling grocery items, clothes, cosmetic items, vegetables etc. Although there is a health post in the VDC, people prefer to walk down/take a vehicle to the nearest town for treatment. People in the village grow crops for their own consumption. The practice of going to India for work is high, especially among male members.

While substantial changes were not observed in D1, there were a few things which stood out compared to the baseline. One noticeable change observed was the increased frequency of Bolero jeeps using the RAP road. While the number of Bolero jeeps coming from the district headquarter had increased, the number of tractors carrying grocery, clothes and other household items had largely gone down. The condition of the road was a lot better than the baseline. However, this was not because of the work done by the RMGs as vehicles mostly took a short-cut route to the district headquarter, leaving a certain stretch of the RAP road unused. All houses which had not had toilets in 2014 now have toilets under the local government scheme.