Reality Check Approach
Perspectives of People Living in Poverty in Nepal:
A background paper for the Mid-term review of Swiss Country Strategy (2013-2017)

June 2015

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Acknowledgments

The Team gratefully acknowledges the management and logistic support of the
Trail Bridge Support Unit/ HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
Manbhawan, Lalitpur, Nepal

Cover photo: Woman and her daughter ploughing
Credit: Bikram Serchan

Consent was obtained for all photographs depicting people which appear in this publication.

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Abbreviations and Glossary

CF	Community Forestry
DDC	District Development Committee
FHHs	Focal Households (neighbours of the host households)
HA	Health Assistant
HG	Home Garden
HHH	Host households
LILI	Local Infrastructure and Livelihood Improvement
RCA	Reality Check Approach
NTFPs	Non-timber forest products
SSMP	Sustainable Soil Management Programme
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SCS	Swiss Country Strategy
TBSU	Trail Bridge Support Unit
VDCs	Village Development Committees
WCF	Ward Citizen Forum

Bhatmas	Fried soybean
Chiura	Beaten rice
Doko	Bamboo basket
Parma	Reciprocal labour arrangement
Kami	*Blacksmiths*
Khetala	Hiring of local labour
Kodalo	Hoe
Kuwa	Uncovered ground water
Dhendo	Maize porridge
Mudas	Bamboo/wooden stools
Gagri	Traditional water vessels
Khanlasi	Drivers assistants/apprentices
Lahures	One who serves in foreign armies – either in the Indian or British forces
Nanglo	Flat tray woven from bamboo, used for shifting grain

Acknowledgments

The Reality Check Approach Study has been made possible by the commitment and enthusiasm of many. The Reality Check Approach (RCA) was originally an initiative of the Swedish Embassy in Bangladesh where it was first commissioned in 2007.

This study was commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to provide insights for the mid-term review of the Swiss Country Strategy (2013-2017) for Nepal. The study was undertaken by the RCA Study Team, trained and convened by FDM, and led by Ansu Tumbahangfe (Results Monitoring and Reporting Manager, Trail Bridge Support Unit/ HELVETAS). Advisory support was provided by Dee Jupp PhD (Team leader RCA+ project, Indonesia).

The RCA study was only possible thanks to the ten families who opened their doors to the study team and embraced them as temporary family members. We thank the families for contributing their valuable time and allowing the team members to live with them and share in their everyday experiences. Through our time with them we gained unprecedented insights and a deeper understanding of their realities.

We hope that this report reflects well the views and experiences of these families, their neighbors and others within the communities. It is our hope that this study contributes to improving the understanding of the policy makers and that development programmes are better geared towards their needs and aspirations.

Executive Summary

The Reality Check Study (RCA) was commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in April 2015. This is one component of the larger self-evaluated mid-term review being conducted by the SDC of its Swiss Country Strategy (2013-2017).

The main objective of the study is to provide insights into people's perspectives of change in rural areas and discuss whether SDC project activities are relevant and appropriate to the current context and aspirations of people living in poverty in rural Nepal.

The RCA is an internationally recognized qualitative research approach that seeks to gather the experiences, opinions and insights of people living in poverty. It combines the act of 'immersion' (living with the poor households for several days and nights) with traditional listening studies which focus on having in-depth conversations to understand what matters to them. The focus is therefore on 'how' and 'why' things happen rather than the 'what' and 'when'.

The study was conducted in eight Village Development Committees (VDCs) in three of SDC's core district – Khotang, Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga. Ten study team members were 'immersed' with families living in poverty for five days and four nights. A total of 10 host households were purposely selected as being poorer households from the study sites. Overall, the team members interacted and had conversations with over 270 people during the course of the study.

Conversations around poverty revealed that people unanimously regard the 'elderly left on their own', either because they have no children (or they have already died) or have been abandoned and families singularly dependent on agriculture as being the poorest in villages. Other determinants voiced, though less strongly, were indebtedness and lack of food security.

The findings of the study also indicated that people's contemporary aspirations no longer rest within agriculture. People do not regard farming, even with improved practices, as a 'way out of poverty' and are instead keen on other economic opportunities that enable them to earn cash incomes. Having cash (or the lack thereof) was regarded by most of our study families as being the main determinant of poverty. We were told that the *need for cash was greater than ever* as people became more reliant on markets for food; agricultural inputs; clothes; education and health costs; amenities such as electricity, mobile phones and phone credit, etc.

Overall, people expressed the view that there have been improvements in their lives especially related to food habits and access to public resources. Parents are motivated to send their children to school, primarily with a view enhancing their children's future earning potential. However, parents and students often indicated that the quality of the public education systems was failing them. The emphasis on needing cash these days has led to and is also a consequence of different livelihood choices, particularly migration for work. People feel driven to maintain cash flows as they become part of the emergence of an increasingly consumer society.

At the household level, people felt that women's roles are changing, often as a result of pragmatics of managing households and farmland while their husbands migrate for work. As a consequence, many say have to work longer and harder. Many expressed the view that basic labour saving technologies (such as electric mills to grind cereals, availability of piped water directly to their homes) had lessened some of their physical hardships.

The attribution of development interventions was found to be difficult, especially when changes have multiple and often inter-related causes and explanations and where many and often duplicating development interventions are taking place. When people discussed change, it was within a wider context of their lives and not necessarily about specific projects and how they had affected them.

The main drivers of change as identified and ranked in order of significance by people themselves include:

1. ***Migration (to Kathmandu and abroad):*** Leading to increase in disposable incomes,; improvement in eating habits (more money spent on nutritious food); investment in children and siblings education; rise in construction work facilitating waged work (skilled and unskilled) within villages; labour shortages (especially

during the peak agriculture seasons) leading to decreases in land cultivated; and changing landlord and tenant relations (with tenants having more negotiating powers)

2. ***Roads***: Which have increased the availability of multitude of goods (especially rice) within villagers; lessened hardships and saved time by families in transporting goods for their household needs; more convenient access to external markets for purchasing goods (not for selling goods) and hospitals
3. ***Personal networks, initiatives and investments***: Which support relatives, friends and villagers to avail meaningful employment; and spread of ideas and knowledge
4. ***Modern communication (Mobile phones):*** Have increased spread of ideas and knowledge; increase the aspirations and expectations of people; and stay in contact with family and friends
5. ***Scarcity of Water***: Decrease in cultivation area and change in cropping patterns (from paddy to maize); and families migrating out from mountain villages to Terai

Overall, people indicated that SDC supported projects were pro-poor and the findings indicate that proactive approaches have been carried out to reach the 'poor', mostly interpreted in the local context along caste and ethnic lines. However, the study findings indicate that there are significant differences in poverty levels within districts, VDCs and wards, which do not always fall within caste/ethnic categories. In our study villages, we met and talked with Dalit households who were doing very well, even better than their Chhetry neighbours, mostly due to the incomes from migration for work and yet were beneficiaries of targeted project interventions. People often pointed out those who received benefits were not necessarily the poorest. They consistently said that elderly living on their own as well as families fully dependent on agriculture (subsistence) and therefore cash deficient, irrespective of ethnicity or caste, were the 'most needy' in villages. This cautions against applying a blanket approach of focusing only on caste/ethnicity and the need for local NGOs and social mobilizers to take more care in applying targeting criteria which comprise both social and economic indicators, as in fact suggested by Country Strategy.

Amongst the SDC supported development projects, it was clear that roads were considered to be the most important planned development intervention in the communities. People regarded the employment opportunities during road construction to be important and reliable for short term cash flows to meet their daily consumption needs, but not so significant in terms of retaining men from migration for work . Rather it enabled those left behind (mostly wives) to earn cash incomes. Roads leading to easier access to consumer goods (mostly brought into the villages) and access to various public services were also mentioned often. But, the expectation that it will propel commercial agricultural production through access to markets was found to not have occurred as envisaged.

Synergies between roads, irrigation and commercial agriculture projects were also found to be largely unsustainable, beyond project support. People identified low prices in local markets as a major disincentive for the lack of success of commercial agriculture. Furthermore, findings from the RCA indicate that for most small landholders the switch to commercial production involves taking risks due to the unpredictability of market prices, yields; hard work; and financial resources- which many are not ready to take.

At sites where Community Forestry Programme had been established, people told us that there were signs of increased protection of forests, due to the well-defined institutions and rules in place that. Meanwhile, with Leasehold Forestry Programmes, the findings showed that the members were more interested in receiving the goats that had been provided (to encourage them to become members of the group) as liquidity than in the forest regeneration.

People, especially Daits, shared that Ward Citizen Forums (WCF) operating in villagers had contributed to them being more aware and knowledgeable about grants coming in to the village in their names. Dalit women groups had organised themselves to tap into these funds for developing economic opportunities, suggesting that villagers are have begun to play proactive roles.

Importantly, the RCA findings indicate that a 'long lens, beyond project support' is needed when porjects are being planned and implemented. Development planners need to know what is 'meaningful' and relevant for peope, and under what context, for development interventions to truly have an impact on the lives of people living in poverty.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

This report presents the findings of the Reality Check Approach (RCA). The study was commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and was conducted in April 2015. The RCA is one component of the larger self-evaluated mid-term review being conducted by the SDC of its Swiss Country Strategy (2013-2017).

The main objectives of the mid-term review are to enable SDC to reflect and systematically address the changing context. Specifically it includes:

- Assessing if the context has changed since the preparation of the current Swiss Country Strategy. If so, how has SDC adapted to the changing context and whether the context is changing due to their work.

- Determining the status and trends in achieving the targets of the Country Strategy; particularly assessing whether the project activities correspond with the planned and foreseen activities and determining if the country strategy approaches are being applied and whether they are still relevant.

- Identifying areas for improvement in project monitoring (and management, if needed); to identify areas of improvement/adaptation/adjustments in the current results framework.

- Preparing for the decision for the Human Security Division for its future involvement in Nepal.

The RCA was commissioned to provide insights into the first two objectives, specifically providing people's own perspective on the changing context in rural areas since 2013. RCA is not an evaluation approach but can shed light on the relevance, uptake and outcomes of project activities and/or other programmes. It's special comparative advantage as an approach lies in contextualising findings and taking the position of the intended beneficiaries.

This report is a stand alone report, but it also serves to provide an interpretative lens for the quantitative findings of the household survey which was also conducted as a part of the review process. The report is presented from the perspective of people themselves, with purposeful minimisation of an authorial voice. Photographs and quotes have been used throughout the report to illustrate the points made by them.

The RCA team comprised ten experienced Nepali RCA practitioners who have been trained by FDM and have been involved in other RCA studies in Nepal and Indonesia since 2011. The team was led by Ansu Tumbahangfe, Results Monitoring and Reporting Manager, TBSU, who also received training through the RCA+ project, Indonesia. Advisory support was provided by Dee Jupp (Team leader RCA+ project, Indonesia). The overall management of the RCA was undertaken by Trail Bridge Support Unit (TBSU)/ HELVETAS Intercooperation on behalf of SDC.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Reality Check Approach

The RCA is a qualitative approach that seeks to gather the experiences, opinions and insights of people living in poverty. It combines the act of 'immersion' (living with the poor households for several days and nights) with traditional listening studies which focus on having in-depth conversations to understand what matters to them. The focus is therefore on 'how' and 'why' things happen rather than the 'what' and 'when' (Sida 2007, 2009).

One advantage of the RCA is that it deliberately seeks to move away from programmatic monitoring and evaluation studies, which generally use logical framework approaches. It is an atheoretical approach which valorises people's own perceptions and experiences and builds the theory of change from these rather than from the outside. The RCA provides an opportunity to take a step back and a adopt a wider lens to

understand how different spheres (economic, social, political) of their lives are interconnected with the wider macro-level changes taking place in their communities, regions and the nation.

The emphasis is on gathering a wide and diverse view of multiple realities, rather than developing a public consensus. In addition, by documenting what people say, the study aims to 'flag up' issues that can be responded to, or if necessary, investigated further by those engaged in the programme.

RCA practitioner helping to prepare meals

Community map indicating public resources

The RCA researchers do not use checklists or research questions, which may suffer from normative bias. Rather the researchers use broad thematic checklists of 'areas of conversation' (summarized in Annex 4) which assist in ensuring purposeful conversations. The emphasis is on relaxed informal two way conversations without note taking to ensure that people feel at ease.

The immersion aspect of the RCA is crucial as it creates opportunities to experience first hand what the people mean (eg. difficulty in collecting water, fodder, accessing services) and observe the difference between what people say that they do and what they actually do (e.g actual use of toilets, nutrition practices etc). By spending considerable time with the families, who are referred to as **Host Households** (HHHs), a relaxed and trusted environment can be created for candid conversations.

Assisting in household chores (collecting water, cleaning livestock stalls, preparing meals), ploughing fields, planting maize greatly helped in this process and changed the dynamics of the relationship between the RCA team and household members, allowing for more open exchange. The RCA team found that the families, which they stayed with, were accepting and most conversations were open and relaxed.

The team members also had conversations with many neighbours, referred to as **Focal Households** (FHHs). In addition, RCA members interacted with local leaders and service providers such as teachers, health workers, shopkeepers, local NGO staff, etc. These conversations, which are held at different times of the day/night and with different people, allow for triangulation of findings, which is an integral part of the RCA approach. Unfinished and confusing conversations can always be pick-up again and/or cross checked with other family members.

Sometimes conversations were supplemented with visuals which family members and others created themselves. The photo on the left shows one such example of mapping the community as a way to extend and deepen conversations. Other visuals included timelines, asset diagrams and mobility maps

Important characteristics of the RCA include:

- **Living with** rather than visiting (thereby meeting the family in their own environment, understanding family 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 who experience poverty take the lead in defining the agenda and what is important);
- **Centring on the household** and interacting with families rather than users, communities or groups;
- **Being experiential** in that researchers themselves take part in daily activities (collecting water, cooking, cultivation) and accompany household members (to school, to market, to health clinic);
- **Including** all members of households;

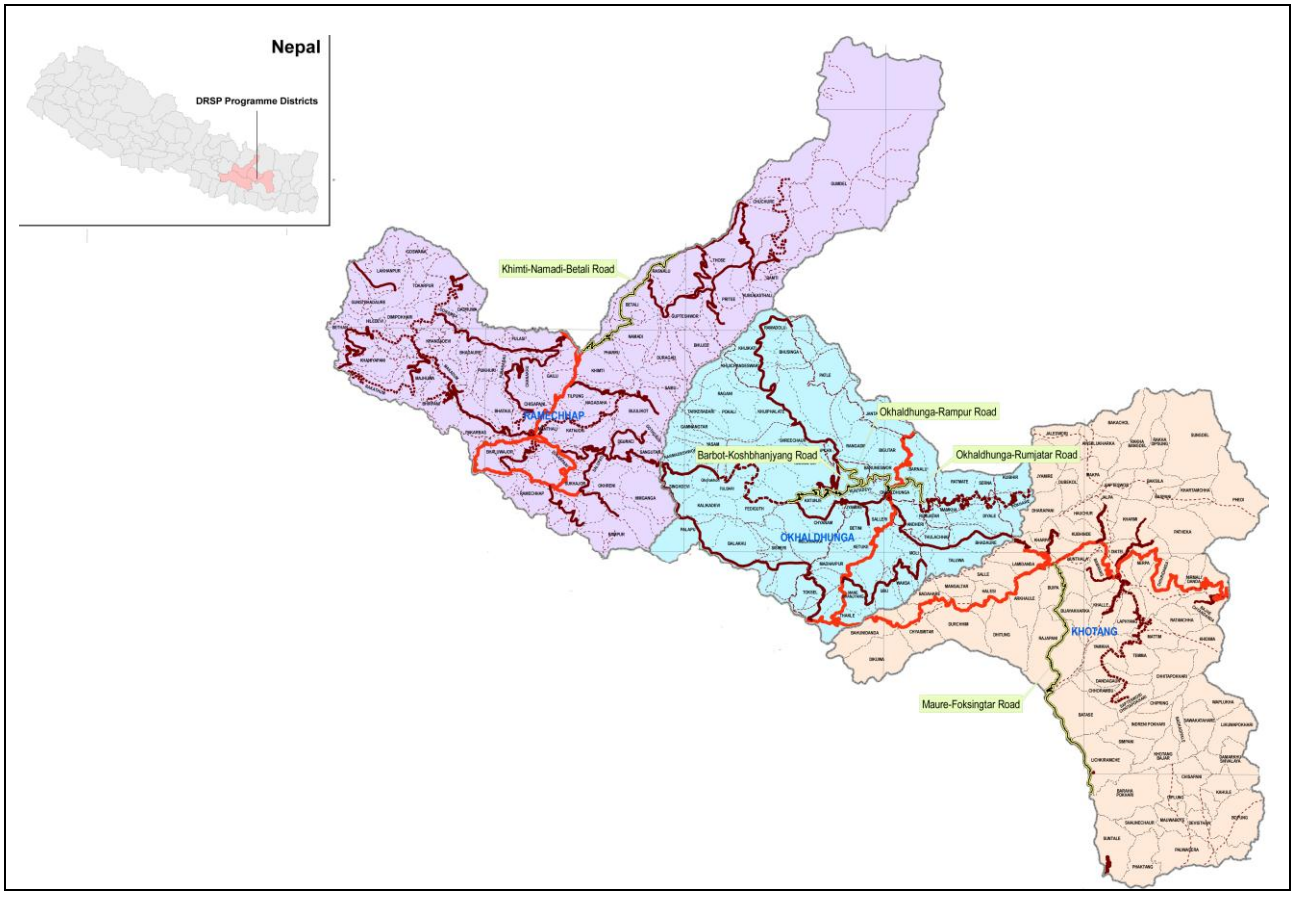
- **Using private space** rather than public space for disclosure (an emphasis on normal, ordinary lives);
- **Accepting multiple realities** rather than public consensus (gathering diversity of opinion, including "smaller voices")
- **Interacting in ordinary daily life** with frontline service providers (accompanying host household members in their interactions with local service providers, meeting service providers, e.g. teachers as they go about their usual routines);
- **Taking a cross-sectoral view**, although 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;
- **Understanding longitudinal change** and how change happens over time[1].

At the end of the study, each team member left 'gifts' to compensate for costs that the host households might have incurred while allowing the RCA members to stay with them. These generally consisted of food items (rice, oil, sugar, salt), tea, soap, stationery, solar lamps to the value of NRs 2,000.

1.2.2. Selection of the sites

The RCA was conducted in all three of SDC's core programme districts - Ramechhap, Khotang and Okhaldhunga (ref: Annex 1). Within these three districts, four Village Development Committees (VDCs) were selected altogether. The VDCs are located along the road corridors supported by SDC and represent communities which had varying concentration of SDC programmes, proximity to the district headquarters and caste/ethnic compositions (Table 1). The village names are coded to protect the identity, confidentiality and anonymity of those involved in this study.

Map 1: SDC Core Districts



[1] Assuming the study becomes a longitudinal one.

Table 1: RCA selected site characteristics

District	Community	Caste/ Ethnicity of the selected communities	Road network	SDC supported programmes in the sites
Ramechhap	A1	Magar (53 HHs) Tamang (16 HHs)	Manthali-Kathjor-Gobi	DRSP, LILI, RHDP, HG, LCGDP
Ramechhap	A2	Magar (9 HHs) Newar (13 HHs) Tamang (3 HHs)	Manthali-Kathjor-Gobi	DRSP, LILI, RHDP, VG, LCGDP
Ramechhap	A3	Dalits (40 HHs) Chhetry (1 HHs)	Manthali-Kathjor-Gobi	DRSP, LILI, RHDP, VG, LCGDP
Okhaldhunga	B1	Rai (33 HHs)	Okhaldhunga-Rumjatar	DRSP, LILI, SSMP, HG, LGCDP, MSFP
Okhaldhunga	B2	Dalit (16 HHs) Brahmin (70 HHs) Sherpa (8 HHs)	Okhaldhunga-Rumjatar	DRSP, LILI, SSMP, HG, LGCDP, MSFP
Khotang	C1	Rai (20 HHs) Chhetry (3 HHs)	Mahure-Phoksintar	DRSP, SSMP, LGCDP
Khotang	C2	Chhetry (16 HHs) Rai (10 HHs)	Mahure-Phoksintar	None
Khotang	C3	Dalit (33 HHs)	Mahure-Phoksintar	DRSP, SSMP, LGCDP

Note: DRSP: District Road Support Programme, LILI: Local Infrastructure for Livelihood Improvement, RHDP: Rural Health Development Programme, HG: Home Garden, SSMP: Sustainable Soil Management Programme, MSFP: Multi Stakeholder Forestry Programme, LGCDP: Local Government and Community Development Programme

1.2.3. Selection of the Host Households

The RCA members stayed with 10 Host Households (HHH) in eight different communities across the three districts.

HHHs were purposively selected as comparatively poor and belonging to traditionally socially discriminated groups and with different generations of family members living together. These criteria were used as representative of the kinds of households SDC would target for its programmes.

While entering the villages, every effort was made to be 'low key' and independent from local SDC staff. Teams were dropped off at the road heads and purposely walked into the communities. All the team members started early in the morning so as to ensure enough time to meet the 'right households'. Some groups took their time meeting people in tea shops and engaging in conversations about the general locality and gathering insights about the villages before they approached prospective families; while others got into conversations with locals on their way into the villages. As expected the researchers were initially directed to local leaders and 'better-off' homes but further polite explanations of the need to live with households living in poverty in order to understand their reality enabled the team to connect with poorer households and those that belonged to socially discriminated groups on their own and without the intervention of gatekeepers. Once a potential household had been identified, the researchers took care to explain the nature of the RCA and the need for not being afforded 'guest status'[2]. Except in two cases, during which the researchers had difficulty in convincing families to allow them to stay, all the other households which they approached readily agreed.

The HHHs included, 3 Dalit households, 5 Janajati and 2 Chhetry households (ref: Annex 2 for the characteristics of the HHHs that were selected for the RCA). Amongst these, two households also belonged to women headed households, who were purposefully selected so as to gain an understanding of their lives.

Each team member stayed with the HHHs for four nights and five days. Within each sub-team, the researcher's HHHs were between 15 minutes - 1 hrs walk away from each other. The main reason for this was to ensure that the researchers interacted with at least four Focal Households, maximise the number of interactions with community members and avoid duplication. In addition, the researchers also accompanied the HHH members to various service centres and interacted with diverse service providers (ref: Annex 3 for the List of Service Providers met during the RCA). In total the researchers interacted and had conversations with over 270 persons. Findings have been triangulated and are therefore somewhat

[2] All the team members were also provided with letters of introduction about the objective of the RCA and why it was being undertaken. Team members were also instructed to take ID cards. The letters were found to be useful on two occasions, when the villages were suspicious of the male members of the team when they entered communities, where in the past in one village girls had been trafficked by outsiders.

representative of the study sites and the locality, rather than just anecdotal perspectives and opinions of our host households.

1.2.4. RCA study: Timing and Process

The study was conducted during the end of April 2015. A one-day orientation on the objectives of the study along with discussions on the 'areas of conversations' [3] was first conducted on 19th April 2015 with all the sub-teams[4]. While the main study was conducted between 21st -26th April 2015. This period falls within the pre-monsoon season in Nepal, , so, apart from a few incidental showers, the study areas were dry during the time of the study. In Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga, most households had already planted maize; while in Khotang, planting had just begun and, as a consequence, the majority of the households were out in the fields. Government schools were also closed for the holidays.

The study period also coincided with the first earthquake that took place on 25th April 2015, which occurred on the last day of the RCA. The study districts were less impacted by the earthquake (and subsequent aftershocks) compared to those nearer to the epicentre in Gorkha. Fortunately, none of the RCA members nor the family members of the HHHs or the communities were injured during the earthquake. Some of the houses suffered damage (cracks on walls, broken roof tiles). The HHHs in Ramechhap suffered the most damage and, as a consequence, the team had to cut their stay short and returned to Manthali (the district headquarter) a day earlier. The remaining sub-teams meanwhile stayed with the communities as planned.

Landslide that occurred after the first earthquake on 25 April, 2015 between Manthali and Khurkot

Families taking shelter in temporary tents after the earthquake

Once all the sub-teams returned to Kathmandu, each sub team was taken through a one day de-briefing sessions by the team leader between 4-7th May 2015. During these sessions, information and insights were shared and findings were analysed and triangulated.

Methodological considerations

Like all research methods, RCA takes notes of and attempts to offset potential bias. The following is an analysis of the potentials for bias and the way RCA researchers and the approach itself seeks to minimise them.

Bias from being researched

The focus of an RCA approach it to be low key and unobtrusive as possible. This is not covert research as it is explained to study participants that researchers are learning about their reality to explain to policy makers but the team also makes sure that it is seen as an independent team without project affiliations in order to reduce confirmation bias. The RCA team members ideally seek to listen to family conversations and interactions rather than engage in lengthy question and answer sessions. Considerable effort is put in to

[3] The RCA team members also got an opportunity to interact with Photo Journalists who were part of the SDC mid-term review and had visited Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga a week prior to the RCA. These discussions, though brief, allowed the members to get an idea of some of the issues and include them in their 'areas of conversation'.

[4] The majority of the RCA practitioners were all experienced and had participated in a number of studies. The focus of the orientation was therefore on the areas of conversation.

ensure families with whom the RCA team members stay feel comfortable and at ease so they tell their own stories, explain their reality on their terms and in their own way. The main objective is to ensure that families do not feel that their answers should be filtered, measured or in any way influenced by the presence of the outsiders. Considerable effort is made during the training of RCA team members to make them aware of their own attitudes and behaviour which are conducive/obstructive to openness and trust among those they interact with.

Researcher bias

A minimum of three researchers were allocated to each village but worked independently of each other thus allowing for some confidence in corroboration of data. Each sub-team underwent a day long de-briefing to review information and findings after the immersion. This involves a high level of interrogation of the observations, experiences and responses and reduced the possibility of individual researcher bias. Generally, this would have taken place immediately after all the teams come back from the villages. But, due to the earthquake and general uncertainty that followed, the de-briefing sessions took place a week later.

Evaluation framework bias

Rather than using research questions which may suffer from normative bias, the RCA team uses a broader areas of conversation. These are summarised in annex 4 and provide the basis for conversation topics but do not prescribe the questions or the way or sequence in which these may be introduced. The RCA team members engaged with family members and others at appropriate times on these issues e.g. while cooking the meal, there may be opportunities to discuss what they usually eat , when and who takes what; accompanying farmers to the field provides an opportunity to discuss production, challenges, aspirations around farming.

Confidentiality, anonymity and continuing non-bias in project activities

The study locations are referred to by code and the approach seeks to ensure that both the report and other documentary evidence, such as photos, do not reveal the exact locations nor details of the host households. This is done primarily to preserve good research practice of confidentiality but also has the benefit of ensuring that special measures or consideration will be given to these locations or households in the course of the programme.

1.2.5. Study Limitations

This was a small RCA study during which members were immersed in ten households. Generally, other past studies have stayed with 18-30 HHHs . Initially, the plan had been to select at least two different VDCs in each district, one close to road corridors and the other remote so as to get a wider perspective of changes since the implementation of Country Strategy. But, due to the timing of the study and the availability of the study team members, a much smaller study was conducted than originally envisioned. Nevertheless, the findings are no less significant.

The ‘areas of conversations’ (Annex 5) were developed following the Country Strategy and feedback received after a presentation on RCA that was held with SDC staff during the inception phase of the study. This report therefore primarily focuses on poverty, livelihood opportunities, education, health, mobility as elements which were identified as being of key importance. Other themes that emerged through conversations as of importance to people have also been noted and discussed in the report. Other concerns such as politics, governance to mention a few are also significant and though the report may not explicitly discuss these in detail, it does not mean that they any less important.

The timing of the study also coincided with the government school holidays at all the sites, which limited interactions with teachers and affected observations and experience of children going to school. Some of the private schools were however open and this afforded the study team the chance to interact and observe the schools in progress.

2. Main Findings

The findings are presented from the position of people living in poverty and are intended to convey their experience and views without overlaying the interpretation of the research team. The first section looks at people's perspectives of poverty and their aspirations.

This is followed by people's perspectives of livelihoods with a view to understanding short term changes since 2013 (the year the new Swiss Country Strategy (SCS) was introduced). Where relevant, boxes indicating the priority areas identified by the SCS have been included to help guide the reader, while a brief synopsis of the domains and expected outcomes are presented in Annex 1.

Public resources and how people view access and control of these resources are then presented. The main drivers of changes as identified by people themselves are then explained followed by a discussion on SDC approaches based on the RCA teams own reflections and insights gained.

2.1. Perceptions on Poverty

Causes of Poverty:

- Unequal access to opportunities due to gender, caste, ethnic and religious identities
- Remoteness of markets and access to basic pubic services
- Lack of gainful employment opportunities for youths

Swiss Country Strategy (2013-2017)

'Rich people don't stay here in the village, they go to the cities… only the poor farm'
(Man, Ramechhap-A3)

During conversations with our study families we asked them who they regarded as being poor. In some locations people that we chatted with were quite forthcoming, while in other places, we had to be more sensitive and frame the question indirectly by asking who was instead regarded as being 'less poor' or 'better-off than the rest of the community'.

The usual answers we got, as typified by the quote above, was that 'everyone is poor in the villages'. In most instances, we had to probe deeper and it was only then that more nuanced descriptions were shared. Two clear main factors emerged as common determinants of poverty according to people living in poverty themselves :

a. Elderly left on their own

One of the strongest feelings within our host and focal households was **that the elderly who are left on their own, either because they have no children (or they have already died) or have been abandoned, are unanimously considered to be the worst off in the villages**. When we chatted with them, they described how they were dependent on others for a variety of tasks. For farming purposes they were relying on *Parma* (reciprocal forms of labour arrangements), *Khetala* (hiring labour) and/or decreasing their cultivation area, because they did not have enough hands to work the lands. A few of the neighbours that we talked to often referred to changing cultures and practices, whereby where it was the norm for children to look after their parents, now it is not guaranteed. The neighbours were generally sympathetic and we observed them occasionally lending a hand when they were free (such as fetching water, sharing snacks in the afternoons). But, more often than most they were left on their own and many confided to us that '*as long as my hands and feet allow me to work, we won't starve…after that I don't know*' (Elderly man, Khotang-C2).

People also spoke of the hardships of single women headed households but referred mainly to elderly mothers who may have sons (working in Kathmandu and abroad), but whose daughter-in laws have opted to move out and live separately either in the same village or other towns, either because they have the finds to settle in locations that have better facilities and/or there is tension between the mother and daughter-in laws. Villagers often told us that most elderly women living on their own do not always receive the benefits of remittances, as the daughter-in laws do not always share, and are left with no other option but to farm lands by themselves and/or be reliant on wage labour. One of our study households was one such case.

When we first suggested that we might stay with her, she was initially unwilling to let one of our team members stay because she was worried about the cost. But, after convincing her that we would not be an extra burden and that we were willing to work with her, she reluctantly agreed. By the end of our stay, she was so appreciative of the assistance (cleaning livestock stalls, fetching water, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes) that she insisted our team member stay for another week or two.

By contrast, younger single women who were left on their own by husbands who had migrated for work , but, were receiving remittances were more likely to be regarded as amongst the better-off. Despite some of the women telling us that they were finding it difficult to farm the lands by themselves and control their children, neighbours perceived them to be fortunate to have husbands sending in money. '*She is lucky her husband is sending in cash'* (Woman, Okhaldhunga-B1) , '*her life is made (better)'* (Woman, Khotang-C1).

b. Lack of cash incomes

Having cash (or the lack thereof) was also regarded by most of our study families as being one of the main determinants of poverty in villages. We were told that the **need for cash was greater than ever** as people became more reliant on markets for food; agricultural inputs; clothes; education and health costs; amenities such as electricity, mobile phones and credit, etc.

Our conversations with various families indicated that they regarded **families singularly dependent on agriculture as being poor, while those with multiple sources of cash incomes as better-off**. This was particularly relevant if one of the sources of cash was from remittances. The dominant view in all the villages was that if a household had a member who was sending cash back, then, that family was considered to be doing well for themselves. Even more so, if there were more than one migrant member. '*The son is sending back money, so they are better off than before*' (Women, Okhaldhunga-B2), was typical of the opinions expressed during the study.

Households having a salaried government job holder (teachers, civil servants, police), were perceived as 'better-off' and an aspiration for most households. In Khotang we chatted with one ex-postman who had quit his job during the Maoist Civil war. He explained to us that travelling within the villages then was risky and that his family and friends were concerned about his welfare, so he had resigned. During the course of our conversations, he confided to us that he should not have done so, as now he has no source of cash incomes except selling surplus maize, which is very negligible. Others in the village also echoed this sentiment and went on further to remark that '*he was stupid…he was receiving a good source of money and he listens to others and throws it away, he will now never get that job back'* (Women, Khotang-C3).

Cash incomes also translated into purchasing power for consumable goods that, people said, were increasingly being brought into their communities. Youths spoke of the need for money to be fashionable, have the latest mobile phones, drink Red Bull energy drinks, etc. They remarked that these were signs that they were 'not poor'. Households that have TVs and satellite dishes were also mostly regarded as of better-off households, though it was also shared that they were not always a reliable indicator due to the dynamic nature of poverty, whereby people move in and out of poverty at different periods of their lives. For example, one household in C3 (Khotang) had a TV, which was bought by the husband after coming back from the Middle East, more than five years ago. During our conversations, he indicated that he was struggling to make ends meet and with his wife pregnant, he was searching for loans to go abroad for work again as he had finished most of his savings and farming was not good.

c. Other determinants of poverty

In addition, other determinants of poverty were also voiced by our host and focal households, though not as strongly as those mentioned above.

Indebtedness : Many of our host families had taken out loans. The reasons for borrowing varied - buying food, investing in migration, paying for children's higher education, weddings, etc. Several families indicated that they have multiple loans that were piling up and were sources of anxiety. Amongst some there was also the prevailing view that those who were 'lazy' or 'drunk' were likely to be highly indebted due to the need of cash and were therefore regarded as poor. Conversely, the rich were the shopkeepers and landlords who could afford to loan money.

Food security: Not producing enough to feed ones family was also, we were told, a sign of being poor. This was closely associated with the amount of productive land one owned as well as the number of mouths to feed. A large family with only a small plot of land but, a lot of children, who were not of age to start earning any cash incomes into the families, were regarded as poor. What you ate was also said to be important. This specifically concerned the consumption of rice, which was closely linked with the status of a household and the ability to purchase it from the market. The more able you are to consume rice regularly the less poor you are.

Less choices in location: People also spoke of families that were migrating out (to the towns, Terai and Kathmandu) as being rich and conversely, those that remained in villages (without amenities) were all poor. Most people felt that city life was good (due to the various amenities available) and the various opportunities to earn incomes.

2.2. Aspirations

It was very clear from our interactions with our host and focal households that they did not want their children to become farmers. The dominant views were that farming was *'physically hard', 'demanding', 'dirty', 'provided low returns'* and '*unpredictable'.* Most of the people we conversed with expressed the view that they wanted better for their children.

What 'a better life' entailed was educating their children so that they could have a better chance of gaining employment. As education was directly correlated with getting a salaried job, the prevailing view was that government jobs were the preference. People spoke of steady incomes and the pensions that would be available later on. At the same time they were also aware of the consequences in investing in their children's education as far as their own farming future was concerned. But, nevertheless many conversations indicated that parents were willing to invest in higher education for children (at least one) who did well in school; with the expectation that they would be able to acquire lucrative employment in the cities and help their families back home. Meanwhile, children who were not so doing well were less likely to be encouraged and '*…farming is his fate*' (Father, Okhaldhunga-B2) was typical of the views expressed.

Acquiring skills (such as driving, masonry) to earn a living in the towns and abroad was also considered to be a better choice and we heard many families voicing their opinion that '*I want him to go abroad and earn money'* (Father, Okhaldhunga-B1).

Amongst the youth also the need to make money was expressed commonly. In Khotang, teenage boys that we spoke with openly told us that they were biding their time until they could organise their passports, so that they could go abroad. They confided that they were not really interested in their studies, the quality of the education was also not very good according to them, and so besides farming, which was regarded as a last option, they were increasingly drawn towards migration (to Kathmandu and abroad). Where there had been successive generations of men who had been migrating abroad (such as Khotnag), boys also expressed the view that they also wanted to 'see the world'.

Girls meanwhile were less expressive about moving out far from their communities. Instead, our conversations with them indicated that they were more inclined to stay closer to their homes. The dominant aspirations expressed were to become teachers, health workers, set up a tailoring shop, beauty shops. We did however meet a few who were more adventurous. One girl that we chatted with while waiting in line to fetch water confided to us that she was tired of doing household work and that she wanted to join the police force. She told us that they were '*smart', 'independent'* and though her family were surprised about her desire she was adamant that she would succeed.

2.3. Livelihoods

2.3.1. Migration: Remittances is a key source of cash incomes for families

SCS priority areas:

- Foster access to skills development for gainful employment in Nepal and abroad
- Offer alternatives to those considering migration for economic reasons

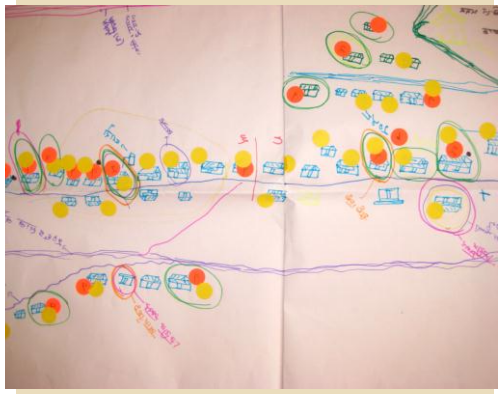
People say that the number of families now dependent on migration as an alternative livelihood source has accelerated in the past ten years, with most of the migrants working as unskilled workers abroad.

Five (out of our ten HHHs[5]) were dependent on cash sent by family members working abroad. Within the larger communities, people explained that migrants could be from all caste and ethnic groups. *'If we bump into 15 people abroad, 1 will be a Nepali'* (Man, Khotang-C1)

In Khotang, one Dalit hamlet had 20 households (out of 46) with at least one member who was currently abroad (mostly to the Gulf States) for work. Similarly, in Okhaldhunga we were told that five (out of sixteen) households have sons who work as drivers, *Khanlasi* (drivers assistants/apprentices) and labourers in Kathmandu.

Migrating for work has a long history within the study areas, and working for the British or Indian Army remains, people say, the preference, primarily because of the higher status, good salaries and attractive pensions[6]. In recent years however, people explained that as military recruitment procedures have become tougher, they are turning towards other types (mostly unskilled) work such as labourers, cleaners, plumbers in factories, hospitals, airports and super markets in the Gulf states (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE) and Malaysia.

'Competition is high', *'both my brother and I tried for the (Indian) army, but only he passed and now I'm thinking of going out'* (Man, Khotang- C3). *'I had gone to Bangalore to try for the India army, but I failed and so I became a security guard (in Bangalore) instead'* (Man, Ramechhap-A1). The same man went on to describe how through him other men from the village have gone on to secure jobs as guards in Bangalore, thereby leading to the establishment of a new network.



This map was made by teenagers in Khotang-C3. It shows the number of households, denoted by the orange dots, that have migrant labours working outside the country.

Overall, it was the men who had exclusively migrated for work. Their ages ranging from 18 – 45 years. Women and girls that we met indicated that they had either not considered going abroad to work or were reluctant to travel to far off (and unknown) places. Instead, the young women that we chatted with indicated that they were interested in learning skills that would enable them to earn cash either in their villages, the district headquarters or Kathmandu. As discussed earlier, many mentioned that they wanted to set up tailor shops, hairdressing parlours or gain employment as teachers.

In Khotang (C3), male students spoke of leaving school and going abroad to work as soon as they are eligible for citizenship and their passports at 16 years of age. They were aware of the risks and had heard stories about the difficulties faced. But, as discussed in the preceding section, they regarded migration as a '*tried and tested'* means of earning money and much more reliable than other job prospects within their villages and more attractive than farming. These opinions were especially strong in villages which had longer histories of migration for work, such as Khotang (C1), where youths pointed towards increased cash flows, improvement in living standards and asset accumulation of families with migrants compared to those that did not have anyone abroad. It was clear that some villagers were better connected than others. People in locations that had longer tradition of migration such as Ramechhap (A1, A2) and Khotang (C1, C2), where second generations of men were on their second cycles, explained to us that they had exploited their networks to learn about and arrange jobs for themselves. While people in Okhaldhunga (B2), where migration for work started within the past five years, explained that they were primarily reliant on middle men.

In our conversations, villagers never referred to any development projects that were supporting or providing information with regards to migration choices. We only came across one instance in Ramechhap (C1) when

[5] Khotang : 3 HHHs, (Dalit:2 + Chettry:1), Ramechhap: 1 HHH (Janajati) and Okhladhunga: 1 HHH (Janjati)
[6] Indian army pensions were reported to be NRs 8,000 – 10,000 per month.

we met and heard from a staff from the Safer Migration project in a teashop. He was talking to a potential migrant about legal procedures and what to expect while working abroad. The man was passing through and recommended that the villager go to the project offices in Manthali, the district headquarter. Later, when we talked with the potential migrant, he told us the information provided was useful. But, when we asked others in the communities, they told us that they had not yet heard of the project nor the work that they do.

Most families explained to us that they take out loans from multiple sources (relatives, shop keepers, moneylenders) to cover the initial costs for migration for work abroad. No one we talked with had taken any loans from banks, even though the Nepalese government since 2005 has implemented a policy to provide loans at more affordable rates.[7] People said that banks require collateral to secure funds and involve paperwork, which people are hesitant to get into. Credit in the villages was found to be readily available and families said they take amounts between NRs 50,000 – 1,50,000. The first priority is to first repay the loans, with families sharing that the interest rates can range from 3-30%[8]. One man in Khotang (C1) told us that he was able to pay off his loans in 4 months while working as a construction worker in Saudi Arabia. But, other conversations indicated that this was uncommon and that most households commonly take at least one year for repayment of loans, and it is only after that families are able to benefit from migration.

Rough calculations with our HHH families indicated that they were receiving remittances of between NPR 20,000 – 80,000[9] per year; with families with more than one migrant member generally receiving more cash. The cash was being used for repaying loans, buying mobile phones, food, paying for education[10] and seeking medical treatment. Successful families were also investing in land. Quite a few of the wives we talked to told us '*our future is secured (*with the money that their husbands send)*'* (Ramechhap, A2). In fact, in some places the remaining younger sons were being actively encouraged to go abroad by their families. A recently widowed daughter-in law was also being pressurized by her in-laws to work abroad. They were telling her that they would look after the grand children, but, she was reluctant to go.

Through increased incomes from migration, people explained that they were becoming financially more secure and had a better quality of life. In Khotang (C3), Dalit families spoke of increasing numbers of their households moving to the Terai after buying land there. We were told that in the past, only a few Chhetry households had moved out due to the scarcity of water (for drinking as well as for agriculture purposes), but, in recent years the trend had accelerated with Dalit households as well[11]. Last year 8 households had migrated out. A trend which was predicted to continue with some remarking that '*soon there will be no one here'* (Women, Khotang-C3).

A strong 'pull factor', besides the better education and amenities available in the Terai, was also the opportunity for Dalit families to start a new life, away from the discrimination in the villages, which our HHH families raised in several study locations. '*We can share their cigarettes, but not go into their homes'* (Man, Okhaldhunga- B1).One man remarked that *'we will always be Kami (blacksmiths) here, but over there we can be Nepali '* (Dalit man, Khotang –C3).

Conversations with various Dalit and Chhetry families suggested changes in traditional land owner and tenant relationships. Tenants spoke of more negotiating powers when it comes to sharecropping and hiring labour (See Box 4). Before migration became an alternative livelihood source, they explained that the power lay with the landlords, who could choose amongst the various tenants and demand their share of the crops, including (unpaid) labour to perform various tasks.

But, with the increase in migration for work, land owners were finding it difficult to find labour during the peak agriculture season. As a consequence, they were having to increasingly appease tenants, either by increasing the share of the crops and/or providing meals. The rates for hiring labour, people say, have increased. For *Khetala* arrangements the wage rates ranged from NRs 150 -200/ day for women to NRs 200-400/day for men along with provisions of food and, sometimes, alcohol.

> '*Before people would come to me to ask to rent my lands, now, it's just the opposite. I need to go and look for people to work on my land, soon there will be no one left and I'm getting old'*,
> (Old man, Ramechhap, A1)

[7] In 2005, the GoN started a scheme to provide loans at low rates. According to this scheme, private banks are to provide Dalits, Janajati and those affected by conflict loans (maximum of NRs 1,00,000) at 8% annual interest.
[8] The lower interest rates charged by relatives while moneylenders appeared to charge up to 30%.
[9] Families with two or more members were sending in up to NRs 80,000 annually.
[10] Generally an older brother working abroad was expected to contribute towards the education of younger siblings for higher education and we came across a number of families who were educating their sons in Kathmandu.
[11] We were told that no one was buying land within the Khotang study sites (except along the road corridor). As a consequence, many families had moved out without selling off their land and letting it remain fallow.

A Chhetry man in Khotang (C3) also remarked that before they (Dalits) were 'dukhi' (miserable) and, '*they would agree to work for one pathi of rice and food, but now I now need to give NRs 400 and food'*. He also spoke of local labour rates rising (up to NRs 500/day) due to road construction work, which meant that he has had to offer higher wages.

Box 4: Changing relationship between landlords and tenants

It was the second day of the RCA and my Dalit HHH mother and her neighbour told me that they were going down to a Chhetry household to discuss the planting of maize. When we reached their house, which was 15 minutes downhill, three women members of the household were present. I later learned that two were the landlady's grand-daughters who had come to visit, but would be leaving the next day. After introductions, my HHH mother began to ask the grand daughters about their husbands, while the landlady went inside the kitchen. She soon emerged with tea for the three of us. The landlady soon began asking my HHH mother when they could start planting the maize on her land. She wanted them to start the next day, but, my HHH mother told her that they she had already planned to plant her own fields and could only do so after that was finished. The landlady did not insist and instead asked, '*how many can work on the land*?'. '*Four*' she was answered by my HHH mother, who later added '*like last year, I'm sure you will give us the same amount*'. The landlady nodded and with the negotiations seemingly done, she went inside and emerged with bundles of corns ears. The three of us then began to de-husk the corn, separating the good seeds for planting. This took over 45 minutes, but, during that time none of the household women helped. Later, when I ask my HHH mother, their share of the produce, she replied '*nearly two thirds'*.

Source: Field notes Khotang (C3)

Not everyone was however happy with their men working abroad. We did come across wives who were complaining of the extra burden this left them to manage house, farm and children. '*my husband would have helped me' (Women, Ramechhap-A1), 'I need to now work twice as hard' (Women, Ramechhap-A1), 'the children do not listen to me' (Women, Khotang- C3).*

We also noticed that once a son migrates aboard, the daughter-in-laws do not always stay with the main household, with some opting to live separately in the same village or the nearby towns. We met quite a few in-laws who told us that their daughter-in-laws do not share any money with them and that they were forced to work even in their old age.

2.3.2. Farming: A means to feed families

SCS priority areas:
- Increase agricultural production
- Increase food security through better access to business services and markets
- Reach beyond traditional agricultural production towards a post-harvest, transformative and market approach programmes

People say that farming feeds their families, but, it is not a 'way out' of poverty

Many conversations suggested families that solely rely on agriculture are poor. Farming, people say, is hard work that gives little returns, especially in terms of cash that is increasingly required for food, agricultural inputs, clothes, education, etc. All our study households grew their own food, with little or no surplus to sell. Maize [12] was the primary cereal crop that was being cultivated, with millet also being planted seasonally.

[12] Maize is the primary crop grown in the hills
in Nepal. It is generally grown in mixed cropping systems with millet and soybean and requires less water. Farmers regard it as a 'safe crop' which can be used for food as well as feed for livestock.

We observed maize being cultivated as the main crop in the study locations. People spoke of following the same techniques that they have been using for the past ten or more years.

These are traditional crops that had been grown without any discernible recent changes in terms of inputs, except in the use of bio-pesticides. We were told that the collection of cattle urine in drums as pesticides (in lieu of chemicals) was a relatively new technique they had learnt from development projects. In Khotang, villagers did not remember who had provided the drums and trainings as there had been many programmes that had provided support. Many families we talked to were not familiar with the names of various development projects, and we had to rely on hoarding boards or talk with lead farmers. For example for the bio-pesticide trainings and support, it was only after conversing with a lead farmer that we were able to identify that the SDC supported Sustainable Soil Management Programme (SSMP) had been promoting the bio-pesticides in the area.

Farmers told us that they were using their own seeds from previous harvests. We did not come across any farmers who had gone to District Agriculture Department Office (DADO) for seeds, but, people did tell us that they went for urea (when it was available)[13].

Our study families explained that they have been using urea routinely and that one sack (equivalent to 30 Kg) is used for 5-7 ropani (0.25-0.35 hectare) of bari land for maize production. We were told that without using the fertiliser, production is low. Farmers in Khotang spoke of using urea on the tree roots of orange trees as well. Conversations with them indicated that no one (outsiders from the villages) had specifically told them to put urea on the roots, it was something that they themselves tried thinking that it would be a 'good idea'. But, were now left regretting their action. Every farmer the team conversed with had the same story to tell. Before their villages were well known for producing oranges and they used to sell the fruit in the markets, but, once they started using urea, the trees began to shrivel up and die. Many have now been cut down and used as firewood.

Farmers say they are confused about best farming practices

People told us of many other agricultural project that had been implemented at one time or another. Some projects had focused on improving cereal production and home gardens, while others focused on commercial vegetable and seed production. Most households we talked to referred to them as 'agricultural projects' with locals remembering the name of the local partner NGO which had implemented the project – such as Sayapatri, Pragati Krisak Samuha, Nawa Kisan Sewa – rather than the development projects, unless we came across lead farmers in the community.

It was interesting to note that because of the multitude of approaches being implemented (within the same communities and often with the same households), farmers said they were confused about best practices, specifically with respect to the type of fertilizers to use. According to one farmer 'one *project told to us to use cattle manure, but, a new project came and told us to use chemical fertilizers to increase production, now I'm not sure what to do'* (Man, Okhaldhunga-B2).

Source: Field notes Okhaldhunga

During the study we saw mostly women and children working in the fields. This was largely explained to us that it was due to the absence of male members who had migrated out for work. We observed that larger families, having more than six members, were still continuing to farm lands without decreasing the area of cultivation. While households with fewer members, widowed women without children, and abandoned elderly couples, had to either rely on *Parma* (reciprocal forms of labour arrangement), *Khetala* (hiring of local labour) or had decreased the area of cultivation.

Many villagers told us that leaving fallow land is an increasingly common occurrence. The two main reasons being - the high rates of migration (for work) which left few family members to look after the farm lands and/or shortage of labour, which meant that fewer *Khetalas* were available for hire; and the scarcity of water for irrigation.

[13] Shortages of urea were said to be common at all the study sites.

The former was particularly obvious in the case of single women households, which had to rely on external labour. One had sold off land (since the death of her husband five months ago) and was using the money to hire labour, while another single women household (whose husband had been away for over two years) was dependent on *Parma* arrangements. But, in this regard, she explained she was at disadvantage as she had had to wait for her turn to come, which was after everyone else's maize had been planted.

Scarcity of water for irrigation and drinking water was a serious concern in the Khotang study sites. At the lower elevations, farmers who had previously planted paddy up until three years ago, were now increasingly turning towards maize to survive. '*There is no use planting paddy as the harvest is not good and I cannot produce enough to even pay the hired labour'*– (Elderly Farmer, Khotang –C2).

Farmers digging a pond to collect rain water for farming. There are no irrigation canals or ponds. (Khotang)

At the time of the study, the same farmer was seen to be digging a pond to collect rain water for irrigation. Further upland, 8 households were said to have migrated out of the village to the Terai leaving their lands, primarily because of the scarcity of water, low production, and also because the remittances (sent back by their family members) had allowed them to buy land outside of the village.

Rice was the main staple food amongst all our study households. During the time the researchers stayed with their families, rice was eaten at least once (sometimes twice a day in the less poorer households) along with vegetables from the kitchen garden. Occasionally, *Dhendo* (maize porridge) was also consumed. But, rice was preferred instead of maize[14] and we were told that this had been the norm for some years (even before the construction of the roads).

Rice has replaced maize as the main staple food in all the study sites. As a consequence, families are now more reliant on market access and cash for their food security.

On average, families indicated that maize production was sufficient to feed their families for 4-6 months. For households having three members or less, people told us that it was enough for the entire year, during which they would also consume rice.

Rice meanwhile had to be bought either from the nearest markets[15] or towns in the Terai (where prices are slightly lower). The cost of a sack[16] (30 Kgs) ranged from NRs 1,100 – 1,500.

Discussions with our study families showed that expenses for buying rice were high, ranging from 18-25% of total annual expenses. Families told us that the cash for buying rice (and other commodities) were coming in from multiple sources- remittances, wage labour, selling livestock, and loans. We also observed that the consumption of meat (primarily buffalos, goats and pigs) was high. Families told us that they normally eat meat every other week and were spending NRs 12,000- 15,000 annually. They also indicated that eating meat was now much more frequent than before as their cash incomes have increased.

None of the study teams notice any malnourished children in their communities. Rather, we observed that there was a high incidence of children buying snacks from shops and consuming biscuits, noodles, sweets, aerated drinks (Mountain Dew), energy drinks (Red Bull) throughout the day. Traditional afternoon snacks such *Chiura* (beaten rice), popcorn, *Bhatmas* (fried soyabeans) and boiled potatoes were also being eaten.

[14] Maize was also used as animal feed.
[15] Only one HHH said they cultivate rice (in small quantities) in Khotang.
[16] One sack of rice was said to last for 1.5 months for one couple, while for a family of nine it would only last for 10-14 days.

2.3.3. Commercial Vegetable Farming: Abandoned or Limited

SCS priority areas:
- Reach beyond traditional agricultural production towards a post-harvest, transformative and market approach programmes
- Emphasize value chains and marketing
- Applying a road corridor approach to focus activities along the main roads to increase synergies amongst different projects and foster multiple livelihood opportunities

Vegetables were being cultivated for home consumption. Only isolated cases of commercial production had occurred despite external efforts to encourage production along road corridors.

In Okhaldunga and Ramechhap we were told that a couple of years ago families had cultivated vegetables for commercial sale – but, this had been through the support of agricultural projects and since the end of the projects they had not continued. During the entire study we only found only three households (out of 150 who had received support in the past) who were continuing to cultivate vegetables and seeds for commercial production.

In Okhaldhunga (B1) people told us that five years ago, an NGO came to their village and conducted a survey. They were told that it was to find out the '*bippanna*' (poorest) households in the area. All 33 Dalit households got selected and as a part of the programme they were provided vegetable seeds and training on cultivation techniques. We heard a similar story in Ramechhap. But, not all the Dalit households that were selected were however poor. At one study location, we came across a Dalit man, who was a contractor and one of the most influential individuals in the village. His household had also been selected for the commercial vegetable production and had been provided with inputs and trainings.

People take vegetables to the weekly hâat bazaars to sell by themselves.

One of our HHH mothers told us that '*back then we had a good harvest of vegetables*' (Women, Okhaldhunga- B1), which used to be taken to Rumjatar, the nearest town, to sell at the Hâat bazar. When we asked why they had not continued we were given a range of replies.

'We put in a lot of effort, but the money was low' (Women, Okhaldhunga –B2)

'The tomato harvest was very good, but we didn't get good prices and so did not make much profit' (Man, Okhaldhunga – B2)

'We planted the vegetables as long as 'sir' came to help us' (Man, Okhaldhunga –B2)

'Had we cultivated different types of vegetables, we could have at least bartered with each other. But, since we were producing the same vegetables no one wanted to buy anything from us in the village' (Woman, *Okhaldhunga –B1)*

In Ramechhap, we heard a similar story. The common thread was that even though production had been high, they were not getting good prices as everyone was cultivating the same crop and the nearby markets were flooded with the same types of vegetables.

'We need to work hard and it requires a lot of labour and it's not worth the low profit (Man, Ramechhap-A1)

'We were paying NPR 5/kg for the transportation cost to Manthali, while we were selling the tomatoes for NPR 10/ Kg[17] in the market' (Man, Ramechhap -A3).

[17] NPR 10/kg was the lowest price at which the families had sold tomatoes. We were told the sale prices ranged from NPR 10 – 60/kg and that one would get good prices near the end of the harvesting season, if you could keep your vegetables then. But, it was only possible for those farmers who had green houses.

'We planted Kiwi but it takes 5 years for the fruit to be harvested and so we plucked them all out' (Man, Okhaldhunga –B1)

Households also had alternative sources of incomes, which provided much more than they earned from vegetable farming. In Okhaldhunga, a Janjati HHH told us that they only made NPR 1,500-2,000 in one season by selling vegetables in the market , which was lower than the NPR 4,000 – 5,000 per month earnings that they made from selling alcohol. Similarly, at Ramechhap a Dalit HHH father shared with us that he was earning up to NPR 15,000 per month by working as a skilled labourer in the village and so he was not interested in cultivating vegetables. His wife, meanwhile, was working as a porter, transporting items for shops. She spoke of making at least three trips per week, with her earning NPR 250-300 per trip.

Ponds had also been constructed in Okhaldhunga and Ramechhap to supply water for commercial agricultural purposes through the support of the SDC funded Local Infrastructure and Livelihood Improvement (LILI). We knew that these were constructed by LILI due to the signboards which had been erected. In Okhaldhunga (B1) there were 5 ponds, at B2 there were 2, and 5 in Ramechhap (A1). These were all constructed in Dalit and Janjati communities. One Chhetry HHH father in Ramechhap told us that he had also wanted to learn how to farm vegetables also, but, he did not qualify for inclusion in the group and so could not start any production as he did not have access to the pond water. Altogether 12 had been constructed in our study sites out of which only 3 were in use.

At one site in Okhaldhunga, one pond (pictured below) was being used by 5 households for irrigating home gardens, toilets and washing clothes. People explained that a maintenance committee had been set up after the construction of the pond and that this had remained active. One woman described how they had organised themselves and every 2/3 days a member would go and check the main water source along with the pipes for blockages. When we inquired why their pond was the only one still functional, they told us that it was mostly because the main drinking water tap (which had been construction many years ago by UNICEF) did not provide enough water for all their household needs. '*Water does not come for 24 hours and it is only enough for drinking and cooking'* (Woman, Okhaldhunga-B1).

Pond used for irrigating home gardens and washing clothes (Okhaldhunga-B1)

A neglected pond (Ramechhap-A1)

Meanwhile, the other ponds where dry and neglected. We observed clogged pipes and people indicated that blockages had not been repaired. These households were also using water from another UNICEF tap and we were told that '*the water was enough'* (Woman, Okhaldhunga-B1), though the other neighbours were more cynical and said, '*they are just lazy (to maintain the pond)'* (Woman, Okhaldhunga-B1). The families that were no longer using the ponds, spoke of how even though a fund had been established for its maintenance the pond had remained neglected, '*the chairperson doesn't tell us where the money for the maintenance went, he doesn't tell us anything*' (Woman, Okhaldhunga-B1).

In Ramechhap we did however come across two farmers who were using the water for tomato production. They had set up rudimentary green houses and were using the water from the ponds. They were *Aguwa Krisaks* (lead farmers), who were continuing with the commercial production. They told us that if vegetables can be produced earlier or later in the season, then the prices that they command are much higher.

When we asked the other households, that had stopped commercial production, what would it take for them start again, we were told that *'if a new project comes and gives us the seeds, then we would start again'.* A group of 16 households had applied to the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) and according to them they had received a grant of NPR. 40,000 to develop their pocket area. The women spoke of being part of the earlier project and had also received support through CEPREAD for vegetable seed production. They were hopeful that they could increase their scale of production and were planning to use the collection centre (constructed by CEPREAD) to supply more vegetables in bulk to the nearby markets in Rumjatar and Okhaldhunga. We also heard of another Dalit women's group, that had also received funds and were reported to be starting pig farming.

Meanwhile in Khotang, no programmes for commercial vegetables had been launched. Families told us that LILI staff had come to inspect the area for its potential, but, because of the scarcity of water they were told that it would not be feasible to construct ponds, nor start commercial vegetable production.

Mushroom production was however initiated by CEPREAD some years ago. But, people shared that even though production was good (and for some people it was the first time that they had ate mushrooms) they did not continue with the production after the project ended. The unavailability of inputs was cited as the main reason, with farmers telling us that '*the biu (spores) needs to be brought from Kathmandu and it's just not possible for us to get them here'* (Women, Khotang-C3)

2.3.4. Other Income Sources

SDC lines of interventions:
- Improve access to skill development and gainful employment

Families spoke of greater need for cash, which was motivating families to take up diverse income generating activities, some at the same time

During our stay in the communities our study families were involved in a number of non-agriculture activities to raise cash within their villages. These mostly comprised of temporary waged work to buy commodities that require cash, such as food, school materials, phone credit, and electricity bills.

Mud bricks drying in the sun for construction in Okhaldhunga

One of our HHH fathers in Okhaldhunga (B1), shared with us that he was earning NPR 15,000 per month through skilled construction worked. People told us that skilled masons, generally men, could earn NPR. 500/day for house construction and this was an important source of local income. They explained that most new houses were being built along the road corridors, as people wanted to move to set up shops to take advantage of the increased flow of people and goods. In Khotang, as we sat chatting to a tea and retail shop owner, he explained how he had seen business potential as the road was being constructed and so he and his family moved (from a neighbouring ward) and set up a shop three years ago. He recalled that there were only farm lands then, and his was the first shop that supplied *Khaja* (snacks) to the road workers in the afternoon and alcohol (in the evenings). He told us that his first original shop was small and so he set up a larger one across the road a year later. Presently, we observed six shops near the vicinity of the road.

Households had also earned cash by working on various development programmes that had been implemented in their communities. This was primarily on road construction.

Five HHHs[18] (out of ten) had had family members (up to two members, both men and women) who had worked as waged labour during road construction. Our HHHs considered the work during the road construction as being reliable and beneficial for earning cash during the construction period; with people speaking of earning between NPR 400-600 per day during the construction of the road segments which

[18] These included two Dalit households in Khotang and three Janajati households in Okhaldhunga.

lasted up to 3-4 months. People remarked that '*It* (road construction work) *was good money'* (Man, Okhaldhunga-B1) during the construction period and '*if we keep getting work like that, then there is no need to go abroad'* (Man, Khotang-C3). This was the common view. The work did however not prevent men from migrating for work abroad. The wives of migrant labourers told us that they worked on the projects, while the men go to work abroad.

Some women said they earned up to NPR 48,000 annually by brewing and selling local alcohol

Our HHH families and neighbours spoke of utilizing the earnings to buy food, other household necessities and paying off loans (incurred for food, investing in migration, repayment of loans, higher education of children). Investing in land and /or buying gold were rare occurrences. '*We heard that someone had bought land in the Terai with his earnings, but ours was used to for buying things for the household'* (Woman, Khotang –C3).

In addition, quite a number of the women from our HHHs complained to us that '*I don't even see one paisa from his earnings'* (Women, Okhaldhunga-B1). *'My husband boasts that he earns NPR 15,000 per month, but doesn't give me anything and looks down upon us'* (Woman, Ramechhap –A3). Many wives spoke of their husbands spending their earnings on buying cigarettes, alcohol and gambling. We saw that the consumption of alcohol was prevalent in all the study sites, but, it was particularly conspicuous in B1 (Okhaldhunga), amongst the Janajati community, where we saw both men and women start drinking from the early morning. At six of the study sites, we were told and saw for ourselves that a number of households are involved in alcohol production, mostly from rice. According to shopkeepers there is a high demand in the villages and that their best business is in selling local alcohol; which was being sold in old Pepsi bottles for NPR 50-70.

Occupational crafts, like blacksmiths, are slowly dying out as the younger generation is not interested and markets are flooded with cheaper alternatives from India (Ramechhap- A3)

Women we spoke with shared that it is generally they who are the ones involved in making alcohol and that it is a good and steady source of cash income. One HHH mother in Okhakdhunga (B1) told us that she earns approximately NPR 2,000 per month, by selling alcohol at NPR 40/litre to the nearby shops.

Among Dalit families, we saw that the older generation were still engaged in their traditional occupations. Within our study sites, the majority were blacksmiths. '*I have been working with irons from the age of 12, and look, now I am over 60 years*!' (Man, Okhaldhunga-B2). Chatting with the older generations, we came to understand that the traditional mode of payment for repairing tools with food grains continues. But, for new tools, they spoke of asking forcash. For example, a new *Kodalo*[19] (hoe) can cost NRs 800.

The profession is however dying. '*My sons do not want to do this work as it is dirty and people look down upon us. One has instead chosen to be a driver and the other does nothing at all*' (Man, Okhaldhunga- B2). In addition, to the lack of interest amongst the younger generation, people spoke of local markets being flooded with cheaper goods from India, which according to the blacksmiths are of poorer quality, but are still bought by locals.

In Ramechhap (A3), people told us about households that had received handicraft training on making '*mudas*', (bamboo/wooden stools) from the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) three years ago. One of the participants that we spoke with told us that the training was targeted towards women, and altogether 19 had been trained in her village. She also went on to mention that besides herself, only one other friend, has continued to utilize the training to make and sell the *mudas.* According to her, the process takes time (on average around 4 days) and one has to wait for orders to come from the village (which is not always regular). For one muda she makes NPR 500, which according to her is usually spent on buying household items such as oil, sugar, etc. Meanwhile in Khotang, people spoke of earning additional cash by selling *Dokos* (bamboo baskets). We were told that the main market is in Buipa, the district headquarters, where a

[19] Raw iron is brought from the Terai.

local shop keeper sells them, after collecting from the villagers. People said that they could make about NPR 5,000 profit each year my selling *Dokos.*

The father of our HHH family told us that he normally earns NPR 5,000 annually by selling the *Dokos* (Ramechhap)

Salaried employment was rare within the study areas. The only government salaried employment was for teachers, health workers and post office delivery men. Households with members with salaried jobs were considered to be better off and many of the parents we talked with had aspirations for their children to have these types of jobs as they provided a steady source income, less hard work and the potential for pensions later on. People said that their earnings per month ranged from NPR 4,800 (for postmen) to NPR 15,000 (teachers in GoN run High Schools). The elderly were also receiving government old age allowances (NPR 6,000 yearly) and some were receiving pensions from the Indian army (NPR 8000/month).

2.3.5. Livestock: Assets to Cope with Unexpected Expenses

Livestock were found to be an important source of liquidity. Our study families explained that they could be easily sold for cash, but, only a few had initiated rearing for commercial purposes.

Our HHH families told us that there in the past ten years the trend had been to decrease larger cattle numbers. This, we were told, was primarily due to less number of hands being available to take care of the animals. Some were however still keeping at least one (sometimes two) cattle (ref: Annex 2). They explained that this was chiefly due the need for animals to plough fields and provide manure[20] as well as for household milk consumption and the making of *ghee* (clarified butter).

Rare example of farmer turning towards commercial animal husbandry. (Khotang – C3).

People told us instead of the larger animals that they kept smaller animals (goats, chicken, pigs) in small numbers (5-6)(ref Annex 2). Families indicated that they rear as many as they can cope with and that the animals are kept for consumption and also as an easily liquefiable asset.

In communities where there were Community Forestry (CF) Programmes, such as Okhaldhunga (B2), animals were stall fed on a diet of maize grains, crop by-products and fodder from private forests. Families also had small plots of private land, where they had planted trees for fodder. Meanwhile in Ramechhap (A2), where there were no CF programmes, animals were taken for grazing in the nearby forests. Despite the time burdens associated with keeping livestock, we found that even women headed households were investing their time in livestock rearing. For example, one of our HHHs who is a widow had a buffalo, a cow, four goats and five chickens.

Villagers said that they did not have any problems selling their animals (mostly one or two at a time within and outside their villagers) and that the prices for livestock had steadily increased, with the present prices for buffalos ranging between NPR 60,000 – 80,000 (depending on the milk produced), while goats were being sold for NPR 5,000-8,000 (depending on the size of the animal).

[20] As discussed in the earlier section, the majority of the study households had received training on better collection techniques and were found to be applying them. '*We are using Gotay Mal (manure)"* was a common reply to the usage of inputs.

In Khotang, we came across asset transfer programmes where goats (two to each family) had been provided to Dalit families who were considered to be 'poor' and were members of a Leasehold Forestry Programme. Similarly in Okhladhunga (B2), pigs had been provided to Janajati families through PAF. These *'gifts'* were well received and families told us that they had already been sold for cash. Only rarely families spoke of still rearing the offspring's of the original 'gift' goats for consumption, and none of the recipient families had started commercial production, even though we were told by a local social mobiliser that this was one of the main reasons behind the distribution of livestock[21].

Other families that we spoke to also indicated that they were not interested to develop their herds for commercial purposes (either for milk or meat production) even when markets were close by and transportation was readily available as a result of the recently constructed roads. They mentioned the lack of capital, know-how and lack of family members to support the enterprise, which they considered to be high risk.

There were only two cases in Khotang (C3) where poultry farming and goat rearing had been started for specialised production and both were self initiatives (See Box2).

Box 2: Rare examples farmers switching to commercial livestock production

Migrant returnee turns towards commercial animal husbandry

'*I was aware of the challenges'*, was what I was told by a farmer who had started animal husbandry on a commercial scale through his own initiative. He told me that after weighing up the advantages and disadvantages, he finally decided to start his own business. The road connecting his village had just been constructed and he had had saved a little while working on the road project. After the project ended, he told me that he did not know what to do. He had already worked as a labourer in Kuwait for 4 years, but it had been rough, and he did not want to go back. So, with the left over savings from Kuwait and earning from working on the road, he started rearing animals on a commercial scale. Today, he owns 22 goats, 9 pigs, 6 buffalos and 10 chickens. According to him, the main markets are at Buipa (the nearest market) and Diktel (the district headquarter), where he transports the animals on buses, except for pigs which are not allowed and buffalos which he walks to markets. He sells them at prices ranging from NPR. 5,000 and above whereas pigs are sold between NPR. 2,500 (during winters) -. 1,500 (during summers).

Source: Field notes Rajapani (Khotang)

Shopkeeper expanding into poultry farming

The shop owner tells me that he set up his poultry farm two months ago. (He also has a mill with a diesel generator that seems to be doing good business). According to him, his main idea is to supply to Buipa and Diktel and even within this short period of time, he says that his investment shows signs of being profitable as he has already sold 20 chickens (weighing 67 Kgs) at NPR 280/kg. The chickens were sent to Diktel and cost NPR 200 for transportation via a bus. As there are no veterinary services in the village, he's had to describe the symptoms to a vet in Diktel using his mobile who then sends medicine on the buses. So far, he tells me that the medicine is working. He was quite optimistic about the future.

Source: Field notes Rajapani (Khotang)

2.4. Peoples' perspectives on access to Public Resources

With regards to public resources, all households (except those C3 in Khotang) told us that their access to and over various services had improved in the past few years. This section discusses the main changes that have occurred with the past few years.

[21] Another reason is also to provide an incentive to form leasehold forestry groups.

Table 2: Public resources available in the study villages

District/ VDC/	Road connectivity	Access to Markets	Access to Health Facilities	Access to Schools	Electricity	Water (Drinking/ Irrigation)	Community Forestry
Ramechhap/ A1	Earthern Road Road connected to Manthali. Another road being built by DDC to connect to Dhobi.	X 2 local tea and retail shops (also functions as a place for locals to gamble) Larger markets in the nearby towns, where locals go once a month	x1 GoN Health Post Well equipped. Locals use this facility	x1 GoN Primary school Locals not happy with the quality of education provided	No electricity Locals using kerosene and solar lamps	Community taps built by GoN in 2000 Two LILI ponds constructed	No community forestry programme
Ramechhap/ A2		Larger markets in the nearby towns, where locals go regularly		x1GoN Primary school GoN x1Secondary school Inadequately staffed. If two teachers are absent (out of 7) then sometimes a holiday is given after lunch		Community taps Two LILI ponds	
Ramechhap/ A3				GoN Primary school x1		Community taps One LILI pond	
Okhaldhunga/ B1	Earthern Road Road connecting Okhaldhunga and Rumjatar	Large markets in the nearby towns. Locals use buses/jeeps as well as walk during haats	District hospital at Rumjatar, Mission hospital in Okhaldhunga	x1 GoN Secondary school x1 Private higher secondary school funded by donations from Canada and Ireland. Locals consider the education to be good quality	Connected to the main electricity grid	Community taps built by UNICEF. Still functional Five LILI ponds	Community forestry programme
Okhaldhunga/ B2		Large markets in the nearby towns Vegetable seed collectiion centre constructed by CEPREAD which is rarely used				Community taps built by UNICEF. Still functional Three LILI ponds	
Khotang/ C1	Seasonal road connecting Rajapani to Buipa and Gaighat.	X 6 Local shops at the market in Rajapani bazaar Rice is cheaper in the Terai towns of Phoksintar and Gaighat, so, locals go there for buying in bulk items	x1 GoN Health Post (Staffed by 1 Health Assistant and 2 Female Community Health Volunteers) Locals use HP for treatment. x 1 Medicine shop	x1 GoN Higher Secondary school Locals do not think the education quality is good. Dalits (3 students) being provided with scholarships X1 Private Primary school Was established two years ago. Parents consider the quality of education better than the GoN school	Connected to the main electricity grid	Water scarcity. Community taps have less water, families forced to go to Kuwa.(spring water) Farming heavily dependent on rain water	Leasehold forestry programme
Khotang/ / C2							
Khotang/ C3				x1 GoN Higher Secondary school (Same as above) X1 Private primary school (Same as above) Early child education X1			

2.4.1. Road Connectivity and Access to Markets

SCS focus:
- Improve access to income, opportunities and mobility through construction and maintenance of disaster resistant rural infrastructure
- Applying a road corridor approach to focus activities along the main roads to increase synergies amongst different projects and foster multiple livelihood opportunities

People spoke of roads providing cheaper and easier access to foods and consumer goods.

All the hamlets/communities that we stayed were near the road corridors (the farthest that we stayed was 1 hr walk away) and so all had relatively quick access to the road networks and the connectivity that they provided.

People told us that the main roads had been constructed by the Nepalese Government and *'the Swiss'*. Families that had worked during road construction regarded the employment provided during construction as government work[22], which was being support by the Swiss government[23]. While others (who had not been employed) were not sure who had been supporting the construction of the roads.

Being able to transport goods **to** their villages was regarded as a major development change by the villagers, who previously were having to transport everything on foot.

Five HHHs[24] (out of ten) had had family members who had worked during road construction. Villagers told us that the 'poorer' households were provided this opportunity. These were mostly Dalits and Janjati households, who we were told had been identified by NGOs that came into the villages. Dalit families that we chatted with were happy to have been provided with the opportunity to work and as discussed in the earlier section were able to earn between NPR 400-600 per day, which they regarded as being *'good money'.* But, those that had not been provided with the opportunity, who were mostly Chhetry families in our study locations, complained that they had been excluded even though they were also poor. This also extended to the distribution of fruit trees, which had been provided to households through the project that had been chosen for road construction work. '*We are also poor, but, we did not get the opportunity (to work during road construction)*' (Woman, Khotang-C3). '*They* (Dalits) *were also provided with fruit trees for free but we had to buy them'* (Man, Khotang-C2).

Conversations with the people in the study sites all echoed the desire to have road access closer to their homes. '*Now everyone wants a road to connect to their households'* (VDC secretary, Ramechhap-A1).

We were told that local politicians have been quick to jump on this as a tangible way to gain influence. According to the VDC secretary in A1 that '*all the parties want to build roads to gain influence'*. Here there is a new road being constructed to the nearby town of Dhobi. We were told that it was being funded by the District Development Committee (DDC), through their local Constitution Assembly Member of Parliament's Fund, and costing, they said, NPR 7,00,000- 10,00,000. Almost everyone we chatted with was optimistic about the potential increase in access and time that would be saved by taking public services, which was thought to be around about two hours.

Table 3 provides information on main road networks that were constructed through the use of labour intensive means with SDC support in the study sites. In addition there were other 'locally constructed roads' in the communities which were built using mechanical means (bulldozers and diggers).

[22] In Khotang, locals told us that a road opening ceremony had been organized during which politicians from Kathmandu along with the ambassador from Switzerland had come to their village.
[23] There were only three people who told us that it was the District Road Support Programme (DRSP) which had built the road.
[24] These included two Dalit households in Khotang and three Janajati households in Okhaldhunga.

Table 3: Salient features of the road corridors at the study sites

District	Road Corridor	Road Length (km)	Construction period	Vehicle flow
Okhaldhunga	Okhaldhunga-Rumjatar	11	2003 – 2006	Flow of public vehicles is low. Two buses transport people and goods in the mornings and evenings. High numbers of motorcycles (up to 15) observed
Khotang	Mahure-Phoksintar	48	2010 – 2013	Moderate flow of public vehicles as the study sites lie along the network connecting the Terai with Buipa and Diktel. Up to 4 buses pass through at two times in a day. Morning (before 10 am) and afternoon (around 4 pm). Trucks carrying goods (rice, oil, sugar, noodles) into the villages
Ramechhap	Manthali-Kathjor-Gobi	22	2009 - 2011	Moderate flow of public vehicles. Two buses are available in the mornings and afternoons. Tractors transport goods into the villages

Women selling vegetables at the weekly hăat bazaar in Rumjatar (Okhaldhunga)

The road passing through the study sites in Okhaldhunga connects the district headquarters with the town of Rumjatar, which includes an airstrip. We were told that before the construction of the road linking the district with the Terai (and Kathmandu), Rumjatar was the main transport hub of the region, with locals dependent on the planes for bringing in goods. The other option was to porter and transport goods on mules which we were told took up to 3-4 days.

Since the expansion of the road connections and the direct transport of goods to the district headquarters, we were told that the shops in Rumjatar which previously thrived are now closing down. Our study families, described that they now go to Okhaldhunga, which takes 45 minutes by public buses, to buy goods as the items are cheaper there and also because there are more options. The weekly hăat bazaars are now the main reasons for them going to Rumjatar. This is a 20 minutes walk and is where our study families take their livestock and surplus vegetables to be sold.

Tractors are regarded to be important means to transport goods <u>into</u> villages, but, also blamed for damaging earthen roads

Walking to Okhaldhunga (taking up to an hour) was also preferred by some of our study families. People spoke of crammed buses and not enough seats for the 45 minutes journey. '*I need to pay NPR 50, and still I have to stand' (Women, Okhaldhunga-B2).* Along with the saving of fares and the availability of vehicles only during certain hours for taking short cuts along the foot trails to reach the district headquarters. Those that told us about the short cuts, were the ones who also indicated that one of the negative impacts of the road was that the trails were now neglected and overgrown with vegetation.

Meanwhile in Ramechhap, besides the SDC supported road, there were five smaller feeder roads that had been constructed by the local government. These were earthen roads which we observed (and also confirmed by our study families) were used mostly by tractors to bring in supplies into the villages. The people that we chatted with told us that it has become easier to transport items into the villages by tractors, but, at the same time they also complained that the tractors were responsible for damaging the roads, which become impassable during the rains.

In Khotang, we observed higher volumes of traffic as buses (up to 4/5 buses) transporting people between Gaighat (in the Terai) and Diktel, the district headquarters. People told us that during the monsoon, vehicular movement gets blocked due to landslides. Last year, locals mentioned up to seven days of disruption, but, generally the road was regarded to be of good condition and '*not too bumpy'* (Women, Khotang-C3). In addition to the buses, jeeps and tractors were also observed to be transporting goods into the study locations. These goods comprised mostly food items (rice, sugar, noodles), mobile recharge cards, clothes, alcohol, soaps, construction materials (galvanized iron sheets, cement) and other household consumables.

Increased availability of goods locally were often said to be a significant sign of progress, with people remarking that ''*if you have money, then you can buy anything' (Woman, Khotang-C3)*. Our study families spoke of previously going to Phoksintar on foot to buy rice, which would take up to 3 days. The same journey now takes only 1 day.

We were told that rice had been available in the shops before the construction of roads and that the cost of a sack (30 kg) was NPR 1,800 then, compared to 1,100 now (38% decrease). Shop keepers also told us that transportation costs had decreased. For example in Okhaldhunga (B2), the portering cost of transporting 40 kgs for NPRs 150, had nearly halved to just NRs 80. People now buy daily household commodities (oil, sugar, salt), stationery at the local shops, which also double up as tea shops and places to exchange gossip. Gambling is common at all the study sites, with the tea and shop owners benefiting the most through alcohol and snack sales. One shopkeeper in Khotang (C3) spoke of selling alcohol worth NPRs 300- 500 per day.

Whilst people like the fact that goods are transported into the village, goods are not being transported out of the study villages. We observed that most of the tractors were returning form the village to towns empty. As mentioned earlier, people shared that except for rare cases, they were not interested in commercial production of vegetables and/or livestock so there was no need to transport anything out of the village. We saw occasional animals being loaded on to buses (one or two goats, chickens) to sell during the hăat bazaars, but nothing transported or sold in bulk. When we asked about what was being taken out of the villages, people had to think hard. In the end they usually identified livestock and handicraft items such as *Dokos* and *Nanglos*[25] and confirmed that the value of roads was to bring goods nearer to them.

2.4.2. Access to Education

Families valued education for the potential to get salaried jobs. Most were however not satisfied with the quality of education available in the villages.

Most parents we chatted with were keen for their children to study. Their main motivation was in securing better salaried jobs, away from agriculture, as none of the parents regarded farming as a future for their children. One of our HHH mother's in Okhaldhunga (B1) told us that, '*I don't want them to suffer like I did'.* Similar sentiments were echoed at the other study sites, where parents indicated low income returns along with the physical hardships as the main reasons for wanting their children to do something besides farming.

There was a sense that completion of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) was the basic requirement for 'getting a job', though after that, parents were less sure of what their children would do. '*We need to educate them at least till they pass class 10*' (Father, Okhaldhunga-B1). A few of the families that we conversed with explained that of course not all their children would go on to study further, as some were '*not good at it'*. But, those that could afford to send their sons and daughters were investing in their education in the district headquarters, the Terai or even Kathmandu. For example, one HHH father told us that he had just sent NPR 30,000 for his third son's education fees and living expense in Kathmandu. For the cash, he had sold livestock and used the remittances sent by the two elder sons. Parents also often spoke with pride of children that did well at school. '*He is very talented, never comes less than second place in school*'(Mother, Khotang-C3).

Chatting with the grandparents indicated that there has been a gradual rise in the education levels over each successive generations. We were told by most of them that they had not gone to school and that only a few could sign their names. Similarly, many conversations with the parents (between 30-50 years) suggested that they had mostly studied up to the primary level.

[25] The Dokos were said to be sold at NPR 200-150 per piece, with the main markets in Solukhombu.

In Okhaldhunga however, we talked with FHHs who were more concerned about making money than sending their children to school. '*Why do they need to study, when they can become drivers in Kathmandu?'* (Father, Okhaldhunga-B2). One significant reason was that, as discussed in the previous section, there was a high incidence of men migrating to Kathmandu and working as drivers. They had set up networks, which helped families and villagers to gain apprenticeship as '*Khansalshi'* (helper of drivers) who would then later become drivers themselves.

Generally though, people told us that parents send their children, both boys and girls, to either government run public and/or private schools.[26]

All our HHHs children were going to government schools. Even though the quality of education (in the government run schools) was widely regarded to be poor by both parents and the students themselves. For example in one government run school in Okhaldhunga, parents told us that exams are *'useless'* as all the students are '*passed on to the next grade'* regardless of whether they turn up for classes or are qualified or not. Parents explained that the school wants to maintain a certain number of registered students and not show 'dropouts' in the official records, which might reflect poorly on them. As a consequence we were told that the quality has deteriorated and that anyone '*who passes class 6 now are equivalent to those that passed class 2 in the past*' (Father, Okhaldungs-B1).

We also heard other complaints that '*teachers don't come in time and sometimes we just end up playing and gossiping*' (Girl, Khotang-C3) and '*Last year no one passed SLC, the year before only 1 student passed, if none pass this year, I hear that the government will close it down[27]'* (Father, Khotang-C3).

The growing disillusionment with government schools has meant that more parents, with the means, are turning towards private schools which have cropped up at all the study sites. In Khotang, one primary level private school was found to be charging NPR 380/month, which parents regarded to be a better investment than sending their children to the government run school. These schools do not always have the best infrastructure, but there is a perception amongst the parents that '*at least the teachers come on time'*, 'as *we pay for the education and we can at least ask the teachers what is happening'* (Mother, Khotang-C2).

This private school is operating four classes (grade 1-4) in a shed for the last two years. The government school nearby has better infrastructure, but parents say that they prefer sending their children to the private school as the classes are always on time (Khotang)

In Okhaldhunga (B1) there is a private school which had been, according to the locals, established through support from donations from Canada and Ireland. Funds were provided for the construction of the buildings and also the salaries of the teachers. Parents told us that they want their children to study there, but as it takes only 200 students, seats are limited and so their children are sent to the government schools nearby.

In the same community, one Janajati family told us they were sending their son to a primary school outside of the community to study with Brahmin children because according to the mother '*they are more studious and who he associates will have an influence on him*' (Mother, Okhaldhunga-B1)

At government schools, primary education is touted as free for all, but parents said they have to pay new registration fees, examinations, and photocopies – which when accumulated made up significant sums of money. Overall, through conversations with our HHHs we roughly calculated that a household was spending up to 8-10% of their annual incomes on the education for one child in government schools. With costs increasing if they had more than one child to send.

[26] In Nepal, the education system comprises of Primary (1-5 grade), Lower Secondary (6-8 grade) and Secondary (9-10) Grade 11 to 12 is known as the Certificate level or 10+2. University education comprises of Bachelors (13-14) and Masters (15-16).
[27] Under the Education regulations, schools that perform below 15% levels (in terms of the SLC examination pass rate) over three years are penalized.

For example, in Khotang, a high school was charging NPR 600 for new registration for grade 6, NPR 700 for grade 7 and so on till the 10 grade at NPR 1,000. Parents who were sending their children to this school complained to us that these costs were high, especially if they had more than one child studying, which was the case for two of our HHH households. Schools also have compulsory uniforms for students, which puts additional financial burden on the parents. This was also contributing towards absenteeism as we heard students tell their parents '*I will not go to school until and unless you make me a new pair of clothes for me'* (Boy, Okhaldhunga-B1). Most were reluctant to go to school as they would not be allowed in class or would get scolded by the teachers.

Our HHH parents were at pains to tell us that there is no discrimination between their sons and daughters, and that their children are all sent to the same school. The current parity, according to our HHHs was because '*she can also earn a living*' (Okhaldhunga-B1), '*nowadays education matters when a girl is married*' (Khotang-C3). Parents shared that the norm is for prospective grooms to seek girls who are better educated, either because they do not want '*illiterate bridges'* and rather want brides who can also earn money. When we talked with the daughters of the households themselves, they confirmed what their parents said, but, added that unlike the boys they are also expected to contribute much more towards household chores and also do well at school. '*I need to fetch water and feed the goats, my brother helps too, but only when he wants too'* (Girl Khotang-C3), but this was often acknowledged by parents with comments such as *'she needs to learn how to do household chores (such as cooking, collecting water), '* (Mother, Khotang-C1).

Box 3: A teenage girl lists her likes and dislikes in her village

Likes	Dislikes
Drinking water, health, education and transportation facilities in village	Alcoholism in village
Marriage after getting self reliant economically	Untouchability existing in village
Games alongside the formal lectures/classes in school	Dowry system
Spreading knowledge to others	Parent's attitude towards children: one sent to public school and another to boarding (private) school. Besides, it's only the later ones who get money for snacks.
Having good relationship with friends	Discrimination between son and daughter
Helping the poor, disabled and people in need	Playing cards, which is much in existence here
Studying by earning on my own, but with the consent of parents	Discouraging children- "you can't do it"- to participate in games and several other community programs
Frosty winter more than Spring	Spending a lot in marriage ceremony

Translated. Girl aged 19 years. Grade 9. Okhaldhunga (B1)

Many of the students who had left school early indicated that the '*poor quality of the education*[28]' was the main reason why they discontinued. Some confided to us that *'it's no use going to school if I don't learn anything'* (Teenage boy, Okhaldhunga-B2), '*the teacher doesn't come, why should I go?'* (Teenage Boy, Khotang-C1). The 'poor quality' broadly encompasses teachers not being present, or not teaching if present; and syllabuses not being completed in time. There were also other reasons such as '*embarrassment of joining juniors'* when they failed a class and were kept down. This was raised by teenagers (mostly boys) who regarded it was being particularly humiliating to study with 'youngsters' and so instead chose to leave school.

Married girls (mostly those that had run away to get married) were reluctant to re-join after their marriages because they '*didn't want to be ridiculed'* (Young wife, Khotang-C3), when they went back to school. A few of the girls that we spoke with had run-off and so did not want to be teased by their class mates. Teenage pregnancies did happen, and in such cases, we were told that the girls rarely came back to finish their education. They also had the added responsibilities of being the new daughter-in law and were thus expected to perform household chores, sometimes at the cost their education. We only met a few cases of girls who after marrying had continued with their studies. Married boys meanwhile had other problems.

[28] Poor academic progress was cited as the main reason for leaving school in the Nepal Living Standard Survey II (2010/2011).

They were expected to take on extra responsibilities and were pressurized to earn as soon as possible, and so leave school to seek opportunities to earn incomes for their new family.

2.4.3. Access to Health Services and Household Cleanliness

People prefer to go to traditional healers and larger hospitals in Kathmandu for health treatments of more chronic and severe ailments.

People within our study locations spoke of first turning towards Dhami/Jhankris (traditional faith healers) for treating various aliments (such as fever, stomach problems). In Ramechhap (A1), we were told that families were paying up to NPR 500 to faith healers, who would continue to treat them until the individual recovered. Meanwhile in Okhaldhunga (B1), HHH families shared that since the faith healers could be paid in kind (generally rice), they were more convenient to access in comparison to formal service providers (such as private medicine shops) which required cash. Sometimes, families also spoke of going to both Dhami/Jhankris as well as using allopathic medication simultaneously.

The formal health facilities meanwhile were regarded with mixed views. In Okhaldhunga, people spoke of going to the nearby health posts for getting '*cetamol, eye drops and dressing burns'* '*Its okay'* (Women, Okhaldhunga-B1) was a typical sentiment that was expressed about the existing formal services in the villages. In Ramechhap and Khotang, locals complained that the facilities are understaffed, had poor stocks of medicine, and were closed when they went to the centres (even sometimes during operational hours). They were instead turning towards private medicine shops, which we were told, were open during the day and were well stocked with medicine.

When we talked with the health providers they told us '*that we are doing the best we can*' (Health Assistant, Khotang). They themselves also had complaints that villagers rarely followed instructions on how to take medications. For example, one Health Assistant (HA) was keen to tell us how, it took him 30 minutes to convince the villagers to allow him to give an injection to a women, who had fainted. His diagnosis was that she was suffering from severe gastric [29], but, the villagers insisted that she had the 'forest fever' and should not be provided with any injections at all.

During the course of our conversations with our host households, we were told that for serious and chronic diseases (such as heart problems, jaundice broken limbs, cancer, meningitis, liver cirrhosis) most families go directly to the hospitals in Kathmandu. They spoke of low confidence in government run facilities within the districts. '*In the end they will always refer us to Kathmandu, so we might as well go there anyway'* (Man, Ramechhap – A2). Families in this situation told us that they might have to spend up to NPR 30,000- 70,000 per visit for major treatments and operations and were having to make regular visits every year for check-ups. People were using the newly constructed roads to go to Kathmandu and we were told that ambulances have come to all the study sites.

Cash incentives were attracting expectant mothers to give birth in birthing centres which had notices that said '24 hour maternity services'

The work by the Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) was highly appreciated by the villagers. They were credited to be the main catalyst for encouraging mothers to attend ante-natal check-ups (ANC) and/or carrying iron and vitamin tablets with them to provide to pregnant mothers at their homes. '*The didi comes to my house to remind me when I have to go for check ups'* (Woman, Okhaldhunga – B2). ' *we get polio vaccines at home'* (Woman, Khotang-C2). People also agreed that the work of FCHV had increased the coverage of immunization programmes, which has improved in recent years, and all their children have received vaccinations.

Home births were still preferred at all the sites, except in Ramechhap where we were told that more women were increasingly going to birthing centres. People spoke of the cash incentives as being one of the main motivating factors for them to give birth at the centres. ' *You will only get NPR 1,000 and clothes for your*

[29] Gastric was held to be a common ailment amongst the villagers at all the study sites. Health workers attributed this is the irregular and/or skipped meals.

child if you go to give birth there, but, if you have gone for regular check-ups before, then you get 1,800' (Woman, Ramechhap- A2). At other places, women explained that they only think it is necessary to go to health facilities if there is a complication or if women have had difficult pregnancies in the past (such as still births, miscarriages), otherwise they expressed the view that home births assisted by family members and/or *Sudeni* (Traditional birth attendants) is good.

Most of the HHHs did not have toilets and people did not prioritise them as being necessary. Most were going to the fields or private forests near households either in the mornings or late evenings. It was only in Khotang that all the households had toilets and we were told that it had only been two weeks earlier that the VDC had been declared an 'open defecation free area'. According to the Health Assistant, one main reason was the introduction of the 'Sanitation Card[30]' system, which has forced households to construct toilets. He told us that villagers have to produce the cards (along with other documents) while seeking any type of service from the VDC, otherwise nothing is done. In addition, we were also told that some households had been supported by a development project (whose name they could not remember) that had provided them with toilet pans and roofing materials for free. We observed that families were using the toilets even though water was scarce and had to be carried from a nearby spring every day. To lessen the burden, our study families use the kitchen water (used to wash dishes) in the toilets.

2.4.4. Access to Natural Resources

SCS focus:
- Support access, management and sustainable use of natural resources including land, water and forest with emphasis of value chains, marketing and post harvest systems

- ***Water***

Families spoke of difficulties in accessing drinking water and were reliant on rainwater for their fields.

'*Rajapani[31] means the king of water, but, we don't have water'* (Woman, Khotang-C3)

Scarcity of water in Khotang expressed major issue for all people who chatted with us. During our stay we observed community water taps in the villages, but, locals spoke of long lines to fill one *Gagri* (traditional water vessel). We were told that despite of the lack of water in the taps, households were paying between NPR 100-150 per month to use them. This was being collected for a maintenance fund. But, there is not enough water and so everyone walks a further 15 minutes down to the *Kuwa* (uncovered spring water). In a day women and children made as much four trips to collect water. But, over there too the water was scarce and one HHH daughter-in-law told us that she doesn't bathe as often as she would like as there is hardly any water in the village. To cope with the shortages, we observed that our study households were recycling kitchen waste water in the toilets and for their livestock.

Box 4: Scarcity of water leading to conflicts

When we first entered C3 site in Khotang, we had nearly half the community gather round us to point out how dire the need for water was. Thinking that we were 'development workers' from a project, they were at pains to tell us of their plight, even though we saw community taps while entering the village. Later we learned that the water in those taps only comes for 3 hours a day. There are long queues and a household is only allowed to fill one *Gagri* (traditional water vessels) at a time. So scare is this resource that fights were reported to have broken out when one woman tried to fill two of her *Gagri*s without waiting for her turn again.

Source: Field notes Khotang (C3)

[30] here are three types - White, Yellow, and Red. To get the white cards, you have to have a water sealed latrine; while yellow means that they are not water sealed; and a red one means that you do not have a toilet

[31] The name 'Rajapani' according to locals was coined by King Mahendra in the 1970s. The saying goes that on his travels he drank water in the village and liked it so much that he changed the name of the place to fit the quality of the water.

Scarcity of water increases burdens and drudgery of women and children as they are forced to travel further and more frequently to collect water for their household's needs (Khotang)

There were rumours in the study village in Khotang that a large NPR 30 million programme is planned for water to be supplied to them, though the people in the village were not exactly sure when the scheme would be completed. They were cautiously hopeful of the scheme, and views such as *'we don't need anything except water'* (Woman, Khotang-C3) were common.

Meanwhile the next village, the more better off households told us that they (five households) had collectively bought a water source at NRs 2 lakhs, but, this too was drying out. Many conversations with the people in Khotang suggested that the lack of water for farming and household needs was amongst the chief reasons why households, with enough cash, were migrating out from the villages to the Terai.

In the other study sites, water scarcity to such a high degree was not observed. As mentioned earlier, in Okhaldhunga (B1) UNICEF had constructed community taps in the area, from which most households were installing pipes to take directly up to their households. Where needed, people were also using the ponds for their household necessities (such as washing, watering home).

For agriculture, all households were reliant on rainwater, except in one hamlet in Ramechhap (A1) which had an irrigation canal constructed through the Tama Koshi Irrigation scheme.

- ***Forest resources***

Families spoke of the forestry programmes being responsible for protecting forests, but less of direct impacts on their lives.

Many of our study households had their own private forests, from which they gathered branches and cut trees for fuel for cooking.

In Khotang, most of the families that we talked to did not have much knowledge about a Leasehold Forestry Programme that had been established a few years back, except one HHH mother who told us she was the Treasurer of the committee. She told us that NPR 50,000 worth of bamboo had been sold last year and that Cinnamon had been planned this year for harvesting. However, others that we chatted to did not have much to say and when we attempted to direct conversations towards the leasehold programme, people only referred to the goats that they had initially received as 'gifts'.

Meanwhile in Okhladhunga (B2), people spoke of the community forestry that was recently established leading to a decline in deforestation. The general feelings expressed to us was that before '*people were cutting trees everywhere and deforestation was rampant*' (Woman, Okhaldhunga-B2). We were told that now with the new rules, locals are only allowed to cut trees for fire wood once a year in Asar (June-July) and that most households were members of the CFUGs in the hamlet. We were told that member households had recently been trained on how to prevent forest fires and were looking forward to another training on non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

Meanwhile in the study sites in Ramechhap, there were no forestry programmes. Locals did tell us though about a local guard who was responsible for guarding the forests and by all accounts, there had be some decrease in cutting of trees. Illegal logging was another area of enquiry that we tried to raise, but the most common answer we received was that it was not taking place.

2.4.5. Access and Awareness of Government Provisions at local level

SCS priority areas:
- State building at local level
- Ensuring transparent and accountable management of financial resources

Villagers that we talked with, especially Dalits, were aware of VDC grants coming in their names and were seeking ways to utilise the funds for livelihood schemes.

Allowances for the elderly was the most commonly talked about government provision by our study families during the course of our stay. For elderly couples who were living on their own the NPR 500/month provided by the government was amongst the few sources of cash income that they had. '*At least I am getting my pension*' (Man, Khotang-C3). As discussed in the earlier section on poverty and abandonment, we met and were told that as the younger generations (and their families) move away from villages in search of employment opportunities and/or sought better quality of life in the city, the elderly are increasingly being left behind in the villages. Those that do not have children or children that do not care for them are in the worst position and are unanimously agreed to the 'poorest' in the village. One of our host households were an elderly couple who were still working hard, but, were vulnerable to loneliness. *'There is no one, but the two of us now' (Khotang- C2).*

In Ramechhap, people told us that the elderly allowances are collected from the nearby Sub Health Post (SHP), because there is no VDC office in the village. The VDC secretary has set up his offices in a small space, which opens every week, and it seems that all the villagers know when the VDC secretary comes in to do their official business.

Meanwhile in Khotang, we came across a VDC secretary who stays in Diktel (the district headquarters) and hardly comes to the VDC. Many villagers complained of delays and unnecessary costs (travel, accommodation) that they had to bear because of his absence. At the time of the study, we met a widowed grandmother who was trying to transfer the land and house to her name following the death of her husband. She was preparing herself for at least 3 days of journey to Diktel, because she was not sure when the secretary would complete her task. For the journey, she was also taking her nephew to help her navigate the process and help her with all the documentation.

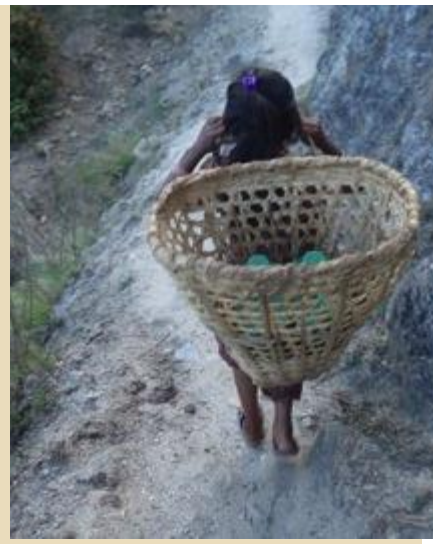
A few individuals also told us about Ward Citizen Forum (WCF) in all the study sites. Amongst all the various caste and ethnic groups, the Dalits were found to be the most knowledgeable about its work in Okhahldhunga (B2) and Khotang (C3). Knowing the amount of 'VDC grants (10%) that come for Dalits' was the most widely shared information when we inquired what the happens in the forums. In Okhaldhunga (B2) we were told that meetings are held in a community hall regularly and '*we learn about what is happening in the district and the budget'* (Man, Khotang-C3). '*Before it was only the rich and clever people who knew about what is happening, but, now we also do*'. (Women, Okhaldhunga-B2). In Khotang, a man was also keen to tell us that that the construction work being undertaken for the protection of the water supply near the road (supplying water to 200 households) was through the NPR 40,000 that had been provided by the VDC grants. The women's group which we met in one study site in Okhaldhunga (B2) who were planning to upgrade the LILI pond for commercial vegetable production through PAF grants, also informed us that '*it encourages us' , 'we need to know what is coming in our names'.* Other ethnic groups (i.e. Rai in B2) in the same villages, were however less aware. They had heard of the forums, but, did not have much idea of what was taking place.

2.5. Well-being Effects on Rural Women

Women said that basic labour saving technologies had lessened physical burdens.

Through the conversations that we had with different generations of women about their work loads and attitudes, most agreed that in general their lives had improved. The older generation indicated that when they were younger, they had faced much more hardships. '*We didn't have water coming to our homes*' (Grandmother, Okhaldhunga-B2), '*I used to walk for 3 days to get a sack of rice'* (Women, Khoatng-C3), *'now things are much more easier for my daughter-in law'* (Women, Khoang-C1). Many were still however devoting considerable time and energy performing a multitude of tasks ranging from household chores (collecting water, fodder and firewood), farming, caring for families (and the sick), earning cash incomes

(through income generating programmes) and devoting time for user committees. For single women (living on their own) the '*lack of hands'* was particularly difficult. We observed that neighbours would help out when they could, but, this was dependent on the well wisher's time and was irregular.



Collecting water is one of the most time consuming and fatiguing tasks for rural women and children

Our conversations with household members as we accompanied them to mills (generally ranging from 5 – 30 minutes) and waited in line for our turn to grind maize suggested that basic labour saving technologies such as electric mills were helpful in reducing burdens. Mothers told us that before they would have to spend hours pounding/grinding cereals through the traditional methods (mostly using two slabs of stones). But, *'…it only takes a couple of minutes now'* (Mother, Khotang-C3) was a sentiment that was typically expressed by many. Sometimes we had to wait in queues (up to 10-30 minutes). But, despite the 'waiting time', household members we accompanied did not complain. The costs were also said to be manageable; with the cost of grinding one kg of maize and millet costing NPR 3 in an electric diesel operated mill.

Taking piped water from community taps directly to household yards were a small but significant change, reducing burdens on women ,in particular, having to collect water. This was especially noticeable in Khotang, where as discussed before, women were having to travel up to 4 times a day to a nearby *Kuwa*, carrying water on a 15 minutes upward hike- everyday.

For pregnant women this was especially difficult. During one instance we observed one pregnant woman request four of her neighbours, before one finally agreed to go and fetch water for her. In other places, such as Okhaldhunga (B2) women had laid pipes from the (LILI) ponds for washing and in their home gardens.

HHH mother making tea on an improvised improved cooking stove on stilts that she designed by herself.

In one of our study households we saw an improved cooking stove on stilts. We started chatting about how it was built and its usage. Our household mother told us that it was her design as she was tired of bending down all the time with the traditional types. She explained that she had paid extra to a '*mistri*' (skilled worker) who had been trained by an NGO some years ago and she was happy with it, even though it needs to cleaned often. Other families that we talked to were however less enthusiastic about improved stoves. '*Cooking is slow'* (Woman, Ramechhap-A1*), 'the chimneys get blocked frequently and need to be cleaned regularly' (*Woman, Khotang-C3) , '*it's still smoky'* (Man, Khotang-C2) were typical of the views and we saw that besides an improved stove, there would be more often than not a more traditional open stove nearby.

Increased access to public transportation, especially to transported goods, was another development which many women identified as making life easier for them. '*I used to carry sacks of rice for days, now I just go to the shop' (*Woman, Khotang-C3). Women also mentioned that they generally use the public transportation for going to hăat bazaars and to visit relatives. As mentioned in the earlier sections, the lack of available seats as well as the short distances and the opportunity to save on bus fares meant that they sometimes preferred to walk instead. Unlike other RCA studies in other locations, people generally felt that the conditions of the roads were adequate and no one mentioned 'the bumpiness of the roads' as being particularly inconvenient. Though all the villagers that we talked to now wanted black topped roads into their villages.

Women with husbands who had migrated for work and who had separated from their in-laws told us that they didn't travel far. We were told that with increased responsibilities to look after their family and farm on their own they had less time for moving outside villages. '*When do I have the time to go out?' (*Woman, Khotang-C1*), 'all I do is work' (*Woman, Okhaldhunga-B2*).* On the other hand, becoming the de-facto heads

of their households, has necessitated them to become more engaged within their villages. When we asked them about decision making we received mixed responses. Some women told us that they always had been involved in making decisions with respect to farming and household activities and for them it was not a drastic change. Others, meanwhile said that with their husbands away, the responsibilities now fell on them and they needed to engage more with outsiders (for example negotiate with villagers for ploughing/sowing fields).

Many of our conversations indicated that almost all women are now engaged in saving and credit schemes (sometimes two or three). We came across many Mothers groups and Small Farmers groups which had had different saving amounts (NRs 10 – 30) and interest rates (2-18%). Because of the multitude of groups, sometimes mothers got confused while explaining the rates and benefits of each programme. Generally we were told that women place more importance on the information that was being shared (related to family planning, health, hygiene, new development programmes) than the actual micro-credits being received in the groups. People shared that the amounts are usually small (between NPRs 1,000 – 5,000) and are used for household daily needs. If they really need loans (for weddings, investing in migration, medical costs) then they are more likely to go to money lenders, who are said to charge up to 28% interest.

Women were eager and proud to tell us that domestic violence had reduced in their villages. They told us that one of the main reasons were the Mother's Groups set up through development projects. Or, more specifically the members in the groups who have developed strong bonds amongst themselves and are ready to take group action against men. *'Whenever we find out that some has been hit, we all go and confront the man'* (Woman, Okhaldhunga- B2), *'We warned him not to hit her again'* (Woman, Ramechhap-A2). Fighting between women were less heard in our study sites (except in Khotang over water), though we have come across fights between mother and daughter-in laws or neighbours in other RCA studies.

Box 5: Some reasons why women are not interested in coming to meetings

I met, Ram Maya Thapa Magar (name altered) at the sub-health post. She was a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) who also sold groceries nearby. In her free time she told me that she also makes *Mudas* (bamboo stools). As I sat down and got talking with her, she told me that she is involved in a mother's group. The chief reason for her joining was to learn about the different projects that are launched in her community. Her objective was to be amongst the first to tap into the new opportunities. According to her, being involved in a group is a good thing.

Our conversation moved to asking if other members felt the same way and she said that it was not. Not all understand the importance of the group activities and she thought some only come for the Daily Subsistence Allowance even when the meetings are called *'for their own benefit'* . For many, coming to the meetings themselves means that they have to leave their household chores and most were dissatisfied with too many unproductive meetings. She further told me that some tend to look negatively at the projects, thinking that they are implemented for the sake of the organization and not the benefit of the community.

Source: Field notes Ramechhap

Many women were also found to be participating in development processes. For most it was a trade off with household responsibilities. Most said they were keen to be a part of income generating activities (such as road construction, candle making) and skills trainings (such as Muda making) that have the potential to improve their cash flows – even if it means time away from household responsibilities. But, for other processes (i.e. community meetings) which do not have a direct link with their household incomes, they were less willing, especially if they found the meetings to be unproductive. Within each community there are a few 'women leaders' who are either FCHVs, Chairpersons in Mother's groups, CFUG members who always step forward or are put forward by the community when it comes to development processes. Sometimes, one individual may wear all these hats. In Khotang, we came across one such woman who was also an active local political party member, who had to leave for Diktel where the party was having its annual internal party conference. When we asked her daughter-in-law about what was taking place in her village, she told us '*it is mother who knows all these things, wait for her to come back and she will explain everything to you'*. Similarly, at other sites we came across women who were happy to remain in the shadow and allow 'the active' woman be the voice of their entire community.

Besides, women involved in development processes, we also met with an ex Maoist combatant woman. She had taken the voluntary retirement package and had come back to her father's house and was active in the community. According to her neighbours, she is quite vocal while raising issues in community meetings. When we talked with her, she was keen to persuade us that they (Maoists) were responsible for bringing

about improvements with regards to discrimination against Dalits. She argued that they would forcefully enter the higher caste's kitchens and make them eat their meals with Dalits and this had broken down taboos. Others in the Dalit community agreed that there had been some lessening of discriminatory practices, but, overall it still persisted. During a local wedding we noticed that Dalits were provided a separate area to eat, away from others and we also heard that '*we can share bidi (local cigarette) together, but not water*', '*we can't enter their (higher castes) kitchens'* (Man, Okhaldhunga-B2).

3. Main Drivers of Change

3.1. People's Perspectives of the Main Drivers of Change

During the RCA, many of our study families told us that their lives were becoming better. They spoke specifically of eating better and having disposable cash incomes that allowed them to buy goods in their villages, pay for education and health care, and stay connected with family and friends.

When people discussed these changes, it was within a wider context of their lives and not necessarily about specific projects and how they had affected them. Rather, multiple and inter-related causes, impacts and explanations were provided. The table below lists the main drivers explicitly identified by the people themselves and ranked[32] in order of frequency and importance that were told to us.

Table 4: Main drivers of change according to people living in poverty

Rank	Main Drivers of Change	Impacts	No. of RCA sites where it was mentioned as important
1	Migration (to Kathmandu and abroad)	• Increase in disposable incomes • Improvement in eating habits (more money spent on nutritious food) • Investment in children and siblings education • Rise in construction work facilitating waged work (skilled and unskilled) within villages • Labour shortages (especially during the peak agriculture seasons) leading to decreases in land cultivated • Changing landlord and tenant relations (with tenants having more negotiating powers)	Six RCA locations
2	Roads	• Availability of multitude of goods (especially rice) within villagers • Lessening of time and hardships by families in transporting goods for their household needs • Faster and more convenient access to external markets (for purchasing goods) and hospitals	Six RCA locations
3	Personal networks, initiatives and investments	• Support in gaining employment • Spread of ideas and knowledge	Four RCA locations
4	Modern communication (Mobile phones)	• Spread of ideas and knowledge • Rise in aspirations and expectations • Staying in contact with family and friends	Four RCA locations
5	Scarcity of Water	• Decrease in cultivation area and cropping patterns (from paddy to maize) • Families migrating out from villages to Terai	Three RCA locations

Amongst the drivers of change mentioned above, migration, roads, and scarcity of water have already been discussed in detail in the preceding sections. Personal networks and spread of communication are however two aspects, that have grown out of the people's own initiatives and interests.

[32] The ranking is indicative and should not be seen as an absolute priority ranking.

Many of our study families voiced the importance of drawing upon networks of family, friends and villagers for a variety of activities. Amongst them, one of the dominant views expressed was that networks were being relied upon for fixing jobs for others, in Kathmandu, India and abroad. For example, the Janajati youths that we talked were familiar and were actively pursuing employment in foreign armies (in India and Britain) through their networks as an economic option. Parents (in Okhaldhunga) spoke of sons gaining apprenticeships to become drivers in Kathmandu. They indicated that these connections were essential and a big motivational factor for the youth to leave their homes. It was clear from our conversations that when an individual establishes him or herself in a new location or job, then others are quick to seek advantage. For example, in the earlier section when we gave the example of the man who had failed in his attempt to join the Indian army in Bangalore and had instead stayed on to become a security guard, he told us that '*…I have already helped six others to find work (as security guards)*' (Man, Ramechhap-A1). Conversations in other locations suggested that families which do not have or have only minimal networks are the ones that are at a disadvantage.

In Khotang, people that we spoke with also indicated that when they go to Kathmandu or Terai (for health, education or social reasons) they usually all stay within one particular area. Though this is not a recent trend, when we probed deeper, we came to find out that this has accelerated in recent years with many villagers migrating there and 'satellite villages' have been established, which have become the bases for others to pass through, gain information and knowledge.

The spread of mobile phones and networks have allowed migrants to stay in touch with families back home

Another important source of knowledge and information was mobile phones and TVs (where there was electricity). All our study households had mobiles and it was often mentioned, along with the increase in network coverage, as a significant development in the last couple of years. People that we spoke to valued the phones to keep in touch with family and friends. '*My daughter calls every week, and I talk with my grandchildren'* (Woman, Khotang-C3), '*I can tell my husband buy and send what we need in the house*' (Woman, Khotang-C1).

In some of the HHHs, husbands who had migrated for work were calling their wives every day. People told us that it is cheaper to call from abroad than from Nepal, as there are pre-paid card schemes available there. All the HHHs has at least one mobile and ww noted that when the electricity went down, the families were most worried about charging their phones. The phones were mostly being used to make social calls. The youth were also watching videos and movies that they had downloaded from shops in the bazaar. During our stay, we often also heard and wives also told us that they were talking frequently with their husbands and that they felt that '*they were not so far'*. In Khotang, a poultry farmer also explained to us that he contacts a veterinary shop to seek advice for diseases, with the medicines being sent via the public buses the next day.

Mobiles are also being used to order food items, clothes and medicine from town. Downloading the latest music videos and movies, via mobile shops, was a common habit amongst the youth.

The importance of mobiles and network connectivity was further heightened after the earthquake, when it was the sole medium to find out about the safety of loved ones. Later, it was also a vital tool to find out about road networks that were passible and those that were blocked due to landslides.

In all the study sites, the widespread use of mobiles had made charging of phones a priority. Electricity was observed to be more important than ever and mostly for recharging phones. In places without electricity, households were using solar chargers, and we were told that neighbours (who did not have solar chargers) would often going to neighbours who did.

3.2. Discussion of SDC Supported Projects as Change Agents

This section presents the study teams perspectives on the influence of SDC supported projects based on the insights gained during the RCA. These are discussed viz-à-viz the Swiss Country Strategy (Annex 1) and in particularly Domain 2[33], which focuses on improved livelihoods and resilience of people, especially

[33] Domain 1 focuses on contributing towards an inclusive Federal State, Human Security and Rule of Law.

Disadvantage Groups[34], living in rural areas. Furthermore, the findings and discussions have been structured around the SDC support projects that were implemented within the study sites (ref: Table 1).

Key strategies for SDC supported projects:

- Programmes are to target women and disadvantaged groups. The process to identify beneficiaries involves identifying locations with a high concentration of disadvantaged groups, followed by identifying households and individuals with multiple disadvantages. Investment in the maintenance of infrastructure, such as bridges, rural roads and irrigation channels and provisions of skills training and support to entrepreneurship skills and market development.
- Road corridor approach to focus on economic development in VDCs along the main roads. Contributing towards increased coordination and synergies among the projects in the areas to foster a multiple livelihood approach for the beneficiaries.
- Strengthening the capacities of public authorities to design an implement local development strategies, applying participatory methodologies, to ensure transparent and accountable management of financial resources, and to provide accessible public services of good quality, corresponding to the demands and rights of people.
- Social mobilization of reaching out to the poor and socially discriminated groups to enable them to organise themselves and influence purposes that benefit them.
- Support access, management and sustainable use of natural resources including land, water and forest with emphasis of value chains, marketing and post harvest systems

Swiss Country Strategy (2013-2017)

3.2.1. Targeting

SDC supported projects were found to be pro-poor focused and the findings indicate that proactive approaches have been carried out to reach the 'poor', mostly interpreted in the local context along caste and ethnic lines.

The findings of the RCA however show that the poor are not always those that are identified by development interventions. Poverty is dynamic, as people move in and out depending upon internal causes (number of household members able to work, assets, indebtedness, personal networks) as well as external factors (opportunities to earn cash incomes, access to loans).

Within our study sites, there was unanimous agreement that the 'poorest' were the abandoned elderly, who were often 'not seen' by development programmes, including SDC. For many, the Government welfare provision of NRs 6,000 annually, though small, were important and the only schemes that were specifically targeted towards them, which raises the question of whether more can be done.

Furthermore, the study shows that there are significant differences in poverty levels within districts, VDCs and wards, which do not always fall within caste/ethnic lines. In our study villages, we met and talked with Dalit households who were doing very well, even better than their Chhetry neighbours, mostly due to the incomes from migration[35] and yet were beneficiaries of targeted project interventions. These examples caution against applying a blanket approach of focusing on caste/ethnicity and instead ensuring that greater robustness is applied when local NGOs and social mobilizers undertake the targeting and identification of socially excluded as well as the economically poor, as stated in the Country Strategy.

During the course of our conversations, we also felt that resentment and frustrations at not being allowed to participate in development programmes amongst the 'non-targeted' poorer Chhetry households exists and is simmering. If not addressed, this could in an extreme scenario lead to the undermining of development goals and 'do more harm' than good within communities.

[34] Disadvantaged groups refer to people who are both economically poor as well socially discriminated (SCS, 2012).
[35] According to a World Bank study on migration, Hill Dalits receive the highest share of the total remittances coming into the country from both foreign and internal sources at 36%, followed by Terai and Hill Janajati (WB, 2009).

3.2.2. Road Corridor Approach and Synergies amongst Projects

It was overwhelmingly clear that roads were considered to be the most important planned development intervention in the communities.

People regarded the employment opportunities during road construction to be important and reliable for short term cash flows to meet their daily consumption needs, but not so significant in terms of having a long term impact. The generation of local employment opportunities did not however lead to the retaining of men from migration for work as intended in many programmes but, rather it enabled those left behind (mostly wives) to earn cash incomes.

The conventional wisdom that roads will bring about increased mobility of people and transportation of goods into and out of communities has also not necessarily transpired as envisaged. Consumer goods have been brought closer, and people have been quick to identify this as an important development change. But the improved access to nearby markets for increased export of goods from communities has not happened. Multiplier effects and synergies between roads, irrigation and commercial agriculture projects were found to be largely unsustainable, beyond project support. People identified low prices in local markets as a major disincentive for the lack of success of commercial agriculture. Past RCA studies in the east of the Nepal also suggest that in addition to road access there are other conditions that need to 'fall into place' which not always under the control of development planners. These include building linkages to larger markets (i.e. Indian towns, Kathmandu), fall and rise of international prices, access to inputs and transportation are needed before success can be achieved. People have to see value in investing in changing their livelihoods and expect quick returns so long term projects such as fruit tree cultivation or low profit activities such as tomato cultivation do not compare favourably with the option of international migration for work. Furthermore, the findings from the RCA indicate that for most small landholders the switch to commercial production involves taking risks, which many are adverse to take unless they have the resources and can cover the financial risks. Exposure to new ideas and networks for supporting such ventures also came across as being significant.

In addition, the findings from the commercial agricultural projects, including irrigation schemes, show that there is scope for agro-based enterprises for value addition. These enterprises need not necessarily be highly technology driven, and instead, focus on sorting, cleaning, packaging and/or processing into value added products of vegetables.

3.2.3. Strengthening of Local Government Bodies

The findings from the RCA indicate that Ward Citizen Forums were responsible for villagers, and in particular Dalits being aware and knowledgeable about grants coming in their names. In Ramechhap, women groups were also found to have organised themselves to tap into these funds for developing economic opportunities, suggesting that villagers are have begun to play proactive roles. The challenge is to strengthen these processes so that there is more engagement with local people and also to ensure that other groups also know what is going on.

3.2.4. Social Mobilization of Disadvantaged Groups

Rural areas have an abundance of user and beneficiary groups that have been created and nurtured by development projects. Many development partners, including SDC, have contributed to this situation based on the strategy that beneficiaries need to be organised into groups to target project inputs and lower transaction costs.

Programmes have focused on improving access of women and discriminated groups to improve access to resources, increase empowerment, with the expectation that access to income-generating programmes, vocational training will enhance livelihoods and encourage people to play more active roles in decision making processes. Most are concerned about who is participating and have numerical targets against which projects compare their successes.

The RCA findings meanwhile show that members are keen to be part of income generating projects and are willing to take upon extra work and time if it means that they have opportunities to earn cash incomes.They are however less enthusiastic about taking part in meetings (that do not have a direct link with their

livelihoods), especially if they find the meetings to be unproductive. The lack of participation therefore should not always be equated with less empowerment, but also the lack of interest.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that there is the risk that the same few people volunteer and get selected for different development programmes; either because they are able to better articulate their needs and/or local NGOs find it more convenient to support people who are already active in comparison to taking extra effort to engage and facilitate those who require support. The risk is of support reaching only a few who are already able to 'express their voices' and grasp the opportunities that are available, leaving those who really need to be encouraged/supported neglected.

3.3.5. Management and Sustainable Use of Forest Products

Community and Leasehold Forestry programmes and the benefits associated were less mentioned during the RCA. In Ramechhap, locals did however suggest that there are signs of the Community Forestry Programme will be successful in the conservation of forests, with well-defined institutions and rules in place.

Past studies have also shown that households decrease their livestock, especially larger cattle, as access to fodder is reduced after the establishment of Community Forestry Programmes (Dhakal et al, 2005; Bhatta, 2002). Within the RCA study sites, we found the decline more to do with the effects of migration and the lack of family members and the ability of families to feed and take care of livestock, than restrictions on grazing lands.

Meanwhile, with Leasehold Forestry Programmes, the RCA findings showed that the members were more interested in the goats that had been provided (to encourage them to become members of the group) than in the forest regeneration.

4. Conclusions

The study has shown that RCA provides a way of getting closer to people's view on the changes and the main drivers of those changes. Change was discussed with respect to people's lives and not through project or sectoral lenses, which has helped to understand what is important and relevant for them. The information provided has added value since it has been obtained through spontaneous conversations, which allows the findings to avoid some of the biasness of conventional evaluation processes.

One of the main findings of the study is that people's contemporary aspirations no longer rest within agriculture. People do not regard farming, even with improved practices, as a 'way out of poverty' and are instead keen on other economic opportunities that enable them to earn cash incomes. Yet, many development programmes consider agriculture to be a priority and continue to develop programmes without appreciating that people's lives and aspirations are transforming. There is an implicit view that people should be retained in agriculture without seeking to exploring other diverse avenues for their livelihoods. Instead, interventions should have a better understanding of what is meaningful for people and what fits with their current reality (for example, trainings for various trades such as masonry, carpentry, etc; women friendly labour saving devices).

The findings also show that there is a risk of groups being left out of development interventions, when conventional targets get so embedded that we fail to see other emerging groups who are also in need of a voice and assistance (such as elderly, increasingly divorced/fragmented families).

Overall, people expressed the view that there have improvements in their lives related to food habits and access to public resources. Parents were motivated to send their children to school, more for the sake of future earnings, though the quality of the public education systems were often found to be poor. The increasing need of cash as people become more reliant on markets for food, clothes, agricultural inputs, health and other amenities was also well articulated. This has led to and is also a consequence of different livelihood choices, particularly migration for work, that people are making to maintain cash flows which is increasingly leading to the emergence of a consumer society.

The importance of roads, amongst all other planned development, was also strongly expressed. This has led to easier access to consumer goods and access to various public services. But, the expectation that it will propel commercial agricultural production through access to markets has not occurred.

At the household level, the RCA findings show that women's roles are changing, mostly due to absent male members in their families. As a consequence, many have to work longer and harder. This indicates that increasing women's access to labour saving technologies for agriculture, water collection, farming, fodder gathering, post harvesting of cereals is potentialy very important, especially when one considers the additional burdens that women with migrant husbands have to face as they are increasingly left on their own.

The attribution of development interventions is difficult, especially when changes have multiple and often inter-related causes and explanation, with various other external processes along with development activities that are happening. The study suggests that personal networks and to people's own initiatives also play a huge role in the diffusion of ideas, seeking employment and have mostly been 'unseen' or under-valued by development interventions.

To summarise, the development assistance provided by SDC, and in particularly the roads programme, were regarded by people as being the significant. Others, as discussed, had varying levels of impact and sustainability ranging from the agricultural projects which were found to be largely unsustainable after project support ended to the encouranging signs of the targeted population becoming aware and using funds that come in their names, through the facilitation of WCFs. Importantly, the RCA findings indicate that a 'long lens, beyond project support' is needed when porjects are being planned and implemented. Development planners need to know what is 'meaningful' for peope, and under want context, for development interventions to truly have an impact on the lives of people living in poverty.

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Annex 1: Swiss Country Strategy (2013-2017)

As the main objective of the mid-term review is to take stock of the progress and determine whether project implementation has been in line with the Swiss Country Strategy 2013-2017, this section provides a brief narrative summary of the SCS.

The strategy comprises of two inter-related intervention domains presented below. The household survey and its analysis is primarily geared towards the latter domain, which seeks to bring about improvement in people's well-being and incomes, especially those of disadvantaged groups.

Domain 1: Contribution to an inclusive Federal State, Human Security and the Rule of Law
The intervention focus within this domain is on consolidating State building; supporting transition mechanisms, as Nepal is envisioned to move towards an inclusive democratic federal state; capacitating local institutions; and strengthening human rights mechanisms and practices at the national and local levels.

The three outcomes related to this domain include:

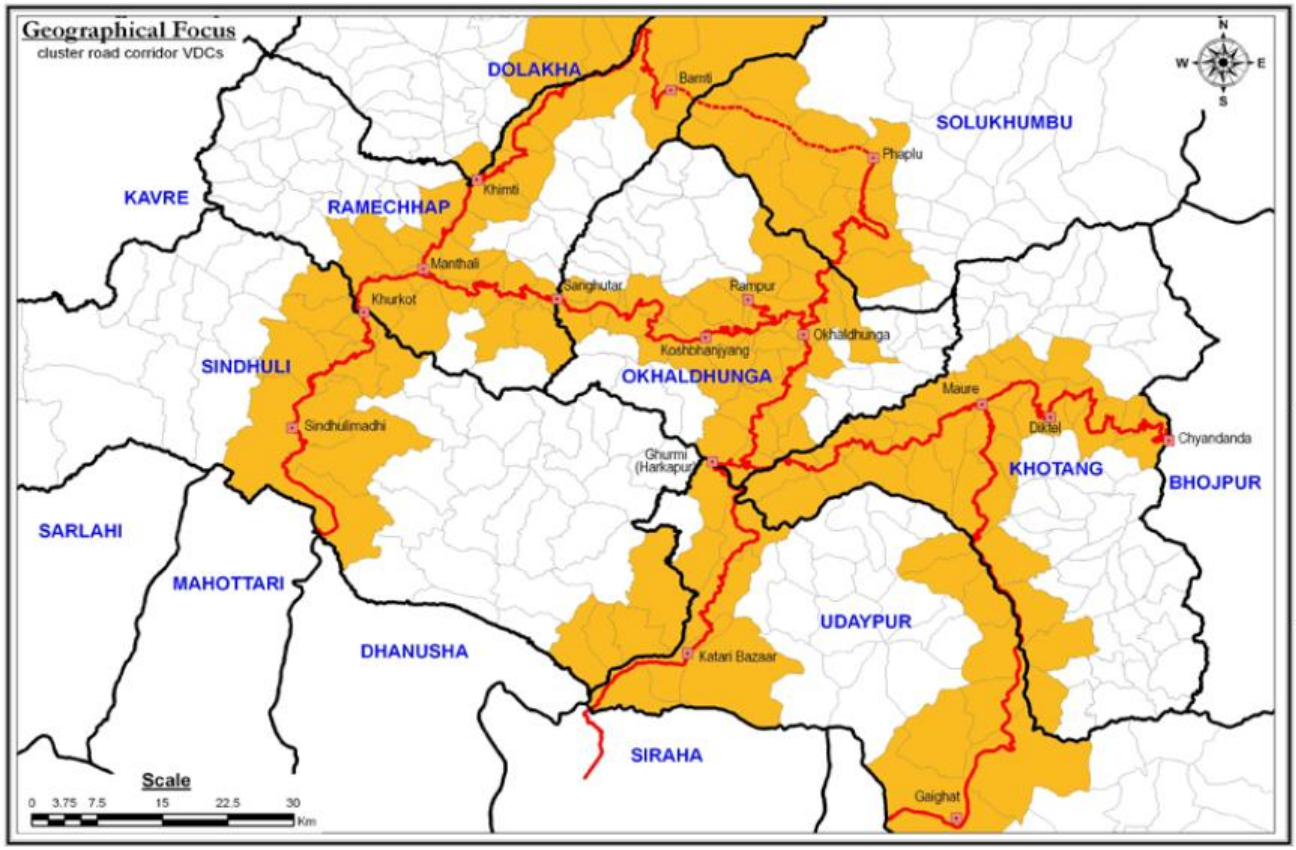
- ***Outcome 1.1. State building***: The elected representatives, civil servants and civil society ensure that the constitution drafting, the election and the State restructuring processes, as well as State structures at the local level, are inclusive and well managed.
- ***Outcome 1.2. Human security***: Stakeholders use non-violent means to deal with conflict, particularly related to resources, identity, gender and domestic issues.
- ***Outcome 1.3. Human rights***: Relevant national institutions effectively promote and protect Human Rights, specifically those related to impunity, to discrimination and to the situation of migrant workers and refugees.

Domain 2: Contribution to improved livelihood and increased resilience of people especially the Disadvantaged Groups living in rural areas and small urban centres.
The interventions within this domain are targeted towards improving livelihoods, incomes and opportunities of disadvantaged groups. A geographical concentration of Swiss programme/projects has been envisioned in two cluster areas in the central and mid-western hills of the country. Within these clusters, SDC's strategy is to implement a 'road corridor approach', whereby programmes and projects are implemented in Village Development Committees (VDCs) adjacent to the main roads to increase coordination and synergies amongst the various projects and generate multiple livelihood opportunities for the beneficiaries. As such, the majority of SDC supported programmes/projects are concentrated within these VDCs.

There are two outcomes related to this domain:

- Outcome 2.1. Inclusive socio-economic development: Disadvantaged groups improve their livelihoods and resilience.
- Outcome 2.2. Public service delivery: Local governments and line agencies in cluster areas effectively deliver basic services in response to needs and demands of women and men, especially disadvantaged groups.

Annex 2: RCA sites with the list of sub-teams



Team	District	Sub-Team members	
A	Ramechhap	Sub-Team leader	Toran Singh
		Members	Pooja Koirala
			Kamal Khanal
B	Okhaldhunga	Sub-Team leader	Bikram Serchan
		Members	Shubheksha Rana
			Ram Chandra Adhikari
C	Khotang	Sub-Team leader	Ansu Tumbahangfe
		Members	Manis Verma
			Ashish Shrestha
			Avisha Tuladhar

Annex 3 : Host households' information

No. of Host Family: 10	
Nuclear	Extended
3	7

Head of household

3 Women, 7 men

No. of children currently living in house

No children = 3 HH

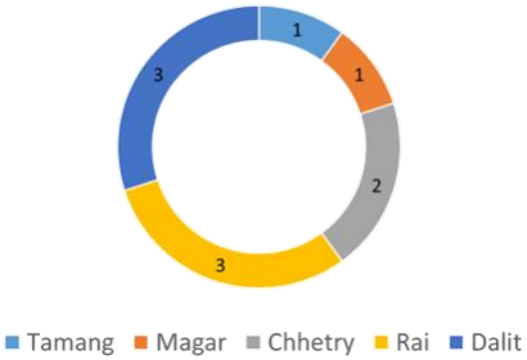
One child = 2 HH

Two children = 1 HH

Three children = 2 HH

Six children = 1 HH

Caste & Ethnicity



No. of migrant (former, returning, current) in host household

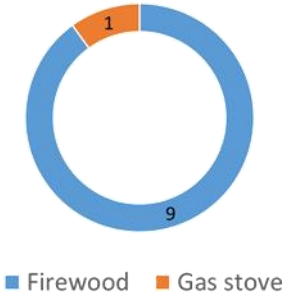
No migrant worker = 3 HH

One migrant worker = 5 HH

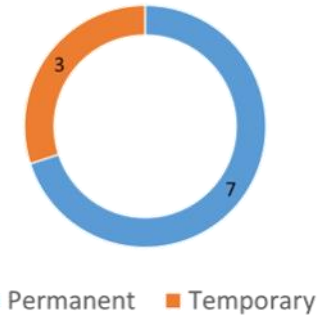
Two migrant workers = 1 HH

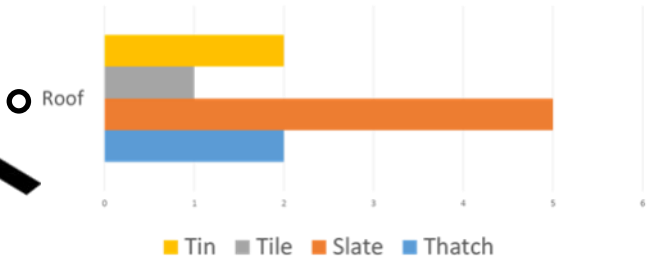
Three migrant workers = 1 HH

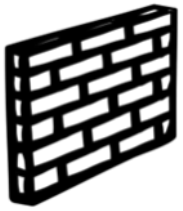
Fuel

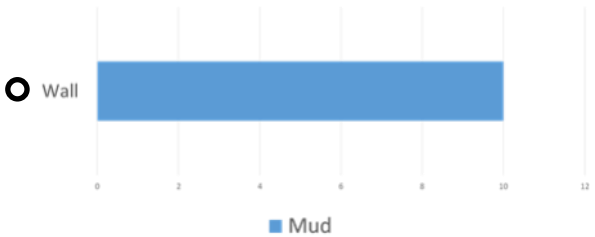


Toilet

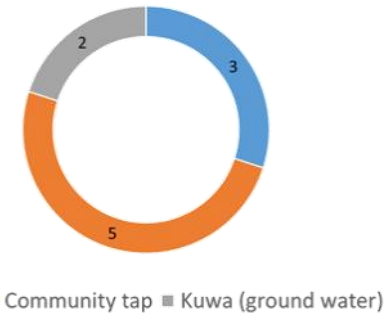


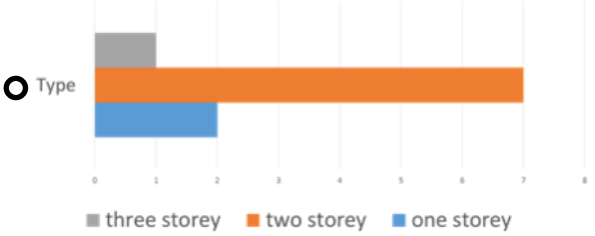






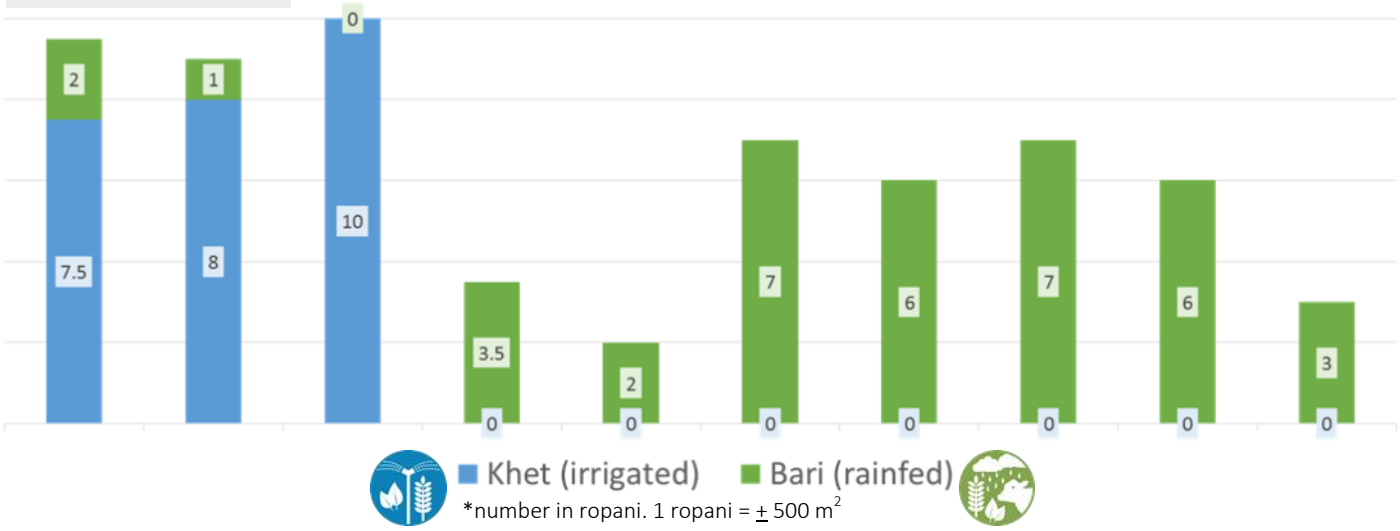
Water





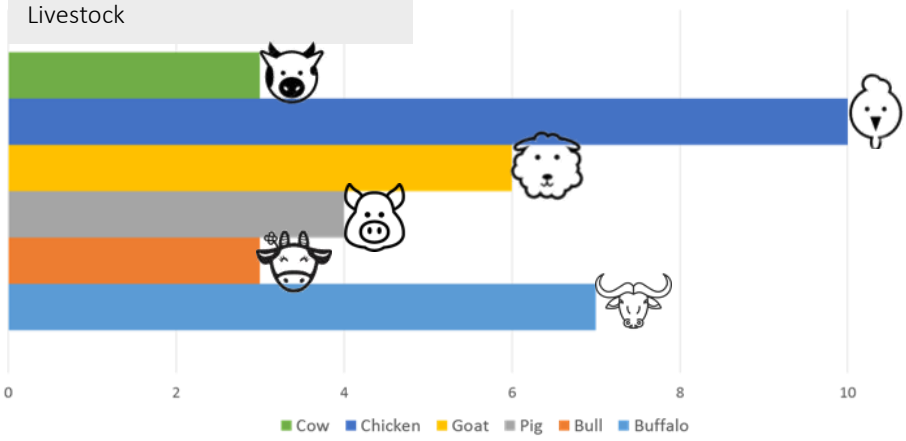
Assets

Land



*number in ropani. 1 ropani = ± 500 m^2

Livestock



Mobile

One mobile = 3 HH

Two mobiles = 3 HH

Three mobiles = 2 HH

Four mobiles = 1 HH

Six mobiles = 1 HH

Others assets

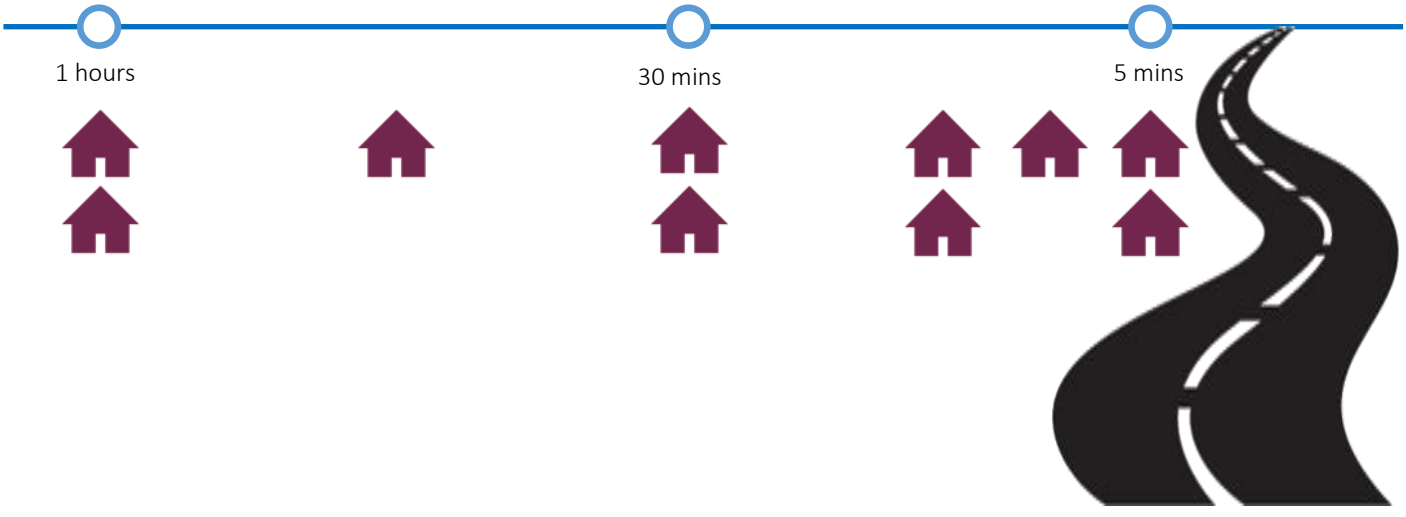
Solar lighting = 4 HH

Radio = 6 HH

Television = 3 HH

Motorbike = 1 HH

Distance (from nearest road)



Annex 4: List of people the RCA team had conversations with during the study

District	Study site	HHHs	FHHs	Service Providers	Others (non-service providers)
Ramechhap	A1	Tamang Household (6 people)	5 households (9 people)	• Community school management: 1 • Police: 1 • Post office personnel: 1 • FCHV: 1 • Medical shop owner: 1 • Shopkeepers : 3 • Local Road construction committee: 2 • Ex Ward Chairperson: 1	2 people
Ramechhap	A2	Magar Household (1 person)	5 households (12 people)	• Peon: 1 • Shopkeeper: 3 • VDC secretary :1 • Youth facilitator: 1 • Safer Migration Project worker: 1	2 people
Ramechhap	A3	Chhetry Household (11 people)	4 households (10 people)	• Shopkeeper: 1 • Cooperative staff: 1 • Teacher: 1 • Blacksmith : 1 • Transport operator : 1 • Political leader: 1 • Armed police force officer: 1	4 people
Okhaldhunga	B1	Rai household (3 people)	5 households (16 people)	• Shopkeeper: 2 • Assistant Nurse Mid-wife: 1 • Teacher :3 • Shopkeeper: 2 • Health Assistant: 1	3 people
Okhaldhunga	B1	Rai household (4 people)	5 households (10 people)	• Teacher: 2 • Shopkeeper: 3 • Cooperative secretary: 1	4 people
Okhaldhunga	B2	Dalit household (8 people)	4 households (16 people)	• Shopkeeper: 1	3 people
Khotang	C1	Rai household (3 people)	4 households (13 people)	• Teacher: 1 • VDC vice secretary: 1 • Businessman: 1 • Shopkeeper: 1 • Commercial Livestock Enterpreneur:1	2 people
Khotang	C2	Chhetry household (2 people)	5 households (10 people)	• Teacher: 1 • Postman: 1	5 people
Khotang	C3	Dalit household (6 people)	5 households (15 people)	• Shop keeper: 4 • Teacher: 1 • Health Assistant: 1 • Female Community Health Volunteer: 2	4 people
Khotang	C3	Dalit household (9 people)	5 households (10 people)	• Shop keeper: 1 • Teacher: 3 • Health Assistant: 1 • Female Community Health Volunteer: 1 • Sustainable Soil Management Project Lead Farmer: 1	3 people

Annex 6: Areas for conversations

Agriculture/Forestry/Food Security	Economic/Financial activities/Involvement in Dev Activities	Health
• Land use-ownership • Subsistence/Commercial farming • Livestock-who owns, controls, looks after. Kept as income earning, asset, savings, status Cereal production • Female headed households • Access to markets for grains-changes in availability, price, quality • Access to irrigation • Food habits • Crops- mix, pattern, seasons • Availability of inputs (seeds, fertiliser, insecticides , credit, irrigation) • Fertility of land- changing trends • Machinery/technology use • Livestock holdings- changes • Agriculture services • Markets-middle men, sell themselves, co-operative arrangements- road network/transport • Aspirations • Access to community forests • Use of non-timber agro products • Changes in techniques/tools that lessen women's burden	• Cash-sources, in kind arrangements • Non-farm livelihood activities-employment opportunities, diverse income sources • Changes in wage rates • Supplementary income sources-seasonal, handicrafts, agro-processing , SDC or other donor funded projects • Markets for non-farm goods/services • Savings –money, assets • Coping mechanisms in difficult times-loans, gifts, • selling assets • Access and availability of micro-loans • Informal loans , credit arrangements-level of indebtedness • Expenditure • HH financial decision making • Skills/trainings learnt - use • Market access -Physical access • Savings • Attitudes of ppl towards development projects	• Sanitation- practices- children/adult, day/night • Maternal health-ante-natal, birth, post natal practice • Hygiene-food, personal, kitchen • Health seeking behaviour- where do people go for different ailments, formal/informal/self-treatment • Quality of health services-formal/informal • Availability of drugs, staff • Food habit/nutrition- daily, who eats what? Changes in food habit over time. Quality of food. • Family planning-preferred family size, why? • Disease/health problems- common? Newly emerging problems? HIV/AIDs, diabetes, hypertension, Child health. • Accessibility to health services-distance, time, cost (hidden and real), behaviour of service providers • Health information- sources, type
Education	**Migration**	**Governance**
• Types of educational institutions-primary, secondary schools, pre-primary, others • Accessibility- distance, difficulty of the journey, cost (hidden and overt) • School-going behaviour-children's attendance, performance, barriers to schooling • Teachers attendance-absenteeism, lateness • Quality of education-what is important for parents/children • Special programmes for the poor to attend school • School management committees • Attitude of people	• Migration for work- men/women • Families migrating out of villages- why? • Returnee migrants • Migrant destinations • Means of migrating – Investment-selling assets, loans, interest rates, networks, use of middle men • Remittances- use of remittances • Impact of migration on households (economic, social, labour) • Aspirations	• Leadership structures- Traditional, Government, informal, formal. How are they chosen/selected? M/F? • Involvement/participation in community activities • Involvement in public hearings/audits – do they think it is worthwhile? – Women's engagement • How governance processes have developed- changed • Involvement/participation of HH in various user committees • Politics- participation/engagement, knowledge of political structures
Quality of life	**Intra-household relationship**	**Access over public resources**
• Perception of well-being - poverty • Consumption items – use and control by different family members • Aspirations • Existing services available	• How are resources, pooled, shared and distributed? How are these decisions taken? • Impact of migration- absence of men/women • Female headed households and their decision making • Has participation in SDC projects affected gender roles, decision making and women's empowerment and self-esteem within beneficiary households? Any changes • Domestic violence	• Types of resources used by HHs • State structures, service providers that exist within the communities • Awareness of government policies • Extent to which ppl (disadvantaged groups) have been able to raise their concerns in community meetings and communities (eg. Ward Citizen Forums) • Who decides to accolade the resources • Changes in traditional powers? If yes, what type of changes • Making their voices heard