

# DIALOGUE FOR PEACE

2020

## DIALOGUE FOR PEACE

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# Preface

Peace is the ultimate wish of human beings and a basis for human interaction despite some practical and philosophical complexities. Sustainable peace is needed not only for people's happiness but also to think, plan and implement discoveries and developments. Therefore, when people envision a prosperous society, they also think of ways of building peace.

There are many theoretical and practical methods of building peace for social development and mental wellbeing of people. One of them, dialogue has been an effective method since ancient times. It has been very useful in understanding the positions, interests and needs of actors, and creating a justifiable and peaceful solution to problems. Understanding this importance of dialogue, thematic team dialogue of Civil Peace Service of GIZ, in collaboration with local organizations working in conflict-affected areas in Nepal, took the initiative to transform conflicts into peace through dialogue.

In this context, of Civil Peace Service of GIZ collaborated with Samagra Janautthan Kendra, Siraha in Eastern Nepal and Youth Peace Council in Western Nepal in an attempt to transform the religious and ethnic conflicts between communities in a peaceful way. These dialogues eased the ethnic tensions between Tharu and Pahadis that happened in Tikapur, Kailali where a child and eight police personnel were killed, and the religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims due to the killing of cows on the day of Laxmi

Pooja. It has played an important role in creating peace, religious and social harmony and brotherhood in the communities.

Dialogue has resolved the conflicts around the topics of religion and ethnicity. Hence, this booklet is published to document these success stories, highlight the importance of dialogue and its impact on the religious, social, and physical development of the society. It also intends to inspire people to resolve conflicts peacefully in the community and build peace through dialogue.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the Civil Peace Service of GIZ for the financial and technical support to publish this booklet about the peaceful transformation of religious and ethnic conflicts through dialogue. We would like to thank especially Rajendra Subba, Kristin Cain, Anuja Sapkota, Martin Hennings, Bernhard Emmerich and Sadhu Ram Tamang (peace advisors, of Civil Peace Service of GIZ) for their encouraging technical support. Similarly, we would like to thank Pramila Parajuli (Trainee, of Civil Peace Service of GIZ) for her support in translation and Sirjana Subba (Consultant) for conducting the interviews and preparing the text of this booklet.

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# Context and conflict situation

# 1

## **1.1 Country context**

At the time this dialogue program was initiated, Nepal's new constitution had recently been promulgated. Under the new constitution, Nepal is a secular state with a federal structure and three tiers of government: federal, provincial, and local. As part of the transition to federalism, the constitution also defined the boundaries of seven provinces. The process of constitution promulgation saw protests by people from minority communities who demanded that their rights be enshrined in the new constitution and their concerns and issues be addressed by the state. Many Tharus – a community indigenous to the Terai – joined these protests.

A long-standing demand among Tharus from Kailali and Kanchanpur was that new provincial boundaries should not split Tharu areas, but instead include them within a Tharu Province or Tharuhat. By 2015, their key demand was that Kailali and Kanchanpur be incorporated into the proposed Province No. 5, together with other districts with large Tharu populations. Instead, national-level proposals placed the two districts in Province No. 7, where Kailali and Kanchanpur would be the only districts with large Tharu populations. During protests related to this issue, Tharu protesters and security forces clashed on August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015. Eight members of the security forces and a minor were killed. That evening and the following day, an irate group including supporters of an Undivided Far West – a Province No. 7

that would include Kailali and Kanchanpur - attacked Tharu houses and vandalized property belonging to Tharus. These events have subsequently come to be known as the “Tikapur incident.”

## 1.2 Tikapur, Kailali

Following the Tikapur incident, the situation in Tikapur and its surrounding villages became tense. A large number of Tharu youth left their homes to escape potential arrest by security forces. Tharus stopped shopping in Tikapur and started shopping in one of the nearby markets along the Indian border instead. People from Tharu and non-Tharu communities saw each other with suspicion and feared meeting in public gatherings and forums. Leaders from the two communities avoided to attend public events fearing a violent incident could take place again. Everyday communication between these communities stopped. There was suspicion, fear and lack of trust between the two communities. Under these circumstances, anything that went wrong was interpreted through the lens of Pahadi<sup>1</sup>- Tharu relations. For example, during the Village Development Committee (VDC) budget allocation, if the budget was allocated for a particular village, this was interpreted as a strategy for supporting or excluding one community or the other from accessing the local budget.

In the period before the Tikapur incident, as well as thereafter, exclusion and marginalization were key issues raised by Tharu communities. Many existing community mechanisms were not inclusive in nature. There was also competition between communities for leading positions – for example, for the chairperson of the School Management Committees or the Community Forest User Groups – and little support across community lines.

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1 Pahadis are people who migrated to the plains - including Kailali and Kanchanpur - from different parts of the hills, especially in the Far-West and Mid-West.

### **1.3 Lahan, Siraha**

Similar to the process of federalization that led to tensions in Tikapur, Nepal's secularization process has continued to see tensions between religious communities. Nepal was declared a secular state in the 2007 interim constitution, and this status was carried forward in the 2015 constitution. Some Hindu nationalist political parties have contested this secular status. However, religion has not been a defining feature of Nepali politics post-2007, and members of religious minorities are found within all the main political parties. Tensions are, however, seen at times in the social sphere.

Muslims are seven percent of Nepal's population<sup>2</sup> and live predominantly in the Terai. Historically, relations between Hindu and Muslim communities have been good. In a number of local traditions, Hindus and Muslims share certain religious figures and sites. Parts of the Terai have experienced occasional small-scale communal violence, for example when a religious procession from one religious community passes through a neighborhood mainly inhabited by another religious group. Larger incidents have also occurred, such as violence against Muslims in Kathmandu in 2004 after the killings of Nepali workers in Iraq. Recent years have seen increased Hindu fundamentalists in parts of the Terai, such as in Lahan. There, small incidents of symbolic disrespect for the other community – for example, throwing the head of a pig into a mosque or killing a cow on a Hindu holiday – have led to tensions.

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2 National Census 2010/11.



# Dialogue and Dialogue Process **2**

## **2.1 Why dialogue?**

In both project areas – Tikapur, Kailali and Lahan, Siraha – the inter-community communication was damaged. Fear, suspicion and lack of trust were prevalent, and further deepened communal divides in society. People from both communities were reluctant to bring contentious issues or differences between the communities to a common forum to discuss them.

Against this backdrop, the GIZ Civil Peace Service Thematic Team for Dialogue and its partner organizations, the All People Development Center (APEC) and the Youth Peace Council (YPC) held wider community consultations and one-to-one meetings with key leaders and civil society members to assess the possibility of dialogue intervention, and subsequently to inform about the process of developing dialogue strategies and appropriate approaches. These consultations and individual meetings highlighted the need for inter-community dialogue. Project teams from the partner organizations and the GIZ Civil Peace Service Program's Thematic Team for Dialogue together concluded that dialogue would be the best approach to bring divided communities into a common safe space. This would allow them to share their opinions, concerns and needs with each other and develop a common understanding on long-standing contentious issues, and work for a better and peaceful society.

## 2.2 Overview of the dialogue process

The dialogue process began with a context analysis and a needs assessment, big need for conflict resolution was identified in Siraha and Kailali and these were subsequently designated as project districts. The following steps were then formulated for the dialogue in these two districts:

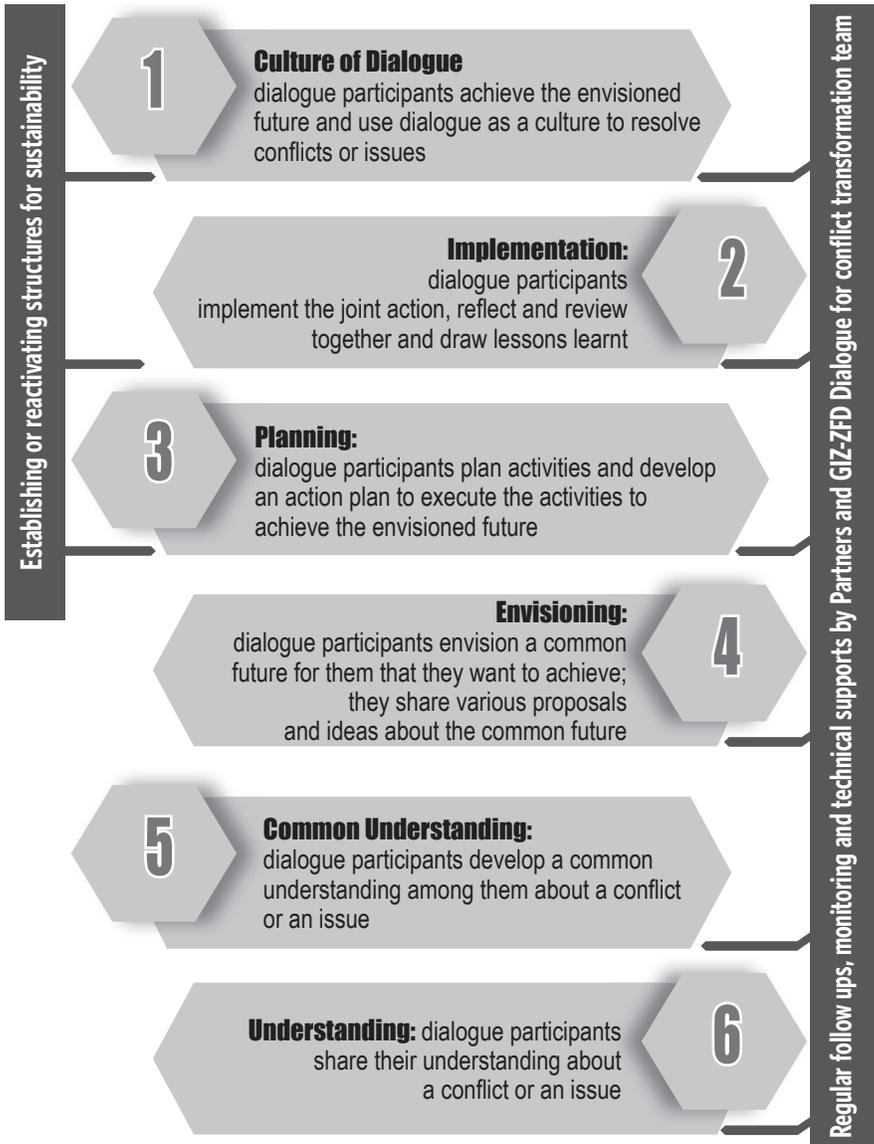
1. First, a **needs assessment** was conducted in the community.
2. This was followed by an internal session within the partner organizations, facilitated by GIZ-ZFD, to **identify the main conflict lines** and conduct a **conflict analysis**.
3. A **dialogue team was then formed** within the partner organizations.
4. GIZ-ZFD supported further **capacity building of the dialogue teams**, including conflict transformation and dialogue in theory and practice.
5. Particular emphasis was placed on **dialogue design, dialogue facilitation** and **monitoring**.
6. Further sessions focused on **strategy development**, such as whether, how and when to use media, coordination with stakeholders, Do No Harm and risk mitigation strategies.
7. A detailed plan for **monitoring** the dialogue process was formulated.
8. Following these internal preparations, the dialogue team members conducted **community consultations** to compile recommendations on concerns, needs, and fears; to identify key actors and possible participants; to prepare communities for dialogue; to increase community ownership and participation in the dialogue design process; and to allow space for communities to select dialogue facilitators, conveners and venues.

9. **Dialogue venues** were then identified and confirmed.
10. And lastly the **dialogue design** was finalized.

After these preparatory steps were taken, it was time for the start of the dialogue.

Over numerous sessions, dialogue followed an overall dialogue structure. As the dialogue aimed to transform conflicts between parties and to improve relationships and build trust between parties, a dialogue structure was developed. In order to achieve these goals it was mandatory that the dialogue would not jump to topics participants had not yet developed the common understanding needed to discuss these constructively. By using this structure, dialogue was able to steadily build towards stronger relationships and a common future with an established culture of dialogue. This structure is named the Pyramid Model and – in the way a pyramid is built – it starts at the bottom and builds upward.

Figure 1 - Dialogue Pyramid



# Societal Changes

# 3

## **From Confrontation to Collaboration: A case of Lahan**

### Religious confrontation

Hindus and Muslims are two major religious communities living in Lahan, Siraha district<sup>3</sup>. Disputes between the two communities were a common occurrence in the past. According to Mohammad Yunus<sup>4</sup>, some individual Hindus and Muslims used to confront each other over minor issues. Participants of the dialogue informed that often disputes between individuals from two religious communities would turn quickly into blaming and involving fellow community members in the dispute, rather than staying at the individual level. The reason for this kind of behavior was religious intolerance, said Parshuram Niraula. The tension reached its peak in 2015, when a cow<sup>5</sup> was slaughtered and a pig head was thrown into a mosque. These incidents led to processions during which religious slogans were chanted and a bandh was called in the area, which affected the wider public and led to increased tension among the people of Lahan.

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3. According to National Census 2010/11, Muslims are 7 percent of the population of Siraha district.
  4. Names of the persons mentioned in this document are participants of an inter-religious dialogue process organized and facilitated by APEC between 2015 and 2017.
  5. Hindu consider cows as sacred and worship them.

The tensions between the two communities was also caused by the use of loudspeakers on high volume while performing prayers and conducting other rituals. "Muslims used to recite Namaz through loudspeakers and we Hindus also used to recite Puran through loudspeakers," said Phuleswor Mahato. This had an adverse effect on the residents of Lahan. The constant sound made it difficult for elderly and sick people to get enough rest, children's studies were disturbed, and residents generally people found hard to sleep at night. Loudspeakers were not only used for religious activities, but also during social events which created substantial noise in Lahan, added Phuleswor Mahato. Thus, noise pollution was another problem that needed be discuss in Lahan municipality.

## Start of the Hatemalo project

The "All People's Development Centre" (APEC), a civil society organization based in Lahan, became concerned about the situation and took the initiative to address the issues of noise pollution and religious tensions and to assist in finding solutions. APEC, in partnership with the GIZ-ZFD Thematic Team on Dialogue for Conflict Transformation, started the "Hatemalo - common understanding for religious harmony" project. The objectives of the project were to decrease the level of noise pollution, increase religious harmony and tolerance, as well as to promote peaceful coexistence between the different communities of Lahan. The project ran for two years from August 2015 to August 2017. As part of the "Hatemalo - common understanding for religious harmony" project, a series of dialogues between 23 selected leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities of Lahan were organized.

According to Bhairab Gelal, chairperson of APEC and dialogue facilitator for the project, APEC has chosen from the Hindu and Muslim individuals who could play an important role in conflict transformation. These individuals were religious leaders such as Pundits, Gurus and Mullahs, as well as representatives from political parties.

## Preparation of the dialogue

The GIZ team trained members of a team from APEC in dialogue facilitation and monitoring. Particular attention was paid to trust-building and conflict sensitivity. Because the APEC team members belong to the Hindu community, it was essential to include Muslim participants. In order to build trust, a Lahan-based Muslim organization called Garib Namaz Welfare Society was taken as a partner organization to hold the inter-religious dialogue, according Bhairab Gelal. To ensure that the inter-religious dialogue would be effective and sustainable, relevant community issues were carefully considered beforehand.

## Inter-religious dialogue

To create a positive environment, APEC first organized an intra-religious dialogue among Muslims and Hindus separately. In this intra-religious dialogue, participants discussed various religious issues and built a common understanding concerning these challenges. During the sessions, both groups also prepared their respective agenda points to the plenary<sup>6</sup>.

Subsequently, the inter-religious dialogue began. Representatives from the two communities - selected during the intra-religious dialogue - brought their agenda points to the plenary of the inter-religious dialogue. Agenda points were discussed in the plenary and common issues were identified. These included: noise pollution, religious intolerance, the trend of politicizing and communalizing individual quarrels, untouchability and the weak implementation of legal provisions. After discussing the issues, participants analyzed the reasons behind them and came up with possible solutions<sup>7</sup>.

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6. 45 persons from each intra-religious dialogue selected 10 persons from each community to represent them in the inter-religious dialogue.

7. The solutions to address the six identified issues were also declared in the "Commitment for Inter-Religious Solidarity." See box 1.

Inter-religious dialogue went well as the participants respected the ground rules which they had made themselves. These ground rules included agreements to speak with respect, not to use degrading words, not to use judgmental and accusing words, to listen to what others have to say, to speak one by one and to stay within the topic of discussion. Madan Mandal, a dialogue monitor, observed that these simple ground rules helped participants to be actively involved in the dialogue process and helped to better understand each other, as they listened to each other and spoke carefully.

### From changing perceptions to collaboration

Dialogue changed perceptions of the individual participants. The dialogue participants, who used to emphasize religious and cultural differences started to see each other as brothers and sisters. This was made evident in the comments by the respective participants. Phuleshwor Mahato stated that, "After the involvement in the dialogue, our relationship got better." Ram Kumari Das remembers that before the dialogue participants from Hindu and Muslim communities used to avoid each other. As the dialogue continued, they started carefully listening to each other. During the dialogue, participants raised their issues and concerns, listened to each other's views and reflected over the issues. Participants in the discussion organized by APEC said that this process helped the participant to understand each other better.

In addition to the improved relationship between dialogue participants, Mohammad Yunus also believes that dialogue and the joint follow-up activities by the participants have contributed to improve inter-community relationships between Hindus and Muslims. Mohammad Amjad said that one must respect every religion and there is no better religion than humanity. Parshuram Niraula said, "Dialogue has reduced the misconceptions about each other." Explaining about the misconceptions, Parshuram Niraula

added that Hindus and Muslims thought they are different and due to that difference, they were unable to live together harmoniously. Arun K.C. said, "We have to respect all religions, otherwise it will bring conflict." Participants saw the importance of religious tolerance and its relation to maintain peace. With the change in perspective, they started to collaborate.

To alleviate one of the drivers of conflict in the community, the Hatemalo Inter-Religious Committee (Hatemalo) agreed to reduce the noise created by religious activities. Mohammad Amjad stated, "Before the dialogue, loudspeakers were used in the Mosque at the time of reciting Namaz, but it was stopped after the dialogue," and they have not used any loudspeakers since due to the campaign. This has included policies and actions by the local administration and dialogue participants' volunteer activities for community sensitization against noise pollution. Parshuram Niraula shared his experience of how he persuaded people to lower the noise: "God will listen to you even if you speak in a low voice. Why must you create such a loud noise?" Firoz Siddhiqui, Chairperson of Garib Namaz Welfare Society said that he and other participants worked on the reduction of noise pollution as their own responsibility.

Besides noise pollution created by religious activities, social activities were also a big problem when it came to unwanted noise. The use of DJs in ceremonies, such as weddings and the singing of wedding songs for days were two major causes of noise pollution. Ram Kumari Das said, "We held programs with the administration and the police in order to reduce noise pollution," and she added, "it had a very good impact." The police helped the dialogue participants/Hatomalo members when they were asking people to reduce the noise in the city by being present and supporting them. Arun K.C. said that professional DJs were against this movement at first. Hatemalo members convinced DJs to work on the reduction of noise pollution by lowering the volume of loudspeakers that could be only heard at the program

venue, says Parshuram Niraula. Participants of the dialogue consider it as a major achievement of the Hatemalo.

In addition to legal measures imposed by the local administration in Lahan, the members of Hatemalo also started a culture of exchanging greetings during each other's festivals. As a practice, with support from APEC, Hatemalo members organized best wishes exchange events during the festival seasons. In the beginning, Bhairab Gelal said that "APEC has organized greetings sharing function on Dashain and Eid." This practice has been continued among the dialogue participants. Mohammad Yunus, stated that, "We exchange best wishes and it has given a positive message to society". Sushil Chandra Adhikari also said that he has invited Muslims to his house to celebrate Holi and he has been giving best wishes to Muslims during their festivals. Suleman Ansari said he had a similar experience of wishing Hindus well on their festival days. Arun K.C. was also happy to share that he provides his personal time to exchange greetings with others.

Ram Kumari Das and Birendra Chaudhary<sup>8</sup> said that after the dialogue, Muslims started to visit the Rajdevi temple, the most temple widely worshipped deity in Lahan. According to Birendra Chaudhary, Muslim participants asked during the dialogue whether they were allowed to visit the temple or not and he informed them that they would be welcome to the temple. He mentioned that there was no resistance from the Hindu community to have Muslims visit the temple and he added that it is open to everyone. Arun K.C. has also shown interest in visiting Muslim religious sites and mentioned that Hatemalo members had agreed to visit religious sites of Hindus and Muslims.

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8. Birendra Chaudhary is an advisor of Rajdevi Temple Management Committee.

Besides promoting religious tolerance, the respective dialogues and engagement of the Inter-Religious Committee in the area resolved disputes and worked on mitigating conflicts. Islam Ali shares, "During the Dialogue, religious leaders ceased to pay attention to rumors that fuel religious conflict." Mohammad Yunus shared that he was thinking of leaving Lahan due to religious conflicts, but after the dialogue, such conflicts have ceased and living together has become more peaceful. He thanked the dialogue members for creating this change in perspective. He explained that before, the whole community was blamed for the misdeeds of a few individuals. But now these incidents are seen as misdeeds done by individuals and do not blame the whole community. Bishnu Lal Shah said, "If a Hindu and a Muslim are fighting, we should not come to the conclusion that this fight is communal. Rather, we have to analyze why people are fighting." Inter-religious dialogue made the participants understand that individual fights are related to individual causes or conflicts and should not be generalized. Mohammad Amjad said, "We understood that we should not judge another person on the basis of his caste or ethnicity."

### Formation of the Hatemalo (inter-religious committee)

After several rounds of dialogue<sup>9</sup>, the participants formed the Hatemalo. The Hatemalo is an inter-religious committee consisting of 31 members with the aim of promoting social harmony in Lahan through small initiatives such as exchange of best wishes, dialogues, celebrations of each other's festivals, bridge the communication between the two communities, coordinating with the local government authorities and supporting them to maintain harmony. The formation of the Hatemalo in itself was an achievement for the project as well as for the participants. Suleman Ansari was surprised and

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9. This occurred after 19 dialogues had been held (8 intra-religious dialogues, 7 inter-religious dialogues and 4 sharing dialogues).

happy because he did not think such a joint committee would be possible considering the former tensions in the community. Sushil Chandra Adhikari also expressed a similar thought, "I had a feeling that both communities could not live in harmony, but a joint committee was formed nevertheless." These two leaders, Sushil Chandra Adhikari and Suleman Ansari, were chosen to be Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator of the Hatemalo respectively.

The Hatemalo then started to work on the common issues identified during the inter-religious dialogue. The Hatemalo came up with a 11-point agreement and announced it as the "Commitment for Inter-Religious Solidarity"<sup>10</sup> (Figure - 2). They shared the points from the agreement with representatives of political parties and government officials working in Lahan to ensure it is understood and implemented. As a result of this sharing meeting, the office of the municipality drafted a policy for punishing those who use DJs at a high volume. The local police office also released a public notice stating that anyone playing at high volume will be responsible.

## Concerns for the future

One of the major concerns of the dialogue participants was the continuity of the Hatemalo after the completion of the inter-religious dialogue project. The participants showed their eagerness to get engaged in activities for promoting religious tolerance and started fund raising locally. They have also planned to coordinate with civil society organizations active in Lahan to raise funds and ensure support from them in Hatemalo's initiatives for peace building in Lahan.

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10. The "Commitment for Inter-Religious Solidarity" is also called the "Lahan Declaration" by the participants.

## **Figure 2 - Culture of Solidarity for religious tolerance and peace**

### **Commitment for Inter-Religious Solidarity**

Hindu and Muslim religious communities have been protecting their religions by performing various religious activities in Lahan Municipality. Due to these activities, antagonism and other problems are increasing in Lahan, Siraha. Similarly, it has created woe in people. Therefore, in order to reduce the problems, the All People's Development Centre organized a series of dialogue programs. We participants of the dialogue have identified the following problems and their solutions. We, the participants are committed to them.

- Hatemalo - Inter-Religious Committee will continuously work on religious solidarity.
- Continuously organize programs to give greetings and welcome in every religious occasion and show respect to each other's religions.
- Instead of politicising both communities should resolved it by social, legal and judiciary means.
- Do not use the loudspeakers in religious, social, cultural events to reduce the problem of noise pollution. The sound should not be heard beyond the event itself.
- Discourage the use of DJs.
- The leadership of the development and social committees should be formed from both communities.
- Distribute a note or religious solidarity to political parties' structures at grassroots level.
- Do not attach a single religion to an event, rather create an environment to respect every religion.
- Start a practice of trust by tolerating each other's religious practices.
- Respect each other's religions, culture and practices.
- Integrate religious tolerance in to the curriculum.

Restressing the need of Hatemalo, Islam Ali said, "the Inter-Religious Dialogue Committee has not fully achieved its purpose, so it must continue." Phuleshwor Mahato said, "People will keep on forgetting and it is important for them to be reminded of these things regularly." Mohammad Amjad said that they need the Dialogue Committee "to solve different kinds of social issues here."

## **Dialogue for understanding and cooperation in development: Case of Tikapur, Kailali**

### **Divided society**

"The behavior with our friends with whom we used to drink tea together was like ... oh, she's here now, I should leave," Chhamika Chaudhary<sup>11</sup> of Durgauli, describes the situation in the past. Bappal Bahadur Rawat also experienced the same. "Tharu and Pahadi<sup>12</sup> could not sit in the same place to talk," he said. Ignoring each other was common in Tikapur and its surrounding villages after the Tikapur incidents there. On August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015, eight police officers died in a clash between supporters of Tharuwan/Tharuhat Province and the police. This is now known as the Tikapur Incidents. Angry non-Tharu community members from Tikapur attacked Tharu homes and businesses and the relationships between Tharu and non-Tharu became bitter due to these events. There was an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion between the two communities.

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11. The names mentioned here in this document are of participants of the "Dialogue for Social Harmony" organized by Youth Peace Council in association with the GIZ-ZFD Thematic Team on Dialogue.
  12. Hill people are commonly called Pahade, Pahadi and Pahadiya. Interviewees have used these terms to indicate hill people. Here in this document the term "non-Tharu" has also been used to refer to hill people.

## Initiative for dialogue

With technical support from GIZ Civil Peace Service - Thematic Team on Dialogue, the Youth Peace Council (YPC), a local NGO based in Dhangadi, started the "Dialogue to Promote Social Harmony" in January 2016. The dialogue ran until March 2018. The objectives of the dialogue were to re-establish disrupted communication, build trust and reduce fear between Tharu and non-Tharu communities.

In the beginning, YPC carried out a conflict analysis in Munuwa and Durgauli Village Development Committees (VDCs)<sup>13</sup> with the support of the ZFD Thematic Team on Dialogue. The conflict analysis found that there was a need for dialogue between the two communities. Then, community consultations<sup>14</sup> were done there to identify development issues or problems, the possibility of using dialogue to address the issues and the selection of dialogue participants. Leading persons from both communities were interviewed and were asked about their opinions. 25 leading individuals<sup>15</sup> (12 persons from each community and one VDC secretary<sup>16</sup>) from each VDC were invited to participate in the dialogue. The dialogues were focused on development issues that were identified during community consultations. The problems included ethnic-based discrimination, the distribution of budget in the VDCs and lack of transparency.

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13. Munuwa and Durgauli VDCs have now put together into Janaki Rural Municipality.

14. Representatives from Mother's Groups, Women Volunteers, Women's Networks, Youth Clubs and Networks, Community Forest User Groups, Ward-Citizen Forums, president of School Management Committees, political party leaders and traditional Tharu leaders (Badghar and Bhalmansha) were present in the consultation process.

15. More than 100 potential dialogue participants from each VDC were identified in the consultation in Munuwa and Durgauli. The numbers of participation was reduce to 25.

16. Since there was no elected governing body at the local level at that time, all the development decisions were made by VDC secretary in consultation with political party leaders in the VDC and representatives of the Ward Citizen Forum.

YPC was very careful about the situation and wanted to make sure that participants felt safe to attend the dialogue. Prem Prasad Dhungana, chairperson of YPC, said that they made sure that they were inclusive in selecting the dialogue facilitators and monitors. The language use included both Nepali and Tharu. The exchange was conducted in a friendly and respectful manner. Furthermore, nothing that has been said in the meeting was shared in social media. Besides that, other precautionary measures were taken non-hierarchical seating arrangements. YPC selected a venue where both Tharu and Pahadi felt safe. They selected a school and a VDC office in Durgauli and Munuwa respectively. Similarly, YPC make sure that no security personnel was present near the venue. This was done because Tharus were afraid of security personnel as they felt they were under surveillance. Similarly, the program was given enough time to speak. For example, participants were not allowed to tell their position or designation, they sat on the same level and in a circle. Each of the participants was given the time to speak and everyone followed the ground rules made by themselves.

### Difficulty in participation

At the beginning, participants, especially Tharus, were afraid to attend the dialogue because they feared being arrested by the police and being attacked by non-Tharus. Bhadrabir Chaudhary recalled that Tharus were afraid to attend public gatherings at that time because they suspected the administration might arrest them on allegations of involvement in the Tikapur incident. Harihar Giri shared that at first Tharus were afraid but when they understood what the dialogue was about and that it was safe to attend, they participated. YPC's preparatory work such as a conflict analysis and the consultations with villagers, inclusive team and safety measures paid off. As the perceived risks reduced; the participants started to attend the dialogue.

## Reduced distance

As mentioned above, Tharu and Pahadi used to avoid each other. However, now participants of the dialogue think that the dialogue has brought the two communities closer. It provided them a forum and an environment to talk with each other. Dhaniram Chaudhary said that it was hard to travel and talk to anyone before that. In that situation, YPC created a place for both communities to sit together and could talk to each other. This made things easier. He said, "It worked like a bridge so that we could interact with each other." Sagar Devi Chaudhary expressed her happiness and said, "This dialogue has brought people from antagonistic communities together and now we get along with each other." The dialogue has made participants see the situation from a different perspective and take action to improve their relationship.

Chhamika Chaudhary and Kaushila Kumari Chaudhary are two female participants who believe in being proactive. Both reached out to non-Tharus in their villages and started talking to them. In relation to reaching out, Kaushila Kumari Chaudhary said, "If I say they are Pahadi and do not visit them, then how can we have a good relationship?" She further said that now the Tharus have started to help the Pahadis with their agricultural work.

Beside ethnic tensions, there were also tensions between political parties, after participating in the dialogues their attitudes towards each other changed. Giridhari Lal Mahato said that initially, people would judge a person on the basis of their political affiliation, but this has now changed. Giving an example, he said when he meets a congress person, he will greet him saying "Jai Nepal" as congress party workers do. Kalam Bahadur Bam shared, "We used to see each other in terms of seniority, by the end of the program we saw each other as equals."

After the dialogue, participants not only started to talk to each other, but also started to think of the broader community. Bappal Bahadur Rawat said they talked about the future of their children and that it was their duty to improve their situation and give them a better place to live. He further mentioned that they have realized that clashes and disputes are not beneficial to anybody. Patarani Devi Kathariya said that the Tharus were discriminated before but the relationship of the Tharu and Pahadi communities has improved after the dialogue. She said, "Now, members of both communities would say: you support us; we support you."

## Raised awareness

Caste and ethnic-based discrimination was some of the most prominent issue in development. Bir Bahadur K.C. said that dialogue played an important role in reducing caste and ethnic-based discrimination. Regarding discrimination, he further said, "We have realized that we live in the same place as brothers and sisters." Participants raised the issue of how Tharus and powerless people were excluded from development measures such as the formation of consumers committees, access to infrastructure, access to information about the allocation of budget" said Bisna Chaudhary, a dialogue facilitator.

Another aspect of caste and ethnic-based discrimination is related to the voicelessness of discriminated groups. Regarding this situation, Bhaktaraj Devkota said he has learned that it is very important to give a voice to disadvantaged groups in order to transform society. One of the lessons learnt from the dialogue is that if we listen to each other and takes suggestions from everyone, the process will sustainable said Rameshwor Regmi. Gopal Giri shared his experience that he finds it easier to work in the community when everyone is consulted instead of deciding unilaterally. He further added that it made a difference, because the decisions were made collectively.

## Empowered women

Female participants felt that the dialogue empowered them to speak and raised their awareness regarding development work in their village. Hira Devi Chaudhary thanked the organizers of the dialogue for developing her capacity and expressed her feelings by stating, "I was afraid to talk in front of big people<sup>17</sup>." She said that it was mandatory for her to speak during the dialogue which made her brave enough to speak her mind. She is happy to share, "My fear gradually diminished." Similarly, Chammika Chaudhary, Lalmati Kathariya, Sagar Devi Chaudhary, Patrani Devi Chaudhary and Kaushila Kumari Chaudhary also agreed that the dialogue helped them in expressing their ideas and feelings. Bhima Mahato found the dialogue interesting and said, "We sat in a circle, there was no podium and we talked to each other - face to face." She also noticed that there were prejudice between men and women, but later men and women both started to treat each other equally. Each participant was given the opportunity to speak during the dialogue session. This approach was highly appreciated by the participants. Prakash Chaudhary, a young Tharu leader, described how the dialogue provided space for people from Tharu communities to speak. He shared his experience of the dialogue, "I can say that the dialogue has prepared the people from my community to speak, raise their voice and to articulate their issues." Female participants credit this approach of the dialogue to feel being more empowered.

Patrani Devi Kathariya also said that she was ignorant before and did not attend public programs when invited. Now, she is interested in participating in public programs and said, "Dialogue made me aware of how important it is

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17. According to her, politicians, government officials and learned people in the village are "big people." This is a commonly used expression in Nepal.

to participate and get information." Four of these women<sup>18</sup> also participated in the local elections held in 2017. One of them contested for provincial parliament, one of the vice-chair of a ward and two for other position in the ward. They said they wanted to experience how it feels to contest in the election. According to Bisna Chaudhary, dialogue facilitator, female participants became more empowered after participating in dialogue and that encouraged them to participate in the local election.

### Effect of the dialogue on development work in Durgauli and Munuwa VDCs (now part of Janaki Rural Municipality)

In the words of Mohan Raj Upadhayay, one of the dialogue participants and a member of civil society, "Dialogue played an important role in the absence of a locally elected government." He said that dialogue coordinated and bridged the gap between the public and the government when there was no elected body. The VDC secretary, in the absence of an elected body, was responsible for carrying out day-to-day work including planning, budgeting and implementation of development work. This included the maintenance and construction of small-scale infrastructure like roads, bridges, irrigation canals. Representatives from political parties and the Ward Citizen's Forum<sup>19</sup> coordinated to improve health and sanitation and started small projects for disadvantaged groups. Participants discussed the development challenges of the VDCs in the dialogue and came up with solutions, which they implemented in the respective VDCs.

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18. Sagar Devi Chaudhary, Lalmati Kathariya, Patrani Devi Kathariya and Kaushila Kumari Chaudhary participated in the local election.

19. The Ward Citizens Forum was a forum created under the social mobilization and community development component of the Local Governance Community Development Programme (LGCDDP) — a joint multi-donor funded programme implemented by the Ministry of Local Development and supported by 6 UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNCDF, UNV, UNFPA, UN Women) in all 75 districts of Nepal.

One of the common problems in both VDCs was that the development work was carried out in a way to the interest of the politicians. For example, allocating most of the budget for his ward only, building roads or bridges near his residence and nepotism were common problems. Tekbir Malla said, "In the past, we used to think which geographical area this person belongs to, which ethnic or class s/he belongs to." He added, "We have to pull people from our ethnic group, class and support persons from the same party." Participants discussed about this issue and ways how to address it. His reflection was that the dialogue was successful in terms of raising awareness and solving development related disputes.

The above-mentioned issue is also related to inclusion/exclusion and transparency at the local government level. The strongest political party leader in the village may form a Consumer Committee according to his interests. Hira Chaudhary gave an example how the Consumer Committee would be formed, "Father-in-law is the president, daughter-in-law is a member and the son is the treasurer." This would not be inclusive or transparent. In the dialogue, when this issue was raised, they came up with a solution on the formation of inclusive Consumer Committees and organizing a public-hearing program<sup>20</sup> after the completion of the project. Bhima Mahato excitedly said, "After the dialogue, we formed a Consumer Committee including people from different localities and ensured women's equal participation." Hira Dev Chaudhary<sup>21</sup> also mentioned that Consumer Committees were formed in consensus with the inclusion of youths and different localities in her ward. Both of them were proud to say that they have done a public hearing program after the

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20. A public hearing is a social accountability tool to promote dialogue between authorities (duty bearers) and citizens (right holders) in which people's needs are identified and they jointly monitor the progress of a project.
  21. Hira Devi Chaudhary and Bhima Mahato were both coordinator of the Ward Citizen's Forum and they were in capacity to form Consumer Committee in their respective ward.

completion of VDC-supported small projects such as a tailoring training to women and vital registration.

In both VDCs public hearings have not been done previous and it was identified as one of the issues and discussed in the dialogue. The presence of both VDC secretaries in the dialogue helped to come up with a solution. Prem Prasad Dhungana, dialogue facilitator said that VDC secretaries organized a public hearing program after the dialogue. During the public hearing, Chhamika Chaudhary and Bhaktaraj Devkota asked what had happened to the budget allocated for the youths. During the next budgeting process, the VDC allocated budget for the youths to support sport, said Chhamika Chaudhary. She stated this as an achievement. Female participants found the information shared in the dialogue very useful. Kaushila Kumari Chaudhary was a member of the Ward Citizen's Forum, but she wasn't aware of how things are working in a VDC. She said, "Before, the VDC would invest the budget allocated for women to construct bridges and buildings. After attending the dialogue, we knew how much budget is allocated to women, what percentage and what programs we can do therefore." Hira Devi Chaudhary said that she was aware that 35 percent of the VDC budget was allocated to disadvantaged groups and out of that 10 percent to women, but she did not know how they could access the budget. In the dialogue, she learned how women could access this budget. Hira said, "Lalmati, Patrani and I supported Bhima Mahato, President of the Women's Network, for the allocation of the budget and we received it as well." Patrani Devi Kathariya is happy now that women get their budget, and the children's budget is invested in the construction of slides and swings. Patrani said, "We are monitoring the use of the budget," and she credits the dialogue for increased knowledge.

To improve the sanitation and hygiene conditions of Munuwa, the VDC wanted to declare it as an Open Defecation Free (ODF) area but it was on

hold because every political party had an interest in leading the program. This obstructed the formation of the coordination sub-committee to declare the VDC an ODF area. Gopal Giri said that the political party leaders present in the dialogue decided to support the formation of a sub-committee. Later, the VDC organized several meetings and Gopal Giri was appointed as the coordinator of the ODF sub-committee and they were able to declare Munuwa as an ODF area. Gopal Giri expressed his gratitude towards the Tharu community for choosing him to lead this project as well as making him the leader of different organizations. He said, "This gives a positive message to the society."

The absence of leadership in the Shree Kailasheshwor Community Forest (SKCF) was an important issue for the people of Durgauli VDC, as it is the biggest community forest holds a great deal of resources in the area. It was not functioning well and due to the absence of the Chairperson, Resham Chaudhary, who had been arrested on allegations of involvement in the Tikapur incident. Therefore he was not able to held its annual general assembly. Bisna Chaudhary said, "The issue was discussed in the dialogue and political party leaders agreed to solve the problem." Sagar Devi Chaudhary who was now elected secretary of the SKCF said that they had a round of meetings with the members of the SKCF and decided to have a general assembly. She proudly said, "I was asked to be the secretary and I said yes." She became the undisputed candidate for the secretary's position. She said that the SKCF had an inclusive committee.

Dhani Ram Chaudhary, one of the dialogue participants, now elected as the Chair of ward 1 of Janaki Rural Municipality said he wanted to ensure the participation of different classes, caste/ethnic groups, women and others; to enhance ownership over governance and to ensure respect for everyone's rights. He said, "If I would deprived the rights of Pahadis, then my behavior

will be like that of the state in the past, this would lead conflict." He explained, "Pahadi are a minority in my ward, however, I do not want them to feel discriminated or excluded."

### **Still a long way to go**

As the participants of the dialogue mentioned, the dialogue has reduced the distance between Tharu and non-Tharu to some extent. Relationships between participants improved and they worked together for the development of their community. However, there are still grievances that need to be addressed. In Tek Bir Malla's words, "People say the state still favors the Pahadi community and this issue must be addressed." Prakash Chaudhary also feels the same and said, "In the village, we live like brothers but in town it is different, they are dominant." There are still issues between the two communities. In the words of Giridhari Lal Mahato, "on the outside, the wound is healed, but inside the wound still is fresh." Similarly, Padam Giri thinks, "on the outside it looks fine but politically it is still tangled." Harihar Giri also shared, "It is still hidden inside." Their words suggest that more time and effort is required to resolve the issue between the Tharu and non-Tharu.

# STORIES OF INDIVIDUALS



## **Mohammad Yunus**

Lahan Municipality

**I** am a social worker and a farmer.

The relations between Hindus and Muslims were not good. There used to be frequent communal conflicts. Once there was the cow incident. A few stupid people had committed that act, but the blame was put to whole Muslim community. During those times, I used to think whether I should continue living here or not. After the Hindu-Muslim dialogue, the environment changed a bit. Now, the environment has improved so that I felt relieved after that.

After participating in the inter-religious dialogue, I learned that communal problems can be solved peacefully. During the dialogue process, we (Muslim community) were not blamed anymore for the cow incident. I felt relief after that. Hindus supported us in this process, and I am grateful to them. I

started feeling that Hindus are also good people. Those who were involved in killing the cows were prosecuted. Now, the relationships between Hindu and Muslim communities are good. We respect each other and this gives a positive message to the society.

We published the manifesto of our inter-religious committee, Hatemalo. We started to exchange best wishes, to support girls from the Muslim community in their school enrollment and organized clean up programs.



## Ram Kumari Das

Lahan Municipality

I am a social worker and also a women's activist. I am currently an elected ward member in ward no. 15.

Before, I used to be scared of Muslim people and I did not talk to them. They used to do the same.

After participating in the dialogue, we don't think that way anymore. We think that we all are human in the first place and then our religions come second. We got the chance to know each other during the dialogue. We have started respecting each other and now, we have become friends. Dialogue has made a woman like me capable of speaking in front of large groups of people. The credit for me being elected therefore also goes to this program.

Being a member of the Inter-religious Dialogue Committee (Hatemalo), I started participating in different awareness raising events. We have decreased the noise pollution created by the use of loudspeakers. This get support from the police and the administration as well. These issues were solved peaceful way. We helped the other community when they are in need. Hindus had not allowed Muslims to open shops in their respective areas. Now, we share common roads and it has made us closer.



## Mohammad Amjad

Lahan Municipality

**M**y name is Mohammad Amjad. I am a businessman and I am also involved in social work. Because I have been involved in social work, I was invited to participate in the inter-religious dialogue.

Before this dialogue program, there used to be noise pollution because of the usage of loudspeakers during religious activities. People used to cast blame on the basis of religion and caste, such as when the whole Muslim community was blamed for the cow incident.

After participating in the dialogue program, I realized that society has people with different characters, and we should not judge to every situation on the basis of caste or community. We should give a person who has made a mistake the chance to improve his or her behavior.

One conclusion of the dialogue was, "We all are human, and we have flaws. We make mistakes. When we make mistakes, we should sit together, discuss and resolve the problem." We sat around the same table and ate our lunch together and that gave a very positive message to the community. The biggest religion as human being is humanity, so we should not discriminate each other on the basis of religions. We should respect each other's religion.

Hatemalo has the objective to reduce conflicts in society. The members of Hatemalo had talked on radio program about decreasing noise pollution.



## Birendra Chaudhary

Lahan Municipality

I am a social worker and also a leader in the Tharu community. I have been facilitating social activities and resolving small disputes in the community. I have been a participant in this dialogue program from the beginning.

Even though I did not have negative feelings towards the Muslim community, I used to prefer Hindus. This dialogue program gave me an opportunity to learn more about the Muslim community. I understood that religion is the choice of individual people and I felt that we all are brothers and sisters and we should work together to develop our society. I learned to listen the story of each side. Now, I listen first and then respond. In previous days, I used to listen to a one-sided story and gave a verdict on who is right or wrong. But

now, I have changed my style of problem solving. I listen to the stories from all sides and then I decide. I use the same technique in the *Panchayat*<sup>22</sup>.

My style of speaking has also changed. I don't speak angrily, the way I did before. I use respectful words and it helped me to gain respect from both Hindu and Muslim communities. I give credit to the inter-religious dialogue for this change.

I got a chance to work with the Muslim community through this dialogue. Now, I am involved in decreasing noise pollution, promoting education for girls, reducing conflicts and promoting cleanliness of the community as a member of the Hatemalo dialogue group.

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22. A traditional practice for conflict resolution, where a group of selected community leaders engage with the conflicting parties to identify causes and consequences of the conflict and make a decision on behalf of the conflicting parties.



## **Bappal Bahadur Rawat**

Durgauli

Janaki Rural Municipality

**M**y name is Bappal Bahadur Rawat. I am a farmer and I am also engaged in social work.

After the Tikapur incident, the situation was not good for Tharu and Pahadi people to live together. The dialogue program of the Youth Peace Council provided an opportunity for people of both communities to sit together and discuss about the situation, which eventually led to improve relationships between the two communities. During the dialogue, we discussed to let go of the incident and stop fueling the conflict. Instead, we said we should create a good environment for the coming generation to live together. We decided to talk to people who would listen to us about it and also decided to talk about it if we found any differing opinions. In this way, our relationship started improving.

We also understood that dialogue and education are needed to live peacefully together in society. Also, we got to know that there should be participation of all people in social work. Instead of keeping the grievances inside, it is better to speak directly to the person concern and to resolve the problem. I will teach these findings to other people as well.

Now, we exchange our best wishes during our festivals. Tharu people visit our homes during Dashain and Tihar and we visit their houses during Maghi. If any problem appears in our village, we engage in a round of discussions and resolve it through dialogue.



## **Bhaktaraj Devkota**

Bhagatpur

Janaki Rural Municipality

**M**y name is Bhaktaraj Devkota. I am a student. I am engaged in student politics and also associated with one youth organization. Being a youth leader, I participated in the dialogue.

The dialogue conducted by the Youth Peace Council (YPC) created an environment for the two communities to discuss their problems and to move towards peace.

I learned that we can clearly understand each other and resolve misunderstandings through dialogue. Also, I learned how important it is to listen to other people's opinions and give a voice to marginalized people to

create an equitable society. Now, I do not react immediately to a situation that comes up. First, I analyse it, and only then I reach to a conclusion. During the process of the dialogue, we got to know about the problems in the programs of Village Development Committee (VDC), in the public hearing and the VDC project selection and worked on how to resolve those conflicts. I feel that this participation has made me more responsible and accountable towards society.

I share what I learnt with other friends in our organization and we used to discuss various issues. Now, we organize street plays and awareness programs on those issues.



## **Chhamika Chaudhary**

Durgauli

Janaki Gaupalika

**I** am Chhamika Chaudhary. I lead the youth club of my village and am also associated with the youth network. After seeing my active involvement, the Youth Peace Council (YPC) invited me to participate in the dialogue program.

I did not know how dialogue works or which issues would be discussed. After participating in the program, I got to know that the dialogue was about the incident of Tikapur and common questions of the Village Development Committee.

The Tikapur incident divided the communities. The discriminatory behavior of pointing out who is Tharu and who is Pahadi had increased. People who once used to share a cup of tea together had started avoiding each other's presence. Friends who once used to go to college together and shared a bench had stopped talking to each other.

Dialogue helped to reduce this discriminatory behavior. It created an environment for the leaders of both communities to sit and talk together. The perception of people “Pahadi are bad people” has changed. We realized that the sad incident had already happened and now it is time to forget it and improve the broken relations of two communities. We tried to share and discuss our learning from the dialogue program with the youth from the clubs, networks and villages. We learned that we should put forward our demand, but our way should not be violence. We also started discussing how to work to bring peace in our communities.

After participating in dialogue, I learned how important it is to get information and participate in the events of village. It is important for women and youth to have access to resources which is not easy. For access, we need information and we can get information only if we actively participate in the programs. Now, I go together with my friends to every program we are invited to.



## **Dhaniram Chaudhary**

Durgauli

Janaki Rural Municipality

**M**y name is Dhaniram Chaudhary. I am currently the president of Janaki Rural Municipality ward no 1. I participated in the dialogue as a leader of the Tharu community and a social worker.

Before the dialogue, there was a feeling of ethnic discrimination amongs all people. It was scary to go too close and talk with an unknown person from another community. The Youth Peace Council brought us, the leaders of both communities together for a dialogue. It became a bridge to get along with people from the other community and made us closer.

After participating in the dialogue, we realize that no matter which caste or ethnicity we belong to, once we live in the same neighborhood, we are only Nepali and our rights and responsibilities are the same within our society. This helped us to maintain peace and support development works when there were no locally elected representatives. Because of this, our inclusion and ownership in the development programs increased.

The residents in ward no 1 are 85 percent Tharus and the remaining are Pahadis. If I would lead with the thought of discriminating Pahadis and exclude them from their rights, I would not be any different than those who led our VDC in the past. And it will lead to conflicts. If we repeat the same thing that we were fighting against in past days, we cannot guarantee that there won't be any conflict. So, I have decided to govern without discrimination against anyone. I have not done anything that would create conflict in the coming days.



## Gopal Giri

Munuwa

Janaki Rural Municipality

**M**y name is Gopal Giri. I am a politician, social worker and also a farmer. Along with being part of the farmer's group, irrigation consumers' group and the health committee, I am also a leader of a political party.

This dialogue program was different than other programs. In this program, there was no discrimination. People would sit at a round table, respect each other, share each other's ideas and make each other understand what they intended to say. I liked the methodology of this program very much. We learned to listen stories of all the sides and collaborate with each other. I also learned that while making any kind of decision, it becomes easier if we do engage with everyone concerned. Now I have been working in the community with the same idea I received in the dialogue program. It has made a huge difference in the way I work, and it has increased my ownership towards my work.

There was a political dispute about the issue of declaring Munuwa VDC an open defecation free VDC, which we discussed during the dialogue. And we

also discussed at the VDC level. I was chosen as the Coordinator of the Open Defecation Free Area Sub-Committee. All the participants of the dialogue program supported me in this work.

I have supported the social activities of the Youth Peace Council. In the community where I am part of the minority, I have been given the position of the president and other leadership positions, which gives a positive message towards inclusion. Participants of the dialogue program have supported me, for which I am grateful for. The distance created by the conflict has been erased with the help of this dialogue program.



## Hira Devi Chaudhary

Munuwa

Janaki Rural Municipality

**M**y name is Hira Devi Chaudhary. I am a housewife and also a social worker. I participated in the dialogue program as the coordinator of Ward Citizen's Forum of Munuwa VDC ward no 8. This event was different than the trainings given by some other organizations. We discussed different issues at different times, like infrastructure development, transparency and accountability. Dialogue created an equal space for everyone which gave me confidence to speak in front of people. I also learned to speak on a particular topic. The credit for enhancing my capacity goes to the Youth Peace Council.

I got to know that there is a 35 percent budget allocation for the marginalized community and a 10 percent budget allocation for women in the Village Development Committee. After getting to know that we, the members of the women network, requested the allocated budget and organized a program. We provided a training for 768 women on how to do birth registration and follow the process to obtain citizenship from the ward office. We chose this issue for the training because most of the men go to India to work and all

the responsibilities come on the shoulders of the women. Women were unaware about the procedures how to apply for citizenship. We had invited the Secretary of the VDC as a resource person. We also provided the skill-based training like bangle making. After the program, we did a public hearing as well.

During the dialogue, we discussed about the consequences of nepotism and favoritism. We also talked about the importance of holding a public hearing after the completion of every event. I learned that it is not a good thing to follow nepotism and favoritism. So I would not do it and will also try to stop it if I see someone doing it. That year, I formed the consumer committee with inclusive environment and with the full support of all people. I also conducted a public hearing in my ward.



## Lalmati Devi Kathariya

Munuwa

Janaki Rural Municipality

**M**y name is Lalmati Devi Kathariya. I am a social worker. I was the coordinator of the Ward Citizen's Forum, ward no. 1 when I participated in the dialogue.

There was a time when Tharus did not want to see the face of a Pahadi and Pahadis did not want to see Tharu people. During the dialogue, we understood that caste is nothing, but a tag given by the society as Tharu, Pahadi, Dalit or Muslims. We all have red blood. So, we should live together without conflict. This discussion helped us to improve our relationships, also made them stronger.

I used to feel uncomfortable to participate in programs in front of men. My participation in dialogue made me aware that we women should not be

limited to our kitchens. We also can do a lot in society. I developed confidence during the participation in the dialogue program. The program taught me about my rights, roles and responsibilities and the tasks of the Ward Citizen's forum. It made it easier for me to carry out my responsibilities.

After the program, we requested the budget allocated for women for our women's network and used it for a training on tailoring and the distribution of the bicycles for volunteers. We felt like we could do something, and we actually did it. I also registered as a candidate for the vice-president of our ward. Although I lost, I learned many things. I wanted to do something for our society by being an elected representative.



## **Tekbir Malla**

Munuwa

Janaki Rural Municipality

**I** am Tekbir Malla. I am a social worker and I also provide different types of trainings.

We discussed peace, governance and development during the dialogue. We talked about how the participation of all can be ensured in development plans. Ways to keep society peaceful and harmonious were also topics of the conversation. The best part of this dialogue was that it let the participants discuss their problems and come up with their own solutions. We understood that the participation of all members of society in development helps to build a good community.

In the past days, there was the feeling that we should grab all the allocated

budget for our ward but now I feel like it should be allocated wherever it is needed. This feeling helped in decreasing the conflicts between the communities.

In the past days, we used to think about our own place, caste, community, clan, religious and political groups and how to uplift only them. This line of thought was cause for discrimination. During this program, we learned not to discriminate.

These days, I provide trainings on these issues. I also try to resolve the small conflicts occurring in our local area with the knowledge I gained from the dialogue program.

