

**Education in a Remote Hill District of Nepal: Deusa Secondary School, Solukhumbu**  
*Marianne Heredge*



*Exams at Deusa Secondary School. Photo: Marianne Heredge*

In April 2008 I visited Deusa, a day's walk from Saleri, in the lower part of Solukhumbu. Four days from the nearest road and off the trekking routes going to the Everest area, this is a very poor and remote area. Home to about 6,000 people (about 600 families), Deusa has one secondary school with about 600 students (Class 1-10), a lower secondary school with 320 students (class 1 to 8), two primary and a couple of infant schools.

After a year of involvement with Deusa Secondary School, the visit was encouraging. Friends have helped to support the salaries of two extra teachers (English and science) as well as provide teaching materials and books to start a school library. Money raised by the Sheikh Zayed Private Academy for Girls in Abu Dhabi will cover the salary of a further teacher for the coming year and has helped buy land adjacent to the school on which additional classrooms can be built. Members of Parivartan Abhiyan Nepal (PAN), a community organisation of people in Kathmandu who come from the village, had been providing reports of improvements in the attitude of teachers and students.

During the year, a small school library was set up and some sports equipment and musical instruments were sent to the school. Working with PAN, a stream of materials and books has been transported to the school by villagers visiting from Kathmandu. I took some art materials and teacher training books on various subjects that some of the teachers are now asking for.

As well as the two teachers supported from the UK, an additional primary teacher joined the school in the autumn, funded by Jalim Bihani Samaj, a Nepali organisation. Seventeen teachers teach about 600 students in 12 classes (there were two divisions in Grades 1 and 9). Splitting two of the largest classes in April 2007 meant most teachers teach 5 lessons a day instead of the typical 4 classes a day they were teaching before.

A major improvement of the year was the construction of a 5-toilet block replacing a single boys' latrine that had served the 600 students until now. Med Himal, a German funded INGO, with the help of the local community and students, who dug the hole and brought up sand from the Dudh Kosi River several hundred metres below, built new toilets that are now the pride and joy of the school.

Most important however, was a general improvement seen in the attitude of many of the teachers, students and the head teacher. Punctuality has improved. Splitting Classes 9 and 1 into more manageable classes has been a big help too. Students seemed more interested in trying to practice their English with me. There is great enthusiasm in writing to girls in a school in Abu Dhabi and in some classes, English is a 'favourite' subject among many of the students. In the next session, it is hoped to start corresponding with some students at a school in Arizona, USA. This will particularly please the boys who were very disappointed at not being able to write to the girls in Abu Dhabi! A volunteer recently spent six weeks helping teach English, which again has done much to motivate students and teachers.

There are still many areas for improvement however.

- **Classrooms:** Two classes were split, and more could be except there are not enough rooms. One class has to make do with a store room under the staff office. More classrooms are needed. A room is needed to teach science. Currently no practical demonstrations are possible – overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources making this subject one of the toughest to teach to the senior classes.

Negotiations with a farmer proved successful and recently the land adjacent to the school was purchased with a view to building extra classrooms.

In May 2008, Deusa VDC (Village Development Committee) announced that they would have funds in the coming financial year, so PAN is now discussing the construction of the classrooms with them.

- **Extra teachers:** As in most government schools in Nepal, there is a shortage of teachers. Especially in remote areas, the teaching of English is poor and usually the subject most students fail. Dev Chandra Rai, a farmer from Deusa attended school in India and speaks very good English. He was persuaded to join the school and started teaching English at the beginning of 2007. He learned how to teach mainly from books and British Council materials, so is teaching English in a progressive and interactive way – to the amazement of all around him. He has just registered to study for a BEd in Saleri, the District Headquarters a day's walk from Deusa.

There were no qualified teachers of science. Lila Kharki from a neighbouring village was recruited in April 2007. Now about to complete his third year bachelor's degree in science, he is teaching with much enthusiasm and energy.

- **School management:** The head teacher is a good maths teacher, but hates administration. A third teacher is starting in May 2008, primarily to assist the head teacher manage the school. As well as being an excellent English teacher, Mohan will teach music and art, to give the children the chance for a broader education.
- **Teacher training:** The teaching style of most of the teachers is very traditional and in particular the primary class teachers have received little or no training. These teachers urgently need some training. Global Action Nepal (GAN) is a UK NGO proposing teacher training in Deusa and two neighbouring villages. In the meantime, teacher training books have been taken to the school to encourage the teachers.
- **Attendance and performance:** Over half the students in every class failed their end of year exams in March 2008. When asked why, some of the older children confessed that they had been skiving school to practice volleyball. The market at Nele Bazaar, 4 hours walks away every Tuesday draws many of the students and teachers from school each week. Seven percent of the students dropped out, four or five from each class. Nothing was done to follow up to find out why. These are problems to be addressed in the coming session.

As well as the general understaffing and lack of resources, all of the schools in the area have serious problems. Thirty minutes from the secondary school is a very poor infant school where mainly Dalit ('untouchable') children go. With three classes, over 60 children and one teacher, (no toilet), the walls of the building are badly cracked and the school is ready to fall down.

Three hours walk away is the lower secondary school. There are over 300 children, but when I met the head teacher, he told me that his school has no toilets at all. Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) had recently been funded to rebuild the school but there had been no money for toilets. Dismayed at this, a friend from the UK has offered to fund this and RRN will help with the construction. (RRN is also helping by trying to persuade the District Education Office to address this problem).

Sadly these problems are very typical for most rural areas in Nepal.

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