



The Mountain Fund

Changing the world, one village at a time



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Medical Camp Delivers Baby

Trekking the Tamang Trail we are asked for help in Tatopani.

The woman has been in labor for two, maybe three days, the story isn't clear. All that is clear is that two hours up the trail a woman is having a difficult time delivering a baby. It's somewhat ironic that on this morning we had just toured a recently built birthing center. Recently built, but with no equipment and no staff. As we make our way up the trail we wonder if the woman would have come to the birthing center this time, with her fourth, or was it her fifth child? Again, the story, as being told to us by more than one local we meet on the way remains unclear.

We arrive in Tatopani near dusk. Tatopani in Nepali means "hot water." This village boasts hot mineral baths that are considered a great source of healing to many. We came this way so we could relax and enjoy these waters. Right now however a very frightened Tamang woman is begging to be taken to the hospital and our midwife and pediatrician are busy trying to help her delivery a baby boy.

The boy will be named Daniel after the midwife's late husband. He is born healthy and mother and son are both well the next day.

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Mountain Fund's E.D. addresses women's conference

The Women's Foundation of Kathmandu recently organized a two day event to address the issues of women and children in Nepal. Members of Parliament who are working to draft a new constitution for the country were invited to hear from leaders of women's organizations, children's organizations and leading experts on the state of women and children and what should be included in the new constitution to ensure basic human rights.

Nepal is not a great place to be a woman or a child. A recent "Foreign Policy" News Report, dated May 2008, has published a list of "The Worst Places to be a Woman" and Nepal was listed as the worst in South Asia. The female to male income ratio is 50:100, and the average literacy rate for females is 35%. The article goes on to say, "Marriage comes early in Nepal: Women born in the late 1970s married at a median age of 16. And motherhood is particularly dangerous." Nepal is the "deadliest place in the world to give birth outside Afghanistan and a clutch of countries in sub-Saharan Africa," according to a 2006 report by the International Federation of the Red Cross. That's because only about 1 in 5 births is attended by trained health personnel.

Amnesty International has found that, in spite of the election promises made by the government, women human rights activists continue to be at high risk of attack because they dare to challenge Nepal's patriarchal system. Many have become social outcasts for raising the issues of domestic and sexual violence and can face intimidation, beatings and even death. The Nepalese police often refuse to file a complaint or to fully investigate attacks and offer no protection, leaving women to face further persecution in their families and communities.

According to Children-Nepal, child labor is a serious problem and 2.6 million children in Nepal are exploited through this practice as they are sent out to work to provide an income for their families. Additionally, 63% of all children are malnourished at some stage in their development.

Against this backdrop of human rights abuse this conference made its case to lawmakers for stronger laws and real constitutional protection. While the current constitution affords some enumerated rights, it adds language that subrogates those rights in favor of local customs, practices and religious beliefs. The addition of such language has rendered the current constitution all but worthless in affording basic human rights to women and children.

Women comprise more than half of Nepal's 23 million people. They are less educated and work longer hours than men. A preference for producing sons is very high in the predominantly patriarchal, Hindu culture. In Nepal, a society where social security does not exist and property is passed on to male descendants, sons are looked upon as old-age insurance. It is also widely believed that sons "open the gates of heaven" by carrying out the last rites of parents. Daughters are "given away" in marriage. These explain, to an extent, the prevalence of sayings like "let it be later, but let it be a son."



Women & Children Quick Facts

Literacy rate for women is 35% with many areas of the country posting rates significantly lower. The Rasuwa District where Mountain Fund has most of its projects has a female literacy rate of only 15%.

As many as 60% of Nepalese children are malnourished at some stage in their development.

Only 1 in 5 births is attended by trained health personnel.

Only 60% of girls enroll in school. Only 27% of children complete their primary school education.

Arranged marriages are still common. Often the brides are quite young.

It is estimated that there are 127,143 children working in the worst forms of child labour — as bonded laborers, ragpickers, porters, domestic workers, in mines, in the carpet sector, and being trafficked.

Nepal has about two dozen laws that discriminate against women. One debars them from inheriting parental property, unless they remain unmarried till age 35. That is more than half the average life-span of Nepali women



Baby delivered during medical camp!

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Toothbrushes handed out during our camp.



The delay in delivery was caused by the baby being in the wrong position. Our midwife was able to ascertain this and then help to reposition the baby's head so delivery could take place. Without this assistance we are not sure what would have happened. And, what about this birthing center we had toured before? Why is it empty and what are women like this one supposed to do when nature fails them and birthing assistance is needed?

We had already conducted a one day health camp at the hospital sponsored by The Mountain Fund in Kalikasthan and a second health camp a few days later at The Mountain Fund clinic in Thulo Syabru, so by now our medical staff was getting to know the health problems and lack of facilities intimately. In all, we'd seen over 350 patients by the time we came walking in to Thambuchet.

Located in the Rasuwa District only 90 km from Kathmandu it can still take 9 or more hours to reach Thambuchet by road. As we'd first trekked from near Dunche to Thulo Syabru, conducted a health camp and then walked to Thambuchet, we'd been on the trail two days when we arrived near nightfall. We'd come this way in part because we knew there was a government health post here we wanted to check out. Our long-range plan for health care in Rasuwa includes trying to add resources to that health post. We were not aware that a brand new birthing center had just been built and was just waiting for someone to equip it and add staff. Thambuchet is ideally located for this center. Situated near a hydropower project on the floor of a valley it sits beneath the villages of Gatlang and Goljung and stone's throw from Chilime village thus making it accessible to nearly 7,000 people. A perfect place for The Mountain Fund

BABY DELIVERED (cont'd) and NEW BIRTHING CENTER

to establish our third base of medical operations for the district. With the government's newly enacted policies a birthing center is perfect. In an effort to reduce infant and maternal mortality the government recently has taken steps to eliminate the village Traditional Birth Attendant, or TBA, and reward families who come to government hospitals to give birth. Nepal has one of the highest rates of maternal deaths in Asia: currently 12 women die in Nepal every day either during pregnancy or childbirth. Nine out of 10 mothers deliver their babies at home without skilled birth attendants, contributing to a high level of maternal mortality. For years, TBAs have assisted in the birthing process in homes but most are untrained and the conditions unsanitary. The government hopes that by encouraging more women to use birthing centers with trained staff and sanitary conditions it can reduce maternal mortality. This policy makes perfect sense in urban centers where government hospitals are located but the reality for rural areas is quite a different story.

Where we are, in the Rasuwa District there is one government hospital in Dunche. While our mother in Tatopani faces a walk of several hours to reach the proposed birthing center in Thambuchet, the trip to Dunche adds several hours over some of the roughest roads in the country. It's not practical to imagine that our mother in Tatopani could have made that trip. One can certainly argue that she could also not have walked the 2-3 hours downhill to Thambuchet either. Trained staff with a safe birthing kit could have easily walked up to Thambuchet two days before our arrival however, saving a great deal of worry and pain.

We have permission from the District Health Office to staff and equip this now empty birthing center and will begin work right away on this project. Our goal, which is subject to your help and support, is to have the birthing center in operation by fall.

The Mountain Fund's new birthing center



FOR MORE INSIGHT ON THE STATE OF BIRTHING CENTERS IN GENERAL
READ LAXMI TAMANG'S ARTICLE [HERE](#)



QUICK FACTS

The majority of Nepalese women have no pregnancy-related contact with modern health services. According to the Nepal Demographic Health Survey 2006, 44% of women received antenatal care from skilled birth attendants (SBAs), that is, from a doctor, nurse or midwife, only 29% of pregnant women make antenatal care visits during the entire pregnancy, and less than 19% of births take place with the assistance of SBAs in a health facility, whereas 81% take place at home.

A large proportion of maternal and neonatal deaths occur during the 24 hours following delivery. In addition, the first two days following delivery are critical for monitoring complications arising from the delivery. However, in the context of Nepal, one in five (20%) women received postnatal care within four hours of delivery, more than one in four (27%) received care within the first 24 hours, and four percent of women were seen one to two days following delivery.

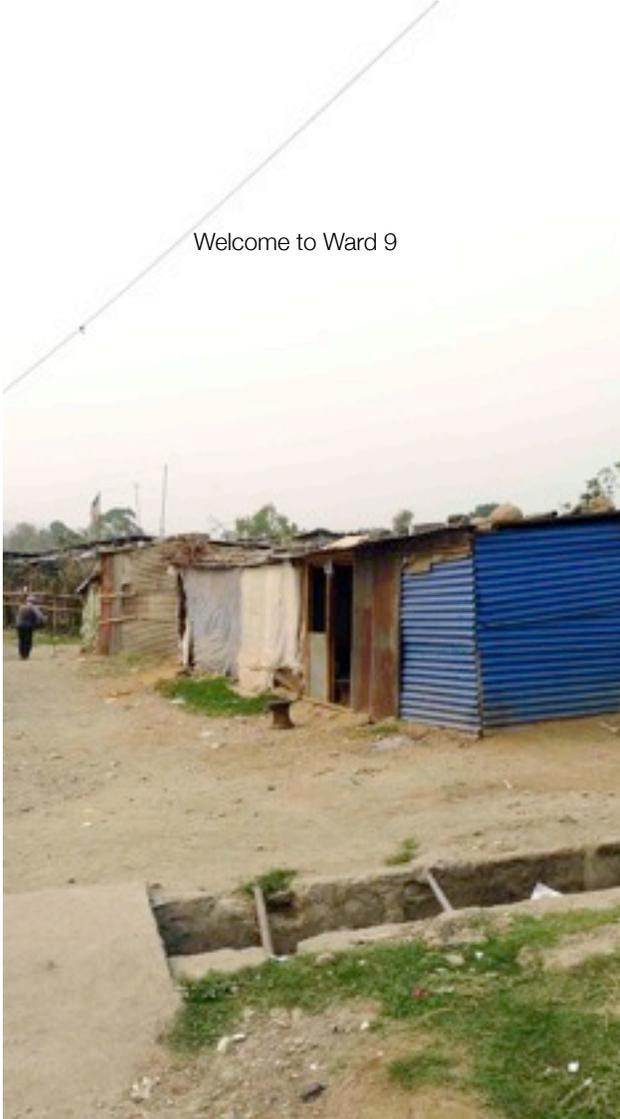
Statistically, each day in Nepal, 12 mothers and 75 newborn babies die in childbirth. 67% of maternal deaths take place at home and 47% of deaths are due to postpartum hemorrhage. Most of the mothers die from severe bleeding, a complication that can be treated even in basic health centers. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR), which is an indicator of the overall health of a population, stands at 281 deaths per 100,000 births in Nepal. This ranks among the highest in the world. At present, only 19% of births in Nepal are attended by a skilled birth attendant, and for the poorest 20% of families, this figure is only 5%.



Slumdog Millionaire?

Ward 9 Pokhara, Nepal could have been the setting for Slumdog Millionaire. The people of ward 9 are homeless squatters living in tin shanty homes on government owned land.

Welcome to Ward 9



I couldn't believe the story Govinda had just told me so I asked him to take me to Ward 9 so I could see for myself. There are sixteen daycare centers currently operated by the municipality but the one in Ward 9 was special since this was the ghetto. Govinda had told me its history and the story was just too compelling to ignore. In the past, these sixteen centers had been operated with support from UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Education Fund. UNICEF had created a lot of new jobs to give oversight to these centers but little in the way of funding had actually reached the centers. The one in Ward 9 had a low tin roof that turned it into a sauna during the hot monsoon season. Govinda says when he first went there the yard was full of feces since there was no toilet provided. The kids had no choice but to defecate outside. The story caused me to wonder if there was any place for the *children* in UNICEF.

That was the past. In the present, UNICEF is gone and the city, partnered with local NGO's, has taken on the management of these centers. The children's center in Ward 9 now has a roof that is three feet higher and some fans for increased ventilation. There's also a toilet now. The inside has been brightly painted. Toys, games and chairs are available. It's a far cry from the dank and dreary days under UNICEF. Locals are in charge and doing a great job.

The center still can't afford to provide lunch for the children who stay there while their parents work but starting this week, lunch is provided by The Mountain Fund. For about \$2.00 a day we are able to feed these children a hot lunch every day. I'm starting to like Ward 9 and people who scrape out a meager existence there.

Travel with The Mountain Fund

Did you know that The Mountain Fund organizes and leads treks throughout Nepal and Peru? While our medical trips continue to be the most popular (and they are not just for medically trained people, by the way) we can also arrange for a number of popular destinations in both Nepal and Peru. Our Ultimate Andes Adventure trek will show you all of the best Inca sites in Peru and take you to new heights as we trek around Mount Ausangate, one of the most beautiful high-altitude treks in the world. In Nepal, we offer trekking on the Tamang Heritage Trail, Langtang, Gosaikund, Annapurna and the Khumbu region. For more information, visit our web site today. If the trip you'd like to take isn't listed just drop us an e-mail at trek@MountainFund.org and we'll make your dream trip happen.

Crocs and MF help Girls Education

Mountain Fund is pleased to announce our assistance in helping Girl's Education International to receive funding for its girls school in Liberia from CROCS.

Mission: The mission of Girls Education International is to work closely with communities in mountainous regions of the world to expand and support educational opportunities for women and girls. We promote local ownership to ensure that programs respect local culture and values and are sustained over the long-term.

We fulfill our mission by supporting local education through the development and/or renovation of schools, the hiring and housing of teachers, the provision of scholarships and long-term funding, and by working closely with local NGOs. Visit www.GirlsEd.org to learn more.

Volunteers at The Mountain Fund

The volunteer programs at The Mountain Fund provide you with a rare opportunity to experience immersion in another culture and help needy people at the same time.

Our program in Nepal is set for a record-breaking year. We are currently on track to host nearly 80 volunteers in Nepal this year. Our volunteers provide thousands of hours of labor to women's programs, schools, children's homes and medical facilities. We have our own house in Kathmandu where staff is on hand 24/7 to assist you and teach you all about life in Nepal.

In Peru, guide Yure Chavez will provide you with a memorable experience living in beautiful Cusco. Visit our web site today and learn more, then come volunteer with us and enjoy the trip of a lifetime.



We are pleased that SummitClimb.com is our newsletter sponsor for 2009. SummitClimb has been a great supporter of The Mountain Fund since its inception. We have a tremendous amount of respect for the good people at SummitClimb.com.

In addition to guiding the highest peaks in the world, SummitClimb gives a lot back to local communities. Their service treks support local schools, clinics and in Deboche they have substantially rebuilt a nunnery. Year in and year out, SummitClimb returns and helps these poor communities.

Please consider joining SummitClimb's Service Treks. You'll have the experience of a lifetime.

Visit www.SummitClimb.com today!

The Mountain Fund

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