

## CHAPTER 6

# Development Interventions

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Despite its distance from Kathmandu, the district of Jumla has been the recipient of government-sponsored development interventions and the Sinja Valley, including Diyargaon, has been one of the important target areas. While a number of government projects function with the support of foreign aid, a few donor-funded projects are specifically targetted on the Karnali Zone, e.g., the Canada-aided Karnali Bheri Integrated Rural Development Project (K-BIRD) and the United Mission to Nepal (UMN)-assisted Karnali Technical School (KTS) in Jumla. However, the latter does not have a programme for Diyargaon, apart from providing training opportunities to a candidate or two from the village.

### **The Karnali Bheri Integrated Rural Development (K-BIRD) Project**

In principle, an integrated rural development programme, the K-BIRD Project, has been implemented in Jumla district in the Karnali Zone and in Dailekh and Surkhet districts in the Bheri Zone since 1979/80. The programme includes various rural development activities such as

agriculture, horticulture, livestock, forest and soil conservation, cottage industries, development programmes for small farmers and women, and appropriate technology. It also has a major infrastructural development component which consists of drinking water, irrigation, tracks, trails, bridges, and rural service centres.

Furthermore, each component represents only a part of the sectoral programmes of the Government that are being implemented in each district and, as such, cannot be separately identified by the villagers. Thus, of the 42 households in Diyargaon, only 15 were aware of the Project's existence, although, quite significantly, 14 of those respondents came from the *chokha* castes and only one was a *kamsel*.

The project does not cover all districts of the Karnali and Bheri zones. In Jumla itself, of the 30 Village Development Committees, the Project covered only 16 of them in 1989/90 (which also happened to be the last year of the second phase of the project when its continuation for a third phase [covering a wider area of Jumla district] remained uncertain).

Whereas the Project is generally aimed at enhancing the living standards of the people and promoting environmental conservation, some of its goals are more specific (such as the establishment of an Agricultural Research Station in Jumla). Its task also includes production of improved seeds for distribution to farmers; conducting research applicable to local agro-climatic conditions; and its outreach programmes (K-BIRD 1990: 5).

In Diyargaon itself, a number of activities are supported by the K-BIRD Project. The most prominent among them is the Rural Service Centre building which houses a number of development activities, e.g., agricultural extension, livestock development, Small Farmers' Development Project, and a local cooperative society. As sub-district level outfits, they serve Diyargaon and a number of other villages in the valley. While the land for the Centre building was donated by the local owners, its construction was funded by the Project, including substantial grants for the first three activities.

The project has funded a number of other development activities in the village through the Small Farmers' Development Project, such as adult literacy classes, a day care centre, and the renovation and expansion of a local drinking water project. Other activities carried out through

the Local Development Officer and related sectoral line offices in the district include an irrigation canal improvement, terrace improvement, and a general Village Development Training Programme intended to mobilise popular participation for all-round development of the village.

Despite the increasing investment in development activities in Diyargaon, the efficacy of the project is questionable. The agricultural extension office has often remained closed for months at a time, as a result of staff management problems. The few villagers who showed up occasionally for vegetable seeds returned disappointed. Although the agricultural programme has highly relevant goals, as mentioned before, given the highly specific nature of local agriculture and the already existing high levels of productivity, neither improved seeds nor improved farming practices to increase productivity have been available to the farmers.

The annual programme of the District Agricultural Office was more representative of the blanket nationwide programme of the Department of Agriculture, and it lacked the capacity to address the specificities of agricultural problems in Jumla. The K-BIRD Annual Monitoring Report (1990: 6) lamented that the extension programme has *"yet to widely reach the farmers' level"*. The only tangible benefit that farmers received from agricultural programmes was apple and walnut saplings. While the latter have become increasingly popular with local farmers, the former, too, despite some recent setbacks due to lack of markets (see Chapter on Agriculture), continue to be popular and are planted in larger numbers with an optimistic eye on the possibility of accessible markets in the future.

The proposed canal improvement under the K-BIRD Project was abandoned because the Local Development Office had the same project included also in a separate programme to be funded by a different source. It was a case of lack of coordination in the totality of activities implemented in the district. The terrace improvement programme created more problems than it solved (Chapter on Agriculture), and the aforesaid K-BIRD Annual Monitoring Report (1990: 21-22) itself again complained, from a different perspective, that such improvements had to be undertaken more systematically on demonstration plots and not in a sporadic manner.

In contrast, the livestock programme, which mainly consisted of animal health care, feed service, training, and breed improvement, was

more beneficial to the people because sick animals received treatment from the stockman in charge who was a local person.

The so-called Village Development Training Programme has shown little results, despite a locally recruited, full-time official. A local female volunteer, a member of a rich and powerful local household, had little time for her duties but she did benefit from the seventy-five rupees' allowance a day, she received during the three-day meeting held every month, as well as from two project-sponsored month-long study tours to different parts of the country over a period of two years.

### **Small Farmers' Development Project (SFDP)**

Of the K-BIRD-funded activities, the SFDP has been, by far, one of the most important. Theoretically, under the programme, people with a per capita income of less than Rs 1,250 per annum are eligible to form voluntary credit groups and each group is given supervised credit for short, medium, and long-term projects at low, but differing, rates of interest, the highest being 18 per cent per annum. The proposed projects of individual members are reviewed by the group which recommends them to the project officials for loans which are extended on a group liability basis. Members are also expected to engage in off-farm and community development activities and to participate in group meetings which are critical for the proper use of the credit and which are supported by project officials.

In Diyargaon, there were six groups with a total membership of 50 households and there was only one mixed-caste group. However, they did not function under the stated SFDP norms, nor did they undertake group savings and community development activities. Loans, in fact, are made to individual borrowers directly by the project office and, they are, as described under the chapter on credit, often diverted to other purposes, mostly for paying off more exorbitant debts, by the poor, or for making exorbitant onward loans by the rich. In short, while SFDP, "*a priority activity*" for K-BIRD, "*is hailed as a programme ... successful in focussing resources on small farmers ... [and] essential for the upliftment of the poor majority of farmers*" (K-BIRD 1990: 29), in Diyargaon, where only one household has been considered ineligible for borrowing from this project, it has basically functioned more as a temporary cushion for a few poor farmers and as a source of extra capital for the rich. The poor themselves are head

and ears in debt to the *chokha* and the project officials are convinced that, unless the *kamsel* are liberated from this bondage, it will be virtually impossible for such a programme as the SFDP to help them effectively.

### Other SFDP Activities

The SFDP also runs two adult literacy classes in Diyargaon, and these are mostly attended by adults-to-be. Teaching and learning are literally impossible because the pine torches do not produce enough light.

It also runs a day care centre on its premises, managed by a female teacher who is aided by a female assistant (*sebika*) who mainly cooks and serves the mid-day meal to the children. Attendance differs but never exceeds twenty. Both *chokha* and *kamsel* are represented and fed together without segregation "because the times have been such that even those who have already shed their old teeth (i.e., the adults) might have to eat together (with the *kamsel*)".

### Drinking Water Project

Back in 1970, the fact that the then *Pradhan Pancha* had received a sum of 1,500 rupees in advance for a drinking water project in the community, from the then District *Panchayat*, was widely known to all villagers. It was not until 1978, however, that they were able to construct it. Altogether five taps were installed, including one which was placed on the edge of the *Pradhan Pancha's* premises.

But, because of poor plumbing in the reservoir and the poor quality of the synthetic pipes, the water system soon broke down and villagers had to face the problem of an insufficient supply of drinking water for many years until the local SFDP granted them 100,000 rupees in 1988.

This time, a new source some four miles away was identified. One of the poorest *Kami*, who had acquired technical know-how from a waterworks' project in India during one of his annual six-month visits to that country, was selected as the project contractor by the villagers.

The contract was for a sum of 15,000 rupees, to be collected at the rate of 200 rupees from each household. Poor people like the *Kami* contributed labour instead of cash, but the contractor complained that they showed up an hour late for work. In all, some 9,300 rupees were collected in cash and part of the remainder in labour contributions. A sizeable sum of money remained uncollected. In one case, a recalcitrant villager not only refused to pay part of the dues (Rs 56) but even slapped the collector each time he went to collect it. The scheme was completed in 72 days. The SFDP grant consisted of pipes which were procured by the project and transported to the village by those who contributed their labour.

The *Pradhan Pancha*, who had a separate reservoir and a separate line installed for himself, was unconcerned about collecting the dues. The contractor's recourse to the local police did not bring him more money; other than an unknown sum which they collected on his behalf, from which they used 500 rupees for a reception for the Zonal Commissioner who was invited specially to inaugurate the system.

The same *kami* has since been appointed by the community to work as the system's *chaukidar* (watchman) to open the reservoir at 5 a.m., close it at 11, reopen it again at 4 p.m., and close it at 8 p.m. In his absence, his wife and his son, who attends the local primary school, perform the chores.

Each of the 90 village households, using water supplied by the project, paid him one *pathi* (four *mana*) of barley in *Jestha* and an equal amount of paddy in *Kartik*. The *ex-Pradhan Pancha* does not pay because he has a separate line with a 24 hour supply. While the annual amount of 4.5 *muri* of grain makes up a good portion of his food supply, the *Kami* would prefer a higher and assured salary from the Government. As it is, he has been nursing a dilemma; because of this job he cannot go on extended stays to India, where he could easily make 900 rupees in Indian currency or some 1,500 Nepalese rupees a month. Besides, he has no tools for repair and maintenance and many lines in the village are without proper taps, in contrast to his experience in India where all the necessary tools, spare parts, and even lime for purifying the water were made available.

In addition the *Sarki* who live farthest from the reservoir have a score to settle. They too had contributed labour for transporting pipes to the village, but the length of the pipe was sufficient only for part of the

way to their neighbourhood. To make matters worse, the brother of a local elite misappropriated part of the pipe for his own use. Consequently, the *Sarki* continue to get their water supply from the Hema River.

### **Health Interventions**

Between 1970 and 1990, a number of changes have occurred in the field of health and some with increasing efficacy in recent years. A health post was established in 1978, and its building was constructed in 1986 with financial assistance of 26,000 rupees from the Nepal Red Cross Society and under the technical direction of the UMN-established Karnali Technical School situated in the district capital of Jumla.

The health post itself, an outfit of His Majesty's Government, leaves much to be desired. The health post in-charge has been absent for six years, apparently attending college in the district capital. The positions of two Auxiliary Nurse Midwives have always remained vacant, and only one of the two posts of Auxiliary Health Worker has been filled. The rest of the staff consists of Village Health Workers, a senior vaccinator, a Family Planning Worker, and three peons who are often used for dispensing medicine; a similar story to that of other Nepalese villages as described by Justice (1986: 101-106).

Medicines too are unavailable more often than not. The few patients who come to the health post with common ailments, such as worms, coughs, eye infections, fevers, cuts, and pimples, do so in larger numbers during the months of *Mangsir/Poush* (Nov/Jan) and *Chaitra/Baisakh* (Feb/May) and most return home disappointed. Often insult is added to injury because the health post charges a non-refundable amount of two rupees for registration before the patient is "examined" by whichever practitioner is present, and afterwards patients are often told that the appropriate medicine is not available.

### **Immunisation**

The immunisation programme, however, has been very popular and widely sought after by parents in the area. This programme, too, faces problems with regard to its support structure. On scheduled days,

when mothers congregate at the health post with their babies, the vaccines fail to arrive from the cold storage at a neighbouring health post, and the mothers have to come back with their little ones some other day over those mountain trails.

### **Acute Respiratory Infection Control**

As mentioned earlier, under the chapter on Population Changes, the Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) Control Programme was carried out as an experimental study with the technical assistance of John Snow Inc. and financial support from the USAID. It was implemented in a study area consisting of 18 selected localities in Jumla district (Pandey et al. 1991:994) and was introduced into Diyargaon in 1986. While the Infant Mortality Rate of the study area was reported to be 189/1000 live births, *"pneumonia was found to be the leading cause of death in infants after the first week of life, and was predominant between one week and six months of age ... 55 per cent of all childhood pneumonia deaths were in children under six months old and 70 per cent were in infancy. It was only after the age of six months that diarrhoea emerged as the leading cause of death"* (Pandey et al. 1991:96).

The programme is based on active case detection. A field-level health worker has three wards in his charge, consisting of some 50 to 120 households. Those with children under five and pregnant women are his target households. While he completes a round of all those households in two weeks, those households with children under treatment are paid follow-up visits every alternate day, or every day, if the case is serious. Each house has a number for this programme.

When a presumed case of pneumonia is identified, the worker gives the parents, free of charge, ARDIPRIM suspension, a broad spectrum antimicrobial, and the first dose is administered under the worker's supervision. While, in most cases, this treatment is sufficient, more serious ones are given Nephenicol suspension.

The health workers are paid only 600 rupees a month and are supervised by a Junior Supervisor who works under a Senior Supervisor. Review meetings are held in the field once every two weeks. Records are meticulously kept and checked.

The programme has been hailed by the local people as very effective. The worker who was in charge of Diyargaon reported that he had



treated 246 cases during 2046 (1989/90) and that not more than eight or nine deaths had occurred during the four years of his work period in the village. Some villagers even hazard a guess that the decrease in deaths of young children is by about 70 per cent. The father of a sick child will trek for more than two and a half hours to seek the worker's help.

## **Family Planning**

Family planning, mostly in the form of permanent male contraception, is gradually becoming popular in the village. Approximately 26 male adults have undergone vasectomy operations. In the sample itself, only six of them had undergone this operation.

There have been three deaths in the village that local people attribute to the operation and which occurred within six months, one year, and five years of the operation. Some men have also complained of decrease in sexual potency, although not in their physical strength. Most men are afraid of this operation for a variety of reasons, including the fear of possible death or loss of physical strength. The reasons most people give for having many children are lack of a son, having only one son, and fear of the death of their existing children.

Those who have undergone the operation have between four to six living children and state the lack of sufficient land and food as their prime motivations. Some respondents stated that they would have undergone this operation long before the number of their children reached four or five. But they could not do so because there were no facilities for such an operation which is only organised occasionally here in the form of a temporary camp. Female contraception facilities are unavailable in the district.

Another health-related intervention has been the Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) Programme under which a mothers' group is organised in each ward, which then selects one member as a FCHV. The volunteer is supposed to be trained and supported by the government health structure in order to enhance people's access to primary health care, mainly for women and children.

After the local organisers of the programme formed the mothers' groups, women were selected and trained as FCHVs. Although the

women do congregate for training, which brings them 40 rupees as daily allowance, the programme has been marred by the broken assurance of an honorarium of 100 rupees per month which was to be received by each volunteer. In Diyargaon itself, the volunteers who were selected included the same lady from the household of the local elite who also worked as a field worker under the VDTP programme mentioned earlier. The health post staff have realised that the selection of volunteers by their predecessors was wrong.

## School

One primary school, which has been functioning in the village for many years, was awarded permanent status only in 1988, making it eligible for annual government operation grants. It has four classes with an enrolled student population of 58, which temporarily swells to 60 or 70 during the three-month period from *Falgun/Baisakh*. Almost 50 per cent of the enrolled students are *kansel*, mostly *Od Kami* who honorifically register themselves as *sikarmi* (carpenters). Only a few *Damai* children, no *Sarki*, and very few girls go to school. Dropout rates have been very high. Whereas there were 33 students in Class 1, Class 2 had seven, and Classes 3 and 4 had only nine each.

In the sample population itself, there were 24 boys and 18 girls of school-going age, of whom 15 boys and six girls (none of whom were from the *Sarki* caste) were reported as enrolled in school. Two teachers from neighbouring villages and one female teacher from Palpa (wife of a teacher in a neighbouring school) made up the teaching staff. The school is housed in a shed which the people had built for the police post. The post was shifted to its present, more expansive, location across the river after a few months. What little furniture they have has been donated, again by the Small Farmers' Development Project, and was purchased for a sum of 5,000 rupees. Teaching materials are very limited and the arrival of two gift parcels through the local post office, consisting of pens, pencils, and other articles of stationery, donated by an Italian tourist, were a novelty for the institution.

## Other Development Activities

Jumla was one of the eighteen districts which came under a long-standing government programme called "Remote Area Development"

and which contributed mostly to the creation of infrastructures such as tracks, trails, bridges, drinking water, and schools. Similarly, the erstwhile District *Panchayat* also distributed government grants for similar infrastructural projects.

Diyargaon has been the beneficiary of assistance from these two programmes for building a local bridge and for a trail to its nearest highland farm; for both of which free labour, in excess of the financial grant, was generated. According to the local system, a villager would be paid only 50 per cent of the normal wages for every day of work carried out.

In the case of the trail, a saving of 2,400 rupees was made from the government grant, and this was spent for reinforcement of a centuries' old irrigation canal in the village. A part of the rocky mountain side was excavated to construct a permanent channel for the canal, replacing the wooden aqueduct which otherwise had to be replaced every five or six years.

### **The Cooperative Society**

The local cooperative society has been in existence since 1977, covering a large area consisting of seven Village Development Committees, including Diyargaon, with a membership of 2,707. The area has been divided into three sub-areas, each sending three members to the Board of Directors which has a local elite as its Chairman.

Since the Small Farmers' Development Project issues production loans, the society's activities is presently limited to operating a consumer store where fertilisers and seeds brought from the district capital; locally purchased maize, millet, and barley; clothes; stationery imported from the National Trading Limited; chillies from Mugu; and other assorted articles such as turmeric, mustard oil, and kerosene (also imported from outside) are sold.

Salt is not sold because the Salt Trading Corporation in Jumla demanded a prohibitive amount of 75,000 rupees as a deposit before it gave any allocation. Consequently, this greatly restricted the society's activities because the salt could have been traded for food grains which, in turn, could have been bartered for Tibetan salt from *Mugali* traders.

The society could not obtain a bank loan because seven other societies in the district have defaulted on them. The society runs on occasional grants from the Government, although it would have liked to earn from its own transactions. What remains of its share capital of 32,000 rupees is sufficient only for the small-time trading that it is engaged in. The Board of Directors does not meet, because the Directors want meeting allowances, and the threat of the manager to quit is met by a similar one of mass resignation on their part. The manager himself compares the current scope of work with a religious ritual in which the presiding priest asks his client to make an offering of a perforated chunk of iron and the latter comes up with a needle.

### **An Assessment of Development Performance**

Between 1970 and 1990, many government-sponsored development programmes have been implemented in Diyargaon and its vicinity, and many of them have even established permanent offices in the locality. A post office and a police post have also been established. For a remote village like Diyargaon, the proliferation of development-related and other administrative institutions does conjure up a scenario of accelerated development and even the vision of a "Model Panchayat" in the area.

Nevertheless, most of these development programmes suffer from some in-built weaknesses. Most of these programmes have been mechanical extensions of development programmes conceived and structured in some remote programme headquarters, and they have failed to address the specific features of Diyargaon where they are to be implemented. Thus, while programmes like agricultural extension are irrelevant to the highly specific climatic conditions and technological traditions of Diyargaon, others like the SFDP clearly lack the ability to address the problems of an oppressive socioeconomic structure and rapidly declining resource base.

The development programmes also lack the capacity for conflict resolution in the faction-ridden society of Diyargaon and its vicinity. For want of consensus in the area, the local people had to wash their hands off two major financial allocations from the K-BIRD Project. One of them was for building a wall around the Service Centre, because one of the landowners had been reluctant to transfer the title of his plot of land to the Service Centre. The other was of far greater

consequence for the area; a hydro-electric project that would provide seven villages with power, including facilities for rice and flour mills. However, the political rivalry among the leaders in the area and the spread of disinformation, stating that it would result in less irrigation water for downstream villages, led to the delay and subsequent cancellation of the multi-million rupee project.

Two programmes from which local people could directly benefit and which could even lead to growth in the area have been horticultural development, mostly in apples and walnuts, and (less exorbitant) trading capital for the poor. But the basic infrastructure has not been developed, i.e., a proper market for the fruits or the provision of capital loans from the SFDP or cooperative facilities to entrepreneurs. The few programmes that they perceive as beneficial are the non-government pilot project for acute respiratory infection control and projects for drinking water, trails, and bridges.

A vast majority of the people are also wary of the irregularities in management and of the misappropriation of development funds. The magnitude of this problem can be gauged from their claim that "if the central cabinet appropriated one lakh of rupees for them, it would be only 25 thousand by the time it got to the VDC. And then the VDC would take its own cut of 20 thousand which would leave five thousand from which the overseer would take another cut of 2,000 rupees leaving only 3,000 for the village". They feel that development funds for the village must be directly channelled to the people without any interference in between.

Most people view the majority of the so-called development programmes with a sense of disgust. They know that without major projects, such as the road link to the outside world, progress will not be possible. They see the existing development programme as nothing more than just "sprinkling asafoetida and cumin powder", which does nothing to augment the quantity of available food. They feel that all the people in the village are poor and they compare the unequal size of landholdings with the insignificant difference in the size of ant houses. Therefore, they are convinced that Diyargaon's and Jumla's development depends on road links to the outer world.