

CAN GOAT BE A VEHICLE IN A PATHWAY OUT OF POVERTY?

[¿PUEDEN SER LA CABRAS UN VEHICULO PARA SALIR DE LA POBREZA?]

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SUMMARY

Belsi, is a small village of 79 households in Chitwan district of Nepal with lush green fields, vegetable gardens and concrete houses. One can hardly imagine the plight it suffered just a decade ago. Engrossed in their work, the faces of the villagers exude content and confidence. However, the people of Belsi have not always been happy.

The road toward self reliance in Belsi began in 1999 when the local women organized themselves into groups with assistance from Heifer Nepal. Prior to receiving goats from Heifer they organized themselves into a self-help group, built shelters for the goats and planted grass and fodder. They participated in trainings on goat management. Income from the goats helped them to initiate monthly a saving and credit scheme. A group saving and mobilization fund opened the door for other income generating activities. During the two years of Heifer's involvement in Belsi, the women learned ways to improve their economic and social condition. In 7 years, these 50 women, have spread their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to 760 women in their own community as well as in neighboring communities. Today the income of each family ranges from 250 USD to 4500 USD per annum from the sale of goats. Each family is keeping 4 to 6 goats and there are 30 breeding bucks in the community.

Building on its valuable experience of working with farm communities, Heifer Nepal uses training and livestock, especially goats, as tools for poverty alleviation with a belief that development is not only about distributing inputs but about empowering individuals, developing successful models, building communities, producing deeper level impact and transformation of lives from receiver to giver, crossing the border of selfishness to sharing, not only thinking for self-livelihood but for the community livelihood and community development. By addressing the inter-related causes of poverty like social discrimination,

illiteracy, superstition, poor health, and family and communal conflicts through Heifer's model of holistic development, Heifer Nepal brought lasting social and economic empowerment in the lives of more than 17,000 Nepal families.

BACKGROUND

1. Introduction of Heifer International Nepal

Heifer International is an worldwide, non-profit organization with the mission of ending hunger and poverty and caring for the earth. Since 1944, Heifer has supported 8.5 million families with the gift of livestock and trainings in more than 125 countries.

Prior to the establishment of Heifer country office in Nepal, Heifer had sent two shipments of livestock on the request of the government of Nepal in 1957 and 1958. The objective was to introduce high-yielding genetic materials for crossbreeding pigs, cattle and sheep in Nepal. In 1993 and 1995, Heifer funded a goat project in Chitwan and a water buffalo project in Nuwakot respectively. In 1997, Heifer registered as a country office to begin its full-fledged operation. As of December 2007, Heifer Nepal has worked in 32 districts of Nepal and has supported 10,790 families.

The key development approach of Heifer Nepal is Values-based Holistic Community Development (VBHCD), which has brought visible social and economic empowerment of Nepali communities.

2. Values-based Holistic Community Development Approach

Heifer Nepal uses livestock, especially goats, and trainings as one of the important tools for poverty alleviation. According to its philosophy of development, development is not *just* about distributing inputs but about building communities, producing deeper level impact and transformation. The goats and trainings allow Heifer to reach the community and form a relationship with them, after which Heifer works with them for their holistic

transformation according to the community's vision. VBHCD approach builds on the strengths and values that are innate in every culture and society. People are encouraged to see themselves as having strengths and values rather than seeing themselves in a situation of hopeless poverty.

2.1 The elements of VBHCD approach

2.1.1 Cornerstones for Just and Sustainable Development

Heifer's work is guided by a set of principles and values called the "Cornerstones for Just and Sustainable Development." The 12 Cornerstones are time-tested principles that enable the community to assess and realize its own potential to achieve a holistic development. They include 1) Passing on the Gifts 2) Accountability 3) Sharing and Caring 4) Sustainable and Self-Reliance 5) Improved Animal Management 6) Nutrition and Income 7) Gender and Family Focus 8) Genuine Need and Justice 9) Improving the Environment 10) Full Participation 11) Training and Education and 12) Spirituality.

2.1.2 Passing on the Gifts for diffusion and sustainability

The first cornerstone Passing on the Gifts is a unique and integral practice of Heifer for ensuring sustainable development in communities. Under this cornerstone, each community member who receives gifts of livestock and other agricultural products agrees to pass on one of the offspring (or equivalent) to another community member in need. This creates a ripple effect, transforming whole communities. In passing on the gifts to others in need, the community members attain a great sense of dignity. The knowledge that they are *giving* something to others enhances their self-esteem. And the receiving families in turn feel a deep sense of gratitude. While passing on their animals' offspring, they also pass on their knowledge, resources and skills, thus strengthening community spirit. This cornerstone sows seeds of hope, prosperity and self-reliance among communities. It makes them realize their own potential and feel accountable for the development of self and community.

2.1.3 Triadic Model for Project Implementation

The Triadic Model represents a continuous exchange of knowledge and resources between the country program, local project partners and the project groups. The goal is the successful implementation of a project through trusted local project partners, along with the guidance of the country program. First, the country program develops a relationship with local project partners (NGOs and government agencies) and passes

on knowledge about Heifer, including Heifer's Cornerstones and values-based holistic community development approach. Once the capacity of the local project partners is strengthened, they can begin to extend their resources and education to the project group. The same knowledge and resources are then passed from the project partner to the project groups. Also, the relationship between the project groups and country office is one of support, co-learning, education and quality assurance. The "triadic model" represents a continuous flow of information and support among the project groups, project partners and the country office, with each relationship strengthened by co-learning, co-monitoring and co-evaluation.

3. Poverty to Prosperity - A case study

Belsi, is a small village of 79 households in Chitwan district of Nepal with lush green fields, vegetable gardens and concrete houses. One can hardly imagine the plight it suffered just a decade ago. Today the village is filled with the sounds of villagers going about their daily business. Some are tending to their livestock; some are watering their vegetable gardens while some are busy working in the fields. A group of children can be seen walking to the nearby primary school. Engrossed in their work, the faces of the villagers exude content and confidence. However, the people of Belsi have not always been happy. The daily struggle with hunger and poverty, disease and suffering had crippled the lives of people in Belsi. They used to be dependant on the landlord for their livelihood, working all day in the landlord's field and in return receiving very little income. They raise goats on a 50/50 sharing basis. But thanks to the enterprising spirit of the local women's groups, Belsi has undergone a complete transformation. From a village whose people never had enough to eat, Belsi has metamorphosized into a village of successful farmers, where they have economically improved their lives, where livestock based agro-business is flourishing, where the level of nutrition has noticeably improved and where women actively take part in decision making and implementation of things related to the family and the community alike.

The road towards Belsi's self reliance began when the 50 local women organized themselves into two groups (Pravat and Prakash Women's Group) with assistance from Heifer Nepal in 1999. Initially, these women received an input of 72 goats, including 1 breeding buck, which was the first asset they acquired. They had also received group management training, improved animal management training, cornerstone training and gender just training from Heifer Nepal. Prior to receiving goats from Heifer they organized themselves in a self-help group, built shelters for the goats and planted grass and fodder. They received

trainings on goat management. Income from the goats and group management training helped them to initiate monthly saving and credit schemes. Group saving and mobilization fund opened the door for other income generating activities. And so began a pathway out of poverty.

3.1 Asia Chaudhary

To illustrate the journey out of poverty here is the case study of one of the members of the Prabhat women's group named Ms. Asia Chaudhary.

Asia Chaudhary, was President of the Pravat Women's group. She has two sons and one daughter. Before joining with the project in 1999 she had no livestock and she was living in thatched hut of 0.01 hectare land, in 0.1 hectare of land for cultivation which belonged to her landlord. Her husband had only seasonal labor for 3 to 4 months work in a year. Life was difficult to her. Most of the time they had to go without food. To survive, they had taken loan of 65 US D with the interest rate of 36 per cent from their landlord. Being illiterate there was high chance of being cheated by money lenders.

Stricken with poverty and the deep rooted gender discrimination of the society, her life was in misery. She was not allowed to go out of her house, talk with other men or participate in any of community activities. Her husband was not supportive to her and often threatened her that he was considering getting another wife.

With these obstacles she was often looking for a way out of her situation. She had seen other women in nearby village belonging to a women's group and receiving benefits from their participation. She had a desire to have women's group in her village too. Women's Group Coordination Committee, local NGO and project partner of Heifer Nepal visited the place and formed new groups.

In July 2000, she received gift of one goat and some training. Even though there was provision of getting more than one goat she took only one because of limited space for goats. That one goat combined with the trainings ignited the progress as follows:

PROGRESS IN FIRST YEAR

Her goat gave 3 kids in each kidding and there were two kiddings in one year. She got a total of 6 kids, she sold two male goats in 160 USD. She added USD 80 from group saving fund as a loan and bought one water buffalo for milk.

From second kidding she had completed pass on obligation of Heifer to another needy family of the community.

PROGRESS IN SECOND YEAR

Within 2 years she sold total of 13 goats and earned USD 780. She earned USD 470 from selling buffalo milk. With this income she was able to buy brick and stone to build a concrete house. Inspired by Heifer cornerstones, gender training her husband learned skills to build house (mansion labor) which made regular income from him too. Otherwise he had to depend on seasonal labour and used to get 3 to 4 months work in a year.

PROGRESS WITHIN FIVE YEARS

Within 3 and half years she was able to build a house of 4700 USD and buy a land of 0.5 hectare for cultivation. That made her to get two crops in a year to earn 250 USD.

Within five years she was able to sale 4 buffalo calves for 200 USD and able to buy another buffalo. She spent 1500 USD to send her elder son to Saudi Arab for employment.

At present her annual income is - from 2 buffalo she gets 940 USD, from 3 goats gets 470 USD, her son sends 1875 USD from Saudi, 470 USD income from crops and 625USD income from skilled husband. In total 4375 USD (360/month) and per capita income of average Nepali people is 290 USD. (Source: Website of Canadian International Development Agency, 2006)

PROGRESS OF ASIA CHAUDHARY'S GROUP

Asia Chaudhary is not only one who benefited from the project. There are 24 members in her group. Their group saving fund reached to 5900 US \$. Out of 24 members 12 started buffalo raising, 10 members purchased land, 13 have leased land for cultivation, 19 members have built concrete house, 5 have improved housing, 18 have concrete toilet and 6 have pit latrine. In 1999 there was not a single toilet in whole village.

They significantly learned to improve goat husbandry practice - selection of breeding buck and doe, breeding practices, use of fodder and forage, feeding mineral blocks, vaccination and deworming etc. Improved animal husbandry practice helped them to increase their income. They also learned to use their increased economic status as a means to consolidate greater social standing in a gender discriminatory society. They learned to appreciate the value of group effort. The group members have not only improved their livelihood but also brought prosperity in the

community. With this group initiation they were able to get one telephone line in the community which they are using as public telephone. They made exemplary effort by building dam in the river which used to flood in rainy season and the whole community had to sleep under the sky.

During the two years of Heifer's involvement in Belsi, the women made tremendous changes in the community. More than anything, they learned to use their new found consciousness and confidence in the betterment of their community. In 7 years, these 50 women, have spread their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to 760 women in their community as well as in their neighboring communities. Today the income of each family ranges from 250 USD to 4500 USD per annum with the sale of goats. Each family is keeping 4 to 6 goats and there are 30 breeding bucks in the community. The fruits of their efforts are self evident. Belsi is one example among many.

CONCLUSION

Building on its valuable experience of working with farm communities, Heifer Nepal uses livestock especially goats, and trainings as a significant tools for poverty alleviation with a belief that development is not only about distributing inputs but about empowering individuals, developing successful models, building communities, producing deeper level impact and transformation of lives from receiver to giver, crossing the border of selfishness to sharing, not only thinking for self-livelihood but for the community livelihood and community development. By addressing the inter-related causes of poverty like social discrimination, illiteracy, superstition, poor health, and family and communal conflicts through Heifer's model of holistic development, Heifer Nepal brought lasting social and economic empowerment in the lives of more than 17,000 Nepal families.

This case study made Heifer Nepal to believe that if goat is combine with addressing other inter related causes of poverty, goat can definitely be a vehicle in a pathway out of poverty.

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