



## **Participatory Research, Planning and Evaluation Process in Nepal Summary Results: Participatory Action Research**

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## **Purpose of report**

This report was produced by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and Action Aid Nepal. It is an output of the programme '*Planning, learning, monitoring and evaluation activities for the South East Nepal Hotspot*'. The programme aims to support learning about the most effective community and NGO activities in combatting modern day slavery and bonded labour in the Freedom Fund South East Nepal Hotspot. The programme is funded by the Freedom Fund and directed by IDS. This report provides a summary overview of the results of the participatory action research undertaken by five NGOs in South East Nepal, with documented evidence of adults and children working through a system of agricultural bonded labour known as *Harwa-Charwa*<sup>1</sup>.

## **Acknowledgements**

The team would like to extend its gratitude to all the partner and the community members who gave their time to be part of the organisations that participated in the action research process. We have anonymised their names to protect their privacy.

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<sup>1</sup> In Maithili, *Charwa* denotes a landless person who grazes cattle. *Harwa* denotes a landless person who works on other people's land. Both terms have connotations with bondage.

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## **Summary Findings**

### **General Observations**

IDS and ActionAid Nepal supported five action research groups in District A, District B and District C in Nepal. The groups identified their research enquiries based on the collective life story analysis in March 2017 and the Action Research Workshop in October 2017. The field research was undertaken between March 2018 until April 2019. The aim of the action groups was to develop ideas for pilot interventions, including encouragement and support of the researchers, but without additional project funding. This allowed people to explore ideas and mobilise resources outside the operational programme.

The following themes were initially identified:

1. Illness and child marriage/dowry systems – NGO 1
2. High interest loans, child marriage and dowries – NGO 2
3. Child marriage and illiteracy – NGO 3
4. Loans and illness – NGO 4
5. Child marriage – NGO 5

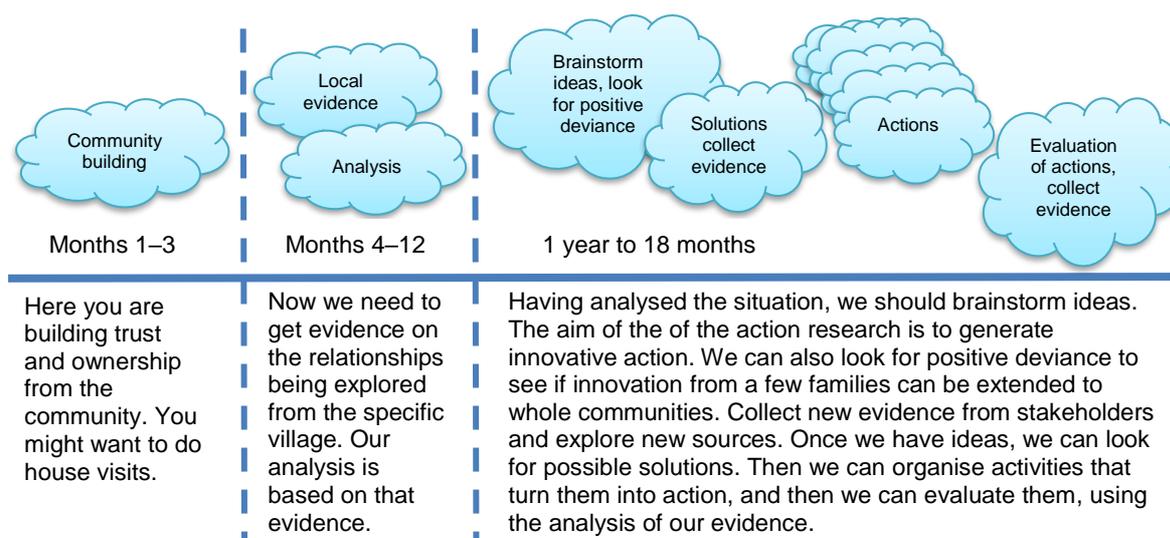
Two action research groups completed a full cycle of action research by April 2019. Three groups are expected to complete their first cycle of action research by mid-2019.

### **Membership**

The groups varied in their original composition. Some, such as NGO 4, consisted of members of the Harwa-Charwa credit and savings group, and only had female members. Others, such as NGO 1, had a mixed membership of local citizens directly affected by modern bondage and activists working at a higher level, such as the district level such as the Harwa-Charwa network. Groups also included service providers, teachers, and elected officials. Membership was stable in most groups, but some people spoke more or had more confidence than others.

### **Process**

We originally envisioned that groups would meet monthly and engage in sequenced activities. At the outset, the process was expected to have several phases, with monthly meetings. The first phase would focus on engagement and trust-building, followed by the collection of evidence and analysis. This would support a third stage of identifying solutions, taking and evaluating actions. These actions could inform a second round of evidence-gathering, analysis and action, until the group decided it was complete. This sequence would take one year to 18 months, as envisioned below:



**Figure 1 The stages of a systemic action research process**

However, due to changes at the programme level the groups started later than expected. IDS and ActionAid Nepal organised training on action research in October 2017, expecting the engagement phase to start after that. Due to partnership management issues at the level of the Freedom Fund, the engagement phase was delayed until March 2018.

To refresh the knowledge of the trainees, ActionAid Nepal visited the offices of the individual participating NGOs, showing and practicing some participatory tools to collect and analyse data, and explaining the principles of facilitating participatory action research.

The engagement phase was initially expected to entail one or two meetings (over one to three months), but in the end it took between one and six meetings (over six months). Group meetings followed a more irregular pattern, but all had a slow start and needed time to decide on the topic they wanted to focus on. All the groups had a range of topics that they wanted to address. Almost all mentioned child marriage and income or poverty as issues, in addition to access to education and government services or facilities, health and alcohol abuse. Many groups appeared to expect some kind of project or government benefits, and for NGOs that focused on project or programme delivery an open-ended process was much more difficult than for those who originated from, or were otherwise familiar with, social or political movement building.

We identified building ownership, both with the NGOs and in the communities, as a key challenge. At the end of the engagement phase it was clear that most NGO staff and the groups welcomed more hands-on support in the field to facilitate participatory action research groups, and to collect evidence and analyse it with the groups.

We therefore provided hands-on support in the villages to the group and the facilitators. In August, ActionAid Nepal provided training in the villages with tools that helped with prioritising issues in a participatory fashion. In November, IDS and ActionAid Nepal made joint support visits to the groups in the field. We observed the interactions, invited groups to present on the formation of the groups and the prioritisation of issues, and jointly examined and facilitated a group analysis of the evidence that they had collected to develop a (loosely formulated) Theory of Change (TOC), as well as criteria for success and some tools for the groups to measure progress. We organised a sharing meeting where all of the NGOs could learn from each other. We provided additional hands-on training in using and selecting participatory tools and shared some experiences from India. Some NGOs had to redo their work in the community, as they had defined the issue for the community without collecting data and analysing it with the community. Some NGOs changed their priority issue several times during the engagement period, as their insights grew from the interactions with each other, the community and IDS and ActionAid Nepal, illustrated in the table below:

Name of Local NGO	How the priority issues changed over time					
	May/ June 2018	August 2018	October 2018	November 2018	April 2019	Current status
NGO 1	Illness, child marriage and dowry systems	Child marriage	Alcohol abuse	Alcohol abuse	Alcohol abuse and child marriage	One full action research cycle on alcohol abuse completed.  Some actions are being taken on child marriage in new cycle.
NGO 2	High interest loans, child marriage and dowry	Loans	Drinking water and electrification	Drinking water and electrification	Drinking water and electrification	One full action research cycle completed on both issues.  Planning more work on drinking water.
NGO 3	Child marriage and illiteracy	Child marriage and illiteracy	Alcohol abuse	Alcohol abuse	Alcohol abuse	Some evidence collected, TOC is prepared. Some actions are planned and accomplished. Still need to do more action to complete a cycle.
NGO 4	Loan and illness	Unemployment	Unemployment	Unfair wage rate	Unfair wage rate	Collected some evidence, prepared TOC, planning for actions.
NGO 5	X	Child marriage	Child marriage	Child marriage	Child marriage	Some evidence collected, TOC is prepared. Some actions are planned.

**Table 1: NGO Priority Issues over time**

The engagement phase took seven months (considerably longer than expected) for groups to develop a clear sense of purpose and develop a TOC.

In all groups there was a need to support the “action-groups” in their development into action-research groups. Some groups took action without research and others did research among members without going out to ask others and test their opinions.

Most groups achieved results. Some have been especially impressive. One group, which was formed in a Musahar community, one of the most marginalised and excluded groups among the Dalit caste in Nepal, managed to get access to clean drinking water and connected most of the village with electricity by mobilising existing schemes as well as new additional support to cover costs that the scheme did not provide for. Two groups ended illegal homemade alcohol sales in the village. The group found alternative employment for a vendor by transforming the *charwa* system that allowed her to herd cattle for many people, rather than for one landlord. The groups achieved this within five months and demonstrated high levels of focus, originality and mobilisation skills. Two other groups learned more about the complexity of the issues they prioritised.

The NGOs that excelled worked hard on community ownership building. They chose to focus on one or two clear topics that everyone agreed had priority and spent a lot of effort linking with the government, receiving practical non-intrusive support from the NGO to do this. NGO staff would help draft letters, identify who to speak to and where offices are, and provided general encouragement without taking over.

Lack of NGO leadership engagement with the community was the main reason why some of the groups floundered. The second challenge was a lack of knowledge by the field staff on important issues, such as employment law. The third challenge related to the gender norms and values of the facilitators. In one group that worked on child marriage, the facilitator married a child bride during the process. In another that worked on wages, the NGO did not help the group to find out what the legal minimum wages are, who implements them, and how to organise collective action. A male facilitator of an all-female action research group (ARG) working on gender wage gaps proposed to find out what the different kinds of work are that men and women do to *negotiate* wages, rather than finding out the minimum wages are that are determined by the district level wage fixation committee and demanding the implementation of these minimum wages.

## **Lessons and reflections**

- All groups need time and support to understand their purpose. Once they understood that these were forums for generating community action, not for appealing to NGOs or receiving development benefits, they made progress. In most cases it was necessary to allow the groups to focus on general community issues first, in order to win trust within the villages.
- NGO and facilitators need to have sufficient technical expertise and knowledge on topics in order to support a group to take effective and legal action. Knowledge on the law, the implementation of the law, eligibility criteria and governance of schemes is essential to help groups access schemes and make plans that are legal and realistic.
- NGO staff and facilitators need to be aware of their own gender, class and caste norms and how these (re)enforce existing inequalities or create blind spots in understanding people's behaviour.
- Providing hands-on systematic support to the groups to use participatory action research tools and facilitate the development of a (loose) TOC was essential in creating successful groups. However, if the NGO does not engage regularly and directly with the groups in the field, or if they have norms and values which make it impossible for them to see inequalities and act on them, or if they lack technical knowledge on issues, then the tools are of little use.
- The evidence-gathering and analysis stage of the action research process is crucial. When people can carry out their own analysis, they own the findings. This supports understanding and action. Evidence gathering and analysis skills, such as social or seasonal mapping, can be applied to many (emerging) topics. Groups need to use methods to collect enough evidence based on their own experiences, as well as from people outside the group.
- As most people living in contexts with bonded labour are illiterate, report-writing and minute-taking is challenging. Most of the groups have prepared summary meeting minutes rather than detailed notes, despite NGO support. Most groups also did not make visual summaries of the evidence, and were instead writing down notes, which members cannot read and so they have to just remember.
- Groups did benefit from facilitated support with the analysis of their data, using simple techniques such as putting the data in chronological order along a wall for everyone to look at, or combining two sources of information such as age of marriage and school level, showing at what grade boys and girls drop out to get married.
- Groups which did well had experienced facilitators and thorough documentation.

## **Recommendations**

1. Take time to build community and NGO ownership and engagement. Developing ownership of a group and an issue takes considerable time and effort. Communities in this context are often (too) trusting of outsiders and lack confidence in their own ability to act and think. This allows outsiders, including politicians, to hijack the groups for their own purposes, which may or may not be in the benefit of the group.
2. Facilitators should be selected carefully after asking critical questions about their gender, caste and class norms. Existing NGO staff should be given a role to support groups as a facilitator, rather than having a new consultant or part-time staff who do not regularly interact with the communities. ARGs should be led by the people who are directly affected by the problem.
3. Embed action research into the programme. It takes time for NGOs to realise the utility of action research and to then think of how it can be integrated into the programme. Several NGOs said that if they had known how this works, they would have organised their whole programme based on action research, as it helps to develop relevant interventions.
4. Provide close methodological and facilitation support and propagate an evidence-based approach to change, which will lead to action which is locally owned.
5. Clarify the similarities and complementarities of the Action Research Group Model and Harwa-Charwa groups, Savings and Credit Groups and Community Vigilance Committee Models across the programme.
6. ARGs have done very well and completed the full cycle where a good facilitator was deployed to support the groups, but where this work is given less priority and responsibility is given to junior and untrained staff, the process is delayed. So, capable and dedicated staff should be given responsibility to support ARGs - rather than being solely dependent on junior staff, managers of organisations should also increase their time and support to groups.

## **Annex 1**

### **NGO 1, District D**

**Issue: Alcoholism**

**Location: Municipality 1, Village 1**

#### **Engagement phase**

This group was formed in May 2017, consisting of seven members from Harwa-Charwa groups and an elected ward member. Out of 102 households in this settlement, 65 are landless.

At first this group wanted to work on illness. However, when prioritising issues, they found that alcoholism was affecting more people in the community.

The NGO was already working in this village with issues of Harwa-Charwa, and people in the community were organising ways to work together to be free from bonded labour. The NGO had been doing various activities in the community to this end.

To prepare the action research, the NGO wanted to build trust between the people working in the community and the group members. NGO representatives stressed to the community that this was a community-led process and the issues would be identified by group members, the evidence would be collected at community level by groups members, and theories of changes would also be prepared by themselves.

After the community building process, ARG members discussed various issues that existed in their community. Among many, the following seven were identified as major issues in the community:

- **Child marriage:** In this community, the common age of marriage is 15–16 for boys and 13–14 for girls. This is a risky age from different perspectives. Child marriage prevents people getting a better education to develop their career and can also lead to negative impacts on their health. Community people found that there were four child marriages that had happened in last two years in their settlement.
- **Landlessness:** 65 families among the 102 in this settlement are residing in public land and do not possess a landownership certificate. This has compelled them to depend on a landlord whenever they need loan, as they cannot access the bank without property to use as collateral.

- **High interest rates:** Most of the community people do not own property which they can use as collateral for a bank when they need loan. They therefore have to go with their own landlord or money lender in community, who charge 48 to 60 percent interest per annum. Due to the high interest rates, they cannot pay back their debt on time.
- **Illiteracy:** Most of the elder people are illiterate in this community and now students are also dropping out of school. ARG members reported that because of illiteracy, all the doors of opportunities are closed for them.
- **Unsafe migration:** Most of the community members are illiterate and do not have skills, capital or land to sustain their livelihood. They try to migrate to gulf countries and Malesia. To do so they borrow Rs. 1–1.5 lakh from the landlord and money lenders. Some succeed, but others do not get a well-paid job or fall ill. Those who fail have to serve the landlord when they return.
- **Dowry:** Dowry practices are changing, and prices are increasing, causing the poor to take out large loans from landlords and moneylenders. Sometimes, young daughters elope to avoid the dowry.
- **Alcoholism:** Alcoholism was also found to be a major issue in the community. In 98 out of 102 households, one person drinks alcohol. The consumption of alcohol itself may not be problem, but the behaviour caused by excessive alcohol usage creates problems. Alcohol abuse causes health problems, shortage of income and poverty. People quarrel and conflicts escalate to the point where the police have to arrest them. When the ARG started, there were two to three cases per month where people were arrested and kept at the police station. Last winter, two community members spent the whole night on the road because they were drunk and died due to extreme cold.

ActionAid Nepal representatives supported them in working out how to prioritise the major issues. ARG group members used a participatory '*preference ranking*' tool to prioritise one issues among many.

### **Problem rationale**

Alcoholism was identified as a priority. During the engagement phase, the group members collected evidence to show the income and expenditure of a family. Families with one or more alcoholics spend most of their income on alcohol, as a result of which they cannot save, and are dependent on landlords for loans in emergencies.

ARG members prepared a social map and found that alcohol was consumed in 98 out of 102 families in this settlement - a reported total of 225 drink alcohol regularly. They made a seasonal calendar and found that people drink most during the winter, during wedding ceremonies, and around 7–8 pm in the evening.

There are four alcohol shops in the settlement that sell locally made, unlicensed and often unsafe liquor. Licensed liquor is available in town. Locally made liquor is also found in nearby villages. One of the shops was operated by a female ARG member. Although it is illegal to produce and sell homemade liquor and sell liquor without a license, these businesses operated openly.

### **Theory of change**

*If community people reduce their consumption of alcohol or manage the harmful use of alcohol, they will save their incomes for emergencies, and decrease investment in health so that there are fewer reasons to take out risky loans.*

### **Actions**

**Action 1:** The ARG visited households to raise awareness about alcohol abuse.

**Action 2:** The ARG mobilised other residents to shut down these shops. They discussed with the owners what alternative business they could start. The female ARG member who sold liquor and drunk herself started to take care of cattle of different households (around 30 cows). She now earns 80kg rice per cow per year (approximately 2,400kg rice in a year). After home consumption, she sells the remaining rice to buy other items for family members. Two other illegal liquor vendors started a grocery shop in their own home. Another started a tea stall.

### **Impact**

- Reduced accessibility and availability of homemade illegal alcohol. To buy alcohol, residents have to travel to the local certified liquor shop in town, which is more expensive. One bottle (750ml) of local alcohol costs Rs. 50 compared to a minimum of Rs. 150 to buy one quarter (180ml) factory made alcohol. Similarly, they can get local alcohol from neighbouring villages and markets, but this is also inconvenient for them to go every day.
- Reduced alcohol consumption. Young children and teenagers who used to drink local alcohol could not go to neighbouring villages to buy homemade liquor, and they could not afford licenced alcohol.
- Fewer disputes. Since the end of the engagement phase (November 2018) until now (April 2019) the number of arrests has been reduced sharply. There has been one alcohol related case of arrest by the police. Violence against women has also decreased.

- The lives of members in the ARG has changed. One member was an alcoholic from a respectable family, who fought and was always late. He is now sober, participates in the group and is a living example that change is possible. Others have also reduced drinking and one has stopped smoking bidis: “I feel much healthier since I quit smoking and I think I look better. My appearance has changed” (Male Member); “I used to drink every day, one day looked like the next and I forgot a lot. Now I have a purpose and people respect me more” (Male Member); “I stopped drinking. I am surprised but I don’t miss it” (Male Member).
- People have started saving money which they used to use to buy alcohol in past. They believe that they can pay off loans with saved money and will also use this money in an emergency.
- More children go to school because their parents are drinking less and are awake in the morning to help their children.

#### **Did the group membership change?**

No changes in group membership.

#### **Lessons learned and reflections**

*“We have development confidence to be able to fight social issues.” (Female ARG Member)*

*“In past I used to drink alcohol, since I stopped drinking alcohol my health is improved, and I am being respected by other group member.” (Male Member)*

*“If we work collectively, we can solve any social problem collectively.” (Female Member)*

*“All government decisions/ legal provisions are not in favour of poor and marginalised community. Sometime Dalit and marginalised community are more excluded because of government policies. So rather than blindly support government policies and programme, we have to critically look and act against those.” (Young Man)*

#### **Next steps**

- They will calculate the income/ expenditure trends of people since they have reduced consuming alcohol. This will help to convince other people on how reducing alcohol consumption can help to their prosperity.
- They will ask people to buy blankets and jackets to be used in the winter, so that they will not start drinking in the winter (pretending alcohol helps them to be safe from cold).

- The ARG agreed that no-one is allowed to sell or buy alcohol after 8pm, and if they do, they will have to pay a fine. All ARG members have the contact number of the police station to report drinking after 8pm in public, or people who are sleeping on the road. However, they have no clear implementation plan, for example, whether this is legal or how to manage the fines.

## **NGO 2, District B**

**Issue: Electrification and drinking water**

**Location: Municipality 2, Village 2**

### **Engagement phase**

NGO staff started meeting community people and started the community building process from March 2018. After a long discussion with community members, the Action Research Group (ARG) was officially formed in July 2018. There are nine female members in group from the Dalit community. The group identified electrification and the scarcity of safe drinking water in dry season as the priority issues and are working with these two issues simultaneously.

At first, the group identified as many as seven issues as priorities for Village 2: child marriage, dowry, lack of good roads, landlessness, illiteracy, electrification, and scarcity of safe drinking water in dry season. ARG members were confused about where to start. They thought that every issue was affecting the life of poor Dalit community members, so they could not decide which issue should be addressed with action research. ActionAid Nepal representatives supported them in determining how to prioritise, using a participatory '*preference ranking*' tool. In the preference ranking, 'scarcity of drinking water in dry season' was identified as the priority.

### **Problem Rationale**

The well was polluted, it was not dug deep enough and ran out of water in the dry season. As a result, the villagers had walk to another village with a well and pay for water. Due to the lack of water, the village had many diseases including scabies, typhoid and diarrhoea. They could not wash clothes in the dry season, which also helped to spread disease. People reported diarrhoea, itchy skin and infections.

The village had no electricity. Therefore, some villagers were afraid to go outside at night for fear of snakes or falling, and children had to study with a kerosene lamp.

## Evidence collection

The group collected a wide variety of evidence using participatory tools such as social mapping, ranking, seasonal mapping and problem trees. Key findings included:

- People spend Rs. 100 per month to buy drinking water from the adjoining settlement
- The well was both polluted and dry, resulting in a continuous clean water shortage
- Seasonal mapping of diseases showed that most people do not get sick in the dry season – as was assumed – but rather in the rainy season. The diseases listed included diarrhoea and eye infections
- People spend around Rs. 100 per week on kerosene
- People are afraid of snakebites and fires in huts at night, and children must study by small lamp light
- The government has clean water and electricity programmes for the poorest communities that this community is entitled to.

## Theory of change

- *If we have electricity, we save money for kerosene, we have fewer snakebites and children can study longer, so that we have fewer reasons to take out risky loans*
- *If we have drinking water, we save money and we will be sick less frequently, so we have fewer reasons to take out loans*

## Actions and results

**Action 1:** A petition was sent to the Electricity Office with the recommendation of ward chairperson, and as a result the Electricity Office made a commitment to provide electrometers in next fiscal year (as the stocks were finished this year).

**Action 2:** The ARG learned that landless households must pay Rs. 1,000 to the electricity company to get individual access to an electricity meter. There is no regular state subsidy for this expense. The ARG mobilized Rs. 25,000 from the ward office to pay for these expenses.



Figure 2 Improved access to drinking water

As of April 2019, 25 out of 34 households have electricity in the village. In the action research group, four out of nine have electricity. The reason why some households still have no electricity is because the village has two parts, and the electricity lines only go to the first part of the village. Lines will be extended, but the date has not yet been set. Instead of spending Rs. 100 per week on kerosene, they now spend Rs. 100 per month.



Figure 3 Improved access to drinking water

With electricity, people feel safer going outside, they save money and children can study. There are also more mosquitos.

**Action 3:** The ARG demanded a deeper well in the community, so that they can get safe drinking water in their village 12 months of the year. Similarly, they also cleaned an existing drinking water well to keep water safe and made a plan to clean it regularly.

The well has now been cleaned and has been drilled deeper. The well is now providing clean drinking water. People do not have to buy drinking water anymore and save time. However, for some people it is still far away and they want a second well.

### Did the group membership change?

The same members of the group still attend.

### Lessons learned and reflections

*“I have learned to speak out.” (Young Female Member)*

*“My mind has opened I learned how to think. I know we can do things. Before people made fun of us saying that we would not know what to do with electricity but now we have it and we managed it by ourselves.” (Older Female Member)*

*“I take sending my children to school more serious.” (Young Mother, Member)*

*“I learned how to solve problems in a group.” (Young Women, Member)*

*“We can solve other things too – we collected money to build a roof over this meeting place and visitors can also sleep here.” (Older Women, Member)*

*“If the whole programme would have been designed like this it would have been much better. The programme does not respond to people’s needs. There is a mismatch between what people need and what the programme provides and how it provides. We would be able to liberate many more Harwa-Charwa faster.” (Male NGO Programme Coordinator)*

*“Documentation is key in understanding the real situation on the ground.” (Male NGO Staff)*

### **Next steps**

- Dig a second well in the village
- Get citizenship cards. Several members in the group and several households in the village do not have a card. It is complicated to get a card because one needs a birth certificate and a marriage certificate, and many people do not have any cards or documentation which means it will be a long process for them.

### **NGO 3, District C**

**Issue: Initially child marriage, changed to alcohol**

**Location: Municipality 3, Village 3**

#### **Engagement phase**

The group membership started with seven women from seven wards – mostly living in the community without formal affiliations to an NGO or the state. They invited two men to join the group. During the life history collection and analysis, we identified loans as a major issue. NGO 3 first invited some of the poorest women from the wards to start the group. The village has about 2,100 people living in 665 households. The group did not want to work on loans. They initially wanted to work on child marriage. During the engagement phase this was problematic, as the group facilitator himself married a minor. After the meeting in November in Lahan, the group changed topic to reducing alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

The reason for a focus on alcohol abuse was in general that the group wanted to improve their conditions in life. Health issues such as fever, diarrhoea and typhoid are also issues that need attention. However, alcohol is a specific problem that affects many members as well as the rest of the community: “My husband fell down the road drunk and broke his leg. My husband does not work, he sits around all day drinking and I have six children that are going into a life of darkness” (Female Group Member).

The group members thought this was an important problem affecting the whole village. Each member estimated the number of households and the number of people who drink and who are alcoholics. They estimated 1,425 people drink alcohol and among them 500 are aged between 8–15 years old, with 285 who are sick.

The alcohol comes from a village outside around 2km away. It is homemade alcohol made with chemical ingredients such as fertiliser which have made people sick. The group reports that alcohol use was related to rape, domestic violence, selling of household goods including food and pieces of land, and a freak murder case in the nearby village of a man who killed his wife and made it look like a suicide. The rape case of a 13-year-old, by a 24/ 25-year-old man from the village, is currently in court.

It is mostly men who drink. Their response to the group has been hostile: “Men came up to me and asked me who I was thinking I was to try to stop them from drinking. They said the government allows me so what right do you have” (Female member).

There are three sources of alcohol: 1) homemade liquor sold illegally 2) factory made liquor that is sold illegally and 3) factory made alcohol that is sold legally with a license.

### **Evidence**

The group collected evidence based on their own experience and created a social map. The data, based on reports from their own members, showed that more than 65 percent of the members in the community drink, including some very young people (around 500 were 10–15 years old).

Data written down by the facilitator, along with a participatory visual mapping exercise, showed that most of the drinking is taking place in the late afternoon when men come back from work, around 4pm. They consume locally made illegal alcohol, and some factory liquor that is sold illegally.

### **Theory of change**

*The group sees alcohol abuse in a vicious cycle of 1) loans and debts, that 2) causes stress, which 3) results in illegal cheap alcohol consumption, and that 4) makes people sick and/ or unable to work, which increases the need for loans.*

### **Actions and results**

- The group have talked to the ward office
- They have spoken with the police to ask for support by patrolling and implementing the law
- They organised a rally in January 2019 to raise awareness. The slogan was “Stop Alcohol and Save Life”. The six Harwa-Charwa groups in the village, along with the police, the mayor, students and teachers, all participated in the rally
- The police patrolled in the morning and the afternoon and spoke with the illegal alcohol vendors. They made no arrests, but the shops moved outside the village, making access to alcohol more difficult
- Alcohol abuse and the violence associated with it has gone down
- The home situation for children has improved because conflicts are not escalating anymore. More kids are in school regularly because families are more stable

### **Lessons learned and reflections**

The group is divided over abolition. A minority of very vocal members want abolition. The majority has seen that abolition in Bihar has resulted in problems in Nepal, such as an increase in crime. “The rich profit from abolition, they own the factories, they can pay the police and they can make money of smuggling - it’s the poor that suffer” (Male Member).

### **Next steps**

- Some members in the group want to work on dowries next, to try to mobilise support from the government against dowries and access the support that is available for inter-caste marriage
- Some people believe that paying fines for consuming alcohol will help and propose that the ARG implements this and collects the money

## **NGO 4, District A**

**Issue: Unemployment and gender wage gap/unequal pay**

**Location: Municipality 5, Village 4**

### **Engagement phase**

This group was formed in October 2017 but was passive until March 2018. There are 12 female members in this group and most of them are from bonded labour families. At first, this group wanted to work on loans. While prioritising issues, they found that unemployment has compelled them to take loans from landlords and moneylenders.

To work in action research, people were organised together, facilitated by the NGO to build trust among group members and the NGO. NGO representatives counselled community people, advising that this was community-led process and the issues would be identified by group members, the evidence collected at community level by groups members, and theories of changes would also be prepared by themselves.

After the community building process, ARG members discussed various issues that existed in their community. Amongst many others, the following 13 issues were identified as the major issues in community: child marriage, underemployment, risky settlement, illness, death from cold waves, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of skill, dowries, low wages, high interest rates, child labour and good access of road.

ActionAid Nepal representatives supported them in determining how to prioritise the major issues. They used a participatory '*preference ranking*' tool to prioritise, and unemployment was found to be the major issue that should be addressed as soon as possible. Community people are not totally employed, and they work in the informal sector for a very low wage rate. In June/ July they work planting rice and in September they work on the harvesting.

During the discussion, it was found that people do not actually spend the whole day without doing any work, they work the on household chores, but this is not paid. It is mainly women in the village who are involved in household chores. When we talked with men in the community, they said that it is regarded as a shameful act if any of the men do household work.

During the discussion, one group member reported that the "landlord wants women to work because they are paid less, men have to be given 13–14kg rice for a day and women are paid only 8kg paddy for a day as wages" (Female Member), whilst another reported that "women are getting paid Rs. 200 while men get paid more - Rs. 400–500 a day" (Female Member).

ARG members are researching what kind of job in small scale businesses can be feasible for them. They have already experienced some unsuccessful ideas. Four group members were trained by the NGO to provide 'detergent power', but none of them are making money after the training. One man in the community reported that "they do not know where the raw materials are found, how much money should be invested and how much money they can earn by making detergent power".

IDS and ActionAid Nepal suggested to the group that they should undertake a deeper analysis of the production cost, market availability and expected profit before starting any business.

### **Problem Rationale**

After the workshop in Lahan Municipality with the other NGO, and based on reflections, the group decided to change its focus to unequal pay.

*"Men and women do different work and they say the men are stronger, but we are not weaker - we do different work and work longer than men. We plant and weed. Men plough."  
(Female Member)*

*When they ask for the same pay, "landlords say you can get Rs. 500 if you can get this done, but the amount of work it takes to get done what they ask for is not possible and they then refuse to pay us" (Female Member)*

*"We have to work to cover household expenses, but we want to get paid the same as men."  
(Female Member)*

*In April 2019, the group "did not know what the minimum wage is or that there are laws on wages." (Female Member)*

### **Evidence**

The group made a social map which they discussed among themselves and made notes on, but for five months no meeting minutes were taken. The group has not systematically collected evidence outside the members, and the NGO has not yet facilitated interactions with the relevant government agencies.

### **Theory of change**

*The group does not yet have a clear theory of change.*

### **Actions**

The group has not taken any actions.

### **Did the group membership change?**

The same members of the group still attend.

### **Lessons learned and reflections**

The group members are more aware of gender issues and the existence of a minimum wage.

*“Women are not weaker than men, but it is our culture that makes us be seen as weaker.”  
(Female Member)*

*“We are not succeeding because there is no solidarity and we are not organised.” (Female  
Member)*

The NGO is more aware of the complexity of the issues and the need to work directly and regularly with the community.

### **Next steps**

- The ARG plan to connect to other Harwa-Charwa groups nearby to ask about the wages that women from nearby villages are paid
- They plan to visit the Ward Office to complain about being underpaid by the landlords and ask for implementation of the policies on minimum wages
- NGO staff will find out information about the legal minimum wages in the district and link the group with the relevant government authorities

## **NGO 5**

**Issue: Child marriage**

**Location: Municipality 6, Village 5**

### **Engagement phase**

Group membership and formation took place on 17 August 2018. It had nine members. The group membership is mixed. The group leader is a politician, and members also include residents from various parts of the municipality, but only one female member from Village 4 where the members planned to do the action research. The political leader is not from Village 5.

The group identified a long list of problems including citizenship rights, lack of medicines or out of stock medicines, poor education, child marriage, dowries, violence against women, loans, unemployment, poor roads, lack of drinking water, no veterinarian, alcoholism, gambling, and illegal drug use.

“There is no lack of toilets, as the government forced people to construct them, but people don’t like them... They stink and we work on the land, so we stay there when we need to use the toilet” (Male Member).

The group decided to focus on child marriage in Village 5. They reasoned that child marriage leads to poor maternal and child health and overall poor health. However, there is only one member from that ward. They made a list of children who married in that village, based on the information provided by the member from the village. In the last two years, 15 out of 20 marriages (three boys and 12 girls) were of 15–16 year-olds, just before grade 10 so their dowry price was lower.

At the October meeting with IDS and ActionAid Nepal, the group agreed to go to the ward they selected and recruit members from there. Those members should decide what action research topic the group should take, it should not be imposed on the ward. As a result, they invited six people from Village 5 on 3 January. On 6 January, the group held its first meeting. Since then they have visited 80 out of 88 households in Village 5 to conduct a survey. They found 50 boys and 56 girls aged between 10–20 years old.

They found that during the last two years, 13 child marriages (rather than 15) took place, with eight girls and five boys between 15–17 years old getting married. They also collected some other information which has not yet been properly analysed.

### **Theory of change**

*If we reduce child marriage, then girls can apply for higher education and have improved health and better prospects.*

### **Actions**

They have not yet taken any actions.

### **Did the group membership change**

Six members from the targeted village joined the group in January 2019.

### **Lessons learned and reflections**

*“I have learned to adjust my opinions. When we do research on the ground, we sometimes learn that our assumptions do not match the reality. I still do not agree with child marriage, but I understand it is more complex to solve than I had hoped and thought half a year ago.”*

*(Female NGO Staff and Facilitator)*

### **Next steps**

Invite recently married child brides and grooms to share their experiences with adolescent boys and girls