

UNITED MISSION to NEPAL'S ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY

Strategy 2020-2025



Fullness of life for all, in a transformed Nepali society

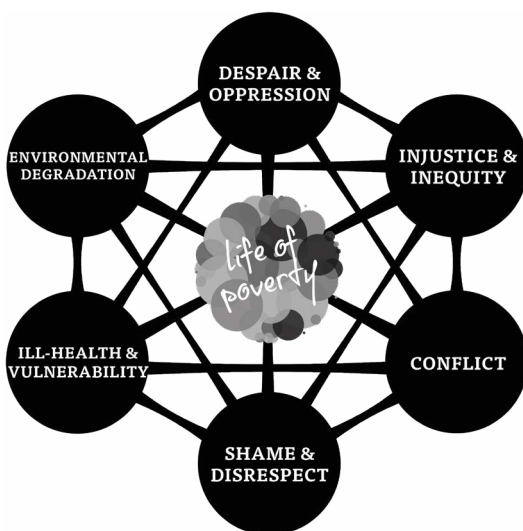
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1.0 THE UMN FRAMEWORK

1.1 UMN's Understanding of Poverty

UMN defines poverty using the Life of Poverty model shown at right. Poverty is multi-dimensional and arises from a complex web of interrelated causes which work together to limit the ability of human beings to live as God intended. Poverty is much more complex than simple material lack. The impacts of poverty occur at the individual, household, community, district and national levels of society. When UMN refers to the poorest people living in poverty (PPLP), it uses this model to define them in each context.



1.2 UMN's Vision, Mission & Values

1.2.1 Vision

UMN's vision is: "**Fullness of life for all, in a transformed Nepali society.**"

Based on Jesus' words in John 10:10, *Fullness of Life* as UMN understands it is the opposite of a *Life of Poverty*. The components of Fullness of Life, as defined by UMN, are shown in the model at left. The different aspects of the Life of Poverty model are inverted and expressed positively in the Fullness of Life model.



1.2.2 Mission

Inspired by the love and teachings of Jesus Christ, in partnership with the Christian community and others in Nepal and worldwide, we will serve the people of Nepal, particularly those who live in poverty:

- ➔ to pursue peace and justice for all;
- ➔ to address the root causes of poverty; and
- ➔ to make Christ known by word and life.

1.2.3 Values

UMN's six core values are:

- ➔ Love and Service
- ➔ Equity and Social Justice
- ➔ Integrity
- ➔ Innovation and Creativity
- ➔ Special Concern for Poor and Marginalised
- ➔ People Care for the Environment

Being motivated and dependent on God, we believe these values to be foundational to our work. They influence our behaviour, our choice of partners, the way we work with our partners, and the selection and development of staff.

1.3 UMN's Theory of Change

1.3.1 Introduction

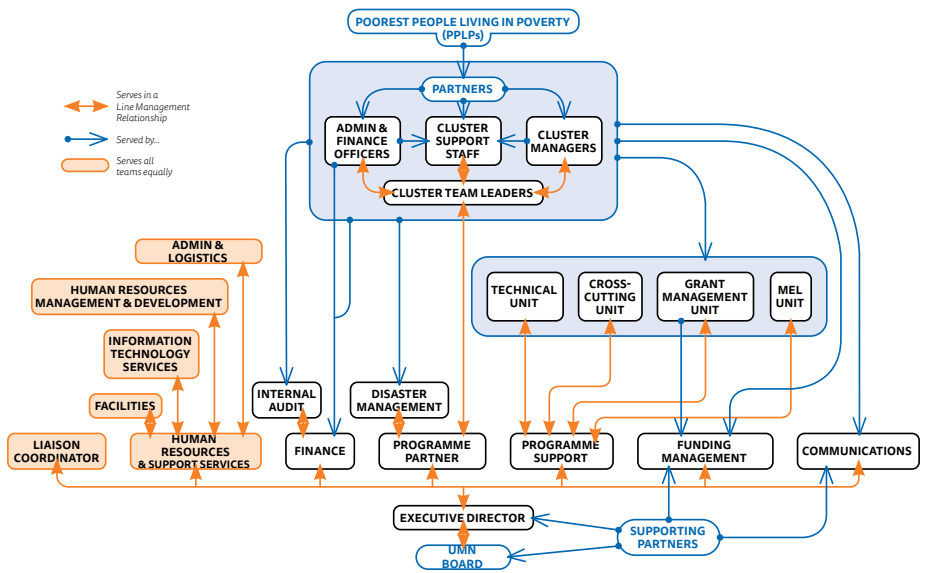
UMN's work is based on the radical ministry and example of Jesus Christ. The change that UMN demands from its work is also radical: all members of a community moving away from a Life of Poverty towards the promised enjoyment of **Fullness of Life**. This long-term process of continuous positive change is what UMN means by "community transformation."

UMN acknowledges that it cannot bring about this kind of transformation directly through its own work. Radical transformation is contingent first on the power of God, for which UMN prays in all its work, and secondly on community members' own commitment to self-transformation. It cannot be brought about by any amount of external pressure, intimidation, or alluring activities.

The primary objective of UMN's work is therefore to create and nurture the conditions that allow communities to transform themselves. Community members (including the poorest/most marginalised individuals as well as the relatively powerful) must be the agents, not just the objects, of transformation. They are the only ones who can ultimately decide which of their long-held values and practices will continue to be foundational to their common life and which are in need of challenge. They must set the agenda for change in their community, as empowered, proactive decision-makers rather than passive participants in externally planned projects.

UMN's most immediate opportunity for empowerment is to share *UMN's own power*—its funds, its relationships and network connections, its knowledge and tools. UMN's strategies and projects must be designed from the bottom up, giving communities genuine power over the shape of UMN's work and the use of UMN's resources. Key design decisions must be taken not between UMN's Kathmandu-based staff and international funding partners, but between community, local partner, and UMN staff based in Cluster offices as close as possible to the communities.

This inversion of typical decision-making power relations and the *servant mindset* that accompanies it are conveyed in UMN's most recent organogramme (shown on the next page). This proposed way of working also sets a model for the relationship between communities and local government, allowing UMN not just to recommend bottom-up decision-making to the government but to demonstrate it with practical examples.



So UMN and its partner NGOs will work with communities, and specifically the poorest people living in poverty (PPLP) in those communities, to identify:

- ➔ A vision for transformation in which all members of the community are freed from poverty
- ➔ The factors that both support and hinder this transformation, including the local resources that community members/PPLP can use to overcome the barriers to change
- ➔ The role UMN and other actors (including local government) can play in facilitating this transformation

These discussions will shape UMN projects and also form the basis of UMN's **Cluster Strategies**, which apply the principles of this Theory of Change to the specifics of the local context. The participatory analysis carried out in Cluster Strategies will provide a basis for UMN to prioritise between potential projects and invest in the ones most likely to be transformative.

Throughout its work, UMN must remain open to transformation as well. Rather than taking the role of a detached expert agency that already has all the necessary skills to bring people to Fullness of Life, UMN is committed to growing, learning, improving, and changing along with the communities it serves.

Post-2020 Comment: The public health measures necessary to reduce the spread of coronavirus have created significant obstacles to bottom-up, participatory approaches. During high-risk periods for viral spread, it is hard to bring people together, especially in larger numbers, for consultation and deliberation. Travel restrictions and lockdowns can also make it difficult for UMN and partner staff to reach and empower communities. However, these are obstacles to be overcome by creative use of technology, normalisation of public health measures like masks and distancing, and making the most of the times when unrestricted access to communities are possible. They do not fundamentally alter UMN's Theory of Change.

1.3.2 Overall context

For the past few decades, Nepal has been undergoing extensive socio-economic transformation through which many people have already escaped from one or more dimensions of poverty.

Some of the key factors in this rapid transformation have included:

- ➔ Greater connectedness with the outside world, through e.g. mass migration, mobile phone networks, and motorable roads, even in Nepal's remotest rural areas

- ➡ The steady expansion of government services, including education, health, and agricultural extension, and greater awareness by Nepali citizens of their rights to such services
- ➡ Disruption of traditional fatalism and exclusionary caste and ethnic hierarchies, both by civil society efforts and by Nepal's decade of civil conflict
- ➡ Urban livelihood opportunities (or the perception thereof) drawing Nepalis by the hundreds of thousands into Kathmandu, Pokhara, and the cities of the Terai
- ➡ Significantly greater participation by women in decision-making bodies, and other moves away from gender discrimination.

It is at this point vanishingly rare to find a village in Nepal that is not caught up in fundamental change. However, these processes of transformation have had many negative side effects and still leave many households behind (notably but not exclusively in rural areas).

Nepal is also in the midst of a continuing political transformation. This has included not only a new architecture of government, but the reassertion across Nepal of many identities previously suppressed or marginalised in the process of nation-building: Dalit, *janajati*, Madhesi, minority religions and languages. The country's political transformation reached a new stage when the 2015 Constitution formally declared Nepal an inclusive, federal, and secular republic.

The devolution of power and funding to the elected representatives of the 7 provinces (*pradesh*) and 753 municipalities (*palika*) will, to the extent it succeeds, be another driver of community-level transformation. There are already signs of this. Palika-level provision of vital services (e.g. birth registration, school exams) has begun to reduce people's vulnerability, increase their awareness of their rights as citizens, and ease their engagement with their government.

Federalisation remains a source of uncertainty, however, with the final balance of responsibility and authority between federal levels a matter of ongoing contention. Nepal has over the years built up an extremely progressive and pro-poor body of legislation and policy; implementation at local level continues to be limited, however, especially where that would challenge entrenched structures of power and/or injustice.

After decades of social and political disruption, it is unsurprising that social harmony is a growing priority of many Nepali citizens, not least those in government. INGOs and NGOs, especially if faith-based, are often accused of breaking social harmony through advocacy, awareness-raising among marginalised groups, partisanship, and/or proselytism. A growing number of laws and policies seek to bar them from doing so. UMN must continue to help communities manage the strains and conflicts of transformation—and

to convey that social harmony comes not from suppression of difference or dissent, but from respectful mutual sharing between citizens with different histories, beliefs, values, and political priorities.

Environmentally, Nepal is struggling with many impacts of unsustainable economic development, including most conspicuously air pollution, proliferation of non-biodegradable waste, overextraction of natural resources (e.g. the “mining” of medicinal herbs), aquifer depletion, slope destabilization by road cutting, and flood and landslide control measures that protect some areas at the expense of others.

Climate change exacerbates many of these problems and creates others, through e.g. delayed or erratic monsoon rains and glacial outburst floods. Natural hazards, both hydro-meteorological and seismic, put at risk many of the achievements of community transformation.

Within this context, UMN’s work must begin by investigating the processes of transformation that are already going on in a given area. By what routes are people in these communities escaping poverty? Does the process create risks, negative consequences, or community tensions? If so, can these consequences be mitigated, or should the community be looking for other, better pathways out of poverty? Above all: who is being left out, or left behind, and why?

Post-2020 Comment: The coronavirus pandemic was a major change to our working context, constraining access to Cluster working areas for much of 2020 after the declaration of a national lockdown in March. Policy reactions to COVID-19 in Nepal and other countries created many new vulnerabilities including:

- Loss of labour migration opportunities; many returnees faced fear/stigma as potential virus spreaders, as well as a lack of local jobs
 - Disruption to many other livelihoods by lockdowns and travel restrictions
 - Closure of schools and sporadic adoption of distance learning methodologies
 - Significant reduction in access to normal health services for many people, due to lockdown, travel restriction, fear of viral transmission, and health workers’ focus on the pandemic
 - New sources of anxiety and reduced support for mental health
 - Increased exposure to gender-based and domestic violence, especially for women/girls
- These urgent COVID-related needs have added new priorities to UMN’s work with the poor.

1.3.3 For and with whom will UMN work?

UMN is committed by its values and strategy to work with the poorest people living in poverty (PPLP). The categories of people most commonly left behind in processes of community transformation include:

- women, especially single women or spouses/female family members of migrants;
- people with disabilities (PWD);
- Dalits (i.e. people from castes that are traditionally discriminated against);
- ethnic/linguistic minorities with a history of discrimination;
- highly vulnerable children/adolescents (e.g. orphans, children without access to education, adolescents without livelihood opportunities);
- the elderly (especially given the migration-driven breakdown of traditional family-based care);
- people with psychosocial disorders;
- people with socially stigmatised diseases, such as leprosy or HIV;
- people without rights to productive assets (especially land);
- stateless people, e.g. border area residents not recognised as Nepali citizens;
- people living in ecologically fragile areas or with livelihoods highly vulnerable to disruption;
- people with addictions and/or tendencies to alcohol abuse;
- people with dangerous or stigmatised livelihoods, such as sex workers.

Each Cluster Strategy will identify specific groups that are being left behind in their target palikas (based in significant part on participatory exercises in the community to determine who they see as poorest and most vulnerable) and will propose ways to bring these PPLP into a whole-community transformation toward *Fullness of Life*.

Post-2020 Comment: In addition to above mentioned groups, all the Clusters have re-worked their strategies and identified the following key groups of people whose vulnerability has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Returnee migrants, especially from India
- Daily wage labourers, some small retailers, and some smallholder farmers
- Pregnant and lactating mothers
- School children and adolescent girls
- Youths
- Parents
- Women and girls affected by gender-based and domestic violence
- People with mental illness
- Natuwa (a nomadic people group who move around regularly – in Kapilvastu Cluster)

To bring about change for the PPLP always requires working with the whole community, including:

- the powerful and the powerless
- the duty-bearers and the rights-holders
- those who are in authority and those who are not

UMN facilitators will discuss with community groups and key informants to identify the community power-holders who support pro-poor change and those who are barriers to pro-poor change. UMN will work with both groups in authority:

- the supporters of change, because UMN needs to identify and work with allies; and
- those who oppose change, because it will be difficult to effect change without some significant changes in attitude, values, and basic belief among these groups.

Finally, UMN will carry out all its work with appropriate local civil society partners, seeking to build them up in both their technical effectiveness and their outworking of values. UMN partners will include both local voluntary CSOs (e.g. networks of disabled people or local congregations), who have the crucial capacity to mobilise local collective action, as well as project-implementing NGOs, which often lack the capacity to mobilise volunteers but are effective as channels of grant funding to meet local needs. UMN will respect and build on the distinct professional capacities of each type of partner.

1.3.4 What will UMN seek to change?

UMN seeks to change the root causes of poverty (see 1.1) that ensnare PPLP and prevent them from taking transformative action. These root causes typically manifest themselves through:

- **Institutions, policies and practices.** Government, civil society, and business/market institutions often have unjust policies (formal or informal) that exclude marginalised groups and reinforce the poverty trap. So too do traditional community institutions, with harmful practices that may have endured for generations.
- **Relationships.** A shared vision based in mutual trust and respect is required for community transformation. But trust and respect are often lacking, due to relationships broken by a history of conflict, prejudices, or systemic injustice. UMN must work to restore/create honest, trusting, mutually empowering relationships within the community and between community members and external stakeholders.
- **Beliefs, worldview, and attitudes.** When the poor believe false things about themselves, it leads to despair. When the powerful believe false things about the poor, it leads to oppression. Challenging these kinds of false beliefs and perceptions is a crucial stage in freeing communities to transform themselves (represented in UMN's Fullness of Life model by the shift from Despair & Oppression to Hope & Freedom).

As part of developing each Cluster Strategy, UMN will facilitate a participatory systems analysis by PPLP and their neighbours, looking at poverty in their community. This will help the community identify the specific factors (whether institutions, relationships, worldview, or other structures) that are driving poverty in their context, and agree how best to transform those factors.

Intervening in any of these areas will change the **distribution and use of power**¹ in communities. In all its work, UMN will encourage communities to move toward distributions of power that are more equitable, just, and constructive (i.e. in which people with power use it to build up people who have less). UMN will seek to model this in its own use of power and resources, and encourage its NGO partners to do the same.

1.3.5 What will UMN do to achieve change?

When outside intervention fails to achieve transformative outcomes in a community, it is often because that intervention was not seriously designed to achieve transformation. Some strategic plans end up merely as lists of opportunities, identifying a range of thematic projects that are known to be mutually acceptable to donors, local authorities, and communities. Such projects alleviate the symptoms of poverty but often fail to transform it, because:

- they are justified on the basis of a high-level analysis of national or regional problems, rather than actual community-level poverty dynamics—the specific factors that have trapped specific groups in poverty and vulnerability; or
- they slip into prioritising reliable, readily countable results, rather than riskier, harder-to-measure, but potentially transformative activities; or
- they end up benefiting the moderately poor, rather than the excluded poorest people; or
- they are done in isolation, rather than part of an integrated programme; and/or
- they are selected and designed externally (or with limited community consultation), reducing communities to passive participants rather than agents of their own transformation

UMN seeks deliberately to avoid these pitfalls. It will instead support communities to set their own community vision, to analyse the local system of poverty for themselves, and to shape a holistic, multi-sectoral programme that aims genuinely to transform that system. The result will be Cluster Strategies and specific projects based in locally specific theories of change, developed jointly with the community and local partners.

¹ For purposes of our work UMN understands power as the authority/capacity held by certain people to have either a positive or negative influence on persons, groups, social organisations, systems and structures, which have direct relationship with poverty and being poor.

Post-2020 Comment: Each Cluster had developed an integrated Cluster Strategy in 2019-20 through extensive bottom-up consultation. Due to the new needs and uncertainties of the coronavirus pandemic, however, it became impossible to start outworking these as planned.

Instead, each Cluster developed an Interim Cluster Strategic Plan (ISCP) for 2021-22 which focused on the challenges of addressing new emergency needs and adapting existing project commitments to the COVID-19 context.

In early 2022, each Cluster will review its original Cluster Strategy and agree a new 2023-25 Cluster Strategy, taking into account the learning of the pandemic period.

Of course, many community members themselves may not want I/NGO projects that aim to be truly transformative. This might be because:

- ➔ they are not PPLP, and benefit from the status quo
- ➔ broken relationships are a barrier to their cooperation with their neighbours
- ➔ some root causes (e.g. alcoholism, casteism) may be too sensitive for people to discuss
- ➔ they don't trust I/NGO-facilitated efforts at transformative change, and would rather use I/NGOs as a channel of welfare aid

UMN will encourage the community to design as transformative a programme as they are ready for, while working to build their confidence and commitment to greater transformation. Meanwhile, UMN will seek to identify and develop the capacities of the local **influential individuals, civil society** organisations, and **government** institutions that are committed to justice and pro-poor change.

The specific approaches and thematic projects UMN pursues in any given Cluster will be determined by local needs and priorities. However, UMN recognises that some issues must be addressed in all its programming in order to bring about transformational change. These cross-cutting issues, which will be mainstreamed across *all* UMN activities, include:

- ➔ **Conflict Sensitivity**, minimising harm from UMN's work and contributing to peace and harmony.
- ➔ **Disability**, looking at how UMN's work can include people with physical and mental disabilities.
- ➔ **Environment & Climate Change**, reducing negative impacts from UMN's work and helping people sustainably adapt to their changing environment.
- ➔ **Gender**, addressing the destructive impact of gender inequity on both women and men across Nepal.

There are in addition three key areas which will be included in every Cluster's strategy, though not in every single project:

- ➞ **Disasters.** UMN will work across all Clusters to increase the preparedness of staff and partners to respond to major disasters, notably through contingency planning for a major earthquake, and to reduce the risk of disasters through community resilience-building work.

Post-2020 Comment: The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the priority of building community resilience and preparedness for pandemics and more broadly for unforeseen shocks. UMN has adapted its processes, policies and strategies to this new crisis, including changes to UMN's health and safety guidelines, evacuation plan during crisis, group process approach, and remote monitoring and planning. Cluster teams' regular plans were revised to address new relief and recovery needs, applying a conflict risk assessment and mitigation tool that had been updated for this disaster. The clusters have now developed Interim cluster strategic plans of two years to meet the new needs/gaps created by the pandemic. UMN will continue to build resilience and response capacity in its partners and communities.

- ➞ **Governance.** UMN will look for opportunities to work with local governments to increase participation and transparency, as well as helping communities and PPLP claim their rights. UMN will also work with civil society partners to identify any opportunities for them to improve their own internal governance.
- ➞ **Integral Development.** UMN's Christian identity and values give it a distinctive opportunity to challenge, inspire, and train local Nepali congregations and Christian organisations to address poverty, engage with their communities, and increase social harmony.

1.3.6 How will UMN know if its Theory of Change is valid?

Each Cluster Strategy will identify key expected outcomes that are specific to the local poverty context, which will allow UMN to periodically assess whether transformative change is taking place. See Section 3 below for greater detail. Some common outcomes expected in any process of community transformation involve the major stakeholders:

- ➞ **Empowered communities.** Mobilised and organised; aware of rights and opportunities; overcoming social barriers and broken relationships to build trust; with experience in deliberation and decision-making about their own transformation.

- ➡ **Sustainable local civil society associations.** Capable of fostering collective action toward a common goal for mutual benefit; an effective channel for external resources and ideas, but not entirely dependent on them; technically proficient in their areas of activity.
- ➡ **Responsive local government.** Committed to pro-poor change; welcoming community-level participation in planning processes; responsive to feedback from citizens and local civil society.

UMN will have an annual review discussion in each Cluster in which the team will assess the outcomes achieved and whether the Cluster Strategy is genuinely resulting in transformation.

Meanwhile, UMN will continue to work toward an environment where learning is at the centre of everything it does, continually asking questions about how change is happening (or not) and seeking to improve. UMN will strengthen systems at all levels that encourage and value learning, and ensure that learning is used in improving performance.

2.0 PROGRAMME STRATEGY

2.1 Where UMN Works

Nepal's 2017 constitution created 760 new elected governments at provincial (*pradesh*) and municipal (*palika*) level. To increase the impact of UMN's work under the new constitutional structure, UMN narrowed its geographic focus, with the goal that by 2020 we would be working in only 3-4 provinces, and focusing on only 1-2 palikas per Cluster office.

The target provinces and palikas were chosen on the basis of poverty, as assessed by various indicators of economic deprivation, ill health, disempowerment, insecurity, and disaster vulnerability.

Province	District	Palikas	UMN working there since:
Sudurpaschim	Doti	Badikedar Bogtan	2009 2020
	Bajhang	Bungal Thalara	2018 2012
Lumbini	Rukum East	Bhume Putha Uttarganga	2010 2020
	Kapilvastu	Mayadevi Yasodhara	2015 2015
	Nawalparasi	Palhi Nandan Pratappur	2017 2019
Karnali	Mugu	Mugum Karmarong Soru	2012 2020

UMN and our partners will work to serve the poor living in these target areas. Systematically addressing the root causes of their poverty will at times require looking beyond borders, e.g. when a key value chain actor, hazard, or network/institution is based elsewhere. Any work done outside these areas will however be for the ultimate purpose of supporting PPLP in our working areas.

Given the extreme rates of poverty in Karnali Province and Province 2, UMN is not satisfied to have only one Cluster in the former and none in the latter. Following the closure of Dhading and Sunsari Clusters in 2020, UMN will explore opening a second Karnali Province Cluster in a district to be selected on the basis of poverty and relative I/NGO neglect. Thereafter, UMN plans to open a Cluster in Province 2.

2.2 What UMN Does

2.2.1 Bottom-up, integrated programming

In keeping with the Theory of Change described above, UMN's local partners will use a participatory toolkit to help the whole community (including PPLP) design projects that address poverty. Community participants in the design process will not only provide needs information to external aid actors, but will lead the process of setting a vision, analysing their situation (including unrealised local capacities), agreeing on activities, and identifying signs of positive change (i.e. indicators to monitor).

UMN's new participatory bottom-up design framework, piloted in 2019, will be the basis for its projects in the coming strategic period. This framework may be adapted to the realities of particular funding opportunities, but is intended to be implemented proactively, so that priorities for action can be set by the community rather than an international donor and be shaped by the local context rather than a technical sector label.

Until recently, UMN has tended to structure its projects in the following ways:

- Projects were managed within technical teams, and thus had a sectoral focus (e.g. livelihoods, health, good governance)
- Many projects were spread across multiple Clusters, with a manager in Kathmandu and officers in the Clusters
- Each project was supported by one UMN funding partner
- Within each Cluster, projects tended to be geographically distinct and separate. This allowed UMN to reach many parts of the district, but usually only with single-sector projects that had few opportunities for synergy with other work.

These features of UMN's project structure have been changing since 2018. UMN's projects have been reoriented to be single-Cluster, sectorally integrated, and geographically focused. Project manager roles based in Kathmandu have been replaced with manager roles in the Cluster offices, to facilitate decision-making and design at community level. Multiple funding partners are now invited to support integrated programming in a Cluster.

The intended goal of these changes, which should be realised in the 2020-25 strategic period, is for UMN's work to be more focused and better integrated, in order to deliver better outcomes for PPLP.

Post-2020 Comment: Since 2018, UMN had begun to design programmes/projects using a more participatory, bottom-up integrated approach. However, the pandemic led to major restrictions on free movement and engagement with the community. A UMN working group reviewed the options for adapting the process and drafted new guidelines on how to conduct participatory programme design with limited visits and engagement over the phone. This is not ideal but allows us to pursue design in line with the strategic vision even during times when it is impossible to carry out a process that relies on extensive in-person interaction. During times when Cluster staff on the ground have more freedom to interact with the community and other stakeholders but it is not possible for Programme Support Team (PST) members to travel to join them, PST can still develop/adapt relevant tools, analyse the outcomes and document them together with the Cluster Teams.

2.2.2 Thematic work

Notwithstanding the reorientation of UMN's work so that projects and strategic goals are not primarily categorised by technical sector, UMN retains a strong commitment to technical excellence. The Clusters will be supported by Technical Leads in the six key sectors of Education, Good Governance, Health, Integral Development, Livelihoods, and Peace & Protection, with further technical support in UMN's Cross-Cutting Areas of Climate Change/ Environment, Conflict Sensitivity, Disability, and Gender.

There has been a tendency for UMN to carry out a wide range of projects under each sector label. This can make it harder for UMN's staff and local partners to grow beyond a basic level of technical capacity. To bring increased focus to its work, for each sector UMN has identified an **Area of Excellence**:

Education	Child-friendly education	Integral Dev't	Church & community transformation
Governance	Accountability	Livelihoods	Diversified livelihoods
Health	Maternal-child health	Peace & Protection	Ending domestic violence

UMN will intentionally invest in increasing its capacity to deliver high-quality outcomes in these areas. Relative to other subsectors, UMN expects to start a higher proportion of new work in these Areas of Excellence. Over time, UMN aims to build a distinctive reputation in these areas and to be recognised by other development actors, internationally and in Nepal, as a key source for learning and good practice.

UMN's advocacy and policy work will remain largely at local level. UMN will focus on equipping local actors to be aware of the rights, opportunities, and resources granted to them in the existing (often quite robust) national level legal and policy framework, as well as supporting Nepal's elected local governments to establish pro-poor policies using their constitutional powers. UMN will not during this strategic period seek to build up a strong independent capacity to contribute to national or international advocacy, but will participate in advocacy through networks and partnerships of which it is a member.

Post-2020 Comment: In the initial phases of the pandemic, UMN's thematic leads refocused on engagement with the United Nations cluster system's priority technical areas: health, WASH, education, livelihoods, and socio-economic recovery including food security and protection clusters. All thematic areas have incorporated the needs created by the crisis and defined strategies on how and what to focus during or post-pandemic. The full outworking of the AOE's, like many other elements of the strategy, will begin somewhat later than planned due to the centrality of addressing COVID-19 in 2020-21.

2.2.3 UMN structure

UMN's organisation chart (in 1.3.1 above) emphasises that its overall goal is to serve the poorest and most marginalised people of Nepal. UMN does this primarily through local partnerships, with a mindset of serving locally-based NGOs in order to serve the poorest people living in local communities.

Cluster-based staff, who most directly engage with UMN's local NGO partners, constitute the heart of UMN's **Programme Partner Team** (PPT). The PPT is responsible for the *design and implementation* of UMN's development programmes through collaborative processes involving Cluster, partner, and community. This is a shift from UMN's previous practice, in which Cluster teams were primarily responsible for *implementation* while design decisions were largely made by Technical teams and a Kathmandu-based Programme Development Unit.

UMN's PPT also includes the Disaster Management Unit, which is responsible for ensuring the humanitarian response capacity of UMN and its partners. In any future major disaster, this unit would take on responsibility for design and implementation of a large-scale relief programme (e.g. UMN's Dhading Disaster Response team following the 2015 earthquakes).

For PPT and partners to fully take on responsibility for the process of programme design as well as implementation, many capacities need to be transferred to Cluster and partner staff, e.g. skills in participatory design, technical quality, grantwriting, and reporting. The team with primary responsibility for this vital capacity building work is the **Programme Support Team (PST)**.

PST comprises a Technical Unit, a Cross-Cutting Unit, a Grant Management Unit, and a Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Unit. Each unit is responsible for working with PPT and partner staff to identify capacity gaps in the unit's focus area, and to address those gaps through coaching, training, and accompaniment. UMN's PST is also responsible for quality assurance and learning.

UMN's **Corporate Teams** will continue to provide vital support. These include the Funding Management Team, the Finance Team, the HR & Support Services Team, and the Communications Team, as well as the Liaison Coordinator.

UMN will continue bringing **expatriate** specialist volunteers under its longstanding agreements with the Government of Nepal. The role of expatriates in UMN's Cluster work has changed over time; from being team leaders and budget holders, now expatriates are (almost without exception) advisors and influencers, reporting to Nepali team leaders and specialists. This trend will continue, as part of UMN's long-term commitment to Nepali-led development. UMN's expatriates do not displace Nepali employees but complement and add value to their work.

For nearly two decades, UMN's strategy regarding the **mission hospitals** in Tansen and Okhaldhunga has been to transition them to ownership by a like-minded Nepali institution. That Board mandate formally ended in 2017, in recognition that the obstacles to a handover were only increasing and that it would be better for UMN leadership to pursue synergies between Clusters and Hospitals.

The Hospitals will remain largely autonomous, with their own vision statements, values, and strategies set by their Internal Management Committees (IMCs). UMN's governance role will remain high-level oversight. Meanwhile, UMN will seek to increase mutual learning and action between its Cluster and Hospital teams on matters including:

- Rural community health programming
- Mother-child health
- Mental health, trauma care, and psychosocial rehabilitation
- Cross-cutting issues, notably community-based rehabilitation of disability
- Disaster risk reduction and preparedness
- Integral development and pastoral care

2.3 With Whom UMN Partners

2.3.1 Local NGO partners

UMN's partnership with local organisations, mainly NGOs, is value-based with the aim to support partners to develop appropriate capacities to bring about community transformation where they live. Partnership in UMN is established in set principles such as openness, integrity, transparency, accountability, respect, and participation. UMN will continue to encourage and facilitate partners to develop their own vision and strengths, not merely serving as a channel for UMN's own vision.

UMN broadly categorises these local partners into two types: **local collective** action partners and **grant mobilising** partners. The first type of partner NGOs are member / volunteer based and mobilise themselves and communities for common issues for collective benefits. These partners may not have strong capacities to manage big, complex grant funding—and often do not need it to be effective at grassroots level. UMN will seek to engage with these partners in a way that does not have a negative impact on their ability to foster local voluntary action (i.e. not reducing the number of volunteers they can attract) and help them grow while remaining grounded in volunteerism. In the past, UMN has sometimes classed these as “low capacity partners,” but will no longer apply this label to any partner with significant capacity to mobilise local collective action. Such capacities can be much more important than grant management capacities, when it comes to fostering actual community transformation!

The second type of partner NGOs are required to have capacities and systems in place to manage bigger and complex funds. UMN will seek to strengthen these partners' capacities for donor compliance and proposal development, with the goal that they will eventually be able to establish and sustain relationships with donors without needing UMN as a middleman.

UMN understands that it may take some time to grow local partners as envisioned. UMN will invest in partners' organisational development aspects as well as their technical excellence, so that they will be able to serve the disadvantaged and vulnerable communities to their full potential. UMN will further support them to be accountable and transparent to their rights holders in delivering services, managing resources and fulfilling promises while addressing needs. Both types of partner NGOs are drivers of envisioned change and have strong linkage to the communities to be served.

2.3.2 Other local and national partners

In addition to UMN's long-term partner NGOs, UMN has the following categories of partnership:

- **Emergency Response Partners**, to respond to emergency situations in the country. Emergency Response partners may be selected when necessary following a disaster, when going through the lengthy formal process of partnership is not practical. This sort of partnership will be short term, guided by the emergency situation.
- **Strategic Partners** including government institutions, semi-government institutions (e.g. Ministry of Education; Department of Education; Family Health Division; Agriculture Department; etc.) and experienced and high capacity (I)NGOs. The scope of the Strategic Partnership is to develop strategic alliances based on specific strengths required to accomplish a certain task/project or address particular issue/gaps. The relationship with UMN and Strategic Partners is formalised by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Moreover, UMN can have a working relationship with i) Networks; ii) Alliances; iii) Movements, lobby, campaigns, advocacy forums; and iv) Relational Associates to share learning and best practices for improvement; and to advocate or demonstrate solidarity on certain issues of common interest and importance. The relationship may be maintained loosely or by some kind of membership agreement.

2.3.3 International partners

UMN will continue to partner internationally with a wide variety of institutions that wish to support work in Nepal consistent with UMN's vision, mission, and values. These will include funding partners (who fund UMN's projects), sending partners (who support the deployment of expatriate volunteers), and a range of like-minded networks and alliances.

2.4 How UMN Learns

2.4.1 Results orientation

UMN's programme interventions, strategies, approaches and methods will emphasise impact, and how it can be assessed and measured effectively. UMN commits to the evaluation of results; it is not satisfied with tracking activities and processes. UMN's preferred approach incorporates **outcome mapping** and **outcome harvesting**.

As noted in UMN's Theory of Change, poverty is systematic and underpinned by the behaviour, mindset, relationships and attitude of key stakeholders, including the PPLPs themselves. Outcome mapping recognizes the complexity involved in trying to impact such problems, and hence invites systems thinking and a probing, learning and adaptive approach to change.

To help this happen effectively, UMN will incorporate a continuous participatory monitoring, evaluation and reflection system into its projects. Such system must be flexible, adaptive to context, and encompassing to go and see beyond

what was planned; capture changes taking place that were not foreseen or intended – both in favour of or against the desired community transformation.

Outcome mapping and outcome harvesting offer tools that are evolving in nature, and capture changes that go beyond what can be tracked using more typical logical framework approaches. UMN will however build the capacity of all relevant staff and local partners to use a range of results-based approaches, including logframes—recognising that logframe-centred approaches to results management are required by many of our partners, and that it is possible to articulate many of the insights from outcome mapping within a logical framework.

UMN will establish clear baseline and endline data for all desired changes in each project. There will be a regular participatory monitoring system, midterm and final evaluation of each project. The final evaluation will seek to capture the ultimate impact of our interventions while the midterm evaluations will provide us the sense of direction towards the ultimate goal.

UMN plans to use outcome harvesting as the main evaluation approach for midterm evaluations, beginning with some projects (as a pilot) and if successful, in more and more projects gradually. Outcome harvesting is an approach that engages with “boundary partners” to determine significant outcomes of the intervention, both intended and unintended, and builds credible evidence to ascertain the contributions of the intervention to the outcome. All these processes will be as participatory as possible.

In addition to project evaluation, there will be periodic programme reviews at Cluster level to assess whether our integrated programmes as described in the Cluster Strategy are leading to actual **transformative outcomes**, considering the overall fullness of life model.

Post-2020 Comment: UMN’s first pilot project for outcome mapping and outcome harvesting (OM/OH) was just beginning in Bajhang Cluster when a countrywide lockdown was enforced. This led to severe delays in UMN’s ability to pilot OM/OH on the envisioned timescale; and like other highly participatory approaches OM/OH must be adapted to the requirements of physical distancing and protecting the vulnerable. UMN’s capacity to roll out a new approach is also compromised by pandemic travel restrictions between Kathmandu and the Clusters. UMN continues to believe that OM/OH is the approach best suited to its strategy; a working group is developing a plan to address the challenges of rolling out OM/OH later in the strategy period, taking account of the gaps and delays created by the pandemic.

2.4.2 Accountability and feedback mechanisms

UMN desires to be accountable and transparent in what it does. As part of the Dhading Disaster Response Programme in 2015 UMN developed a formal Feedback and Response Mechanism (FRM) for the first time. Based on the principles of Confidentiality, Accessibility, Transparency, Timeliness, and Safety, the FRM has been applied across the organisation since 2018-19. UMN staff and local partner organisations were trained in its principles, and communities and other stakeholders have also been gradually covered in orientation sessions on FRM.

The FRM plan and communication channels are disseminated in appropriate interventions of the organisation. Various forms of public announcement, including hoarding boards, leaflets, dedicated

phone number, and email ID, are being used to communicate with targeted populations. In each Cluster, a FRM focal person has been designated and a 'Feedback Response Committee' has been formed. A committee at Thapathali level is provisioned to address complex complaints and feedback issues especially medium and high category. UMN will ensure enough dedicated staff are involved to empower communities to participate effectively in this mechanism and to recommend necessary changes in the system over time.

2.4.3 Research and replication

Within the Programme Support Team, UMN has dedicated staff carrying out research to inform the design and implementation of UMN projects. Prioritized research areas have been identified on the basis of programmatic needs and will be updated on an annual basis or as needed. In the coming five years UMN plans to make its research approaches more participatory and action/reflection oriented, involving Cluster and partner staff in design, implementation and analysis of data, while also increasing UMN engagement with universities and international development think tanks/networks.

Research will be carried out both to inform the design of our projects and programmes and to document successful outcomes of UMN work which can be shared among different Clusters and other actors, promoting replication. Learning will be shared between UMN programmes through a variety of means, including annual Learning Reviews in Thapathali, joint Cluster visits, and regular learning newsletters.

2.5 What risks UMN faces

As with any strategy, there are risks associated with it that may prevent the objectives being achieved. The major risks, with the associated mitigating strategy, are identified as (in order of perceived risk):

	Risk	Key Mitigation Approaches
1	<p>Major earthquake The April-May 2015 earthquakes caused major disruption to UMN's ongoing development programmes. Staff capacity was diverted to relief work and travel was impacted for a considerable time period. All of Nepal is quake-prone; a big quake in Western Nepal could severely affect all of UMN's Clusters, Tansen, and Kathmandu.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Keep up to date UMN's disaster mitigation and preparedness plan. ➔ Continue to resource UMN's Disaster Management Coordinator to promote preparedness among UMN staff and partners, training all in earthquake safety and basic relief provision skills. ➔ Demolish unsafe buildings in Thapathali and ensure all staff are working in quake-resilient structures.
2	<p>Reduced support from major funding partners or backdonors Several long-time UMN funding partners are facing diminished budgets. A change in international aid policy by a major backdonor (such as the Australian or Norwegian governments) could affect many key UMN projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ UMN has already ended its long-time support on one backdonor for "Core Cluster" funding, which could have affected all clusters at once. ➔ Establish policy that no one source of funding (donor or backdonor) should account for more than a 33% threshold of UMN's income. ➔ Maintain and increase compliance capacity of Cluster and partner staff. ➔ Identify new sources of funding support.
3	<p>Restrictive central government regulation of INGOs The new Social Development Act may impose new restrictions, as many government agencies feel pressured to be tough on INGOs' purported bad behaviour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Active membership of AIN, including policy advocacy on INGO operating space ➔ Cultivate relationships within Ministries, explain UMN's distinctive value to development in Nepal. ➔ Help staff understand relationship of national priorities, plans, policies to our work.

	Risk	Key Mitigation Approaches
4	<p>Burdensome regulations passed at provincial and local levels</p> <p>New regulations are being passed by subnational governments which duplicate existing requirements, increasing the amount of time required for compliance and liaison.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ UMN has already moved to reduce the number of provinces and municipalities in which it works. ➔ Establish and keep up good relations with local and provincial authorities, making the most of participation in bottom-up project design processes. ➔ Advocate alongside AIN for simple, clear regulation
5	<p>Loss of identity/distinctiveness</p> <p>Despite Nepal being a secular state committed to freedom of association and religion, officials are pressuring faith-based INGOs/NGOs to remove religious language from their work. Many UMN staff are reluctant or unprepared to explain UMN's Christian identity and engagement with Nepal's Christian community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Remain transparent about UMN's Christian identity. ➔ Develop a clear common understanding at all levels of UMN regarding our identity. ➔ Train staff, especially Cluster staff, to outwork UMN's identity and explain it when challenged. ➔ Regularly discuss at Leadership level and listen to local Christian stakeholders.
6	<p>Accusations of proselytism</p> <p>Sensitivity is high on this issue with many Nepali officials and journalists. Media allegations periodically arise about any faith-based INGO, including UMN.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Continue to work within the law of Nepal. ➔ Engage constructively with responsible media. ➔ Ensure a clear common organisational understanding of Integral Development to reduce chances for misunderstandings. ➔ Work for interfaith relationship-building and increased social harmony.

	Risk	Key Mitigation Approaches
7	<p>Disruptions to quality/ capacity through changes of approach</p> <p>UMN's reorientation toward Clusters and bottom-up programming involves shifting responsibilities to Cluster staff and partners, plus other disruptions to existing UMN systems of project design and monitoring. This could lead to reduced quality or compliance capacity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Proactively identify capacity gaps and prioritise staff time (especially from Programme Support Team, Finance Team, Funding Mgmt Team) to train/coach newly responsible partner and Cluster staff. ➔ Continue to monitor retention levels of experienced staff. ➔ Make the most of Supporting Partner capacity- building support to increase local staff capacity and UMN systems strengthening.
8	<p>Inability to recruit and retain the right skilled staff</p> <p>Increased cost and restrictions on expatriates may reduce UMN's ability to bring skilled international volunteers. The changing role of expatriates in UMN demands strong cross-cultural relationship skills from both expatriate and Nepali staff.</p> <p>At the same time, UMN may struggle to retain high-calibre staff based in remote Clusters. Family separation is a particularly significant challenge and burden for skilled staff based in distant locations .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Continue advocacy with government for facilitation of UMN expatriate volunteers. ➔ Ensure ongoing capacity of Nepali staff to carry out all essential organisational functions. ➔ Expand cross-cultural management training and leadership coaching. ➔ Set appropriate compensation levels for all roles, especially in remote areas. ➔ Increased authority and perceived status in UMN of Cluster-based roles. ➔ Recruit locally for roles wherever possible. ➔ Support staff living apart from families through UMN-funded family visits and staff care support.

	Risk	Key Mitigation Approaches
9	Health and safety issues Including risk of fire, gas canister explosion, electric shock, road accident, falls, trips, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Ensure staff awareness and compliance with UMN Health and Safety Policy and protocols. ➔ Ensure staff travel in well-maintained vehicles with responsible drivers.
10	Corruption and fraud Risk is exacerbated by tendency of many Cluster/partner staff to try to resolve issues individually before reporting them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Promote immediate reporting of fraud and suspected fraud. ➔ Investigate all allegations in accordance with UMN policy. ➔ Ensure anti-corruption policy is understood and warning signs of fraud known to all relevant staff through regular trainings.

UMN maintains a more detailed risk register which is regularly reviewed by Leadership Team and Board.

Post-2020 Comment: The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many new risks to Nepal. The two most significant for UMN's work are:

1. Through UMN's work, it **spreads coronavirus** to people (staff, community members, or other stakeholders) who are highly vulnerable due to age and/or prior medical conditions. **Mitigation:** A regularly updated Health & Safety Plan emphasizing distancing, mask-wearing, ventilation, handwashing, and other public health measures to reduce spread of COVID-19. Adaptation of all other UMN processes and plans, including travel, to be consistent with this Health & Safety Plan.
2. UMN **cannot access PPLP** and other community members due to public health restrictions during a pandemic. **Mitigation:** Adapting UMN processes to be carried out remotely, e.g. project design using phone consultation and maximum use of local partner capacity. Building local partner preparedness for emergency response in the absence of UMN Cluster staff, and UMN's capacity for remote monitoring and management.

In the event of a major natural disaster, UMN will respond only to the extent that UMN's existing working districts are affected. If the affected districts do not include a UMN Cluster or Hospital, UMN will identify appropriate alternative agencies responding in the area (e.g. International Nepal Fellowship or Nepal Christian Relief Services) and seek to connect them to any of UMN's international partners who are interested in supporting disaster relief.

Any UMN response will focus first and foremost on rapid provision of lifesaving assistance to the most affected areas. UMN will build capacity of its Cluster offices and all local partners to take part in delivery of immediate relief (including cash-based assistance where appropriate) in compliance with the Common Humanitarian Standard and the Red Cross Code. For emergency staffing, UMN will be prepared to draw on surge capacity from less-affected Clusters and Hospitals, regional networks, and relevant Supporting Partners. Longer-term integrated recovery work will be carried out by UMN with its higher-capacity local partners.

UMN will maintain an Emergency Preparedness & Response Plan which describes these contingency plans for major disaster, and will be the basis for UMN's ongoing preparedness work.

Post-2020 Comment: UMN developed a COVID-19 scenario plan at the outset of the pandemic, with contingency planning for good-case and bad-case scenarios, and has adapted our work and plans since that time through decisions by the Incident Management Team. UMN has responded to the coronavirus disaster solely in our working districts and hospitals.

3.0 UMN STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND TARGET OUTCOMES

3.1 Fullness and Transformation

At the heart of UMN's vision and strategy are two interconnected concepts: *Fullness* and *Transformation*. "Fullness" signifies the holistic, multi-dimensional nature of UMN's work: the fact that e.g. an economically transformed life can still be acutely impoverished if it remains subject to conflict, discrimination, and oppression. "Transformation" signifies the fact that for the poorest people trapped in poverty, fullness is out of reach without sweeping, systemic change; it will not come simply by tinkering within the current system.

"Transformation," if it is to mean anything more than just "change," implies a *threshold* of significance. Transformative change in people's lives brings them across a threshold to a qualitatively different situation. Many changes brought about by development projects are less than transformative: helpful, improving, but unlikely in the foreseeable future to transform people's lives. Such changes may make the life of poverty more bearable, but they do not hold out the prospect of freeing people from poverty.

"Freedom from poverty" is to some extent a never-ending project; every person on earth lacks fullness in one aspect or another of life, every society is in need of transformation.

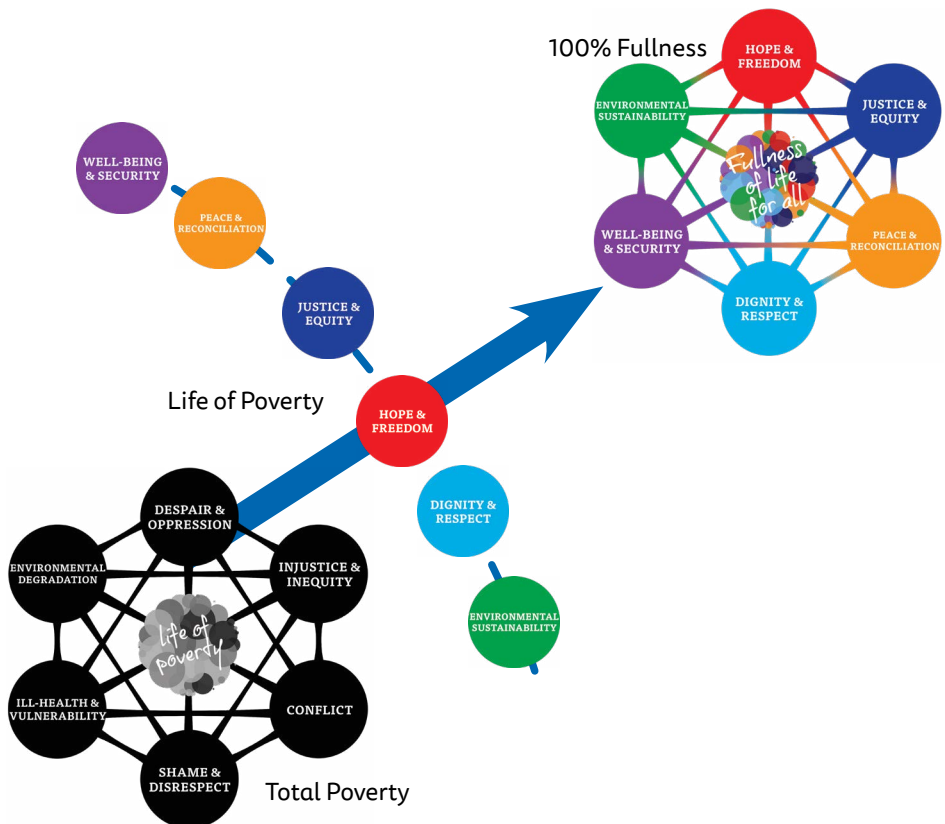
UMN's objective is not to bring people to perfect and complete fullness. While UMN can put people on the journey that leads to that level of transformation, its full realisation ultimately awaits a Kingdom not of this world. But nor is UMN satisfied with just making minor, non-transformative improvements to the life of poverty.

UMN aspires through our work to bring people to the level of fullness where they would no longer be described by themselves or their neighbours as poor and marginalised. For PPLP in Nepal that is still a transformation and indeed a highly ambitious and radical one, given the multiple, deep-seated root causes that combine to keep people trapped below the threshold of poverty.

How are we to describe this threshold of transformation, and know whether we have crossed it?

UMN's *Fullness of Life* model sums up poverty and fullness in six dimensions (see 1.2.1 above). Each UMN Cluster as part of its Strategy can identify certain threshold conditions in each of those six dimensions which would describe the point at which PPLP households would no longer be considered "poor." These might for example include:

- ➔ PPLP households have sufficient food for 12 months
- ➔ PPLP are not dependent for housing or livelihood on acutely disaster-vulnerable land (e.g. riverbank or landslide prone slopes)
- ➔ PPLP enjoy equal participation in community decision-making
- ➔ PPLP are welcomed at social events on an equal basis with other castes/ethnicities
- ➔ The consensus belief in the community is that PPLP (including e.g. "low" castes, people with disability, people living with mental ill-health) can escape from poverty
- ➔ PPLP do not live with the threat of imminent violence from conflict



This articulation of thresholds is context-dependent and should be done at Cluster level for each target PPLP group. PPLP communities are not necessarily poor in every dimension of life; some enjoy levels of e.g. peace or environmental sustainability that are already above the poverty threshold. Each Cluster will identify the key thresholds that describe a meaningful transition out of poverty in the local context.

The Clusters will then carry out an annual Strategic Outcome Harvesting process to assess the progress of target PPLP communities toward their identified thresholds. Since many of these outcomes will not be quantifiable (or easily aggregatable with outcomes from other PPLP groups), a simple “RYG” rating system will be used for progress assessment. If the evidence suggests the target PPLP have crossed the threshold in a given dimension of Fullness, or are on a path that will clearly bring them across the threshold in the near future, the Cluster will record that evidence and mark the PPLP as green in that dimension. If positive change is underway, but it is not yet clear whether it will be transformative, the Cluster will record the PPLP as yellow in that dimension. If no significant change (or negative change) is predominant in a given dimension, the Cluster will record it as red.

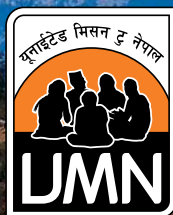
UMN’s overall success will be measured by the success of each Cluster in contributing to transformational outcomes for PPLP.

Post-2020 Comment: UMN will not carry out this exercise for the 2021-22 ICSPs, given the many other demands of pandemic response, but will plan to carry it out from 2023 onward as part of the Cluster Strategies.

3.2 UMN Strategic Outcomes

Three fundamental outcomes will indicate the successful outworking of UMN’s next five-year strategy. By 2025:

1. An annual Outcome Harvesting process indicates that each UMN Cluster is contributing to holistic transformation for that Cluster’s target PPLP.
2. All UMN projects are designed based on a participatory process of analysis and solution-finding carried out by communities and facilitated by local partners and Clusters.
3. All UMN partners have the necessary skills to carry out participatory project design and implementation.



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