



Fullness of life for all, in a transformed Nepali society

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Dear friends

With Christmas approaching, we join Isaiah in rejoicing that,

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light."
(Isaiah 9:2)*

As we follow Jesus, God's light to the world, we often find ourselves called to areas that remain deep in darkness.

One kind of darkness I recently witnessed in Mugu was the lightless windows of schools and clinics built at great cost in remote villages but kept locked and empty. As in many other rural parts of Nepal, villagers lacked the power to demand education and health services. Their powerful adversaries included a private school owner who made sure that the local government school stayed closed, and a corrupt headmaster who swore "you can cut my throat" before he would ever publicly account to the village (as required by law) for his school's budget.

Injustice and disempowerment are a kind of darkness about which Jesus felt very strongly. My time in Mugu starkly reminded me that to address poverty we must help people stand up to injustice.

I was deeply impressed by the commitment and courage of the UMN team and our partner staff. These young Nepalis live in the villages they serve, unlike most other NGO and government staff in eastern Mugu. They mobilise villagers to identify problems and take action, in particular helping them take advantage of all the ways that Nepali law allows them to influence government.

Their work reminds me of another passage from Isaiah:

"If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday." (Isaiah 58:10)

Our partner staff have faced threats and violence from people who benefit from the schools staying closed. Please pray for protection for them and UMN's staff as they keep working to shed light on injustice.


JOEL HAFVENSTEIN
Executive Director

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*Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."
(John 8:12 NLT)*

Times of trouble are often described as being "dark times". Nepal has suffered some dark times in recent years. The earthquake was a major blow to the country, and this was then followed by a six-month-long Indian border blockade, resulting in crippling food and fuel shortages which further hampered the already difficult re-building process. But after the darkness comes the light. UMN continues to help re-build Nepal with their ongoing disaster relief efforts.

Jesus said that whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going (John 12:35). That's why, as an organisation, UMN strives to follow Jesus' example in works and deeds, shining a light on the root causes of poverty. One of the ways that UMN does this is in the harmful practices of women in remote areas (see page 9). The beliefs and practices are deep-rooted in the culture and religion, and changing hearts and attitudes can be a slow, difficult process.

At the end of November there was an article on the international website npr.org* about a young woman who died while staying in a menstrual hut. While unmarried women stay outside the home for up to a full week, married women typically observe the practice for just a few days. Dambara (26) prepared to go outside for the final night of her menstrual seclusion, but her older sister-in-law told her: "It's already been three days now; it's enough. You don't have to go anymore, just stay at the house." The younger woman replied



that she had better stay one last night to ensure that nothing bad would happen. But something bad did happen. Sometime that night, Dambara died alone inside the shelter. The effect of this tragedy – together with information from organisations just like UMN who are trying to promote safe menstrual practices – has made the village think differently about their practices.

It is our hope that we can help further educate people about the dangers without any more deaths taking place.

In the Bible, Jesus is seen as being the light, while Satan is portrayed as the darkness. The darkness always surrounds us, but by shining a light the darkness can be extinguished. In a battle between light and dark, only light will win.

"A lot of darkness cannot overpower a little light, but a little light can wipe away a lot of darkness."

Let us not hide our lights away, but let them shine bright for all to see.

PHIL RAWLINGS

International Communications and Technology Advisor

*www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/11/28/503155803/a-young-woman-died-in-a-menstrual-shed-in-nepal



PHOTO: Sangita BK (sitting down) with the UMN Education team. Kshitij Prasai, far right.

I have a life



My name is Sangita BK and I am 20 years old. My life today is exciting and I feel blessed every morning as I eagerly get on the bus to get to work. I am currently a part of UMN's Education Team in Kathmandu as an intern for a year. To be working as an intern with UMN is the best thing that could have happened to a girl like me who comes from a very remote village in Mugu.

My parents earned very little from farming and struggled to send me to school. During the off-season for farming, my father used to go to India to earn a little and feed the family.

When I was in grade six, a UMN partner came to our school to select and conduct screening tests for Dalit Girls' Scholarship. I was very lucky to be selected for the scholarship. The school materials and school uniform that I received really encouraged and helped me to attend the school regularly. I did well in my studies and managed to score good marks in my exams. When I finished school, people in the neighbourhood asked my parents what plans I had for further studies. I had a desire to continue my education but I wasn't sure if I would continue to receive the scholarship. Around that time, I was asked to go to the UMN cluster office in Mugu by the staff of Gramin Samudayik Sanstha (GSS). There, I was given the biggest news – confirmation of my scholarship for my bachelor's level study!

UMN and its partner GSS has truly turned my dreams into a reality and have made my family proud of me. As I spend a year with UMN, I would like to learn and grow as much as possible in my knowledge and skill.

Thank you UMN for giving me this life!

UMN Education Team Leader, Kshitij Prasai, says: "We are really happy to have Sangita in our team. The story of her life is really an inspiration for us to continue to touch and transform the lives of thousands of needy students like her. We are now sending her to Rukum for several months to understand and contribute in the projects that we run in the communities. This will be an enriching first-hand experience for her."

BUILDING THE FUTURE



Some of us are old enough to remember what life was like before computers. Here in Nepal, the project offices are full of competent Nepali staff constantly using computers and e-mailing their reports around the world. However, in the more remote regions where we work, many children have never seen an actual computer, let alone learnt to use one. This “digital divide” is now starting to be addressed, in partnership with a New Zealand charity called Technology Alleviating Poverty (TAP) and Microsoft Nepal.

TAP was started by a New Zealand former mission worker who returned from his work in Nepal and founded a very successful business. He has chosen to use his wealth to fulfill his vision to install a computer lab into 1,000 needy government schools. Each lab has 20 computers and locally sourced furniture and is a resource for the whole community, not just the school students. UMN has the infrastructure through its cluster offices to deliver 50 of these computer labs, with teacher training and support. Power supplies are erratic in the rural areas so our computer labs have solar power systems so they can be used all day. Because the internet is often not available, we are planning to provide digital learning materials to these schools.

When I spoke to students in Rukum last week, they said how much they enjoyed actually learning to use the computer, rather than just learning theory from a text book. Computer skills will eventually give these students a wider choice of employment and help their families to keep track of business accounts, write official letters and communicate with relatives overseas.

ELIZABETH COZENS
Education Advisor

Warm & SNUGGLED

The sight of babies snuggled in warm blankets, sweaters and winter hats brings smiles to our faces. But for many mothers in Nepal it is difficult to provide basic infant supplies and get extra warm clothes for their babies. Winter is here and mums work harder to feed and keep the family warm, especially the younger babies.

Aware of this challenge, a group of about 30 ladies in England have been working hard with lots of warm thoughts in their hearts. We are happy to receive so many beautifully knitted baby garments and blankets to send on to these deserving babies. This band of knitters get together to talk, share stories, sip their tea, pray and knit for the babies of Nepal in some remote areas.

Margaret Bates, who served with the United Mission Hospital Tansen in 1978-1980, collects the garments and sends them to us at UMN. It has been a special privilege to send out these much needed items to mothers in the maternity wards and clinics of Mugu, Dhading, Okhaldhunga and Tansen.

How wonderful is their heart-warming gift that gives babies the protection they could not otherwise have in these cold months. Thank you to the lovely lady knitters who put in their time, money and above all the love of their hearts for the children of Nepal.

God Bless!





breaking
FREE

UMN has been actively working to address harmful traditional practices (HTP) with the prime focus on issues of unhealthy Chhaupadi practices, alcohol abuse and violence against women. To protect women and girls from the impacts of these harmful practices, UMN has been running a project called "Combating traditional practices which are harmful to women and girls."

CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Chhaupadi is a social tradition in the western part of Nepal for Hindu women which prohibits a woman from participating in normal family activities during menstruation and the post-natal period, because they are considered impure. Some of the women are kept out of the house and have to live in a shed. Women practising Chhaupadi have to eat whatever is given to them.

Shrijana, UMN's HTP programme manager says, "Since Chhaupadi is a social tradition deep rooted in culture and religion, it is not that easy to take action and change the attitude of people and expect results."

Advisor Liv Wendel explains: "Our approach to this is community empowerment through group mobilisation. We work with all the different levels in the community – children, youth, women, men, community leaders and media. By working with these groups we hope change will come from the inside."

Janaki Devi, a member of a women's group in Bajhang, never touched cows during her menstruation because, like the others, she believed the cows would die. She also abstained from drinking milk. When she became a member of the project through DHS she found the strength to break the tradition and started drinking milk. Her in-laws were angry with her as they thought the cows would die. But as no harm was done to the cows, her family now believes that it is just a traditional belief.

Some other group members have also started to drink milk in private, and some openly during menstruation. Awareness-raising programmes have helped to start discussions among communities and groups to shed light on issues of Chhaupadi and the potential health problems attached to it.

Shrijana shares with joy: "Four out of 20 women from a women's group have recently stopped practising Chhaupadi and have left their sheds. It's exciting to see women express themselves. Some changes have started to become visible. One of four objectives is to remove the milk restriction and our goal is to see the women able to stay inside their homes and not in the sheds during their menstruation."

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:

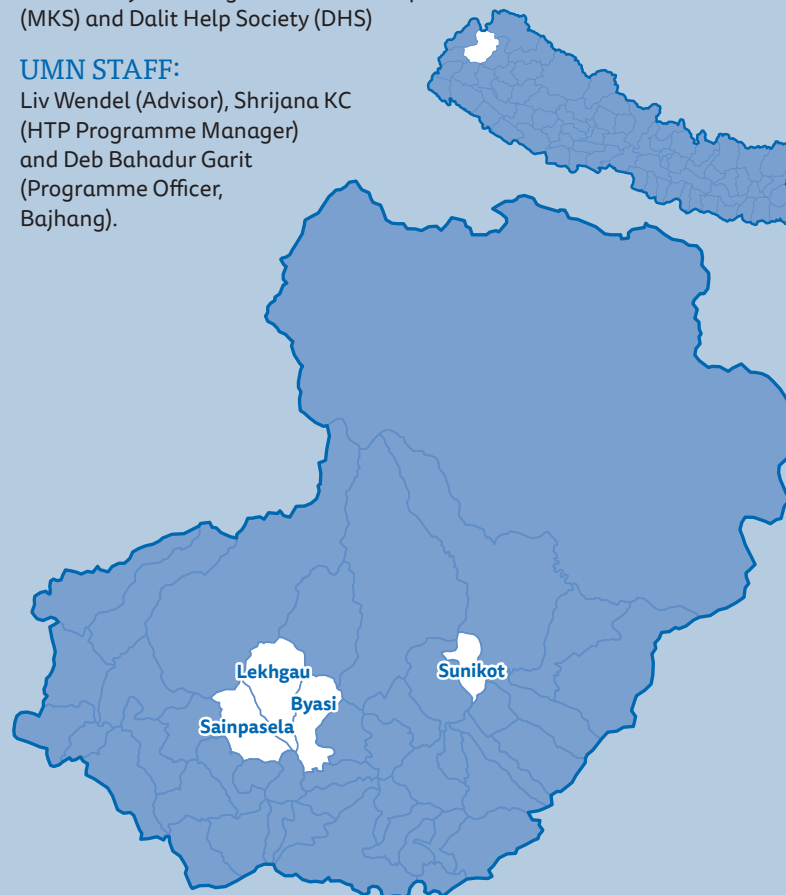
4 VDCs of Bajhang District, West Nepal

PARTNERS' NAMES:

Mahila Kalyan Savings and Credit Co-operative (MKS) and Dalit Help Society (DHS)

UMN STAFF:

Liv Wendel (Advisor), Shrijana KC (HTP Programme Manager) and Deb Bahadur Garit (Programme Officer, Bajhang).



DEMO HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

Dhading is the third most affected district in terms of damage to infrastructures due to the devastating earthquake of April 2015. For these rubble-strewn communities to get back to their feet, reconstruction was an urgent call.

As a part of the rebuilding process, UMN has helped build demonstration houses – one each in Pida, Mahadevsthan, Jharlang, Ree and Lapa VDCs. The construction is close to completion. Later, these demo houses will be used for public/communal use which will include meetings of co-operatives and women's groups, health clinics in villages, and other activities and events in the communities.

WHY DEMO HOUSES?

Demo houses are affordable, earthquake-resistant houses using local materials like mud, stone and timber. The objective of the demo house construction is to give local people clear guidelines about earthquake-resistant construction. We hope this will kick-start the rebuilding process.

DESIGN

The Government and Department of Urban Development & Building Construction (DUDBC) has prescribed 17 earthquake-resilient house models. UMN has adopted this design as per the working VDCs context – dry stone wall for Northern VDCs (Jharlang, Ree, Lapa) and stone with cement for Southern VDCs (Pida and Mahadevsthan).

HUMAN RESOURCES

Trained masons are being deployed in the construction of demo houses in all VDCs. After the earthquake, UMN has trained a total of 513 masons in the five VDCs. These were masons who were already doing construction work in their villages.



Pida



Mahadevsthan



Ree



Restored CANALS

The earthquake had damaged the crucial irrigation canals and systems just ahead of the plantation season. Many families thought this was the end to their crop production and had lost hope.

But today, the crop coverage area has increased and we have 721 households benefiting from the restored irrigation schemes that UMN has supported. These irrigation reconstruction projects have gone hand-in-hand with the support of ICCO and UMN partners PRAYAS Nepal, HIMS Nepal and NRDS.

Five major canals and nine small irrigation schemes have been completed in the five working VDCs of Dhading. Besides this, pipes, drums and other materials were given to help families get back to their fields.

Some schemes were designed for dual purposes – drinking water and cultivation, especially in water-scarce areas and sloped terrain.



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FAREWELL AND GOOD WISHES



Goodbyes are always hard but the legacy left behind will forever be valued. On 6 October we hosted a farewell programme for Sanu Raja Ranjit who has been with UMN for the last 25 years. His long-standing and significant contribution to UMN, his wisdom and teachings will continue to inspire us. We wish him the very best as he begins a new chapter in his life.

CREATING SAFE AND CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

After the earthquakes of April and May 2015, education for nearly one million children in Nepal was in jeopardy with over 32,000 classrooms destroyed. 80% of school buildings collapsed in Dhading. Post-earthquake, it became imperative to make our schools safer for children. As part of UMN's Temporary Learning Center Up-gradation Project, 14 schools of Dhading were upgraded to permanent structures to make them

MEDIATION TRAINING

Micah Nepal, one of UMN's partners, started a new programme in 2016 – "Peace Building Through Mediation" – with the goal of establishing a new group of inter-faith mediators who will be able to help in resolving issues on peace at both local and national levels. Recently, 18 new mediators were trained in foundation-level mediation skills by Laura Coulter, UMN's Peace-Building Advisor. The 18 participants were a diverse group with representatives from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian religions. Laura shares: "I was very pleased to see all the participants from different religious backgrounds work so well together. They showed a real desire to know more about mediation and to enhance their skills. The mediation training was very inter-



active and it encouraged me to see new mediators emerge. I hope that this group will have many opportunities to use their skills in the near future."

earthquake-resilient and also to create a safer child-friendly learning environment. The project has been running under the Dhading Disaster Response Programme of UMN with support from its local partner PRAYAS Nepal and the District Education Office.

An inauguration programme of three schools in South Dhading was held on 11 September and was handed over to the community. Joel Hafvenstein, Executive Director of UMN, also handed over Chandidevi Primary School of Mahadevsthan, Dhading to the community on 28 October. So far, Temporary Learning Centers of 14 schools have been upgraded. The plan is to construct 45 more learning centers in Pida, Mahadevsthan and Jharlang.





CALENDAR 2017

The UMN Calendar features 12 lovely photos of UMN's work, reflecting "Values in Action".

GBP/EUR 4; USD/AUD/CAD 6

Postage extra.

Price in Nepal: NRP 150

To order:

- ➡ Email communications@umn.org.np
- ➡ Order online at www.umn.org.np/store
- ➡ Write to us at PO Box 126, Kathmandu, Nepal.

UMNewsstand

UMNews is now available on the iPhone and iPod Touch, as well as the iPad. The app allows for all of our publications (including *Friends of Tansen*, *Friends of Okhaldhunga*, *Annual Report* and more) to be downloaded and read on your iOS device, all completely free!



Embracing Diversity

It has been a long journey over a decade, living and working in Nepal – a country of rich culture and lovely people. I came from Kenya, arriving in 2004 through VSO and in 2006 I joined UMN. I was happy to have my family join me here also. It was fascinating and challenging to adjust in Nepal initially, but UMN provided language and cultural orientation that helped us familiarise, adjust and settle without much hassle. My wife Agnes and children Francis & Grace were thrilled meeting new friends, visiting places and – with hesitation – enjoying spicy food for a while! Our life in Nepal developed our ability to embrace diversity.

I came to Nepal when HIV and AIDS was the talk of the day through media channels. Poverty was the underlying cause for a range of problems, including poor health and vulnerability to disasters exposing people to social and economic

disadvantage. The UMN way of working with those living in poverty through partnerships has greatly influenced positively the lives of many. It was also an opportunity for learning.

My supportive role was equipping UMN staff and partner staff with technical skills addressing HIV, and building the community's resilience through disaster risk reduction. I have seen strategies change, and new paradigm shifts in addressing root causes of poverty.

Many thanks goes to the Government of Nepal, UMN, staff, partners, communities and Church of Scotland congregations for prayers and every support to my family and UMN programmes.

I leave Nepal in December this year to join my family in the USA and will greatly miss everyone!

JOEL GITHINJI

Programme Manager – HIV and AIDS



PRAY

Please pray for the new Prime Minister Mr Dahal and his cabinet. There is great discontent among people about frequent change of government. Pray that the new government will demonstrate genuine feelings for the needs of the people they serve.

We need to continue to pray for the efforts of advocacy groups in and outside of Nepal who are watching over extremist groups that seek to disturb peace in this nation, including negative feelings and attitudes to the work and existence of the Churches in Nepal.

We request your continued prayers for women at risk in Nepal, especially young girls who wish to go overseas to work. They get into horrible troubles more often than not. In the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, Nepal faces a heightened risk of human trafficking and unsafe migration.

Please pray with us for the opening up of work opportunities for them here in Nepal itself. Pray for the projects of many organisations in Nepal focusing on the response and prevention of human trafficking.



JOIN US

UMN's cross-cultural teams provide opportunities for suitably skilled expatriates to work with Nepali colleagues, sharing technical skills and demonstrating God's loving concern for all people, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable.

Expatriate team members do not receive a salary or remuneration from UMN directly, but are self-supported volunteers, or supported by a sending mission or church in their home country.

If you are interested in any of these (three listed below) positions, or if you would like to ask about other opportunities for service in UMN, please contact us at expat.recruitment@umn.org.np to learn more. Send your CV or resumé with your email.

PRIORITY NEEDS

GENERAL SURGEONS AND ENT SURGEONS – for United Mission Hospital Tansen, to deal with both elective and emergency surgery and to teach and mentor junior Nepali doctors. Flexibility, the ability to work in a resource-limited setting and an interest in teaching are required. For visa purposes, applicants must currently be registered with the national regulating body in their own country. Long-term applicants preferred.

FINANCE ADVISOR – to work alongside our Nepali professionals to ensure that sound financial practices are implemented, to properly manage the funds entrusted to us. A strong financial background, preferably with accountancy is required and experience in the not-for-profit sector would be an advantage.

OTHER NEEDS – We are also interested to receive enquiries / CVs from expatriates called to Nepal whose experience and background may fit into UMN, even if not in one of the above posts. All posts require appropriate qualifications to Masters level or equivalent and usually considerable relevant work experience. We normally require a minimum three-year initial commitment, but four years is preferred.

UMN Christmas APPEAL

BABY BOX INITIATIVE for safer motherhood

Over the past 25 years, Nepal has made steady progress in improving maternal and child health outcomes. Since 1990, the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has declined from 97/1,000 (9.7%) to 29/1,000 (2.9%), and the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has declined from 901/100,000 (0.9%) to 258/100,000 (0.26%) in 2015. However, improvements have not been equitable throughout the country. There are significant differences in access and utilisation of health care across geographical regions and ethnic groups. In Nepal, the mid and far-western regions fall way behind on most health indicators of mortality, morbidity and access to basic health care services.

Poor care-seeking behaviors among women lead them to not having their antenatal check-ups and delivering at home, which often leads to complications and even the death of mother and/or baby. In Baglekh VDC, Doti (one of the targets for this project), the fourth ANC visit is only attended by 21% of mothers, and institutional delivery by only 36%. There is much need to motivate pregnant women to complete their antenatal visits as well as deliver in a health facility.

The Baby Box will include various essential items for newborns and mothers and will be provided free if the mother-to-be completes at least four antenatal check-ups and delivers in a health facility. The box will include baby clothes, cloth diapers, a set of clothes for the mother, personal care items for the newborn and postpartum mother, a toy, a mattress and mosquito net, among other things. The box itself is made of strong cardboard and can also be used as a crib for the baby which will help if the baby needs to be put down and there is a danger of rolling into an open fire.

For more information and ideas on how you can fund-raise for this project, please visit www.umn.org.np/babybox



*Baby not included...



COULD YOUR CHURCH HELP?



HOW TO GIVE...

- ➔ Make out a cheque or money order payable to United Mission to Nepal. Post it in the envelope provided! (to: UMN, PO Box 126, Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal)
- ➔ Use your credit or debit card and give via PayPal.
 - ① Go to www.umn.org.np/page/give-paypal and follow the instructions and you will be redirected to the PayPal page.
 - ② Use your PayPal information to donate from your PayPal account.
- OR
- ➔ Don't have a PayPal account? No problem, follow the instructions above and click on [Don't have a PayPal account?](#) to make a payment using your Debit/Credit card without having to open an account.

One box
costs roughly*
NRP 5,000
GB £35
US \$45

*Actual cost of box is not known at this time, but the true value is likely to be more than double the cost

THE **LIGHT SHINES**
IN THE **DARKNESS** AND
THE **DARKNESS CAN NEVER EXTINGUISH** IT

John 1:5



Fullness of life for all, in a transformed Nepali society

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