

journal

News • Reviews • Ideas and Inspiration

Weaving her way to success

Yamuna Magar's life has changed since she was able to attend literacy classes in her village in northern Nawalparasi, Nepal. A mother of two, she was married at an early age to a man with no skills or education, and the family saw only poverty and struggle.

Yamuna (left) was quick to learn and after three months she was able to join the local cooperative group, where she had an opportunity to learn bag weaving. Yamuna now not only earns enough to be able to save a little money each month, but also visits other group members' homes to encourage and motivate them.

+ Find out more about improving women's lives in Nepal from www.umn.org.np or write to: United Mission to Nepal, PO Box 126, Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal.



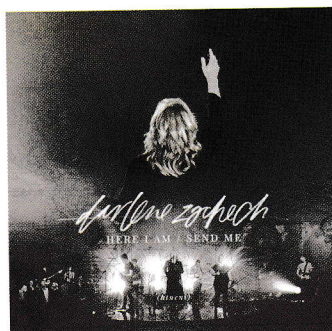
Say thank you to volunteers and celebrate the difference they make during Volunteers Week, 1st–7th June

Listen to ...

Here I Am Send Me,
by Darlene Zschech. Integrity Music ISBN 0000768682890

Shout to the Lord, by worship leader and singer/songwriter Darlene Zschech is a favourite with many of us and her latest album *Here I Am Send Me* offers more inspirational songs.

The album features a variety of styles from the mellow strings



of the first track, *You Are Great*, to the pulsating drum rhythm of *Kingdom Come*. My favourite track is the neo-soul vibe of *Your Eyes*, which talks about turning our eyes to the Lord.

I like the way Darlene experiments with different musical approaches. *First Love* has an upbeat and vibrant sound, whilst *Emmanuel* is a piano ballad and *Beloved* features the male vocal of Pati Telea, which provides a stunning contrast to Darlene's female vocals.

In addition to these beautiful tracks, there are also live recordings. I really recommend this CD, especially as all the songs are from the heart, encouraging, inspiring and reflecting the beauty and majesty of God.

+ Clare Seddon is a music journalist based in Tunbridge Wells



Nepal two years on...

Two years after Nepal's devastating earthquake, PCI missionaries **Peter** and **Valerie Lockwood** and **Stephen** and **Laura Coulter** reflect on how it has affected their work and the country as a whole.

The Lockwoods

It is two years since the 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on 25th April 2015. This colossal earthquake, and the subsequent aftershocks, not only claimed the lives of over 9,000 people, but caused substantial damage to individual property and community infrastructure.

The government of Nepal declared that 14 districts had been seriously affected by this catastrophic event. One of these districts was Dhading, where the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) has over 20 years of rural and community development experience. People from around the world were moved to help and donations and humanitarian aid flooded in. The PCI Moderator's Special Appeal raised an incredible figure of almost £660,000. A portion of these donations initially enabled UMN to provide vital emergency relief packages and then from July 2015, to establish the Dhading Disaster Response Programme. This UMN programme has been focusing on three key areas of engineering and construction, livelihoods and human effects (e.g. trauma healing, protection of the vulnerable and good governance) in order to support the rebuilding and restoration of lives and communities in Dhading.

In my role as the engineering advisor to this programme, I was able to spend seven days in February visiting and inspecting UMN's reconstruction work in the area. Dhading is not an easy place to physically get to, as it takes four hours of travel by bus from Kathmandu and then a further five-hour roller coaster ride by jeep on dirt tracks, until the road actually comes to an end. From there on in, transportation is by foot and whole days

are spent walking up and down valleys to get into the heart of the area.

I was initially struck by the progress that UMN has made in reinstating over 36 kilometres of high quality local foot trails and the repair of seven strategic suspension bridges. This has crucially reconnected north Dhading with local and district markets, provided access to the district hospital and enabled the flow of essential goods in and out of



the area. There are many types of local farming cooperatives in the area and it was satisfying to witness them being able to transport their coffee beans and vegetables once again to various markets.

With over 800,000 houses damaged in Nepal by the earthquake, the reconstruction of these is a massive task. There has been an enormous amount of time spent getting approval for reconstruction from various local authorities and the rate of progress has proved frustrating at times. The Nepal government has pledged to give every affected homeowner a housing

reconstruction grant equivalent to £2000. The release of the grant has been slow and difficult but thankfully the first instalment has now been issued and it was thrilling to see that some homeowners in Dhading have begun to rebuild their dwellings. UMN, in preparation for this rebuilding, has trained over 500 locally based masons (builders) in earthquake resilient construction methods and built model houses to be replicated in these remote mountainous areas.

Alongside housing, rural schools were also devastated and immediately after the earthquake, UMN constructed 14 temporary classrooms, which have subsequently been upgraded to permanent structures. UMN plans to build a further 100 school buildings and has commenced work on 40. During my visit, it was encouraging to see the erection of steelwork and roof structures, every piece of which has had to be carried into the area by local men and women, through valleys and over ridges, to heights of around 3000 metres.

The communities living in north Dhading are a resilient people and have learned how to survive in their harsh and challenging environment. UMN, in supporting local Nepali partners, is enabling these communities to begin getting back on their feet in a variety of different ways. At times the recovery work has been slow due to the systems we work under, the difficulty of the terrain and constraints on construction by annual monsoon rains. However, significant groundwork has been made and the next few years should see UMN making a substantial contribution to the rebuilding of schools, houses, communities and lives in this area.

Peter Lockwood

This colossal earthquake and the subsequent aftershocks...claimed the lives of over 9000 people.

The Coulters

On 24th April 2015, when the first earthquake struck, Stephen and I were attending our first UMN ex-pat retreat in Pokhara, approximately 200km from Kathmandu. The epicentre of the earthquake occurred about halfway between the two places and at 7.8 had a massive impact.

We had just finished our morning session when the building started shaking and there was a very loud noise like thunder. I wasn't sure what was happening until someone shouted, "Earthquake!" and saw people running out down the stairs. We saw buildings shaking and swaying nearby, but thankfully little damage was done. Looking back two years on, it seemed providential that all UMN's ex-pat staff were out of Kathmandu and together at exactly the moment the earthquake struck.

People were just beginning to get back to normality when the second earthquake (7.3 magnitude) happened. In Kathmandu, there was much loss of life and damaged buildings all over the city. Sadly over 8500 people died with more than 16,500 injured. Hundreds of aftershocks occurred, which created a high level of fear and major physical damage to homes and infrastructure in several districts. We were fortunate as our flat was not damaged but nevertheless seeing the devastating effects impacted us.

People experienced much distress as aftershocks continued for the next year. Stephen was in demand both within and outside UMN giving psycho-educational talks to various NGOs and churches on

the 'normal' reactions to this potentially traumatising event and how people could help their own recovery and that of their children. He produced leaflets which were widely circulated, with positive feedback on their use by various other groups. They were also sent to Afghanistan following the earthquake there later in 2015. We



People experienced much distress as aftershocks continued for the next year.



both felt that God used Stephen's skills and expertise to help people at that difficult time. People still remember his talks and someone told us recently that Stephen's words were like "spiritual food". How encouraging to hear!

I was less practically involved in earthquake recovery but took an opportunity to go with my colleagues to help clear rubble from a house destroyed by the earthquake. It was a humbling experience to work with a family who had lost, not only their home but their young son who had died in the house.

UMN decided to focus its earthquake relief work in Dhading district as it was badly affected and as UMN had already been working there. More than 40 new staff were recruited to work on the disaster relief programme. 'Do No Harm' training has been used in developing countries as a mechanism to help people understand the interaction between their intervention and the context and, acting on that understanding, to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of their work. I helped to organise and deliver training on this subject in October 2015 and again in March 2016 to new staff members in Dhading.

We also got the opportunity to work together when Stephen agreed to a request to travel to a remote part of Nepal in Dolakha to deliver a three-day workshop on trauma/counselling skills for a group of 25 church leaders. It was a memorable experience, and humbling to meet people who had very little materially but who were so appreciative of our presence with them.

The last two-and-a-half years in Nepal have been fascinating, frustrating, challenging and exciting! We have been on an adventure with God. And through it all we have felt His blessing and enrichment in our lives.

Laura Coulter



Since January 2015, **Laura and Stephen Coulter** have been serving overseas with United Mission to Nepal (UMN). After an initial period of language study and orientation on arrival in Kathmandu, Laura has taken up the role of Peacemaking and Mediation Advisor for UMN, while Stephen has accepted the role of Mental Health Advisor within UMN and to a wider mental health network.

Peter and Valerie Lockwood, along with their three children, returned to work in Nepal in 2012 and are based in Kathmandu, the capital city. Nepal is a country which

they both have previous experience of, with Peter working for UMN from 1988 to 1989 as a civil engineer and, from 1996 to 2000, as a health, safety and environment manager at a hydropower project. Valerie taught at Kathmandu International Study Centre (KISC) from 1998 to 2000. Peter has been invited by (UMN) to take up the post of Programme Advisor. Valerie has started a part-time post teaching English and business studies in the secondary level at KISC.



For more information go to www.presbyterianireland.org/mission

Right: After training with UMN, Bhima Pun's community negotiated with their local government to install new water points.

The United Mission to Nepal, a TEAR partner, works to bring the “fullness of life” that Jesus talked about to the people of Nepal. Through Bhima Pun’s story we see the fullness that comes with the freedom to engage – to participate on an equal footing – with public policies and authorities. Participation, which Jesus calls us all to, is a powerful and transformative tool for lives that mirror the gospel of Jesus.

Lyn Jackson

WE, THE PEOPLE...

Bhima Pun’s life is very much like that of so many women in the hilly rural areas of Nepal. She wakes up early in the morning, often before sunrise. The house needs to be swept first, and then she sets out on the trek to get water for her family. These days it’s just a short walk to the gravity-fed water point near her house, but it used to take hours to walk to a reasonably clean water source and return with her heavy pot of water. Although this was just one of her many daily tasks, it took so much time and energy that Bhima wasn’t able to be involved in much else. Bhima and her friends longed for a water point close to their homes, but had no idea how they could make it happen.

So many folk in Nepali villages are in a similar situation. They have lots of ideas about how they would like to improve their lives. They have lots of energy and are willing to contribute their time and labour, but they don’t have the resources. The frustrating thing is that the kinds of activities they want are relatively cheap, and the funds for them are actually available within the Government of Nepal’s development budget. But how can women like Bhima find out about them, let alone access them?

Nepal’s Local Self-Governance Act (1998) includes a wonderful opportunity for communities to be part of local development planning and budgeting through the Participatory Planning Process (PPP). The Act provides for community-level meetings where people can voice their concerns and propose small-scale development activities that would meet their needs. The communities’ suggestions go to the Village Development Committee (VDC) and the VDC uses the suggestions to develop its budget and plans. Larger projects that might cover several VDCs are proposed at district level.

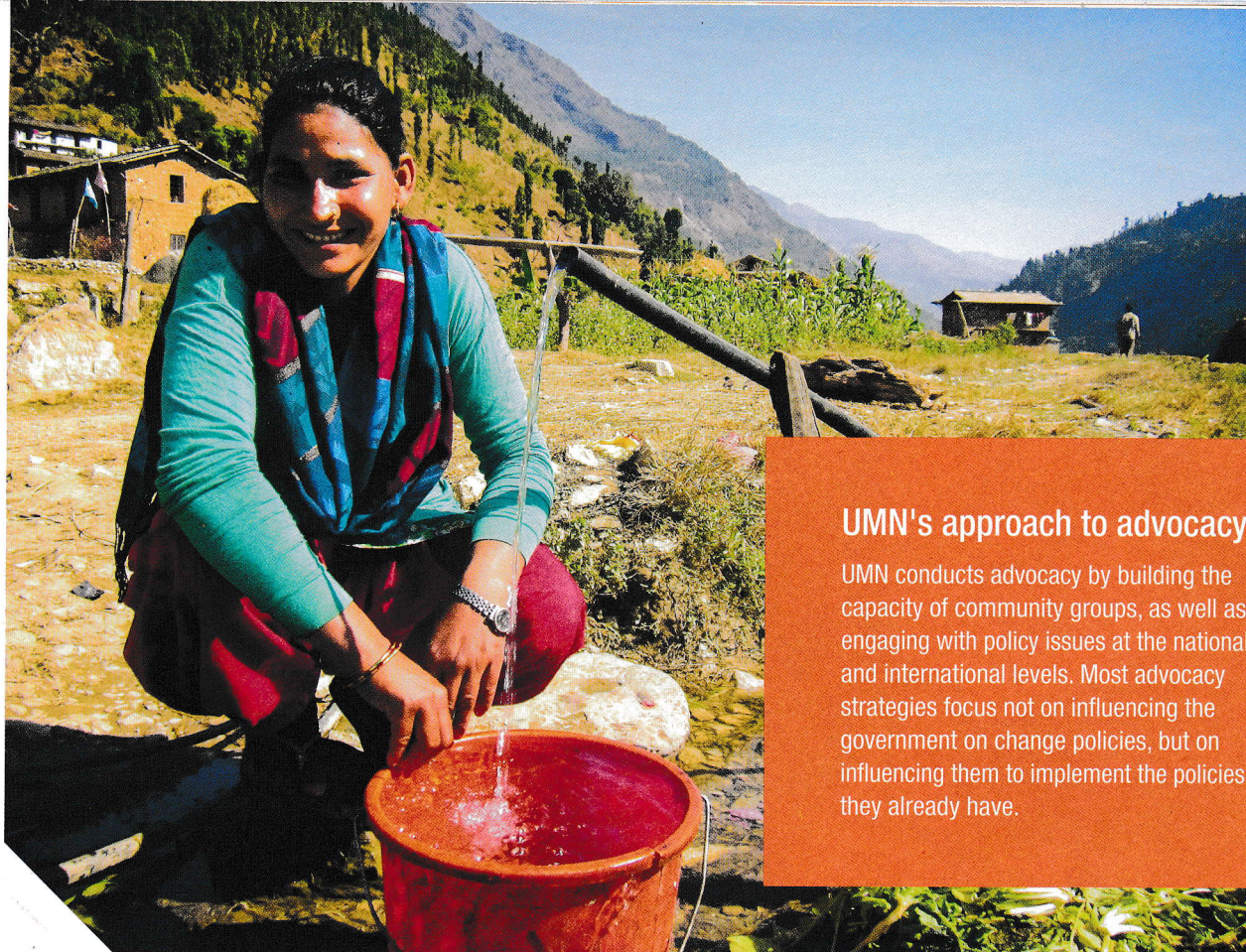
But there is a problem. Most villagers have no idea that this process exists. They see the VDC funds as belonging to the government, not to them. Why would the government listen to poor farmers, landless labourers, low-caste communities, women, children and people with disabilities? In practice, important people (the wealthy, the politically-connected, the educated) make the decisions, while ordinary folk like Bhima are completely left out.

To give ordinary villagers access to the process, UMN’s advocacy team, along with its local partners, runs PPP training programs which have been extremely helpful.

Here’s how it works: at community level, trained local facilitators visit each household, inviting everyone to attend the initial meeting. Because they know their communities intimately, they can particularly encourage poor and low-caste families, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, the elderly and people with disabilities or affected by HIV to take part. A special focus is on including women and children. Sometimes, several visits are necessary to persuade people that they really can influence how things are done in their VDC.

At the meeting, the facilitator explains that the VDC funds for development belong to them, the people, and they are entitled to have a say. The facilitator describes the process for doing this, the way proposals are developed and the current government priority areas. After that, the community:

- identifies issues
- works out which issues are most important to them
- discusses possible solutions.



UMN's approach to advocacy

UMN conducts advocacy by building the capacity of community groups, as well as engaging with policy issues at the national and international levels. Most advocacy strategies focus not on influencing the government on change policies, but on influencing them to implement the policies they already have.

Each year sees more people participating in the process, more funds released for community-initiated purposes, and more lives changed.

The facilitator helps them find other local resources and access technical expertise if needed. Representatives then take their proposals to the VDC. The program also includes ways of monitoring how fair the process is at each step.

This is what happened in Bhima's community. She went along to a local meeting, and when the facilitator had explained the process and asked the villagers to consider their priorities, Bhima suggested a drinking-water system. To her delight, of the many ideas put forward, hers was selected! She says: "When the choice between the plans was being made, most of the women wanted my plan, as it was their concern as well. So together, we were able to ask for what was needed most in our village."

Now Bhima's community has four water points and a big water tank. The daily chore of fetching water is so much easier for the women of the village.

This kind of success has been reflected across many communities. Last year, 166 settlement-level meetings were held in six VDCs. More than 4,000 people participated, and AU\$87,820 worth of small-scale local projects were approved. These projects included walking path and road construction and maintenance, micro-hydro installation, school building repair and construction, small irrigation systems, village drainage

works, bus stop shelters, training for female farmers, and of course drinking water schemes. UMN's outlay for the year on this project was just NRP 1,400,000 (\$17,000), meaning that \$1 spent resulted in \$5 for projects – not a bad return!

The exciting thing is that these outcomes are cumulative. Once facilitators at village-level have been trained and have experienced success in getting projects approved, they continue their efforts year by year. UMN trained 101 new facilitators last year; this year they'll be out there in villages, encouraging people to be involved. So each year sees more people participating in the process, more funds released for community-initiated purposes, and more lives changed. Like Bhima's. Having had a taste of what can be achieved, she has enrolled herself in a non-formal education class, hoping that she can continue to contribute to positive change in her community.

Please note: This project is co-funded by DFAT.

Lyn Jackson is a former UMN Communications Director and TEAR Australia Fieldworker.

Bhima's story documented by Sunila Maharjan (UMN Good Governance Officer)