

RAUTES

THE LAST NOMADS OF NEPAL



Conservation of *Raute Culture*
through Livelihood Improvement
(With Participatory Video Reporting)



Achievement Report 2011

CONTEMPORARY VISION

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Foreword

The nomadic Rautes fulfill their necessities by bartering their wooden pottery and traditional crafts for food-grains with the local people. Although some organizations had helped the Raute community in the past, but a lot of initiatives still need to be carried out on their issues of cultural conservation, sustainable livelihood and advocacy for their rights. This project, "Conservation of Raute Culture through Livelihood Improvement (With Participatory Video Reporting), supported by UNDP – GEF, Small Grants Programme and implemented by Contemporary Vision (CV), has added a new dimension in the conservation of the culture and tradition of the Raute community.

As soon as it was started, the project brought about some significant changes to its beneficiaries, in the sense that the Raute community drew attention of the intelligentsia at various level. People got a better perception on the lives of these nomads, and the government increased the amount of their allowance. The Raute-handicraft products obtained an access even in the international market.

This project supports the UNDP's belief that, conservation of endangered indigenous peoples and tribes, in itself, is an important part of bio-



UNDP- GEF/Small Grants Nepal Programme coordinator Gopal Raj Sherchan (fourth from right) and Vivek Dhar Sharma capturing a moment with Rautes at SGP office in Kathmandu.

diversity conservation. The Raute's livelihood is inextricably bound with the forest. Their rights over the forest must be secured since they are absolutely dependent on the forest resources for their survival.

I would like to thank Mr Hari Thapa and in his team for their hard work in implementing the project and this write-up. Thanks also are due to Mr Vivek Dhar Sharma and Mr Brian Harding for their critical review of this document.

This project highlighted the culture, tradition and integrity of the Rautes at the local as well as the central policy-making level. The different activities within this project have brought the only nomadic community of Nepal onto the fore of the local communities, I/NGOs, sociologists and anthropologist, political parties, and the government. I hope that all the stakeholders will show a deep concern towards the Rautes and take due initiatives to support conserve their unique culture and tradition in the days to come.

Gopal Raj Sherchan

National Coordinator

UNDP – GEF, Small Grants Programme, Nepal



Abbreviation

CDO	-	Chief District Officer
CFUG	-	Community Forestry Users' Group
CV	-	Contemporary Vision
DDC	-	District Development Committee
DFO	-	District Forest Officer
FCCOFUN	-	Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal
GEF	-	Global Environment Facility
INGO	-	International \Non-governmental Organization
LDO	-	Local Development Officer
NEFIN	-	Nepal Foundation of Indigenous Nationalities
NTNC	-	National Trust for Nature Conservation
SAARC	-	South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation
SGP	-	Small Grants Programme
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	-	Village Development Committee

Rautah: the last nomads of Nepal
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1. The Rautes

The Rautes are one of the most typical indigenous groups of Nepal sustaining their unique cultural identities for generations. They are the only nomadic people in the country who never settle permanently in any particular place. The Rautes deny any idea on permanent settlement, education or agriculture. The fact that the Rautes, the last fulltime nomads of Nepal, have survived into this century is truly remarkable in our current period of diminishing cultural diversity. It is estimated that the total population of Rautes in Nepal is about 180, or roughly 52 families. The mid-western region of Nepal remains their only sanctuary.

There is no documented history of the Rautes. But one common ground is that once they fled from the state, they never returned and established a different pattern of life in the jungle. To eke out their living, they mastered the craft of wooden products, learned to hunt monkeys, and adapted to forest life. Only the Mukhiya of the Rautes, on behalf of their tribe, talks to outsiders regarding their lifestyle and tradition. It is for this reason that other people have not had the opportunity to understand their society and their tradition.

While there has been much debate on property rights in Nepal and at the time when there have been many conflicts for the rights of the land, the irony, it seems with the Rautes, they do not want to be attached to any particular land and enjoy living in their traditional nomadic ways.

The Rautes bear traditional knowledge of living in a community. The heredity of the Raute is categorized into three types as Kalyaal, Raskoti and Samaal. It is therefore very important to note the various aspects of these people, such



Raute chief Mahin Bahadur Shahi

as their ethical norms and values, rituals and livelihood pattern

And at the time when acculturation has been widespread the world with the diminishing diversity, the Rautes have been quite successful in sustaining their tradition. Humanity has to learn a lot from the Rautes, since they have been very successful in preserving their tradition in today's world. Their maintenance of the nomadic culture in a rapidly globalising world is commendable. This global uniqueness makes them a precious part of the diverse people of Nepal.



A typical Raute settlement in Dailekh

2. Key Features of the Raute Community

2.1. Internal Management of the Community

Like any other ethnic group following the Hindu society, the Raute community also maintains a patriarchal social hierarchy. However, in matters of internal management, women have a more prominent role than that of their male counterparts. The Rautes maintain a clear division of labour between men and women. Most often the male members get involved in making wooden utensils, hunting monkeys, trading their products in the market, and collecting food grains. It is also common for unmarried girls and widows to go to the countryside and collect food grains and deliver the order for the craft items.

Women in the Raute community bear the major responsibility in the household chores and dominate in almost every facet of the livelihood except in the areas of socializing, hunting, carpentry, and dancing. They have the indigenous know-how on spring water sources. Since it is a part of their job to search for medicinal herbs, firewood and vegetables in the jungle, they also have extensive knowledge of the forest and its ecosystem.

The husband and wife have great respect and love for each other in the Raute community. Married

women never travel outside of their settlement area with anyone else other than their husbands. The women are mainly responsible for collecting firewood, cooking meals and rearing their children. They also may assist the males while shifting homes to new locations and building new homes there. The women do not participate in making wooden utensils and hunting as they are considered to be the male tasks.

Children until the age of 10-14 are not assigned any major household responsibilities, they only spend their days playing with natural objects and roaming around the settlement. On special occasion, they may help their parents in fetching water from the spring and carrying small items while shifting to new locations.

2.2. Monkey Hunting

Monkey hunting is considered to be the fundamental side of giving the cultural permanence of the hunting life of the Rautes. Local people suffer from the menace of the monkeys, which the Rautes kill by using nets. Consequently, it gives the Rautes an opportunity to interact with the communities without any conflicts-after all they just kill the enemies of the villagers. Monkeys (*Macaca mulatta*) are the

Raute women enjoy smoking hooka pipe



Rautes ready to move





Rautes returning from hunting



Rautes at work

only wild animals hunted by the Rautes. Their hunting technique is also very rare in the sense that around 8-30 young and middle aged Raute members go for hunting in a group with their nets. They do not use guns or bows and arrows for hunting purpose.

2.3. Festivals and Celebrations

The Rautes observe the festivals like 'Saune Sankranti' (the first day of the fourth month in the Nepali calendar), Dashain, Tihar, Chaite Dashain and Maghe Sankranti as practiced by the local Hindu community. For the celebrations, the Rautes manage food, homemade ale and meat in advance. As they enjoy complete participation in the community events, they do not like to meet strangers or travel beyond their settlement area during their celebration period. They take complete leave from carpentry and hunting during the festivals. These festivals are observed with much joy and fervor amidst singing, dancing, feasting and their own ritual performances. Rice, meat and drinks play an important role in their feast.

2.4. Death and Nomadism

In Raute community, there is no elaborate ceremony during a death ritual. They simply dig the grave and bury the dead body. But few years back, they used to leave the dead body on the ground for the scavenging vultures.

The death ritual of Raute has played a key role in promoting their nomadic tradition. They consider it to be ominous to continue living at the same place when their member dies. After burying the dead body, they immediately move

to a new place just on the following day. They highlight the cultural aspect of nomadism in their community when they express that they would not settle permanently unless they are immortal. In that sense, mortality and mobility form the basis of their culture. Even when someone dies at a new place on the very first day of their arrival, they follow the same practice.

2.5. Barter

Bartering with the local communities is the major mode of economic exchange in the Raute community. The practice of exchanging wooden products (i.e. bowls, boxes, beds, and other utensils) with the quantity of grains that the same pot can contain is still alive in their community. But in cases when the containers are too large, they trade their wares for money or goats. In recent years, they have increasingly been using money for their economic exchanges, since having money enables them to buy whatever they need from the local market.

2.6. Forest: The Home of the Rautes

Forest is the ultimate home for the Rautes. It is their shelter, source of food, vicinity for entertainment, basis of their utensils and the real foundation for their income source.

The culture of the Raute has deeper consideration towards the wellbeing of the forest. They believe that a longer stay in a particular place will contribute to deforestation. They are people who move from one place to another, and this behaviour consequently controls the excessive exploitation of forest resources in one particular area.

Rautes are the best people. We are not involved in politics. We do not occupy other Nepali people's land. We do not steal crops, clothes, gold or livestock from other people. It is a minor issue when my people take away vegetables from others. We never use explosive. We never get involved in any kind of violence. We do not attack people. Raute do not require police or guards. We fully practice our traditional skills and enjoy life. We do not cause any harm! – Mahin Bahadur Shahi, Raute Chief



Young Rauts busy preparing woodcraft

The Rauts prefer to use only a certain species of woods, so that their selection does not create any clash with the villagers. The species of economic significance such as *Shorea robusta*, *Acacia catechue*, *Dalbergia sisoo* are not their priorities. They only cut common species of trees.

Another peculiarity of the Rauts is their application of very basic tools to cut out timber and craft wooden products. Some of the tools used are an axe, special kind of Basila and Ramo.

2.7. Dance

The Raute dance symbolizes their cultural continuation and is a mode of their entertainment. The Rauts have been performing this dance outside their settlement to reveal their identity and provide entertainment to villagers. This dance has also been an important source of their income. They have a special commitment in their ethnic dance. They synchronize their body movements to the rhythm of maadal beats. As 2-3 madals are drummed, the Rauts dance in different movement, sometimes in a round circle, sometimes in rows, or in lines.



The Raute dance is one of the major highlights during Surkhet festival in 2009.

Wooden utensils produced by Rauts.



Koshi



Madhus



Jhuma



Box 1. A Dozen Unique Raute Culture

1. 'No' to Agriculture

For the Rautes, it is sin to sow a seed. Their traditional culture forbids them to practice for agriculture and animal husbandry.

2. Barter Wooden Pots for Grain

As they do not farm, they have rely on their woodcraft for their livelihood. They can carv various wooden pots such as Madhus, Koshi, Musal, Okhal and Jhuma. They barter these utensils for grain and other basic things. They do not have any other basic things with villagers. They do not have interest in any occupation such as potter or labor.

3. Hunting Monkey Only

They only hunt monkey; birds and other wild animals are never hunt by the Raute hunters. Only male members are involved in hunting. Unlike other hunters, who use nets and logs and sticks to trap their prey.

4. 'No' to Formal Education

Their culture do not accept them to be involved in any types of formal education.

5. High Regards For Women

Women have a good position in Raute community. They are prominent decision makers within the family. But they never go for hunting, cutting trees and carving wood.

6. Nature Worship

The Rautes do not adore stone as God. However, they are worshipers of the natural bodies such as the sun, rivers and forests.

7. 'No' to Population Census

The Rautes do not like the idea of counting their numbers. They get offended, If anybody asks them about their exact numbers. As they believe that birth and death are usual processes

of nature, they do not think necessary to mathematical calculation about their life.

8. Nuclear Family Structure

After marriage, the new couple moves to a new tent where they start their married life together. They will not live with a widowed mother or sister.

9. Strict Limitation about Wedding Age

Child marriage, widow marriage, polygamy and inter- cast marriage are strictly prohibited in the Raute community. They are quite strict about monogamous relationship in their community. But after the death of a wife, the widower can remarry.

10. 'No' to Permanent Settlement

They never spend long periods in one place. Since they cut soft wood tree for carving wooden utensil, staying long in one place means destroying more trees. Thus shifting to a new location gives ample time for forests to regenerate.

11. Shift Camp just after the Death of their Member(s)

As a member of their community dies, they bury the dead body in a nearby forest and in the very next morning, they shift their camp to another place. They are very adherent to this tradition; they move to the next camp even if a death occurs on the very first day of their arrival.

12. Drink Natural Spring Water Only

The Rautes are quite choosy about drinking water; they drink water from spring only. They do not drink water from ponds, hand pumps or wells. So while moving to new camps, they consider the availability of spring water become a requirement.

My people like the services and support offered by the government. Majority of my people say “never think of farming or permanent settlement. They warn me "if you do so, we'll not take you as our leader.” I may involve myself and my two sons into farming or education, but what will the rest of us do? – *Mahin Bahadur Shahi, Raute Chief*



Rautes' temporary shelter at the bank of the river Karnali, near Kalikada, Achham

3. The Raute Support Project

Although the Raute is a nomadic group with its own special culture and tradition, local communities had no respect towards them. The villagers were unhappy about the Rautes' temporary settlements around the forest area and cutting trees. The media were not adequately informed about Raute culture and tradition. Local government authorities provided minimal support on few occasions but did not value the culture of the Raute.

The Rautes make big wooden containers to barter with paddy, wheat, corn, and other grains. Their logic is simple-the bigger the container, greater the portion of grain. Based on this logic they cut bigger trees.

Local communities were pressuring the Rautes for settling in one place, practice agriculture and send their children to school. They thought that the Rautes were roaming from one place to another without any reason. The Rautes on the other hand remained silent and would not offer any explanation about the cultural significance of their nomadic life.

Bartering their product with pot full of rice



Raute : The Last Nomads Of Nepal

In such conditions, Contemporary Vision (CV) carried out a project: "Conservation of Raute Culture Through Livelihood Improvement (With Participatory Video Reporting)" with the coordination and support from UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme.

Project Name: Conservation of Rautes Culture Through Livelihood Improvement (With Participatory Video Reporting)

Goal: The conservation of the nomadic Rautes and their culture.

3.1. The Implementation Process

The project was designed with the support from the planning grants. But, since the Rautes would not accept outsiders in their community, it took a lot of time and effort for rapport building during project formulation. After winning their trust and after a series of interactions, the Rautes gave consent to advocate for their nomadic rights, rights over their access to forest, marketing of their wooden products and health and other livelihood services. In order to implement these key activities,



Raute kids helping their parents during camp shifting



Rautes receiving warm cloths supported by the project

interaction workshops at village level and district level were conducted. During these interaction meetings, the debate over the theme "The Rautes - nuisance or national heritage" was widely held. This debate helped collect opinions on the Rautes from local leaders, government officials, members from community forests and general public. They also participated in district trade fairs, where they performed their traditional Raute dance. Their visit to capital and meeting with top leaders were instrumental in ensuring their nomadic rights and their access to forest resources. Throughout the festival and high profile visit to capital, national and local level media were mobilized so as to introduce Rautes to wider audience.

In the meantime, the project also provided basic material support such as tools for wood carving, material for tent, and clothes. In order to increase women's participation, cooking utensils and jewelry of their choice were also provided. Likewise, health services with mobile health team and emergency health services were part of the project.

The interaction with local villagers also focused on bartering of the wooden product made by Rautes.

Brochures on these wooden products were prepared to further expand the market in district head-quarters and the capital.

Since the uniqueness of the project lies in participatory video reporting, it was crucial to acquire permission from them to film their entire activities. Permission was next to impossible in the early stages but later, they consented. Few of the interested Rautes members were also trained to use video camera, though they never master the skill of shooting videos. The quarterly and annual reports were prepared in participatory video form. Likewise, an official website and video documentary on Rautes were also made to highlight the unique aspects of the Raute community.

3.2. Project Budget

UNDP- GEF Small Grants Programme provided US\$ 50,000 for the project. In addition, the Project was able to generate total US\$ 54,928 from the government of Nepal and many other organizations. The table 1. covers the details of project cost.

People have their own jobs; some are in the police service, some work as porters, some break boulders and some build cities. Some even have landed on the moon, some are pilots, and some are cobblers, and we are Raute. It all goes well. They should let us live the way we are. – Mahin Bahadur Shahi, Raute Chief



Rautes in interaction programme with the local community in Dailekh

Table : 1 Co-funding from Government of Nepal and Various Doners

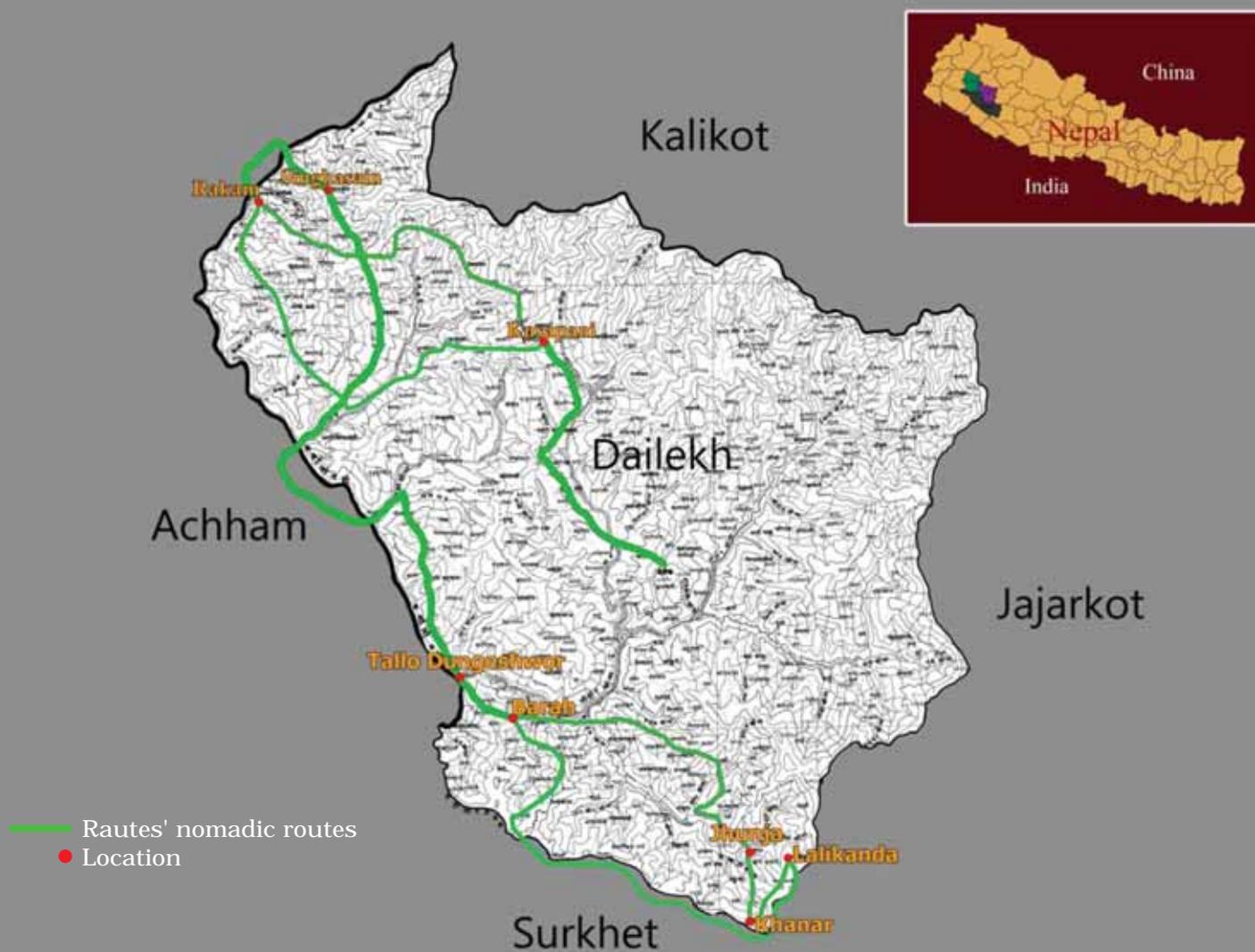
S.N.	Organization (Doners)	Support Heading	Cash/Kind	Amount
1.	Ministry of local development	Livelihood support (Monthly allowance- 15 months xNRs 1,000x170 no.)	Cash	2,750,000
2.	Nepal Tourism board	Hall rent etc.	Kind	35,000
3.	Prime minister's office	Livelihood support	Cash	30,000
4.	Shree Eco visionary	Transportation support	Kind	24,000
5.	Federation of Nepalese Journalist, Surkhet	Organizing meeting and publicity	Kind	5,000
6.	Nepal Foundation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)	Livelihood support (clothes, rice, shoes etc.)	Cash	180,000
7.	National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)	Rautes visit to Zoo and providing lunch	Kind	10,000
8.	Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Surkhet	Cultural fair in Surkhet festival	Kind	40,000
9.	FECOFUN Surkhet	Support to organize interaction programme among stakeholders	kind	40,000
10.	DDC Surkhet	Livelihood Support	Cash	20,000
11.	Patan College Students' organization	Livelihood Support	Cash	6,000
12.	Gold Star Shoe Company	Material Support	Cash	20,000
13.	DDC Dailekh	Interaction Programme Support	Kind	10,000
14.	CV- Nepal	Contribution	Kind	324,000
15.	Rautes	physical assistance (a Period of 2 years)	Kind	36,000
			Total	NRs.3,845,000
			US 1\$ (NRs 70)	\$54,928

Mobile health service at Rautes camp



Rautes women preparing net





3.3 The Nomadic Journey

To implement this project, we followed and filmed Rautes' nomadic journey for three consecutive years in about 29 villages. At the time of making the video proposal, we met the Rautes at Ratu village of Surkhet district. For about one year they moved within Surkhet. In June 2007, when the project started we met them at Khanar village in Dailekh. From there, they divided into two groups. One group headed north towards Lalikanda and the other moved west towards Jhunja. Both groups later met at Baraha after 7 months. The united group went from Tallo Dungeshwor towards Achham and back again inside Dailekh. After

moving through different villages in Dailekh, they went back to Achham and once again back to Dailekh. They divided again into two groups in Rakam and moved through different villages in Dailekh. Both groups again met in Kusapani. From there they kept moving before arriving to Salyan. The Rautes get divided in different groups to create better opportunities for bartering grains in different villages, especially at the time of food scarcity in the region. Likewise, it also helps in conserving the forest by giving ample time to regenerate

We are comfortable working with you (CV -team). Medical treatment, allowances, money from selling our products, yes we got everything. It is perfect. People and communities are kind to us. We are free to acquire timber from the forest.
- Aain Bahadur Shahi, Raute deputy leader



Mahin Bahadur Shahi, Raute chief speaking at a district level interaction programme in Dailekh.



A district level interaction programme in Surkhet.

4. Meeting the Objectives and Activities

In order to achieve the project goal, the following three objectives were set:

1. To carry out advocacy and sensitization initiatives and ensure the rights of the Rautes
2. To contribute to livelihood enhancement through socio-economic empowerment and better livelihood opportunities.
3. To document indigenous Raute knowledge and their relationship with nature.

4.1 Meeting Objective 1: To Carry out Advocacy and Sensitization Initiatives and Ensure the Rights of the Rautes

In Surkhet, 59,305 hectares of forest area has been handed over to 302 Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs) comprising 45,756 families. Likewise in Dailekh, 19,148.74 hectares of forest has been handed over to 261 CFUGs with 3,271 households. In these community forests, Rautes are prohibited to fell trees for wooden utensil production. But they wanted to continue their traditional nomadic mode of life.

In order to ensure their rights, the project initiated different interaction meetings and also facilitated Raute members to visit the capital and meet different dignitaries.

Local Interaction in Dailekh



Rautes participating in Surkhet festival

4.1.1. Interaction Meetings

Interaction meetings were organized with the theme “The Rautes-Nuisance or national Treasure”. These gatherings provided all stakeholders to express their opinion and understand local people’s perception towards the Rautes. These meetings were organized in different tiers.

a) Village Level Interaction in Dailekh and Surkhet

During the project tenure, there were 20 interaction programs conducted at different villages, where the Rautes, the local politicians, teachers, NGO workers, opinion makers and local villagers actively participated. This gave an opportunity to all the parties to understand the ‘issues of the Raute’ and reached to a harmonious solution, which was something that had never happened before.

b) District Level Interaction – Dailekh

A district level interaction program was held among the Raute representatives, local residents, and other stakeholders in Dailekh Bazaar, the headquarter of Dailekh. About 500 participants including Chief District Officer (CDO), Local



Rautes chief, Mahin Bhadur Shahi getting treatment in mobile health camp in Dailekh.

Development Officer (LDO), representatives of various political parties, media personnel and I/NGOs members took part in the program. The Raute Chief Mahin Bahadur Shahi shared some interesting facets of the Raute life. The CDO focused particularly on the necessity to bring about a radical change in the attitude of the general public towards the Rautes.

c) District Level Interaction – Surkhet

In January 2008, an interaction program was held at Birendranagar of Surkhet. The program, which was also supported by the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities and Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal, saw a wider participation, including the presence of CDO, LDO, District Forest Officer (DFO), representatives of I/NGOs, political leaders etc.

Speaking at the occasion, the Raute deputy leader, Aain Bahadur Shahi stressed that they should be allowed to cut soft timber in the forest due to the fact that their livelihood is inextricably tied to the easy availability of forest resources. He also made effort to convince the concerned authorities and CFUG members that their traditional practices do not follow any methods of hoarding and piling stocks more than what they require. At the same

time he also defended his community against the charge of the sole cause of deforestation.

The CDO, LDO and DFO, all expressed that, the Rautes being the true heirs of the forest, their needs should duly be addressed by the community forest management plan. Representatives from the Federation of Community Forests Users clarified that their forest management plan has never excluded the Rautes as the beneficiaries of the forest, and promised that they will try to offer an even better consideration towards their nomadic needs in the days ahead.

4.1.2. Rautes' Visit to the Capital

In January 2008, a visit to Kathmandu was arranged for the Rautes as they wanted to put forward their problems and necessities to the political leader in the context of a newly developed political scenario. On the occasion, they met different political dignitaries and high-ranking government officials.

In Kathmandu, the Rautes shared their predicaments with the President, Prime Minister, speaker of the Constituent Assembly, Minister for Local Development, Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation, Minister for Finance and with

We'll help our best to let you live your ways and save your culture. There's no reason not to support you. Supporting NRs. 1,000/2,000 is not a big deal. Well, let's do this-this years NRs. 1,000 each; NRs. 500 more to that of the last year.
– Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, the then Finance Minister



Aain Bahadur Shahi, Deputy chief, handshakes with Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, President of Nepal in Sital Niwas, Kathmandu

the academia comprising anthropologists, policy makers and the media. To all these dignitaries, they pleaded not to impede their nomadic life. The central level stakeholders valued their persistent will power and love for their culture and tradition and also promised to provide assistance from their side.

a) Meeting with the President

The Rautes met Dr. Rambaran Yadav, the first President of Nepal. In the meeting, they demanded that the government should seriously be concerned in promoting their nomadic tradition. In response, the President assured that he would advise the government accordingly.

b) Meeting with the then Prime Minister

In the meeting with the then Prime Minister, Mr Puspakamal Dahal "Prachanda", they demanded that the government should increase their monthly allowance. They also demanded that they should be legally allowed to use timber from the local forests, and they should be given rice, cereals, goats and clothes on festive occasions. The Prime Minister expressed his commitment that their issues would be discussed at the cabinet meeting.

Meeting with Finance Minister Dr. Baburam Bhattarai



Meeting with Subash Chandra Nemwang, Speaker of Constituent Assembly

c) Meeting with the Speaker of Constituent Assembly

A meeting was held between the Rautes and the constituent Assembly Speaker Mr Subash Chandra Nembang. The Raute deputy chief, Aain Bahadur Shahi said that they are also the citizens of this country, and therefore the government must show a sincere concern towards their welfare. Mr. Nembang, in response, promised that he would advise the government to be more responsible in this matter.

d) Meeting with the then Finance Minister

The Rautes met the then Finance Minister Dr. Baburam Bhattarai at his office. In the meeting, the Rautes pointed out that their monthly allowance of NRs. 500 was quite insufficient for their survival as they do not have any other source of income. They requested their allowance be increased to at least NRs. 2,000. The Minister in response agreed to increase their monthly allowance to NRs.1,000 and also promised that he would try his best to increase the amount to NRs.2,000 in the following national budget announcement.



'Rautes in cyber world <<http://www.nomadicrautes.org.np>>: Rautes inaugurating their website, at CV-Nepal Office

e) Meeting with the then Minister for Local Development

In the meeting with the then Minister for Local Development, Mr Ramchandra Jha, the Raute leader, Aain Bahadur Shahi demanded that their rights over the forest be secured as their culture and livelihood are rooted in the jungle. He also pointed out that the allowance they were given was not adequate for their sustenance. The Minister also expressed his due commitment to do his best towards the promotion of their rights.

f) Meeting with the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)

The Rautes met vice-chairman, Mr Jeetpal Kirati and member secretary, Mr Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar of NEFIN. In the meeting, the Rautes demanded that the Federation being formed for the welfare of the indigenous communities, should also take initiatives to ensure their rights. They even requested the officials not to categorize and compare them with other indigenous people whose livelihood is based on permanent settlement.

4.2 Meeting Objective 2. To Contribute to Their Livelihood Enhancement Through Socio-economic Empowerment and Opportunities.

The primitive nomadic mode of Raute life prohibits them from permanent settlement, practicing agriculture or sending their children to school. Thus their preferences for basic needs are different and specific too. The project supported in a number of key areas, which was agreed upon by the Rautes themselves.

4.2.1 Material Support

In order to contribute to their livelihoods, tents, rice, clothes, shoes, traditional jewelries, blanket, Nepali caps, bags, musical instrument etc. were provided to the Rautes during project period as per their demands.

4.2.2. Health Camp at the Raute Settlement

Two mobile health camps were taken to the Raute-settlements. The first camp was run at Tunibagar of Dailekh in 2007 where nearly 80 Rautes got different health services. The second session of the medical camp was held at Singhasain VDC of Dailekh in August, 2008 where about 100 Rautes received free medical facilities.

After Contemporary Vision started working with the Rautes, we got the opportunity of field reporting directly from the Raute Camp. Likewise, this organization also brought the Rautes to Surkhet for press meet and interaction. These days, there have been more reporting on the Rautes. I think together with the frequency of reporting, the media's understanding has also deepened a lot about the Rautes. – Kalendra Sejuwal, Journalist, Surkhet



Group of Rautes meeting with the then Prime Minister Mr Puspa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda"

4.2.3. Promotion of the Raute Culture

The project has launched various initiatives for the promotion of the Raute culture. The wooden crafts made by these people, their unique dance and other cultural aspects were showcased in different programs and trade fairs. Other than the stall at Surkhet Trade Fair, the Rautes products were displayed at some important forums such as in South Asia GEF constituency meeting in Kathmandu, World Environment Day at The Nepal Academy Hall and Nepal International Indigenous Film Festival at National Convention Hall. Likewise, the project also prepared a video documentary that incorporated the various aspects of Raute culture.

4.2.4. Raute Specific Stall at Surkhet Trade Fair

In 2008, the Rautes installed their own stall at the Surkhet Trade Fair organized by Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. In the stall, they not only showcased their products but also unveiled interesting aspects of their lives to the visitors. They gave first-hand information about the carving process so as to highlight the importance and usage of their wooden products. The Rautes dance presented during the occasion

was show topper. The then-Minister for Peace and Reconstruction, Mr Ramchandra Paudel also visited the stall. Mr. Paudel showed great concern and curiosity about the Raute life; he was so impressed by the Raute culture and their wooden products, that he bought himself a Kosi as a souvenir.

4.2.5. Wooden Products and Market

For the sustainability of their livelihood, the project has focused on enhancing the quality of their wooden products and also takes initiatives to sell them in the national and international market. Even at the community level, the trade of their products has been promoted through different interaction programs.

It was observed that the maximum consumption of Raute products took place in the local communities, but they did not get fair price for their products. Likewise, local people preferred using plastic and other metal utensil instead of the wooden one. Thus sustaining their livelihood by selling their products has been a tough job. Though the villagers' believe that their products have become obsolete, the Rautes judicially claim that they are never obsolete for their way of rural life.

Rautes participating in a central level interaction programme at Nepal Tourism Board, Kathmandu.

Raute rally in Surkhet festival



Raute : The Last Nomads Of Nepal

Rautes with Judda B. Gurung, Member Secretary, NTNC



Krishna Om Thapa, cameraperson, preparing participatory video with the Rautes

Since the local market has not been able to cater to a sustainable livelihood for these people, it is high time that their products found an access into the international market as well. In this respect, the project has facilitated an understanding between the Rautes community and the Organic Village Pvt. Ltd. Kathmandu whereby the latter has taken the responsibility of international market expansion for the Raute products. The packaging of the products includes a brochure and a CD showing the details of the production. These items are mainly used for home décor purposes in the international market.

4.3 Meeting Objective 3. To Document Indigenous Raute Knowledge and Their Relationship with Nature.

The available literatures on Rautes is very limited. Since the community is very introvert and constantly moving from one place to another, their culture, their nomadic life and their indigenous knowledge are neither documented nor exposed to the out site world. Thus with the video reporting, the project attempted to document and disseminate their culture, nomadic life, belief and economic activities.

4.3.1. Participatory Video Reporting

Participatory Video is an approach through which local community members, who could not express their opinion in written form, can orally express their idea through video means.

The action plan was prepared working together with the Rautes, who are averse to keeping a long relation with any person and place. The participatory video enabled us to work in harmony with the Rautes. Earlier, they never allowed anyone to shoot their photos or video. But once we trained a group of Raute youths to handle video camera, the women and children started feeling comfortable in front of the camera. They enjoyed themselves being seen on the video footage they themselves took. As the young ones started to play around with the camera, the elders also became acquainted with video shooting. Although the Raute youths initially showed curiosity towards the camera, they never showed enthusiasm to master the shooting skills. Nevertheless, they did record some video footage at some places. Once they got used to camera, shooting their activities became easier.

The government of Nepal has ratified the International Labour Organization Convention no: 169. It has clearly specified the rights of Rautes. They have clearly stated that they don't want to learn farming or settle in town. They even don't need citizenship. They just love to live in jungle and follow their ancestors' lifestyle. What they want is to have their special rights over the forest, wilderness, and livelihood be secured in every respect. – Krishna Bhattachan, Sociologist



Ratue women enjoy film making

The Rautes are an orally literate society. They have made their demand and opinion through their own words on video. All the activities of the 'Raute support project' was filmed and presented as a video-report. This way, the project is transparent and visible.

4.3.2. Visibility Materials

Posters, leaflets, brochures, product tags, various audio-visual materials along with informative posters, pamphlets and banners were distributed and showcased in order to foster positive knowledge about the Rautes in the local communities. Flex banners, brochures, product tags and introductory videos were also circulated in order to highlight the importance and uniqueness of the wooden products that the Rautes make. The specialized product tags that accompanied the craft items helped a lot in bringing concern for the Raute people in the public consciousness.

4.3.2. Website for Information on Rautes

The project has also designed an official website which offers reliable and authentic information about these people. Details of the various aspects of the Raute - lifestyle and culture can be seen in www.nomadicrautes.org.np

4.3.4. Information Dissemination

Until about 5 years ago, except for some particular places in the mid- and far-western regions of Nepal, people in other parts of the country did not have



Rautes ready to shoot the video

much knowledge about the Raute community. But after this project was launched, more people in Nepal knew or at least heard about them. They became the centre of attention in the mass media all over the country. When the Rautes came for a week-long visit to Kathmandu, they got space in about 120 news entries (most of them in the front pages) in almost every newspaper published in Kathmandu. Televisions, radios and FM stations aired special news features about them. Such Rautes' issues raised by the mainstream national media helped to raise awareness among the general public regarding the Raute community, especially of their unique culture.

4.3.5. Media campaign/Rautes and Journalist

The project has coordinated with journalists in transmitting adequate news and information about the Raute. A group of journalists were taken to the Raute settlement a couple of times. Consequently, news and articles related to these people received priority in various national and international media sources during the project time. Moreover, frequent press meetings were organized in Dailekh, Surkhet and Kathmandu where the Rautes got the opportunity to share their views with media-personel. This has enabled the general public to be more familiar with the Rautes and get a first-hand knowledge about their life.

Krishna Om Thapa Observing the Jhuma Rautes Camp at Kalekanda, Achham



Rautes enjoy elephant ride in Jawalakhel zoo





Searching lies on Krishna's head?

5. Achievements

Within a short period of time, the project showed visible results.

1. The numerous interactions at various levels and Rautes' visit to the capital were pivotal in highlighting their grave issues- nomadic life and their access to community forests. Both their rights have been ensured. The chair person of the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) also pledged that operational plan of the community forests in the districts will be amended so as to legally ensure their traditional rights.
2. The capital visit and meeting with high level officials was very fruitful. After meeting with the then Finance Minister Mr Baburam Bhattarai, the monthly subsistence allowance per person has been increased to NRs. 1,000 from the previous provision of NRs. 500.
3. Better social harmony with the villagers is maintained. As a result of numerous meetings, the negative perception of villagers that 'the Rautess destroys forest' has changed. On the other hand, the Rautes also understood the local people's attitude and perception towards them. They also agreed on the conditions to preserve forests and also tried to convince the agencies and communities that they require only the soft timber having a low market value.
4. Earlier, the government agencies and local non-governmental organizations including the local communities were unaware of the idea that Rautes required assistance and guidance. But after the implementation of the project, the Rautes have been granted with grains and goat during traditional festivals and other occasions by the district government and other organizations. Moreover, the local media and both the governmental and non-governmental organizations are highly sensitized and are quite concerned about the issues of the Rautes.
5. Contemporary Vision (CV) on the other hand has equally opened doors of opportunities for the scholars pursuing their advance level thesis and other research by providing video, photo and information on the Rautes. CV also helped transmission of factual and ground-based information to the media.



Kapil Shrestha from CV with Rautes in their camp



Prahlad Thapa from CV interviewing Rautes

6. Different Opinion Towards the Rautes

'It is the responsibility of all to help their best in conserving the endangered indigenous communities. The government ought to show its concern towards the Rautes for they have been leading a unique but declining cultural tradition. The rights of all ethnic groups should be guaranteed by the new constitution being written. The government should address the problems of the Rautes. I am ever ready to take initiations on my part in this regard. Let's hope that your needs get addressed in the new constitution'.

- **Dr. Rambaran Yadav, President, Nepal**

'The Raute is the only nomadic tribe in the modern context of human evolution. So we do believe that the state must be seriously responsible in conserving these endangered people. We'll hold discussions at the cabinet and see how much the government can help'.

- **Mr Pushpakamal Dahal (Prachanda), the then Prime-minister**

'The Rautes are a part of our cultural heritage. It is the state's responsibility to provide dignified help to these people. Favorable policy should be made and implemented to their aid. It would be my pleasure to assist them on my part.'

- **Mr Subash Chandra Nembang, Speaker-Constituent Assembly**

'Efforts should be made to conserve their culture while uplifting the status of the Rautes. If the Raute culture is really to be protected, then we should encourage them to wear their own traditional clothes, observe their own rituals though focus

should be laid on hygiene and healthy practices. This not only helps to conserve their new culture but also to uplift their life.'

- **Mr Rudra Prasad Poudel, Chief District Officer, Surkhet**

'The Rautes hate the idea of permanent settlement which is a major part of their culture. We need to respect their integrity and ensure their right to self-decision. Our organization is always ready to help them.'

- **Mr Jeetpal Kirati, Vice Chairman, NEFIN**

'The forest that we call our community forest was conserved by the Rautes' ancestors as much as by our own. So it's obvious that the Rautes also have equal rights over these forests as much as we do. Some may accuse the Rautes of destroying the forest, but it measures to a far less extent if we compare it to our own practices that lead to deforestation.'

- **Mr Hariharsingh Rathaur, Journalist - The Kantipur National Daily, Dailekh**

'The Rautes are born in the forest; they live there and are a part of it. The forest means everything to the Rautes. The government should understand this regard and raise awareness among the people in this regard. We have issued our official approval so that the Rautes can use the forest resources wherever and whenever they need. The government ratified ILO convention also ensures the well-being of the Rautes.'

- **Mr Ghanshyam Pandey, FECOFUN**



7. Lesson Learnt and Challenges

The Raute Chief Mahin Bahadur Shahi (left) with his deputies.

1. The project with participatory video reporting is very suitable for orally literate indigenous people like the Rautes. Video medium became an effective tool for stimulating the Rautes to speak out. It also enabled them to speak powerfully to the decision makers, media, local communities and other audiences, who are hundreds of miles away from their habitat.
2. It has been a Herculean task to win the confidence of the Rautes. The project has to spend time and effort for rapport building although the project was designed with planning grants.
3. While working with the Rautes, the project strictly followed a dictum to maintain their communal and cultural secrets as they were very sensitive to these issues.
4. Rautes being nomads, building roads, schools, drinking water, agriculture or animal husbandry are not priority for wellbeing. The activities undertaken by the project, were determined by the Rautes themselves and prior approval were taken from them to disseminate the project activities through video and other electronic and paper media.
5. It was seen that Rautes can voice their view in front of larger audience, media and in front of dignitaries without any hesitation.
6. The positive treatment towards the Rautes in the community forests has sent a positive feedback across all the district forest offices, CFUGs and the locals of mid-west region of Nepal.

7. The effect of the local public participation in favor of the Raute issue like assistance in their livelihood, wider market for the Raute-made products and the recognition of their rights traversed from village to district and to the capital.
8. With the continued dialogue process, a broad spectrum of individuals such as journalists and media people, local experts, members of political parties and local communities got an opportunity to understand, introduce and mingle with the Rautes. This has helped cultivate a culture of discourse and listen to one another.
9. Although the impact of the project does show a brighter side, the project is equally alert on the fact that some of its approaches may bring about non traditional practices in the future. The monthly allowance of NRs 500 per person as provided by the government to all the indigenous communities has doubled to NRs 1,000 up only for the Rautes. The project is also observant of this fact that such kinds of increase may bring about unwanted impact to a community that has survived independently and autonomously for centuries out of its own nomadic cultural practices.
10. The continuation of their traditional Raute culture can be attributed to their simple mode of lifestyle. First, they do not stockpile things more than what is required. Second, they do not compete with the fellow villagers for space i.e. land for house and agriculture, for timber (they only harvest softwood) and during hunting (they only hunt monkey which local villagers avoid). Third, they are strictly against cross cultural marriage and interracial intimacy. And fourth, they do not send their children to the school. Thus in order to let them continue their traditional nomadic culture, they should not be forced on what they do not want to do.
11. The Rautes, instead, learnt to live symbiotically with local villagers. Since monkeys destroy much of agriculture crops, hunting them not only curtails the loss of crops for local farmers but also fulfills regular protein supply in their diet. Likewise they also provide wooden utensils to local villagers and barter with food grain.
13. Since the wooden utensils are replaced by durable plastic and metal goods, the Rautes are facing hard time in selling them in local market. Marketing these products in regional centers and capital is also difficult as they have to rely on outsiders for the market expansion.
13. Since they were constantly moving from one place to another, keeping with their pace was challenging task.
14. The project team could not participate during their traditional monkey hunting as they believe inviting outsider during hunting brings bad omens.

Recommendations

1. Since the Rautes do not have a script of their language, scholars and linguists should work to keep a record of their oral-based language system before it becomes extinct and obsolete.
2. The project is successful in achieving its objectives. It hereby does not mean that the Rautes do not require further support. Research and livelihood supports should be continued to conserve their rituals, livelihood patterns, hunting strategies, dances as such so that future generations will not be deprived of this unique discourse of socio-anthropological knowledge as conserved in a living heritage by the last of the hunters and gatherers of this part of the world.

8. From the Team Leader's Diary

We were briskly heading deep into the rain drenched jungle as soon as we got the word that the Rautes had hoisted their new settlement at Ratu Village, some 50 Kilometer away from the district headquarters of Surkhet, Mid-west Nepal. It was the rainy season of July in the year 2005. Our friend from Surkhet Mr. Bishnu Rishi Pandey led the way through the villages and forest. As expected, we encountered the Rautes at Ratu Village for the very first time. But our expectations to communicate with them did not follow, so soon. They outright posed their rigidity to interact with outsiders during this first encounter. On top of that, they were fully indulged in celebrating the annual Saune Sangrati (festival on the first day of the fourth month of Nepali calendar) at their best. They pointed out that we ought not attempt to come into contact with them for five more days as our presence would disturb them. We relaised the depth of their request and returned to Surkhet.

After five days, we again visited them. But things were still not quite in order. Our expectation failed the second time. They were still thrilling themselves in the festive hangover. They did not allow us to capture them in video. So we maintained a respectful distance and gathered some video footages of surroundings. These were the times when the Rautes bore a stigma attached to them

by the outside world about their habitation, wealth, tools, equipment and their fondness for tree and wood products. But we were on a quest to question such stigma.

Sure enough, when we got this opportunity to directly scrutinize all these processes, we discovered that in fact there was no gap, no hierarchy, and no hindrance to one's will. Already in our first observation we noted that they have had an egalitarian society. They only use few accessories and domestic utensils wooden bowls for eating, aluminum and copper pots for cooking, a big wooden container (Jhuma) for keeping local alcohol (Janda), bedding clothes, garments for wearing, an axe, trapping nets, wooden jars for water collection and tents. Since they are always on the standby to move from one place to another with no prior planning, they collect as few accessories as possible and keep only the essential things. They do not revisit any particular place except to collect few domestic accessories. Among the most used tools are the axe and trapping net for hunting.

Rautes are different from other hunting groups. They never keep an intimate relationship to communities outside their own. They are least bothered about the external world outside their

communal periphery. Despite the different stress and hindrance from the outside world, Rautes have followed their culture and tradition without any compromise.

A conversation with a Raute is enough to realize how naive and innocent they are. The single encounter is enough to understand how free they are from possessions, most social obligation and complicated family responsibilities. Unlike those of us who live in a competitive environment of the modern world, they are totally free from hectic schedules, jobs stresses, bosses, bills, traffic, taxes, laws, news, and money and all the worry attached to these matters.

No matter how much we appreciate the Rautes and their way of life, culture and tradition, can we live like the Rautes? Surely, we say no. We say we cannot live like them. By seeing the life of Rautes we feel as if their life is a never-ending camping trip with the death as a bigger price - death during hunting, death during child bearing, death due to simple disease, and death by falling off a cliff or into ravines. Women bear child with the least safety measures and care. Most of the children die by the time they reach five years of age. The Rautes have to face the severe hot and cold seasons with thunder and regular rain in the wild. Nevertheless, our long years of experience living together with the Rautes has actually influenced us to understand modern world including their life pattern as well as other communities. I would rather say it is the wisdom of the nomadic Rautes that has touched me the most.

As I write these lines from my office in the Kathmandu city, my senses are constantly playing back to the Rautes life. It has taught me way of life - to remain quiet, labor hard, gather no more than what is a necessity, assimilate naturally into every situation, practice a non-attachment way of life. Everyday I reason thus - what is there to gain through haste? But I do not hesitate to convey that I was enormously happy when I had spent

my time with the Rautes. Their severely simple life has taught so many lesson to our life. They are perfect, brave, naive and innocent.

I know I cannot be and live like the Rautes but I have Rautes on my mind. And the feelings are mutual. They regularly contact me too. As soon as their settlement comes to closer to a big village or a town, they take out my visiting card from a special purse and ask any local telephone operator to dial my number. Some of the Rautes also visited me without prior notice. Prakash, Surendra, and Wake Bahadur had landed in Kathmandu and telephoned from the bus terminal expecting me to be right there. I did rush to fetch them after the phone call. Rautes do not have the so-called refined feelings like us. They hardly weep or giggle. However, I try my best to assimilate with them.

For the Rautes, death is a simple process. No matter whoever dies in the family, even the nearest kin practices the same as others do- they simply dig the grave and bury the dead body and shift habitation to another spot the very next day. And having no ceremony means no close affinity with the outsider.

So the next time you land up in a Raute country, do not let yourself down because they do not talk to you the first time. But when they open up, they open up everything to you including their heart and their wild pure and a wise world.

Hari Thapa

Team Leader, Raute Support Project
Kathmandu



A young Raute girl carries pots on her head for fetching water

9. Implementing Organisation

Contemporary Vision, a research based organization was established in 2002 with the clear motto of mainstreaming the issues of the marginalized, dalits and indigenous people through independent filmmaking. It has received both national – international commissions for investigative reports, rights advocacy, and documentaries. The organization strongly believes that documentary films can be an advocacy tool for social transformation.

The organization produces video documentaries on its own and in association with other individuals and organisations. It has been producing a wide range of introductory, promotional and research-oriented documentaries. We lay emphasis on research-based script, high quality picture and objective presentation. Burning issues on social and environmental aspects have remained the subject matter of our prime concern. Consisting of a team of hardworking and dedicated youths, the organization is striving for adding a new dimension to audio-visual journalism and, consequently the quest for excellence would continue. The organization has its own technically sound editing studio, Audio-visual equipments and competent technical and management staff members.

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Akkal Thapa
Raute community and people from
Dailekh, Surkhet, Achham where
Raute moved

UNDP/GEF Small Grants Programme

GEF-SGP of the United Nations Development Programme aims at conserving global environment through community approaches. The programme has entered its 5th operational phase. Nepal is one of the over 122 countries participating in the programme implementation.

Nepal, despite being a biological supermarket, a hydro rich nation, is also facing the threats to its biodiversity, water and climate thus resulting unsustainable livelihood. It is recognized that this challenge could only be overcome through community led efforts to conserve biodiversity and its use for sustainable livelihoods. Thus, GEF-SGP is implementing its projects for the global commons in Nepal under available broader legal framework

Glimpse of the GEF-SGP Nepal Projects

Since, 1998 to 2011, there were all together 131 projects awarded (54 Biodiversity, 40 Climate Change, 18 Land Degradation, 10 International Waters, 1 POPs and 8 Capacity Building), of which, 120 projects were Full Grants, 11 Planning Grants and 1 Strategic Regional Project implemented in Srilanka and India.

Geographical Coverage

The SGP projects covered 50 districts, 110 Village Development Committees (VDCs), and 5 Municipalities of Nepal and one strategic project in Srilanka and India.



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