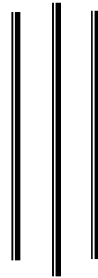


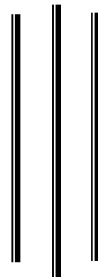
# **Reframing Livelihoods Strategies: Musahar/Bote's Changing Livelihoods Contexts and their Responses to Diverse Development Interventions**

*A Study Report*



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## **Acronyms**

AAN	Action Aid Nepal
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDO, Nepal	Community Development Organisation, Nepal
CNP	Chitwan National Park
HHs	House Holds
I/NGOs	Internatinal/Non-Governmental Organisations
M/B Samiti	Mushahar and Bote Committee
MMBKSS	Majhi Mushahar Bote Kalyan Sewa Samiti
NRC	Nepal Resettlement (Punarbas) Company

## **Executive Summary**

This report documents the dynamics of Mushahar and Bote community's struggle for livelihoods and the ongoing support from development agencies. Mushahar and Bote communities are two of the indigenous groups in Chitwan valley who are struggling hard to sustain their life and livelihoods in the face of modern development and environmental intervention for last 50 years. The community has experienced a series of external interventions including migration and resettlement of hill people, integrated development intervention including transport and communication, market expansion, creation of Chitwan national park, and finally development assistance from both government and non government sector. All these diverse forms of development and environmental interventions have enormous impacts on the livelihoods system, social fabric, cultural identities and political agency of these communities.

This report is an outcome of the study carried out to understand the changing livelihood context and ongoing support in promoting the livelihoods of Mushahar and Bote community. This study explored the ongoing development interventions and their impact on the livelihoods of the community. The study finds that ongoing development interventions by outside agencies in the community lack adequate understanding of dynamics of power relationships, socio-economic and cultural contexts around the livelihood of the community, which has resulted limited impacts despite that generous effort of development organisation and foreign aid agencies.

Starting with the brief explanation over the situation of Mushahar/Bote in the development context, the study explores the ongoing development intervention in the area centred on these communities, in specific, the development agencies' involvements in generating spaces for social empowerment and livelihood outcomes. In particular, the study explored the current situation of Mushahar and Bote community, focusing on the livelihood aspects of development interventions. While doing so, it traces the history of the livelihood bases, the changing patterns of livelihood security and strategies adopted by the community. The analysis has been made at both household as well as community level.

The findings of this study are basically drawn from the field study carried in the Mushahar/Bote villages in the Nawalpur valley. Study methods include participant observation, interviews with key informants, formal and informal interactions, and discussion meetings with Majhi Mushahar Bote Kalyan Sewa Samiti (MMBKSS-Here after M/B Samiti). The insights and reflections from authors' own working experience with these communities are also incorporated where as appropriate.

Greater community participation in the programme is a key to success. It can only be achieved through effective coordination among the involved party as well as community groups. Mobilisation of M/B Samiti and other community organisation, effective coordination and transparent programme procedure are crucial steps to follow. The study revealed that there is a strong institutional bases as well as community preparedness to respond the interventions targeted to enhance livelihood security of the community. Despite the increased flow of outside development agencies and resources, there is limited impact on livelihoods of the community. The lack of proper

coordination among the agencies and their programmes, skills and attitude are the major hindrances among others.

The study aims to contribute to the analysis of the livelihood struggles of the M/B community and generate insights to development intervention particularly reframing intervention strategy for livelihood promotion in future. We hope, this study would not only help guide future development supports in the Mushahar and Bote communities but also would inform the wider development community including development professionals, rights activists and media who are working with indigenous community across the region.

We highly appreciate and acknowledge the contribution of community members, executive members of the M/B Samiti, local people and the members and staffs of the support organisations.

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Background of the study**

Indigenous people internationally have been the target for development assistance. I guess you are talking more on modernisation and not the development assistance. Because development assistance in general may have not specific focus on indigenous. This is even stronger in the case of developing countries in the tropical region for their heavy reliance on local environmental resources that are equally considered as biodiversity hotspots and are therefore prioritised for protection. There is poor link between first sentence and the second sentence. Many of such supports have focused on indigenous people's movement for increased access to their livelihoods resource base and for their demand for cultural freedom and development autonomy.

Following this convention, Action Aid and other development agencies have been supporting Chitwan valley's (Nepal) Mushahar and Bote communities for over a decade. Initially, its involvement was through partner NGO community development organisation (CDO, Nepal) in collaboration with Oxfam Nepal. Since 2000 it is working with these communities creating consortium of 5 NGOS who have specialised expertise to support community initiatives including M/B Samiti– a community initiatives in promoting livelihoods and the rights of the local community. With the support from partner NGOs, M/B Samiti has launched various rights based and livelihood support programmes.

However, despite their continuous support to this movement, the challenge to make meaningful contribution to enhance their livelihoods is ever increasing. Instead, there has been an increased frustration and loss of faith in their mission both within the development agencies and the Mushahar and Bote communities themselves. Given the apparent pessimistic reflection by the stakeholders, it would be hard to justify the continuous flow of precious and scarce development resource without substantial change in the current approaches and strategies.

The study was carried out to provide reflective input on Action Aid's review on supporting rural livelihoods. The existing framework of project evaluation, stakeholder consultation and internal assessment is not adequate to understand and explain the complex dynamics that has mediated the development interventions in the community.

The following are the objectives of the study:

## **1.2 Objectives**

- Develop an understanding on the multiple factors that contribute to the livelihood crisis of MB community.
- Analyse their changing livelihood strategies including their struggle for access to environmental resources.
- Examine roles of I/NGOs in enhancing livelihoods of M/B community.
- Draw critical lessons for future strategies for livelihoods support

The methodology adopted for the study is case study. Initially, literature on conservation, protected area conservation, indigenous and forest dependent

communities and local development initiatives in the Chitwan valley were reviewed. Similarly various documents and records related to development intervention in the area were explored. The study was based on first-hand information gathered by visiting, observing and interacting with the people directly concerned, and secondary information taken from various source of publications. Primary information was collected employing participatory tools and techniques. Interviews, discussions, and observation were employed as the major techniques for the first hand information collection. Interactions were made with individuals, focus groups and the M/B Samiti members. The data collated from primary and secondary sources were processed and analysed, issues were prioritised and a draft report was prepared. To verify the findings, the draft report was shared and discussed with community members as well as executive members of the M/B Samiti. After verification of the draft report, final analysis was then produced and submitted to AAN.

### **1.3 Organisation of the report**

The report is divided into following five sections, in the introductory section the background, objectives and methodology of the study are discussed. In section two, M/B community in Nepal's development context as well as the specific features of their livelihoods dynamics is discussed.

In section three, local responses to changing livelihoods contexts and various external interventions in relation to promoting livelihoods of the community is discussed. These include their coping strategies at individual and household level and organised efforts through formation of M/B Samiti in order to address the broader issues of conservation and development that affect their livelihoods.

In section four: I/NGOs involvements, their approaches and strategies and the intended and unintended consequences of various programme activities have been discussed. Finally in section five, lessons have been drawn from reflective examination of the whole story of intervention in the community.

## **2 Bote/Musahar Community in development context**

Nepal is a country of rich ethnic, linguistic, religions, cultural and geographical diversity and it represents diversified cultural composition, with varied religious and cultural route. These pluralistic features have helped to bring together and unite people of different groups. But at the same time, they have served to divide people into different groups with distinct identities.

For example, Nepal's caste system combined with economic class has become a complex social system of hierarchies and stratification (Bista 1991). Nepal's caste system has been glorified as 'diversity in garden' where 4 *varnas* and 36 *jaat* coexist with harmony. However, the caste is one of the major sources of social stratification in Nepal (FAO 2004). While caste and ethnicity is primarily cultural basis of social discrimination, high (Brahmin/Kshetry), medium (ethnic groups) and low (untouchables), are the general categories defined in the villages.

The National Committee of Nationalities which identified 59 distinct cultural groups belonging to different ecological regions: 19 groups from the Mountain, 22 groups from

the Hill and 7 groups from the Inner Terai and 11 groups from the Terai. In addition, the 2001 census has listed 102 groups and 92 languages. The increased number of ethnic/caste groups in the 2001 census is not only due to the efforts of the CBS but also the increasing ethnic awareness about identity among the various groups of people in Nepal after 1990. However, the No. of population is very insignificant. The cultural identities of various communities are constantly being marginalised.

Among the various ethnic groups in Nepal's Terai, Mushahar and Bote are indigenous fishing communities residing in Chitwan valley. The Mushahar and Bote community is in the minority among the ethnic groups in Nepal. In Nawalpur, there are 1153 households<sup>1</sup>. In most of the villages, they live with indigenous *Tharus*, and other marginalised communities migrated from the hills. The indigenous fishing folk, the Mushahar and Bote community are settled alongside of the river Narayani of Chitwan Valley. Most of them are residing in Nawalpur side. Mushahar and Boe community are very small in population. They are less than 0.1 % of Nepal of the total population including other 20 minorities.

When government implemented the national park and buffer zones protection, the local people were deprived of their traditional occupation. Many of the farming communities were also evacuated from the area. Mushahar and Bote, the indigenous inhabitant of the area displaced from Narayani river side of Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts, who were depending on fishing in Narayani river and forest product from the surrounding jungle.

These people have sustained their livelihoods through forest and aquatic resources and are rich in indigenous knowledge, skills on the systems. These cultures, knowledge and skills could be utilised for their development, if they had an opportunity to do so. It can be argued that Nepal's natural resources, most importantly forest resources, began to deplete rapidly since the indigenous people lost control over these resources.

However, development efforts tended to add to their marginalisation. After malaria eradication in 1950s caused a heavy influx of hill people into Terai. These new settlers, particularly the so-called upper-caste hill people, not only displaced the local inhabitants out of their land holdings but also captured the commons where indigenous people of the area including Mushahar and Bote were using for centuries. National park projects also displaced several indigenous groups, like the *Tharus* and other communities from their lands. Without adequate resettlement policies, all these processes resulted in the economic marginalisation of these groups.

## **2.1 Mushahar and Bote in the Chitwan Valley**

Mushahar and Bote Communities are two ethnic minority groups residing at the border of Chitwan National Park along bank of the river Narayani. Traditionally these communities are forest dwellers. They have no private lands and largely depend on forest and aquatic resources for their livelihoods. Specifically, their livelihood is based on fishing, ferrying and collection of minor forest product. These two groups have been connected to group of Majhi (fishing) and Bote (ferrying) people respectively, although, they differ from each other in their traditions, culture and social value systems. Botes

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<sup>1</sup> There are only about 556 households and 20 hamlets of Mushahar/Bote along the Nawalpur side in 12 different VDCs of the Nawal Parasi district, where the study was carried out.



are Janajatis (indigenous groups) and Mushahars are defined as untouchable in the Hindu caste hierarchy. However, the traditional cultural boundaries that separated these two groups no longer exist. Both of the groups prefer to use 'Majhi'. Most of them are landless and are socially, economically, culturally, and politically marginalized.

However, both of these groups depend on river and forest resources for their subsistence livelihood. They share the problem of marginalization, and displacement from their resource base due to the process of development in general, and establishment of Chitwan National Park in particular.

Collecting forest products, fishing and ferrying was the core of their livelihood strategy. Both groups lived in and around the forest. The elder interviewees claimed that their forest use was sustainable. Their needs were limited and firewood and timber were used exclusively for their own consumption.

In early days, along with other groups of people - basically the Tharus and the M/B community were in the valley with their forest, river-dependent subsistence and agricultural practices based on it. During those days, a ferry was the only means to travel across the Narayani and other rivers. The M/B communities operated various ferry posts along the Narayani, and other river systems. The rivers Narayani, Rapti and Reu had to be crossed to reach different villages of the Valley and to travel into the forest to collect forest products for daily needs. Because, there was no road network and bridge connection, all villagers were dependent on the M/B communities. In return, they used to collect rice and other grains from villagers on an annual basis, their main source of food grains. According to Hom Bahadur Majhi, they used to construct paddy stores in the hamlets. In the grain deficit period many villagers come to borrow paddy and pay back after paddy harvesting.

Another source of income was fishing in the river. Women and children with other males, used to go fishing in river Narayani, Rapti and Reu, and barter the fish for food grains, mostly with Tharus. The M/B community, a traditional fishing and ferrying community were once the proud of their knowledge and skill of river-based livelihoods and had the happiest life all the other communities, but now have become the most deprived group residing along the boundaries of the national park.

The major source of the M/B community's livelihood still depends on fishing. These days, they are facing many problems with fishing activities. Among these, rules and regulations of National park regarding fishing in the river Narayani which are impractical for these people, in the sense that such rules prohibit rather than protect them to fish for their livelihood.

Regardless of the restrictions, they are fishing which is illegal in the official language of the park. Similarly, with the establishment of the National Park, its restriction on collection of minor forest products has made their situation more fragile. Traditionally, these are another source of income and food for this community. In other words, their livelihood base has been completely prohibited.

There is no other opportunity to cope with their day to day problems of feeding and meeting other family needs. Rarely, they involve themselves in agricultural labour work in farmers' fields at the nearby residential area. But it is also becoming hard to find such

opportunities due to the changed farm practices, increased unemployment within farm families, smaller land holdings and the increased flow of a large number of landless populations into the area. Though some of them have their own land and the majority have occupied a small piece of common land, this is not sufficient to feed them for even for 2-3 months of the year.

Their day-to-day living was sustained through the bartering fish, wild fruits, vegetable and ferrying services with grains in the villages. Sometime, they also used to sale these products and services in cash as well. Recognising the traditional occupation of indigenous community of Chitwan valley, Rana granted farm lands to Tharu community and River Narayani to Mushahar and Bote community (M/B community). In those days, 1 Dharni (2.5kg) fish is exchanged with 3 Dharni of paddy (equivalent 7.5 Kg). They were able to secure foods more than the farming communities. The situation was that the farming communities have to borrow paddy from Mushahar Bote in off season. There were established norms for the exchange and barter of products. For example, there was general agreement to allow Tharu communities to fish in festival season and M/B to collect Thimaha (wild) paddy. However, migration of hill people and various development interventions in the area changed the traditional arrangement of economic exchange of goods and services with earlier Tharu and Jamindar.

There was no permanent residential area. They shifted place to place for fishing and collection of forest products. According to villagers, in early days, they used to live in the island of river Narayani for more than 9 month and another 3 month (mostly in the rainy season when islands get flooded) in the marginal land of near by Jamindars. However, the fishing communities were dominated by these landed elites. After the establishment of Chitwan National Park (CNP) their mobility was restricted. They started residing in these hamlets near to the river Narayani. During the rainy season, most of these hamlets are swept by river flood. Out of 20 Hamlets 13 are prone to flood during monsoon. These areas are lack of basic facilities such as drinking water, electricity and roads. However, recently people from Piprahar, Laugain and Gairi have been transferred to Rajahar.

The restriction of fishing and minor forest product collection inside the park, led them to gradually shift their traditional occupation. Since the community is dependent on fishing and minor forest product collect for their survival, they travel place to place based on seasonality. According to villagers, about 60% of the total households have left their traditional fishing occupation and moved to agricultural labour and construction works. By category, Mushahar are more dependent to fishing than the Bote community. Botes are involved in agricultural labour.

Those who are still engaged in fishing and minor forest product collections, about 70% livelihood supports come from fishing along. Villagers from Nandapur Dhajaha and Bramasthan are dependent on minor forest products' collection (bamboo shoot) for livelihood. Villagers from Baghkhori to Tamaspur mostly depended to Sunchalne and also shared goat raising (to increase livelihood opportunity). Similarly, the Mushahar HHs are send their children to the cities for household servant. 15-20% of 10-12 year old children are being sent for the purpose in return they receive nominal salary.

## 2.2 Chitwan Valley

Chitwan valley lies in the lowlands or Inner Terai of southern central Nepal on the international border with India. The densely forested areas of the Chitwan valley were inhabited by indigenous Tharu community. Along with nationalisation of forest and the establishment of Nepal Punarbas (Resettlement) Company (NRC) in 1957, planned development intervention was initiated in the area. The Rapti Valley Development Project was initiated to develop the Chitwan Valley for resettlement. This was coupled with a surge in local human populations following the development of anti-malaria medicines in the mid-twentieth century. However, because population growth in the hills (Ghimire 1992; Shrestha and Karen 2000) as well as increased development aspiration among the people caused heavy influx of hill migrants to the area. The long-term effect was a drastic decrease in jungle habitat and animal populations in the Chitwan valley as jungles were converted to farmland.

The Chitwan region has had a long history of wild life conservation. During the 19th Century, its natural dense forests were already protected from some human intervention. The habitat had been well protected as a royal hunting reserve from 1846 to 1951 during the Rana regime. For many years it was the Royal hunting grounds for the Kings and dignitaries of Nepal and therefore was not hunted by the general public. The dense forest cover, which also served as natural border protection was restricted for agriculture and was preserved for hunting wildlife by rulers of Nepal. An area south of the Rapti River was first proposed as a rhinoceros sanctuary in 1958 and later incorporated into the national park. Chitwan was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1984.

Wildlife conservation became an issue of concern following massive deforestation for malaria eradication in the Terai. In 1963, the area south of the Rapti River was established as a Gaijda Kunja (rhino sanctuary), which is now located on the edge of CNP. The CNP was created in 1973 and was the first such delineated area for wildlife preservation in Nepal.

It was the first national park in Nepal, which was declared a national park in 1973(2029 BS), following approval by the late King Mahendra in 1970. The bye-laws (National Park Regulations) were introduced 1974. The park's boundaries extend from the Daune Hill on the west bank of the Narayani River eastward 78km to Hasta and Dhoram rivers.

By the late eighties, conservation policies in Nepal started to change. Concerned agencies became aware of conflicts between local fishing communities and the CNP. Slowly, these agencies began to approach conservation as a partnership between conservation agencies and local people. Nevertheless, exclusionary practices continued. The concept of the buffer zone evolved only after nearly two decades of state-dominated exclusionary protected area management.

Within global conservation policies to implement, UNDP assisted in conservation and development programme, it started the Parks and People Programme (PPP) in 1995. PPP focused its conservation and developmental activities around the national Park. Later The surrounding a park or a reserve encompassing forests, agricultural lands, settlements, village open spaces, and many other forms of land use areas has been

defined as the Buffer Zone area. The buffer zone of the CNP covers 19 village development committees (VDCs) in the Chitwan district, 15 VDCs in Nawalparasi district, two VDCs in Parsa district, and one VDC in Makwanpur district.

The Buffer Zone Management Regulation of 1996 stipulated that 30–50 per cent of the income from any conservation area must be spent at the local level through the Buffer Zone Management Council. Despite this advance, development initiatives were unable to reach the most marginalized communities. Several studies have shown that the poorest of the poor communities, which have no legal entitlement to resources, are often excluded from the benefits of buffer zone development programmes.

The buffer zone management programme were based on the assumption that people were responsible for the destruction of wildlife and, therefore, needed to reduce their pressure into park developing peripheries. However, the policies and programmes of park as well as buffer zone management restricted indigenous people's access to the forest as well as made fishing in rivers illegal.

Before the resettlement, the valley was surrounded by forests. According to the villagers, only small patches of agricultural field was cultivated by Tharu communities inside the forest. Within the planned migration, Nepal Resettlement Company (NRC) started planned resettlement in the eastern (Chitwan) and western (Nawalpur) part of the valley. During the period of resettlement NRC encouraged villagers to clear the area.

### **3 State interventions on development and environment**

#### **3.1 Migration and associated modernisation**

Resettlement in Terai is one of the earliest land uses planning intervention in Nepal. The early resettlement was occurred in Terai in 1910 where hill people were allowed to own as many Bigha (0.75 ha) of land as they can clear the forest. However, hill people did not come down to the Terai because they were so afraid of the malaria endemic, very few were willing to move down to the Terai.

In 1953, heavy flood in hills washed away the farmland in hills around the Kathmandu valley. During the time, HMG/Nepal was just starting the Rapti Valley Multipurpose Development Project in the Chitwan area, whose one of the major objectives was to convert forests into farmlands. The government encouraged flood victims to migrate to Chitwan and clear and cultivate the lands. Though the malaria control was underway, still hill people were unwilling to settle in the area. Earlier the valley was known as 'the valley of death' (Elder 1974: 12). It started heavily settled when the first lots of migrants successfully escape the malaria (Elder, 1974). The area become over crowded and many of the migrants become tenants of the earlier migrants.

This resettlement programme was aimed to achieve the stated objectives of shifting population pressure from dense to lower dense area, bring additional land under cultivation, providing support to disadvantaged<sup>2</sup> groups and increase agriculture

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<sup>2</sup> Landless families, flood and landslide victims, Nepali returning from foreign including Bruma and Meghalaya because of internal conflict

productivity to feed the ever growing population. However, the Mushahar Bote community did not made any effort for land acquisition during resettlement while the traditional fishing occupation was more than enough to make their livelihood.

It was under the grand project of reducing population pressure in hilly districts causing land degradation in hills and mountains. There was mix result of the projects successes. It was successful in relation to redistributing population pressure from hills to Terai. The resulting diversity in cultural backgrounds among residents in the area has inspired cultural exchanges in food habits, clothing and language. For example, the indigenous Terai people have reduced the system of child marriage and dowry.

People of Terai origin have also been influenced by the hill people resulting in more awareness and interest in girls' education, health, sanitation and family planning. On the negative side, indigenous people have also emulated the drinking habits of the migrants. At the same time, the hill migrants have emulated the hard working nature and the improved farming systems of the Terai people, especially vegetable and crop farming. However, people of Terai origin tend to show solidarity, regardless of whether they are wrong or right, in any dispute between hill migrants and themselves.

In positive sense, resettlement programme was the first attempt to redistribute resources in equalising social relations, which is the first kind of the reform programme. But it could not be sustained for long. However, the consequences of the resettlement programmes to the livelihood of the indigenous people and forest resources are irreversible. More seriously, it insisted the land hunger and land based corruptions in the name of Sukumbasi (landless) by local elites.

The population migration prompted with the subsequent combination of the eradication of malaria in 1977 and the construction of East West Highway. But at the same time, clearing of forested land prompted by the incumbent government's attempt to won the electorate as a part of the 1979 election campaign, induced a steep increase in immigration from the hills with settlements concentrated in town centre and road heads.

### **3.2 Establishment of national park and restriction on livelihood resources**

However, in 1973, following the global biodiversity conservation concern, the major block of forested area of the Chitwan valley was brought under the protected area establishing a National Park.

With the global notion of conservation and development, Nepal has followed the concepts of protected areas, National parks and wildlife centuries for the conservation of biodiversities of the area. While doing so, many patches of dense subtropical forest of the Terai region have been converted into either protected area or national parks. In this way, most national forests in the Terai have been protected within protected areas.

To date there are eight national parks, three conservation areas, four wildlife reserves and a hunting reserve and five in Terai. Forest cover in Terai alone is about 35% of the total land out of which 50% of the forested area in Terai is under protected area. Among them, the CNP is one which is famous for one horned rhinos and rich biodiversity site

recorded in world heritage. This park was established in 1973 and covers the area of 93200 hector of forestland. It is around 60% of the total land of the Chitwan Valley.

From the very beginning of the park establishment, there is on going conflicts of local and global interests. Local people as a looser have been suffered from the restrictions imposed on the resources that belong to them traditionally along with wildlife damage to their livelihood resources and human casualties (Paudel 1999; Pokharel 2002; Paudel 2005). To respond the concerns of the local people, a concept of Buffer<sup>3</sup> zone was introduced in 1996.

Agriculture and livestock development projects/programmes integrated the ideas of 'green revolution' which affected most of the rural economy and way of living integrating rural life into market through the development of communication and transportation infrastructures. This modernization drive led to the construction of bridges and roads eliminating the traditional means of transportation ferries used to be the only means of crossing the Narayani. The fishing and ferrying communities were gradually displaced from their traditional occupations.

Physical and social infrastructure – roads, bridge, dam, co-operatives, market, factories, Commercialisation of local economy, land speculation and increased landlessness, farm mechanisation and decreased labour demand, marginalisation of indigenous communities including MB, increasingly poor people were left to settle in marginal lands – forest fringes or river bank

### **3.3 Resulting crisis and increased vulnerability**

Prior to migration of hill people and subsequent introduction of modernization programmes, there was abundance of livelihood resources. According to the villagers, fishing along was enough to secure the M/B community's livelihood. The situation was that when they were asked to settle near to Bharatpur they refused as they find fishing was more secure and less tedious than agriculture. However, the exclusionary practice in the vary process of State's modernisation through various interventions marginalised the indigenous forest dependent communities including M/B. particularly, the establishment National Park and construction of bridge at Narayangarh restriction reduced their livelihood bases. Similarly, construction of Triveni dam, establishment of factories and use of insecticide, pesticide in agricultural field caused river pollution depleting the fish population.

Similarly, increased population pressure intensified the agriculture and livestock raised competition to marginal land (grazing vs living spaces of M/B communities). In general, these socio-economic changes also contributed to increase the opportunity for livelihood option however, the lack of access to land, water and natural resources, made them further vulnerable. Another, competition to common land put pressures them to be at the marginal lands close to the river, which are more prone to river flood. It is because the national park side is well protected and the river Narayani is increasingly cutting the edge at the side of settlement.

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<sup>3</sup> In the practice it is an expansion of the national park not the buffer zone which is conceptualised to reduce the impact to both human and nature (Paudel 1999)

In particular, the restriction over forest dwelling and fishing into river Narayani heavily affected the livelihoods of the communities by shrinking supply of food and income from fishing and collection of forest products. Initially, the M/B communities were not aware on increasing restrictions and the emerging patterns of crisis over their livelihood. Hence the M/B's livelihoods was solely depended on fishing, ferrying and collections of wild fruits and vegetable in forest, the imposed restrictions left them without any viable option for their livelihood. This situation led pressure especially for women and children. At the same time, changing socio-economic and natural environment increased vulnerability to floods, draught, market fluctuation, sickness.

## **4 Community responses to increased vulnerability**

### **4.1 Coping strategies and livelihoods diversification**

Mushahar and Bote, who are among the most marginalised indigenous fishing communities of Nepal, mostly reside on the banks of Narayani River nearby Chitwan National Park. Livelihood of these landless communities depends upon fishing and collection of wild vegetables, fruits, herbs, fuel wood and other forest products. After the introduction of exclusionary conservation policies, entry of these communities to the forest was restricted. State took away their traditional means of earning livelihood which resulted in an unprecedented livelihood crisis among these communities.

The restriction over the resources forced them to find out other option for their livelihood. Many of them migrated from the area to city centres, road side and even in India (mainly in Panjab) as an agriculture labour. Some others send their children for household servants. Remaining family members diversified their traditional occupation of fishing and ferrying to agricultural labour. Simultaneously, they also adapted their strategy from direct confrontation to negotiation with park officials applying 'weapons of the weak'. At the same time, internal migration to safe place as well as attempts for land acquisition was made with the support from local political leaders.

Once they were alienated from their source of livelihood, local fishing communities began organising and discussing about their traditional rights over natural resources. A series of dialogue with different stakeholders, including various political parties, local authorities, journalists and members of parliaments, also began. Beginning with the internal organising and awareness, pressures to the local politicians, social workers and other community members at local level, they moved consolidating their rights movement up to the CNP head office in Kasara.

### **4.2 Emergence and development of People's Organisation**

While sensing the up coming livelihood crisis because of increased patrolling around the park, the struggle for livelihood security of the community initiated since mid 1980s. Initially, some active members of the community from different villages organized informal meetings to discuss their problems. Their early attempts to organize themselves for struggle was misunderstood as an attempt to confront with local villagers therefore were challenged. According to villagers, various local leaders of the community were charged and warrants were issued to them by local authorities. However, leaders were persuaded to register a formal organization to fight collectively for the cause of marginalisation.

Local leaders from various villages such as Amar Bahadur Majhi, Jit Bahadur Majhi, Buli Ram Majhi, Tej Bahadur Bote, Hari Bahadur Musahar, Kaliya Musahar, and others were the leaders of the community.

In February 1993 (Magh 2049), national park authorities confiscated boats and fishing nets in various villages including Sandh, Badruwa, Laugain, Piprahar (see Figure 1: Social map) They torched all fishing nets, dhadiya (handmade baskets), destroyed many boats, and assaulted villagers. Park authorities asked them not to fish inside the park and river Narayani.

Some active member of M/B community started interactions seeking support for their fishing rights. Initially, they contacted local leaders of various political parties. Several informal meetings were organized before the establishment of a formal M/B Samiti. According to the members of the Samiti, the political leaders advised them to organise in the form of a committee so that they could represent their voice in larger forums. Accordingly they form a committee. In 1992 (2049 BS) activists and leaders from Pirahar to Banghor held a convention at Laugain, Pithauli. This was the first convention of indigenous fishing communities where an ad hoc Samiti called “Bote, Majhi, Musahar Kalyan Sewa Samiti” was formed with the following objectives:

- To ensure fishing rights inside the National Park
- To ensure resettlement in safe place
- Entitlement of lands for farming
- To ensure employment opportunities for the community members for daily survival

In 1993 (2050 BS) Bharna Nath Pajiyar of the District Development Committee (DDC) and Netra Lal Paudel, a former VDC chairperson, supported the fishing community to become legally registered at the district administration office. In 1994 (2051 BS), they finally registered their organization.

After the formation of the M/B Samiti, with the support from the local leaders they were able to register M/B Samiti with the Social Welfare Council (SWC). At the same time, they also submitted an appeal (Gyapan Patra) to royal palace for fishing rights in the Narayani River and complaints about harassment by the Army and Park authorities. Leaders said in the interviews that the secretary of the Royal Palace was cooperative and advised them to approach the Prime Minister. Their early effort to be heard by central authority was successful. The leaders returned with the necessary authorization from Kathmandu and were given a six-month licence to fish.

It was also possible to form an organisation because of a more open political context following the restoration of democratic rights in 1990. Before 1990, the autocratic rulers did not allow the formation of any political organisation. The new constitution of 1990 in Nepal ensured citizen's fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, right to information and freedom of assembly, amongst others.



#### **4.2.1 Community awareness building**

With the formation of ad hoc Samiti, various fisherman of the area gradually organised into a formal organisation. Political leaders, irrespective of the party line sympathised and helped them to organise in to a single organisation of fishermen. NGOs and other development organisations helped them through various training programme and the regular conferences they gradually institutionalised their organisation.

At early stage of M/B Samiti formation, it was active in a few villages in three VDCs of Nawalpur, i.e. Rajahar, Pithauli, and Kawasoti VDCs. Since 1994, village-level groups were formed in Dibyapuri, Pragatinagar, and Aghauli VDCs. The organization expanded its network in Koluwa and Narayani VDCs in 1997 and reached the fishing communities at Mukundapur, Parsauni, and Naya Belhani VDCs. By 1997, M/B Samiti had expanded its network among the Bote-Majhi and Musahar communities in 16 villages of Nawalparasi, with some 400 households, of which majority were Bote households (CDO, Nepal 1996).

Along with the expansion of the M/B Samiti in various toles, they encourage community members to raise the voices on fishing rights and collection of wild fruits and vegetables (sag-sisnu), permanent settlements and land allocations for farming, Employment opportunities to community members and allocation of resources of buffer zone and VDCs in B/M village.

Though there was a moral support form local organisation, MB Samiti was operating without external financial support. Executive members and tole representatives were involved voluntarily in the process.

#### **4.2.2 Exposure and education**

I/NGOs intervention in the communities was began since 1994. In the mid-1990s, MB Samiti began to work closely with Community Development Organization (CDO). Although CDO eventually became an important ally of M/B Samiti, villagers were initially sceptical on their presence. However, CDO's aim was to support the people's movement facilitating the MB Samiti – people's own organisation with the hope that this would improve access to social and natural resources for their better livelihoods.

Initially, a partnership arrangement was agreed between CDO and Oxfam to support MB Samiti. Contribution of CDO was focused on strengthening organisation through creating awareness among the community members, exposure and education. During the period various social mobilisation campaigns including advocacy trainings, exposure visits and non formal education were organised. However, in later stage, with the changes in strategies and approaches of the involved support organisation, the focus was shifted gradually to livelihoods issue and income generation.

#### **4.2.3 Movement and campaign**

Following the two years partnership between Community Development Organisation (CDO, Nepal) and Oxfam, the tripartite agreement between Oxfam, Action Aid Nepal, and CDO was made in 1996/97–1998/99). The project was envisioned to support M/B Samiti the empowerment of indigenous fishing communities in Nawalparasi and to improve their livelihood. An arrangement was made to provide some grants to MB

Samiti, which was the first time grant to the organisation. Though the allocated amount of small but significantly influences the strategies and actions of the M/B Samiti.

During this phase, M/B Samiti involved heavily in movement and campaigns to ensure fishing rights, access to citizenship, formal education for children, and land rights. They organise mass meetings, rallies and demonstrations to achieve their demand to be fulfilled. These movement and campaigns for the fishing rights and citizenship were successfully completed. However, campaigns for the land rights still continuing.

While raising land issues, M/B Samiti began to cooperate with other landless communities including Dalits and Tharu indigenous communities, and with other civil society organizations. During this period, some political leaders and civil society organizations also organized solidarity rally in Kawasoti in support of land rights of the M/B community. An appeal was submitted to the district administration office. This was the first rally organized in alliance with other marginalized groups.

In 1999, the flood of the Rivers Narayani and Lokaha swept away settlements at Rajahar, Laungain, Nandapur, and Ratanpur. Communities from Ratanpur and Nandapur, Laugain and Piprahar were the most affected people. MB Samiti took initiative to resettle them in safe place. Some of these victims were settled on public lands. The campaigns for the resettlement of the flood victim continued till recently. MB Samiti organized a large demonstration followed by a two-hour sit-in programme. Three to four hundred people including journalists, political party leaders, and the VDC chairperson surrounded the office of the district administration. The Chief District Officer, Army personnel, and police officials were also present during the demonstration. Similarly, In 2000/01 MBKSS activists, attempted to occupy land and establish a settlement at Dhakaha near the Amaltari Post of CNP. National Park authorities arrested and temporarily held members from 40 households from different villages who had occupied land. During the two-month period of occupation, Park authorities made several attempts to expel the occupying communities. Authorities used elephants and fire to destroy their huts. The resisting groups negotiated with representatives from the VDC, the Buffer Zone User Committee, as well as authorities from the Amaltari Post. In response to their collective resistance, protests, and continuous dialogue, authorities from Kasara assured the agitating households that they would receive support to construct community ponds if they returned to their original settlements.

Following this, M/B Samiti proposed to occupy public land because the state had not awarded them adequate land. A big open field was identified in Pithauli where flood-affected fishing communities<sup>4</sup> could potentially settle down. The date for occupying the land was fixed by consensus with local political party leaders, MPs, and representatives of the DDC. District level CPN-UML leaders supported plan. The Buffer Zone User Committee was also in agreement. However, this campaign could not be successful because of local resistance.

This incident led to a serious discussion over the issue of resettlement of Mushahar and Bote community. The DDC organized a meeting of the various stakeholders. After the meeting, two villages (Ratanpur and Nandapur) resettled in Koluwa on legally

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<sup>4</sup> From Ratanpur, Nandapur, Piprahar, and Laungain villages.

purchased land. However, the landless fishing communities of Rajahar and Laugain are still exposed to floods during the monsoon.

The monsoon sets in every year in these villages revitalised the struggle for land once again. In June 2006, during the monsoon, thousands of landless communities from Nawalparasi assembled at Parasi District Headquarters demanding land rights. This assembly later turned into a mass rally. M/B Samiti activists also joined the demonstration and took the mass meeting as an opportunity to lobby their own land issues. They submitted their demand for the relocation of households from flood-prone Piprahar and Laugain villages to the local administration.

Responding to their demands, the Chief District Officer asked them to find unoccupied land that could be used for their resettlement. In July 2006, there was a meeting to address the issues of flood victims where M/B Samiti, NGOs, the District Forest Officer (DFO), Chief District Officer, and political party leaders, including members of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) participated this meeting. A committee was formed, led by the DFO and the Chief District Officer. The DFO took over the task of finding an appropriate settlement site in Piprahar and Laugain.

In Shiva Mandir VDC near Kawasoti, the aspirations of landless communities to find land met with resistance from local villagers who use vacant area as grass lands. Due to resistance from the Community Forest Lobby, the process of finding a suitable location for resettlement was delayed. The Samiti organised a demonstration to speed up the process where community members demonstrated with fishing nets and baskets.

Since the establishment of MBKSS, the following achievements were made:

- ❖ Fishing license for the period of 6 month
- ❖ Expansion of Samiti to all the villages of Nawalpur area including Chitwan
- ❖ Leadership development
- ❖ Increased village level interaction
- ❖ Identification of main issues and concerns of the community
- ❖ Movement took shape and consolidation of the efforts
- ❖ General awareness increased among the community members and other actors in the area
- ❖ Changed the perceptions of the other villagers
- ❖ Increased relations with various organisation, government offices and networks
- ❖ Increased access to VDC, Buffer zone national park and other development resources
- ❖ Resettlement of flood victims – Nandapur to Dhajaha
- ❖ Able to get support from other institutions, individuals on the issue of M/B community
- ❖ Received support from Park administration for construction of fishing boats.

Despite these achievements of the movements, there is limited contribution to improve their livelihoods. In particular, land issues, community rights for fishing and access to IGA funds for livelihoods improvement are major issues of concerns. It is being realised that livelihood improvement of the community could only be achieved through advocacy of the rights of the community over park resources including the access to the

buffer zone user committees, VDCs, and community forests. During this period, various movements and campaigns were organised by MB Samiti. These were mainly focused on the raising voices on the rights over park resources.

The issue of landless, which is a major agenda of struggle, yet need to be heard by decisive government authority. Very often, the movement has been seen as NGO sponsored agenda and ignored by the authority. As observed, M/B communities are most affected community by the establishment of national Park. Buffer zone programme should focus their action with priority to solve the problem of M/B community but the arrangement of buffer zone programme could not priorities their effort to solve it. Similarly, health issue, issue of employment, increase of wage, enhancing livelihood opportunities could not be prioritised.

Despite the achievements form the movement, there are several internal problems within Samiti and supporting agencies. Once outside agencies involved in the process, Samiti lost its original strength of people support and commitment internal conflicts and competition to claim achievements as well as leaderships increased within individuals and between two communities at large leading to local people loose their enthusiasm over the leadership. Earlier, there was a sense of a united struggle. Mobilizing local resources for struggles played a role in maintaining the movement's vitality, although this also contributed to internal conflict.

Outside agencies, dependent to donor's priority on funding which heavily influences their existence, began to guide movement with their specific interests and expertise rather considering the people's aspiration and hopes. The Oxfam's ambition to empower people's organisation with out the support of intermediaries and CDO's concentration on national park and land issue rather supporting collective movement and promotion of M/B Samiti are some example of the limitations of the donor funded projects and programme.

Similarly, there were differences in working styles and approaches among the partners. Various support organisations involved in the process. However, in one hand, Oxfam was interested to promote local institutions and leadership at the micro-level of organizing protests by the very poor. Action Aid, on the other hand, was pushing an agenda of initiating income-generating activities along with social campaigns. This divide was not only among the supporting partners, it also heavily affected the performing of the M/B Samiti. The Samiti increasingly started distancing from the villagers. There were decreased interactions among the villagers, low level of local level interactions within the villages. Many of the started becoming inactive and differences surfaced.

#### **4.2.4 Degeneration of M/B Samiti and NGOisation**

With the differences within the participating support organisation, in 2000, Oxfam supported directly to MBKSS for its activities. However, it could not sustain its support for a long with out intermediaries. In 2002, they withdrew their support leaving MBKSS nowhere. Oxfam's direct support to M/B Samiti beyond the intermediary role of CDO is a conceptual flaw which led M/B Samiti members to believe themselves as a local NGO. Their support for strengthening CBOs in one hand oriented M/B Samiti towards NGO in other hand being

Kathmandu based I/NGO they could not provide basic support to the M/B Samiti. The degeneration processes begin with this initiative.

Usually, donors and NGOs set up community organisations at the end of projects as a strategy of withdrawal. In this particular case, as there was already established and gaining strength it was obvious to include as partner.

The effort was not successful. It might have been more useful to explore ways to support existing spontaneous, movement-based, community organizations after assessing their needs and after being very careful not to make undemocratic decisions, or to create dependence in any way.

Meanwhile, younger Mushahar and Bote and people, who have access to formal education and are more exposed to the outside world, began to question the very purpose of the MBKSS, which struggled to retain livelihood security from a traditional point of view. The younger people are more attracted to 'modern' sources of sustenance, which are less arduous, require a different skill set, and are more remunerative.

In (2061 BS) 2004/05, Sahamati, a Nawalparasi-based NGO, began to work with M/B Samiti and other organizations representing the interests of fishing communities. It proposed to contribute to build capacity of the organizations. Initially, M/B Samiti leaders accepted the NGO with believing that it would support their ongoing struggle and that they would also benefit from other income generation activities. However, it could not go long. Increased interaction with NGOs who have long experience of development planning and implementation have greater influences on what to do how to do and why to do it. The M/B Samiti leaders opposed the project developed by the NGO saying that Sahamati developed projects without consulting them. According to chairperson of the M/B Samiti, they wished to be partner not a client of the development projects. Later, a joint meeting among M/B Samiti, Sahamati, CDO, and the donors (Care Nepal and Action Aid Nepal) addressed the conflict.

Then Sahamati declared their intention to form a community-based organization of indigenous fishing communities, with a promise to spend already released funding. Majhi Utthan Kendra was established, even though M/B Samiti was already in existence.

Before the formation of the new community-based organization of indigenous fishing communities, the NGO organized several programmes including advocacy training, a press conference, and citizenship camps, and appointed one person from Bote-Majhi community as a community motivator.

However, in reality, when the project term ran out, the programmes initiated by the NGO struggled for sustenance. MBKSS activists saw that NGO staff only worked during the duration of the project and did not show up after the formal date was over. Majhi Utthan Kendra became defunct. The secretary of the organization migrated to India. The other employees gave up their affiliation with the organization and the NGO. One member, Hom Bahadur Musahar, left the organization and joined MB Samiti. "Outsiders divided us for their benefit," he regrets in distress.

Hari Bahadur Majhi, Ram Lakhan, Suklal, Raj Kumar, Bikram, Buddhi Ram, Suk Ram, and Sam Fuliya, some of the most dedicated activists, have left MBKSS over the years.

Suspicion of corruption within the organization was a contributing factor. CDO realized that income-generating schemes, such as the ones it had initiated, were breeding grounds for transparency issues.

Women activists complained that their involvement affected their family relations causing some to become inactive. Others, however, had different reasons. Some older members left to make way for younger leaders, or because they felt that they were unable to contribute as much as they would like. Some were disillusioned with the lack of progress in the improvement of their livelihoods. Some campaigns took immense energy and dedication and involved spending time away from other resource-seeking activities, but did not necessarily result in any substantial change (such as the Laukhani land occupation). In some cases, there was disappointment over the lack of support given by M/B Samiti, for example, as alleged by Hom Bahadur in Dhakaha.

Table 1 Four stages of M/B Samiti

Stages	Focused activity	Remarks
1-awareness building stage	Organising Samiti activities, expansion of memberships, tole level meetings	Samiti gained the recognition within the community Samiti learned by doing and mistakes. It was owned by community members
2- exposure and education	Exposure to development initiatives through training, visit, building relationship with local bodies, exposure to similar community initiatives in various part of the country	CDO involved in facilitating the samiti initiative with financial support from Oxfam and Action Aid. Samiti was able to identify their agenda for struggle
3- movement and campaign	Mass meeting, rally, gherao, interaction, dialogue with various stakeholders	Heavy input from outside NGOs in lobbying and advocacy. This was based on the earlier stages therefore was powerful initiatives
4- NGOisation	IGA, saving and credit,	Samiti assumed power as strong local NGO

#### 4.2.5 Current situation

After the failed attempt to establish a new organisation, various NGOs (including AAN) working with Mushahar and Bote communities revitalised the M/B Samiti. Currently there are more than 20 organizations operating in the area (see annex 1). Most of these I/NGOs have some activity with Mushahar and Bote community. Major activities include income generation, saving and credit, adult education and advocacy.

Since 2004, Action Aid, Nepal began a partnership programme in the area with a consortium approach. A collaborative consortium was formed among the four specialist NGOs<sup>5</sup> to implement the various programme in Nawalpur valley. The M/B Samiti Among others, Food security, Samartha and land rights movements are the programmes targeted to MB communities. However, current activity plans (See annex 4) indicates that most of the proposed activities are target oriented and short term.

<sup>5</sup> VDRC, Sahamati CDO and Indreni.

Though the implementation of these programmes aimed to organise in coordination with participating consortium members, each NGOs have organising their activities independently. Very often, there found duplication, repetition and confusing approaches. For examples, as many 12 NGOs are active in Pithauli (14 HHs Gairi tole), organising various income generation and social mobilisation activities. Similar situation is found in other toles too.

M/B Samiti in particular, is involved in two major programme; food security and Samarthya. The food security programme is designed exclusively for Mushahar and Bote where as Samarthya to work exclusively with ethnic groups. Under this programme, Samiti is mobilising other marginal communities such as kami, damai and other poor household. Their action of integrating other communities indicates that they wish to be recognised a potential NGO for distributing development fruits equally among the poor and marginalised rather initiative community based movement for justice. However, it is creating frustrations among the Mushahar and Bote community members that they are not getting enough support for their livelihoods.

The Samiti has mobilised some field-based facilitators to implement these activities. According to the coordinator of the food security programme, there are more than 46 activities planned for the year to implement in 20 toles of Mushahar and Bote.

Since all the Samiti activities are guided based on the financial activity plan, the samiti members involved in mobilising funds, they loosed the earlier faith as community leaders. Earlier Samiti used to function without proper system. They often distributed the programme management money among themselves. Now there is a system of financial management, staffs and proper mechanism of mobilisation. These days community facilitation is done by paid staffs and Samiti members do not see their role in this situation. Most of the facilitators are new and have limited experience on how to mobilise community people. Most of the community facilitators of the programmes are newly exposed to the development field and have to rely on the idea of proposal, activity planning budgeting and reporting with NGO staffs. There is a clear difference between the earlier volunteer Samiti members and current paid facilitators.

Similarly, While in interaction with various NGOs in the site it is observed that no one have clear on what next, in their view all depends on how they will be provided development assistant in the next phase. It shows that most of them are operating development mission without faith.

## **5 I/NGOs support in enhancing livelihoods: Some Issues**

There is no doubt about the appealing environment for the interventions towards enhancing livelihoods of the M/B community. However, I/NGOs have limited scope to respond with the demand driven strategy and approaches. Regarding this, some serious concerns are being raised in the consortium of NGOS that includes M/B Samiti and CDO about the need to enhance the synergy of all such organizations towards a collective campaign. So far, this has not yielded any satisfactory collective actions. Several NGOs are working in the one constituency for the cause of the Mushahar and Bote community.

## **5.1 MB community as a fertile ground for I/NGOs**

The poverty understood by the development NGOs is clearly visible in this community. The harsh physical condition of living including clothing, vulnerability of settlement, illiteracy, limited resource base for daily livelihoods, and community appeal for generous support has attracted many NGOs in the area. M/B community as one of the marginalised community in the area, live in a severe poverty situation. The indigenous minority and landlessness of the community meets the icon for development target. At the same, being displaced from national park, the work with these communities also receives global audience.

Similarly, already formed Samiti is seen as appropriate local vehicle for various community based interventions. Receptive community and their institutional foundation – M/B Samiti advertised its appeal for the support. The wider gap between M/B communities in comparison with neighbouring communities also gives an opportunity to verify the legitimacy of intervention. For most, easy access to travel and relatively safe areas in the insurgency period led to the proliferation of NGOs in the area and the community.

## **5.2 Shifting focuses on strategies and activities**

In general, the trends of shift in programme strategy and approach of I/NGOs is influenced by global discourses on development. It applies to the development intervention in the community as well. Earlier interventions in the area have begun from integrated community development such as improvement of agriculture, livestock, community education and community infrastructures. Hence most of these programmes were land based therefore more focused on farming communities of the area.

After the multiparty democracy, proliferation of I/NGOs in the country also created conducive environment community empowerment – advocacy lobbying – integration of advocacy with economic programmes – latest programme are largely shaped by sponsorship support mechanism and agenda driven by external agencies. Though there were not much sequential interventions as such, however, intervention of PPP, CDO, Oxfam and Action Aid's interventions in the community can be counted in similar fashion.

## **5.3 Changing understanding and approaches**

The I/NGOs primarily need a 'community' to legitimise their scope of intervention. Though M/B Samiti emerged out from the struggle, it is driven by the community concept developed by these organisations. Putting together everyone into 'communities' in local organisation is a common phenomenon. The Samiti also not an exception, for example, many Bote and Mushahar, those who never go fishing included as fishermen just because their traditional occupation was fishing. Similarly, many Bote families with enough land have been included in the group of landless communities. Nevertheless, getting their genuine support of for the cause of rights of the community is obvious but inclusion of these people has very often diluted the spirit of movement.

From the discussion with community people, initially, there was community emphasis to address on immediate needs such as income, education, drinking water. However,



without addressing these issues adequately, the support organisations moved to focus on advocacy against park management. It may be justified in the ground of developed understanding on the relation between their poverty and the park management. But serious question still remains that the preparedness of the community to handle the movement with out supporting system for their immediate need of sustaining livelihoods.

However, at the later stage, realising the need for tangible benefits, which is not possible from advocacy alone, both the external agencies and the community leaders gradually began to appreciate programme that provide immediate benefits in terms of economic gain- IGAs, skills development.

#### **5.4 Contradictions in cultural practices**

Huge difference between NGO culture and local ways of organising things- administrative and financial norms, paper works, definite plans with identified targets and so on. But the community has had a completely different cultural practice of handling these matters.

Donors require regular reports and fund activities only within certain boundaries. This put organizational constraints on the movement. A foreign-funded project meant that some activists were paid, while others were not, which contributed to further internal misunderstandings.

#### **5.5 Inherent interests and unintended consequences**

Territorial competition, pressure to raise funds, identity conflicts, and ambition to become radical are some inherent interest of the I/NGOs while working with the communities. The outside NGOs sometime even tried to minimise the role of local NGOs so as to establish direct relation to MB community basically to show that they were working with the local and indigenous communities.

Though conceptually AAN introduced the idea of consortium to avoid such competition among the participating I/NGOs. However, the lack of proper understanding of the internal dynamics between members of the consortium- in many cases resulting into divided communities, lack of coordination and blaming each other and even support for conflicting agenda- caused further complications in relation to the roles of service providers.

### **6 Reflections, lessons and implications for future strategies**

There are many successful as well as failure stories in the community. Learning from these stories (discussed above) is vital for the successful implementation of future strategies. Primarily, the institutional base created through establishment of a vibrant people's organisation, capable of absorbing development opportunity is an asset of community. Similarly, increased awareness among the communities regarding their rights over resources and development benefits is creating an environment for successful implementation of developmental activities in the communities.

Though there is still to see the detail impact of the intervention but scope is there to consolidate and focus, increased dialogue and interaction during the period has expanded the scope of potential areas of IGA activities and approaches. For example, what kinds of IGA need to be prioritised? What could be the major agenda of struggle?

With the involvement of organisations of different field of expertise, human as well as financial resources, there is increased opportunity to maximise the benefit from these resources. Since there is a wide recognition of M/B community culture, their issues and approaches among the local bodies and government authorities there is potential of understanding the needs and priorities based on local demand. This has also open up debates at political level – now political parties and their central authorities are increasingly aware on the situation of M/B.

The weaker part of the intervention is primarily the misrecognition of socio-economic context, cultural practices and value systems of the M/B community by various actors involved in the process. Very often this has created a confusing discourse on main agenda, strategy and approaches. For example, project approach of development intervention such as target of achieving activity plans, focus on immediate outcome of the contribution is weakening the organic relations and relative strength of mass based Samiti towards more professional, individualistic approach of community support creating different layer of hierarchies among the group members. Formal process of application, estimate budgeting billing, reporting documentation is now been expected form the community members (who are illiterate) is not only creating hassles to the participating members but also frustrating them to participate in the programmes. This has been rarely noticed by respective agencies as there is limited documentation of the process learning.

There is also role confusion of the Samiti- whether it should act as watch dog or an implementing agency. It is observed that outside agencies have prioritised their activities around the activities that generate immediate benefits to the community. Samiti, which is dependent to these resources, is prioritising these activities and giving up the genuine social issues such as movement for land rights.

Samiti is engulfing in between the service delivery and rights based approaches. There is an increased trend of engaging in service delivery however there is limited initiative on how Samiti can be strengthened to perform their role in service delivery. It is observed that they have very limited knowledge on handling of financial resources, mobilisation of human resources and implementation of proposed action plans.

There are a large number of outside agencies operating in the area. There are many duplication of activity, reiteration of engagement, and confusion on the priority on activities and actions. For example, Samiti and other NGOs are looking for area to resettle where Abhiyan is supporting activities in the Laugain risk management (see in annex 6). At the same time, it is also evident that many outside agencies are competing for the social space and operating with their own perspective, rather with a broad aim of enhancing community livelihoods collectively.

There is limited analysis of the changing context. For example, the earlier issue of fishing is gradually shifting with the decreased fish population and community interest on traditional occupation such as youths are lesser interested to go for fishing rather

they are preferring to go for employment and wage labour. It shows that there is a need to adjust the strategies and actions to respond the growing community interests beyond traditional livelihood options.

The study is an attempt to understand the impact of ongoing initiatives to address the livelihood issue of M/B community and the process of marginalisation. In brief, the finding of the study suggests that:

- ❖ There is a complex institutional, social and policy processes hindering the potential of external intervention about to bring positive changes in the communities.
- ❖ There is a need for analysing changing context of community awareness, capacity to respond, demand for support and services, refocusing issues and agenda.
- ❖ Revaluation of roles, responsibilities and approaches of involved NGOs, relation with Samiti, community and neighbouring communities.
- ❖ There is a need to develop clear understanding of roles and responsibilities among the involved actors, programme implementation strategies, mechanism of evaluation and monitoring and space for incorporating lessons drawn from the interaction.
- ❖ Need to enhance the capacity of samiti members, facilitators with focus on community demand of services and the potential future role of samiti.
- ❖ Clarity of Samiti on their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat. As a major donor and implementing partner Action Aid should lead the reconciliation process.
- ❖ Non-violent strategies and pressure tactics coupled with popular support can challenge the unjust structures and practices.
- ❖ The struggles would not have been possible without conscious involvement of CDO in training of local activists within the M/B Samiti.

It is more than decade of the outside support for the livelihoods of indigenous fishing communities in the Nawalpur valley. The support ranges from capacity building, advocacy and lobbying to IGA activities. Locally initiated resistance movement of M/B community is a successful example of a non-violent social movement. The movement gave birth to a vibrant people's organization owned by the local community themselves. The movement is also very successful in producing activist leaders within the community. As a result, these campaigns have increased indigenous people's chances of accessing livelihood resources from the CNP and its protected surroundings. Moreover, the magnitude and frequency of human rights violations by conservation authorities, including the Army, have been drastically reduced. All these initiatives is forcing policy makers for better policies governing protected areas and wildlife conservation in Nepal.

Though the resistance movement of the community is relatively successful, the livelihood has not been improved substantially. There is a fundamental gap between the support agencies and local partners in understanding the local context of development priority or needs, interests and capability. Very often, support agencies fail to realise the complexity of ever changing local dynamics of socio-economic context and relationships, influenced by wider socio-political development.

Similarly, the programme approaches and working styles of the support agencies are key elements that affect the outcomes of the interventions. There is also fundamental differentiations perceived agenda of local development. Development agenda set by the leader of the initiatives does not necessarily are the community agenda. Leaders of the community though are representatives of the community in an organisational structure, have their vested interests to reap the benefits from the intervention.

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## Annexes

### Annex: 1 List of organizations working in the area

SN	Name of Organization
1.	Action Aid
2.	Aviyan Nepal /Campaign Service Centre
3.	Bird Conservation Nepal
4.	Buffer Zone Users Committee
5.	Chhahari Community Development Center
6.	Community Development Organization
7.	Community Forest User Groups
8.	Dalit Welfare Organization
9.	DDC and governmental line agencies
10.	Forest Action
11.	HEIFER
12.	HICODEP
13.	Indreni Community Development Forum
14.	MMBKSS
15.	Nari Attma Nirvhar Kendra
16.	Practical action
17.	Sahamati
18.	VDC
19.	Vijaya Development Resource Centre
20.	Women feeling unity forum

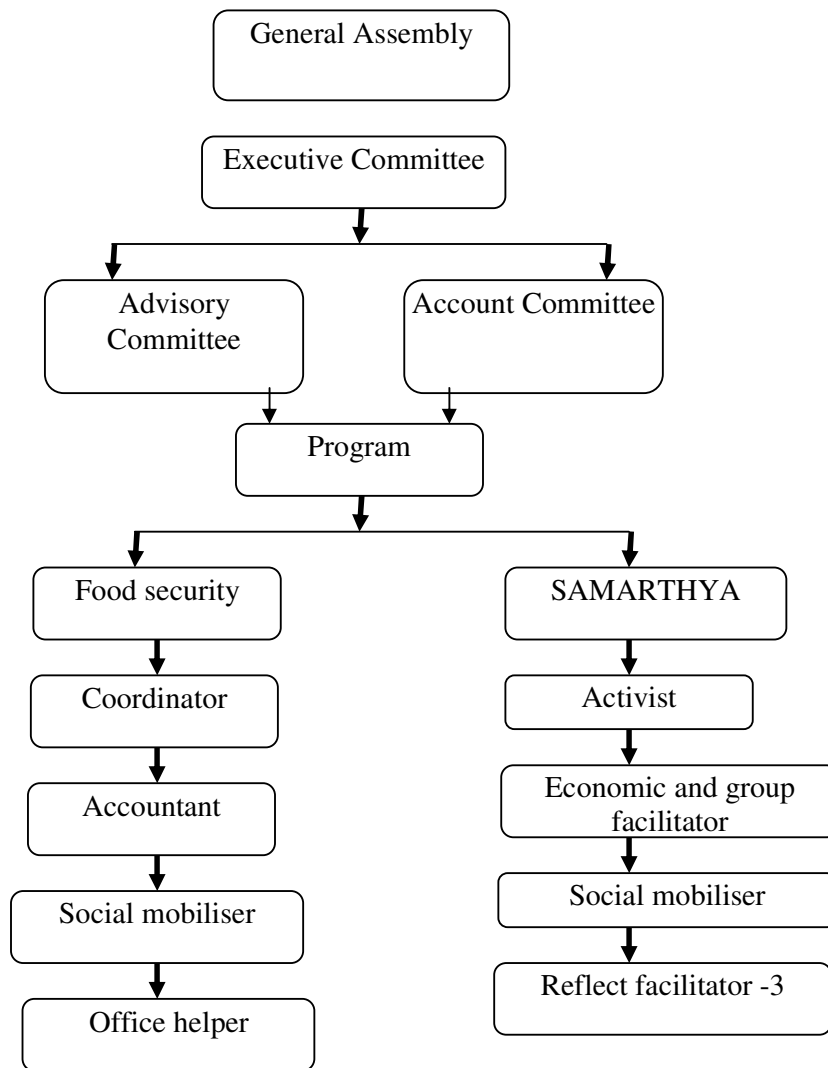
### Annex 2: Total HHs of M/B community in Nawalparasi District

S. No	VDC	Total Household		
		Bote	Majhi	Musahar
1	Gaidakot	63	-	-
2	Mukundapur	25	4	
3	Amarapauri	1	2	
4	Rajahar	29	8	3
5	Divyapuri	38		
6	Pragatinagar	19		
7	Pithauli	20	44	10
8	Kawaswoti	15	7	8
9	Agauli	80		42
10	Koluwa	52	2	
11	Narayani	12	4	
12	Daunne Devi	2		5
13	NayaBelhani	9	15	6
14	Triveni Sustha	1	6	5
15	Kudiya	9	3	11
16	Narsahi		50	5
17	Pakali Hawa			89
18	Amraut		1	

19	Badhara Dubowl		2	5
20	Baidauli			5
21	Banjariya			3
22	Parsauni	2	2	4
23	Guthi Parsauni			28
24	Guthi Surya Pura			30
25	Jahada			23
26	Jamuniya			6
27	Makar		5	70
28	Manhari			1
29	Pancha Nagar			2
30	Pratap pur			19
31	Ramgram Muni.			14
32	Ramnagar			27
33	Rupauliya			134
34	Sunawal			25
35	Somany			3
36	Sunuwal		2	13
37	Swathi			1
38	Tamasuriya	9	1	3
39	Thulo Khairatawa			2
40	Danda Jheri	1		
	Sub-Total	387	158	602
	Total			1147

**Source: M/B Samiti record, 2007**

### Annex 3: Organogram of M/B Samiti





#### **Annex 4: Major Activities of the current projects run by M/B Samiti**

1. Support for citizenship card
2. Vegetable production
3. Saving and credit
4. groups formation
5. Conduct reflect centers
6. Exposure visit
7. Trainings (RBA, vegetable gardening, skill)
8. Mushroom production
9. Fish pond support
10. Mobilization of groups and organization
11. Building institutional capacity
12. Documentation training
13. HH survey
14. Budget analysis of VDCs
15. Mass meetings
16. Submit demand letter to authorities
17. Awareness campaign on right to education
18. Coordination meeting with national park and VDC
19. Meeting with transport
20. Radio program
21. Case study writing
22. Child focus program
23. Press meet
24. Rally
25. Form people's organization
26. Rehabilitation
27. Interaction with political parties
28. Toilet and drinking water support
29. Community shop
30. Integrate Pest Management
31. Goat rearing
32. Sanitation
33. Networking
34. Flood watch tower
35. Gabion box construction

**Annex 5: No. of HHs and Population of Mushahar and Bote in study area**

S. No	VDC	No. of Household			Population					
		Bote	Majhi	Musahar	Bote		Majhi		Musahar	
					F	M	F	M	F	M
1	Gaidakot	63	-	-	213	220				
2	Mukundapur	25	4		61	65	8	10		
3	Amarapauri	1	2		3	2	2	6		
4	Rajahar	29	8	3	39	38	30	38	5	5
5	Divyapuri	38			99	96				
6	Pragatinagar	19			59	60				
7	Pithauli	20	44	10	70	50	125	139	23	37
8	Kawaswoti	15	7	8	40	46	39	32	29	28
9	Agauli	80		42	259	280			121	162
10	Koluwa	52	2		147	169	3	1		
11	Narayani	12	4		36	33	9	12		
12	NayaBelhani	9	15	6	18	16	27	23	14	11
<b>Sub-Total</b>		<b>363</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>1075</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>518</b>			<b>3058</b>					

Source: M/B Samiti record, 2007

**Annex 6: Activities conducted by I/NGOs in Majhi Mushahar and Bote communities**

SN	Name of the organizations	Objectives of the program	Major Activities	Duration	Remarks
1	SAHAMATI <i>Food security and good governance supported by Action aid</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in livelihood.</li> <li>▪ Access to natural resources.</li> <li>▪ To increase advocating capacity.</li> <li>▪ To increase access in education.</li> </ul>	Support in distributing citizenship card, Vegetable production, Formation of Saving and credit groups, conduct reflect centers, organize exposure visit, Training(RBA, collective vegetable gardening, skill), Mushroom production, fish pond support	2006 – 2012  (yearly proposal basis)	Coverage: 3000 population of 11 VDCS.  Budget: Around 1 million per year
2	SAHAMATI <i>ARIBOM, a right based program in MB community supported by CARE Nepal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To increase advocating skills and capacity of MB community to acquire basic rights</li> <li>▪ Develop institutional capacity of community-based organization and mobilize them for sustainable community development.</li> <li>▪ Develop and mobilize local resource persons.</li> <li>▪ Publish a book about MB</li> </ul>	Mobilization of groups and organization, program orientation, Help to increase access and analyze institutional capacity, advocacy training, exposure visit, institutional capacity development training, documentation training, HH survey, budget analysis of VDCs, mass meetings, submit demand letter to authorities, meeting with factories, RBA planning, awareness campaign on right to education, coordination meeting with national park and VDC, meeting with transport.	One year program completion in 2005.	
3	VDRC <i>Food security Focus supported by Action Aid Nepal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To Increase access on food through right based approach.</li> </ul>	Training and campaign on RBA, exposure visit, Radio program, budget analysis, case study writing, child focus program, press meet, rally, form	2006 – 2012  (yearly proposal basis)	13,00,000 yearly.

	Focus on Land rights		people's organization, rehabilitation, interaction with political parties,		
4	Community Development Organization	To raise issue of national park and people relationship particularly access of indigenous community to natural resources.	Policy advocacy, Policy review, dialogue/ interactions with national level stakeholders,	2006 – 2012  (yearly proposal basis)	
5	Nari Attma Nirvhar Kendra <i>Rehabilitation support program for flood affected MB community</i>	To support flood affected community in rehabilitation	Tin support, form saving and credit women groups, Toilet and drinking water support	063 to till date	Nepal-Canada support
6	HICODEF  <i>Women's leadership program for development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support on income generation of the community through women groups</li> <li>▪ Create environment of cooperating with each other with the education of social good will</li> </ul>	Introduction, staff training, group mgt. training, mushroom production support, drinking water support, monthly meetings	2006 - 2008	Supported by Heifier  9 groups of Pithauli where as one group of 16 members are MB
7	Women feeling unity forum	NA	Community shop, IPM, drinking water, goat rearing, sanitation, saving and credit	2003	Caritas, Fundboard, Hefier
8	Forest Action Improved Wetlands Management of chitwan Valley (IWCV)	promote, integrate and institutionalize improved wetland management	Wellbeing ranking and support IGA, trainings and discussion related to wetland, exposure visit, Networking, institutional strengthening	2005- 2007	
9	Chhahari Community Development Center	NA	Women saving and credit group, IGA; goat rearing	NA	
10	Campaign Service Center	To ensure basic human rights and equitable	Flood watch tower, gabion box construction	NA	

		progress of socio-economically marginalized communities who are also vulnerable to conflicts and natural hazards			
11	MMBKSS Partnership with action aid for two project (food security and SAMARTHYA)		organising various development programmes in partnership (see Annex 4 for activity details)	2006 – 2012 (yearly proposal basis)	
12	Indreni Community Development Forum	NA	Advocacy on land and water resources,	2006 – 2012 (yearly proposal basis)	
13	Buffer Zone users Committee	NA	IGA, goat rearing, Saving and credit, Skills training	1996 till date	4 to 10 lakhs per year in every three VDCCS
14	Community forest user groups	-	Distribution of forest products, Provide various development activities		
15	Dalit Welfare Organization (DWO) Program supported by practical action	To provide financial and technical assistance to poor HH for their economical improvement	Training, vegetable gardening, fish pond	2007, Four years program	