



Terre des hommes

# Letters from Kathmandu

Volume 1, December 2002

## We inform about Nepal:

With this newsletter we would like to regularly inform our friends, members and supporters about ongoing developments in Nepal as well as to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexity of problems of this beautiful country.

The Swiss Foundation of *Terre des hommes* first commenced work in Nepal in 1985 with a rehabilitation program to treat children with physical disabilities.

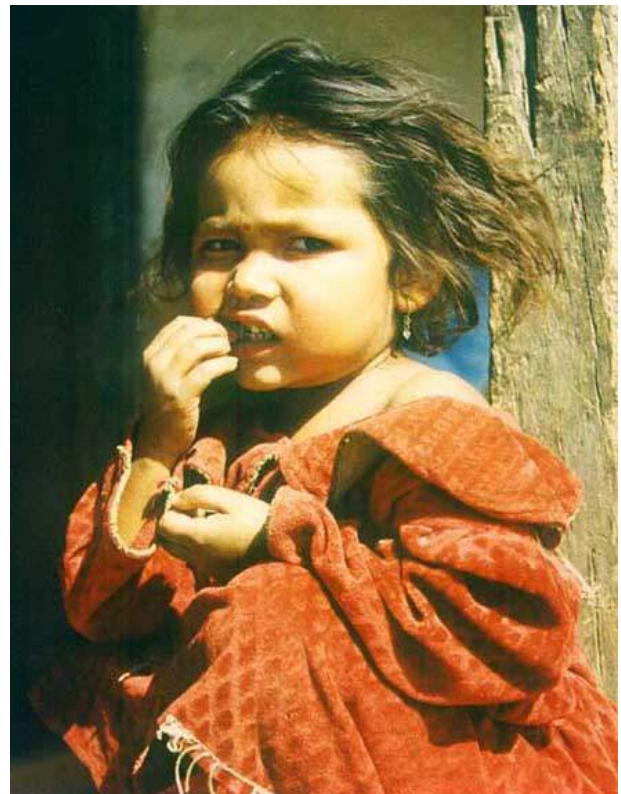
In 1992 *Terre des hommes* (Tdh) handed over the program to the local partner 'Friends of Disabled (FOD), a Nepali Non-Government Organization, which established the "Hospital and Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children" (HRDC) in 1993. In 1997 the project established a new hospital complex in Banepa, 25 km east of Kathmandu as the leading referral hospital in Nepal for children with disability. The center serves children from all over the country, and beyond, carrying out orthopedic surgery to more than 15,000 children up to now, and reaching more than 28 districts in Nepal with professional fieldworkers and mobile camps in remote rural areas.

Over the years *Terre des hommes* (Tdh) was active in the field of juvenile justice by providing legal aid and psycho-social support for women prisoners, rehabilitation of dependant children in jail, and advocacy. A local partner implemented the project.

Nowadays *Terre des hommes* (Tdh) is also working with local partner NGOs to implement community based nutrition projects due to the fact that more than 50 per cent of all Nepali children are malnourished.

One of our partner Sagun, means 'search for harmony', is working in four wards of Kathmandu city with health professionals and volunteers to implement a nutrition project for very poor families.

RICOD is implementing a nutrition project in south Lalitpur, to improve mother and child health of rural communities.



*A child of south Lalitpur – the project area of RICOD*

## The growing crisis in Nepal

"It is difficult to find elsewhere in the world a country as small in area as Nepal with such a variety in population. Nepal is a cultural mosaic inhabited as it is by an amazingly diverse array of ethnic, caste, linguistic and religious communities. The 1991 Census of Nepal recorded 60 caste and ethnic groups (mostly Indo-Aryan and 'Mongols') and 70 languages and dialects (mostly Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman). In terms of religions, the census lists Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and local faiths, but Hinduism-Buddhism interface itself provides so many variations that it is often difficult to put a name on the belief system."(*Rajendra Pradhan: Ethnicity, caste and a pluralist society. State of Nepal, Himal Books, June 2002.*)

The country is a Hindu kingdom that, unlike so many other countries, "has remained relatively free of ethnic, religious, linguistic and caste violence. However, the subordinate groups are beginning to question this picture of tolerance and

pluralism. Particularly since the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990, the open political atmosphere has allowed the emergence of an energetic movement of ethnic assertion, whose leadership might regard Nepal as a pluralistic society, but one that is characterized by hierarchy, dominance and oppression.” (*Rajendra Pradhan: Ethnicity, caste and a pluralist society. State of Nepal, Himal Books, June 2002.*)

According to the World Bank Report (*The World Bank: Nepal Development Forum, Economic Update 2002. January 30, 2002*) Nepal is, with a per capita income of US\$220 per annum, the 12<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world and the poorest in South Asia, and in purchasing power parity terms, the country’s per capita income makes it the 30<sup>th</sup> poorest country. With more than 50% of children under five malnourished, literacy rates of 58% and 23% for men and women respectively, and an infant mortality rate of 72.36 deaths/1,000 live births (2002 est.) “a staggering 71 percent of the 23 million Nepalis live under the poverty line, which is defined as an annual income less than USD 150.” (*Saubhagya Shah: From evil state to civil society. State of Nepal. Himal Books, June 2002.*) There is one doctor for every 20,000 people (*USAID: Primary Health Care Services in Nepal. Field Report. October, 2002.*) and much of the rural population lives several days away from functioning health services.

### High Intensity Armed Conflict

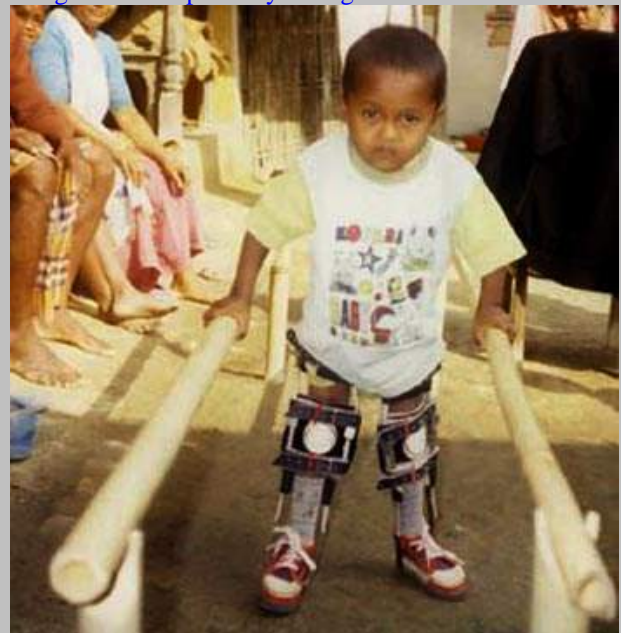
“The origin of the conflict dates back to 1994, when a faction of the communist United People’s Front initiated a campaign to boycott the elections after being excluded from taking part in the electoral contest. The Government of Nepal mobilized the police force to contain the campaign. The government’s response, and reported over zealous repression of civilian populations in some areas, such as Rolpa, drove the Maoists further underground, and had the effect of attracting disaffected locals to their ranks.” (*USAID: Primary Health Care Services in Nepal. Field Report. October, 2002.*)

“Since 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist) has been waging a ‘people’s war’ to establish a communist republic in place of the extant constitutional monarchy. This conflict has now evolved into the most serious internal crisis facing the nation-state of Nepal since its founding in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. And there are no signs of the fighting ending anytime soon. Hopes were raised in July 2001, when the government as well as the Maoists declared a ceasefire and began negotiations. But the talks

### Children with disabilities have a right to special care



Access to special care is a fundamental right for children with a disability. This has been a guiding principle for *Terre des hommes* since it opened a delegation in Nepal 17 years ago.



Initially, Tdh managed a rehabilitation program for physically disabled children. The ‘Hospital and Rehabilitation Center’ (HRDC) in Banepa is now a project of the NGO ‘Friends of the Disabled’, and has become Nepal’s leading hospital for children with disabilities. However, the support of HRDC remains the most important activity of Tdh in Nepal until now.

broke down four month later and the Maoists resumed hostilities. The country has since been under a state of emergency (The state of emergency has been lifted end of August this year without changing much for the ordinary citizens); fundamental rights of the citizens have been suspended; there are strict rules and regulations governing the press; and the military has been called out to tackle the Maoists. The killings continue on both sides and within six months of the emergency more people had lost their lives than in six preceding years of the insurgency,” (Deepak Thapa: *The Maoists of Nepal. State of Nepal, Himal Books, June 2002.*) with victims on both sides representing “ordinary peasants, low-level policemen, rural teachers and average villagers whose deaths do not provoke national and international sympathy or condemnation.” (Saubhagya Shah: *From evil state to civil society. State of Nepal. Himal Books, June 2002.*)

**No. Of Victim Killed by State & Maoist in Connection with “People’s War”**  
(13 Feb 1996 – 12 November 2002)

Occupation	By State	By Maoist
Agricultural	404	225
Teacher	18	42
Political Worker	4355	217
Police		892
General People	83	110
Student	68	30
Civil Servant	15	29
Social Worker	1	3
Businessman	8	15
Worker	30	16
Law Professional		2
Health Worker	1	2
Journalist	1	1
Army	1	212
<b>Total</b>	<b>4985</b>	<b>1796</b>

Source: Human Rights Year Book; Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC); [www.insec.org.np](http://www.insec.org.np)

“The insurgency that began as a localized phenomenon in the 3 mid western mountain districts of Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot, the western district of Gorkha and the eastern district of Sindhuli has now spread to 73 of Nepal’s 75 districts. During 2001, there was an escalation of the conflict and since the failure of the peace talks in November 2001, it entered into a phase of greater intensity that has evolved from a medium intensity conflict into a high intensity conflict (high intensity armed conflict: at least 1,000 battle-related deaths per year. Wallenstein and Sollenberg, 2000). (Dr. Esperanza Martinez: *Conflict-Related Displacement Nepal. June, 2002*)

**Reaching out to remote villages**

The road goes only as far as the village of Battedada, from there on it is all by foot. The remote steep hills in the district of Lalitpur, just a few kilometers south of Kathmandu, are home to mostly Brahmin/Chhettri and Tamang communities.



Here the rate of malnutrition is 67%, which is higher than the national average. In the Tamang communities, several hours’ walk from the center of Malta village, the prevalence of night blindness among pregnant women is 29%. That is 60% higher than the already very high nationwide level, and indicates a severe deficiency of Vitamin A in the diet of the impoverished people of these villages.



The rural NGO RICOD engages the people of these communities with the aim of improving the food and health-related habits. Communities learn to understand malnutrition and find a forum for discussions.



Six years of rebellion by Nepal's Maoist guerrillas as cost the lives of more than 7,000 people and battered the Himalayan kingdom's already weak economy. The government calls them terrorists, but Maoist leaders say they are fighting on behalf of the majority rural poor to rid the country of an outdated feudal system that favours only a small urban elite. The rebels, who follow the late Chinese communist party leader Mao Zedong, are insistent that what Nepal needs is a communist republic system. At the centre of the struggle is land – a traditional passport to affluence in Nepal. Much of the nation's land, from the low Terai to the high Himalayas, is subject to feudal ownership, where millions own nothing. As parliament tries to bring about change, the Maoist army – which controls around 25 per cent of the country – continues to use the gun rather than political means to further its cause. Reclusive Comrade Prachanda, the group's leader whose name translates as "awesome", comes from the same upper Hindu castes that he aims to topple. Prachanda, born Pushpan Kamal Dahal, wants the once tranquil nation be a "people's republic" with none of the feudal institutions currently in place. His movement bases its teaching on Mao Zedong, whose revolutionary movement against land-owning classes in China also began in the countryside.

However, Nepal's Maoists, who have received little if no support from Beijing, view China as having deviated from Mao's teachings adopting capitalist practices. It was after the killing of Nepal's much-loved King Bihendra and most of the royal family by the late Crown Prince Dipendra that the situation took a turn for the worse. Although anti-monarchist, the Maoists were quick to praise the late king for his patriotism and liberal virtues, describing the massacre as the result of a conspiracy. The late King Bihendra never called the army out against the insurgents and in turn Maoist activity barely surfaced in the west. But after the royal massacre, when disinformation and accusations were rife, the Maoists hit politicians and rural outposts hard, prompting the government to call a state of emergency.

Only the king can give permission to deploy the army, which the newly crowned and less popular King Gyanendra did for the first time against the Maoists last year. With up to 10,000 rebels facing off against a 90,000-strong but ill-equipped police force and army, the death toll has escalated. For its neighbors, India and China, the Himalayan kingdom has long been regarded as a convenient neutral buffer state. Neither of the world's most populous nations, who went to war in 1962 over a

## Reaching out to urban poor

More than half of all Nepali children is malnourished. This alarming fact has motivated *Terre des hommes* to extend its activities to nutrition. Improving nutrition status is a slow process as malnutrition is influenced by many factors, some as hard to change as food habits and power-relations in the families.



A mother who is under pressure from her family members has no energy or resources to take good care of herself and her children.



Working to improve children's nutrition means also working for more respect and rights for women in the families and communities.



SAGUN is implementing the nutrition project with health professionals and many volunteers who live in the project area of presently four wards of Kathmandu.

still disputed border, would relish an unstable Nepal. Yet poor leadership from the nine governments in a decade, political turmoil and a decimated monarchy has led to a weakened nation that the Maoists have taken advantage of. As the war continues to escalate, no winner seems likely in the short-term with the inevitable losers being Nepal's millions of poverty-stricken citizens." (<http://asia.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/south/04/22/maoist.profile/index.html>)

## Root causes of the conflict

There is a strong skepticism what development has achieved so far in Nepal, combined with unrealistic expectations and also anger about how the results of development have been distributed. Gender and caste discrimination are so severe that they, beside extreme poverty levels, deserve to be considered as one of the underlying causes of the conflict. Nepal is considered as an extraordinarily "weak state", but also its civil society, however, is not stronger. The state is threatened by a growing Maoist insurgency, which is "fuelled by popular frustration with the way that the country is being governed." (*SC-UK: Nepal Country Strategic Paper 2000-2003*) "There is widespread consensus over the root causes of the conflict. The main grievances are inequitable socio-economic and political access, bad governance and corruption, as well as resulting widespread poverty. These issues are used by the Maoists to justify their challenge to the government, and they contribute to motivate certain sectors of society to openly join or at least silently support their movement and cause." (*GTZ: Nepal Country Study on Conflict Transformation and Peace Building. Eschborn 2002*)

### 110 Children Killed in the Conflict

"With the ongoing 'Government – Maoist War', the nation has lost 110 children so far, stated a press release from the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) today. Till today the state has killed 62 children while the Maoists at least 48 children in the ongoing war."

*The Kathmandu Post: November 20, 2002*

## Impact of the conflict

According to a recent GTZ study (*ibidem*) "the local population considers some of the impacts of the conflict to be largely positive: Pressure has been exerted on national politicians to introduce social reforms such as land reform, a reform of the inheritance law for women, extending the rights of *kamaiyas* (bonded labourers), and ending

discrimination against *dalits* (occupational castes and untouchables). Widespread corruption at the district and local levels has become more contained through more transparency, including public audits under Maoist influence; socio-economic problems like alcohol abuse, gambling or the excessive interest rates of local moneylenders have become more controlled in many regions. However, the negative impacts have increased and have begun to outweigh the positive changes in the eyes of many people. The major negative consequences are: The spread of violence, insecurity and fear; increased extortion in the form of "donations"; government services, especially in the field of education, have been impaired; economic effects leading to loss of income for the already poor."

## Displacement

While the events leading to movements of people may differ from place to place, the root cause of displacement has been the conflict. "Nepal's conflict is already displacing people. Over recent months its main urban centres have been receiving a steady flow of new arrivals fleeing insecurity and food shortages or pushed out by declining services (schooling, health, electricity and water) in conflict areas. It is difficult to assess the scale of this movement although there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that it is already having a noticeable impact on Nepal's towns." (*INF: Internal Displacement and Urbanisation – A call for action. 'Absorption' An INF concept and strategy paper; Kathmandu, July, 2002*)

"According to field data, the poorest sectors of the rural communities have not moved to district headquarters or the larger cities primarily because they do not have economic means to resettle. A sense of attachment to their land might also contribute to their decision to endure the harsh conditions in their villages. There is information that suggests that many rural areas in conflict-affected districts are now only inhabited by the most vulnerable: women, children and the elderly....The declaration by the Maoists of the "district people's government" strategy in August 2001 and the beginning of forced recruitment from every family of one young man or woman, prompted the increased exodus of young people to India. In addition, the military pressure from the security forces since the imposition of the state of emergency in November 2001 has further increased the migration of especially males aged 13-28....For these reasons, one of the most serious results of the conflict is, therefore, the major risk to food sufficiency and nutritional

conditions amongst the most vulnerable in remote mountainous and conflict-affected districts, in other words, those who remain behind in the villages. The poorest are likely to become even more vulnerable with the persistence of the conflict.” (Dr. Esperanza Martinez: *Conflict-Related Displacement Nepal*. June, 2002)

“The humanitarian situation is as uncertain as the political situation. As in June 2002, it appears that no humanitarian/development organisation has been able to gauge the levels of humanitarian need in Nepal with any degree of authority.” (Huntington Associates: *Humanitarian and Development Situation Assessment for DFID Nepal*, September 2002.)

### **“Famine by February**

#### **Western Nepal is running out of food**

Hunger doesn't make headlines, war does. The deaths of over a hundred policemen and Maoists in the Jumla battle last week was big news for the papers in faraway Kathmandu. But here, in the remote hills of western Nepal and away from the glare of media, hundreds of thousands of Nepalis face an imminent and catastrophic food shortage. If nothing is done now, local officials warn, there will be famine by February across the hills.

There are many reasons: the food blockade by the security forces, the Maoists looting what little the farmers have, the worst drought in 50 years, roads and bridges not maintained regularly.

The effects of malnutrition can already be seen in the children. Able-bodied men have migrated to find work, to escape forced recruitment by the Maoists, and avoid being caught in security dragnets. Only the children, women and elderly remain, and they are all hungry. *Nepali Times*: 22-28 November 2002.

### **Human Rights crisis**

Amnesty International (<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/asa310162002>) reports about “unlawful killings, “disappearances”, torture and arbitrary arrest and detention under various security laws by police and army personnel since the CPN (Maoist) declared ‘people’s war’ in February 1996. It also includes details of the deliberate and unlawful killing of civilians, the execution-style killings of police officers taken captive, hostage-taking, torture and the imposition of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments, including “death sentences” by the Maoists. The Maoists have also been responsible for recruiting children as combatants.”

### **Impact on women**

“Emigration and recruitment of men into Maoist cadres or security forces as well as the killing of

male members of the family by both parties have increased women’s on-farm duties. Some tasks that were traditionally performed by men, such as ploughing and roofing the houses, have also now fallen upon women head of households and constitute a significant burden. In addition, forced recruitment of young women by the Maoists along with sexual abuse in Maoist camps and sexual violence against women by the Police have been reported in conflict-affected areas. A large number of women have also been arrested by the Police and face less than adequate detention conditions.” (Dr. Esperanza Martinez: *Conflict-Related Displacement Nepal*. June, 2002)

### **Impact on children**

“A report by a human rights organisation, Child Workers in Nepal, released in May 2002 estimates that 1,000 children have lost their parents and many more have fled their homes since the Maoist violence broke out six years ago. There are also reports that indicate that the Maoists are recruiting and using children as soldiers. In rural areas of conflict-affected districts, health and immunization programs have disrupted. The rural education system has also suffered as many teachers have been harassed by the Maoist and forced to take shelter in the district headquarters. Field reports indicate that many children victims of the conflict have been fostered by their relatives. Many others, in districts such as Surkhet, are dependent on aid from national and international organisations. There are no figures available on the number of children affected.” (Dr. Esperanza Martinez: *Conflict-Related Displacement Nepal*. June, 2002)

Experience of violence, loss of near relatives, displacement, extreme poverty and lack of opportunity is increasingly threatening normal childhood’s social, emotional, and mental development. The loss of other coping mechanisms can exacerbate this situation, increasing the numbers of children at risk and also the risk they are exposed to. Children are directly affected by the conflict. However the main impact is from the indirect and more long-lasting effects of the conflict - increasing poverty and development of a culture of violence.

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