



SUCCESS STORY

Engaging Youth in Community Development in the Eastern Terai



Young people work with the community in Bhodaha, Morang District, to repair a village road.



USAID/NEPAL

Young and old join the effort to rehabilitate a school roof in Budhanagar, Morang District.

In August 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began a program in Nepal to bolster the current peace process, strengthen governance mechanisms, and support positive, nonviolent community engagement in the country's political, social, and economic future. The objectives of the program are to:

- 1. Increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to political transition, and*
- 2. Increase local-level engagement and participation in the peace process.*

August 2008 – Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, Nepal has witnessed a series of political movements by various ethnic groups seeking to ensure their rights under the new constitution. Perhaps no region has experienced more turmoil than the Terai (the southern plains region bordering India), as long-oppressed Madhesis have launched numerous debilitating protests to pressure the central government for equal representation in the promised “New Nepal.” Although the activism has generated impressive wins for Madhesi parties in the Constituent Assembly elections, it has also created a large contingent of politically charged youth and increased ethnic tensions.

In this context, OTI piloted an activity that has both empowered young people and provided opportunities for them to engage in positive development efforts in their communities. Working in four sensitive districts in the eastern Terai, OTI established Youth Mobilization Committees (YMCs) in 150 village areas and empowered the YMCs to consult with communities to identify pressing small-scale development needs. OTI provided 25,000 Nepalese rupees (approximately \$370) in material assistance to each YMC with the stipulations that the communities must contribute additional resources for the activities and that local youth must be actively engaged in the projects.

Support for the initiative was overwhelming, as participating communities pledged in-kind support averaging 21,500 rupees, or 86 percent of OTI's contribution. Communities were able not only to work with the YMCs but also, in many cases, to lobby local officials and secure government funding for larger development projects. In the village of Siraha, the community and local government officials were so pleased with the YMC's work that small government-funded development projects are now managed by the YMC.

Another empowered YMC pressured a local government official to release the community's annual development budget and discovered that nearly half of the funds had been misspent. The official immediately pledged to complete the scheduled development projects and establish a transparent budget process for the upcoming year.

Because of the success of this model, OTI is developing similar projects in three districts in the central Terai.