

## Using Group Action Process to improve livelihoods and food security in Nepal

### Background



Photo: Ralph Hodgson/Tearfund

Mugu District lies in the mountainous Karnali Zone, one of the remotest, poorest and most neglected zones in Nepal. The majority of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. However, a lack of cultivable land, the low agricultural potential of the area and limited agricultural knowledge mean that most families can only produce enough food to last them for four to six months. To reduce pressure on food resources, and to supplement income, the majority of households have one or more men working outside the area in the winter which puts pressure on family cohesion.

For the last 30 years the government and some major international agencies have addressed the problem of food security in Mugu solely by distributing food. This has encouraged

dependency and means that local people have little confidence in their own abilities to solve problems.

### Activities

**Tearfund's partner, International Nepal Fellowship (INF)**, is working to change this. Using a participatory strategy known as Group Action Process (GAP) they are strengthening the capacity of communities to develop their own solutions to problems; solutions that are appropriate to the context and available resources.

It has improved livelihoods and enhanced food security through improved agricultural and livestock production, kitchen gardens and income generation activities such as growing fruit, high value crops and diversifying livestock.

In different forms, GAP has been extensively applied by INF in both rural and urban settings and has been found to be a sustainable and inclusive tool for achieving development.

### The process

- relationship building, social and economic analysis and selection of communities in consultation with local government offices (this stage usually lasts around 6 months);
- formation of Self-Help Groups;
- participatory analysis of existing situations and problems;
- identification and planning of activities to improve these situations;
- resource acquisition;
- implementation of planned activities.

The Self-Help Groups (SHG) are strengthened and supported through appropriate training and accompaniment, building confidence and fostering ownership of their development activities. Skills are developed in money management, encouraging a culture of regular saving. This means that when capital assets reach the end of their useful life (eg the plastic of greenhouses) community members are better able to replace such assets from their own resources.

### Gender issues

Women in the communities generally have lower levels of education than the men and much less confidence when interacting with outsiders. They typically work 16 hours each day and have no leisure time. This makes it more difficult for INF to engage with the women, but investing time in doing so pays off as they eventually demonstrate much more interest than the men in food security issues – they are

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency working with a global network of local churches to help eradicate poverty

## Case Studies - Food Security

the ones who prepare the food and the men are often absent from the communities for long periods, working in India. Once the women see that solutions exist, they often persuade the men not to migrate but to stay and invest their time instead in new food production opportunities.

### Holding the government to account

INF helps develop local awareness of rights to government services and facilitates good links between the community groups and the local district agricultural offices. In one case wealthier, more politically influential people near to a river were pressurising INF and the District Development Office to finance a big irrigation scheme that would only benefit seven households. INF explained that to support such work, the needs would have to be identified through the community SHGs. However, the SHGs had already prioritised a need for a small irrigation project in a different location.

INF was able to help the SHGs advocate for their scheme and eventually they received funding from the District Agricultural Office for the project. On this occasion funds were not made available for the less needy, but more influential, landowners.

# Food Security