

# EMPOWERING DALITS

LEARNING AND SHARING SERIES NO. 1



◀ helvetas Nepal ▶

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# **EMPOWERING DALITS**

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## **Abstract**

The empowerment of Dalits is a major challenge for development organisations. Though the Naya Muluki Ain (New Civil Code) of 1962 and the new constitution of 1990 have sought to end caste discrimination, and development organisations have supported this, it has continued.

Dalits are traditionally lower caste people who are regarded as "untouchable," and are discriminated against socially, economically, and politically. Ninety percent of them live below the poverty line and have little or no land. In Mid and Far West of Nepal the Dalit population is proportionally the highest in Nepal, where they form 30% of the population in many districts, and caste discrimination is extreme here.

Empowering Dalits describes how Helvetas' Linking Local Initiatives to New Know-how (LLINK) programme is reaching and helping Dalit communities in the Mid and Far West of Nepal. Helvetas follows a responsive, step-wise approach of social and economic empowerment.

This paper draws attention to the advantages of working directly with Dalit only groups, and of helping non-Dalits become more aware about the harm discrimination does and about changing the traditional practices. Experience suggests that Dalit only groups, in the initial stages, are the best way to help Dalits develop their confidence and leadership. Then, they can gradually be integrated with non-Dalits and have the confidence to assert their needs.

The formation of Dalit support organisations and networks helps further strengthen the activities of Dalit groups, and helps them put forward their case for equity and equal access to resources. Dalits have found strength in unity and organisation where previously little solidarity existed between their communities. Non-Dalits are gradually recognising Dalits as active members of society. Dalit organisations have been invited to VDC council meetings and given time to speak.

**Empowering Dalits is a major challenge for development organisations.**

**Helvetas initiates social and economic empowerment through a step-wise approach.**

**Dalit communities are now more unified than before.**





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## Abbreviations

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BBLL	Bridge Building at the Local Level
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CT	Community Technician
DCPA	District Coffee Producers Association
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal
IDEA	Institutional Development Extension Alliance
ISK	Indreni Samaj Kendra (an NGO)
LISP	Local Initiatives Support Programme
LNGO	Local Non-Government Organisation
NCPA	Nepal Coffee Producers Association
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
OD	Organisational Development
PCD	People-Centred Development
PPRP	Participatory Review and Planning
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
REDA	Rural Economic Development Association
SLOW	<b>S</b> mall farmers, <b>L</b> andless, <b>O</b> ccupational caste, and <b>W</b> omen
VDC	Village Development Committee

### Credo of Rural Reconstruction

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Go to the people  
Live among them  
Learn from them  
Plan with them  
Work with them  
Start with what they know  
Build on what they have  
Teach by showing, learn by doing  
Not a showcase, but a pattern  
Not odds and ends but a system  
Not piecemeal but integrated approach  
Not to conform but to transform  
Not relief but release

Helvetas Nepal and its staff have adopted this credo from James Yen, the founder of the Global Rural Reconstruction Movement, and bring this into their daily work.

## Introduction

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This short paper, *Empowering Dalits*, represents one of a series of *Learning and Sharing* papers on various topics of current importance in the Helvetas Programme in Nepal. It endeavours to provide a parallel country-level series to the current *Experience and Learning* documents produced by Helvetas at the international level.

The paper shares our working experiences in the rural areas of Nepal, as seen by our operational teams and the staff of their civil society partners. It does not claim to provide an exhaustive or definitive picture of the topic under discussion. Instead, it is a humble attempt to document some of our field experiences - a small building block in our learning and sharing. This documentation will be further elaborated as we accumulate more learning.

This paper focuses on how Helvetas, through its Linking Local Initiatives and New Know-how (LLINK) programme, is reaching and benefiting Dalit communities within working areas of Dailekh, Doti, Jajarkot, and Achham districts of the Mid and Far West regions. The programme supports the promotion of forestry, agriculture, trade-based employment, local institution building, and social empowerment.

The paper explains the *rationale* behind Helvetas' work with Dalits and the basic *approach* through which it has supported partners to empower Dalits. The paper outlines the *activities*, and *outcomes* of the Dalit support programme. It draws on Helvetas' learning about the overall approach and activities, and points out the challenges of empowering Dalits. From this, some *future directions* are identified for supporting the further development of the Dalit empowerment programme.

**This paper shares the experiences of Helvetas working in the rural areas of Nepal.**

**Linking Local Initiatives and New Know-how (LLINK) reaches and benefits Dalit communities in the Mid and Far West regions.**

**The Helvetas approach is explained by rationale, activities, outcomes, learning, and future directions.**





# Background

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**Extreme poverty and caste and gender exploitation are characteristics of the Far Western districts.**

The working districts of Dailekh, Achham, Doti, and Jajarkot are characterised by extreme poverty, a lack of rural infrastructure, limited food production, poor resource management, and underemployment. Weak local governance, migration, and caste and gender exploitation further compound this situation.

**Helvetas focuses on SLOW (Small farmers, Landless rural people, Occupational caste group/Dalit, and Women).**

Helvetas Nepal applies its "operational vector" of poverty and culture. This is a strategic framework to ensure that its programmes are poverty oriented and culturally sensitive, and it focuses on SLOW (Small farmers, Landless rural people, Occupational caste group/Dalit, and Women). A set of indicators to target SLOW, are applied within the framework during selecting, planning, implementing and monitoring programmes.

As the LLINK programme reaches its fifth year of operation in 2003, the Mid and Far West Regions face heightened violent instability. It is an important time for Helvetas to review its experiences and lessons learnt in working with the poor and disadvantaged communities in remote and now volatile districts of Nepal.

## Rationale for Working with Dalits

**Dalits face entrenched discrimination within Hindu society.**

Dalits face deeply entrenched discrimination that Hindu society has practised since the 12th Century. They are discriminated against in their daily lives at water springs and taps, in employment, at schools, hotels, restaurants, temples, and milk cooperatives (milk supplied by Dalits is refused).

Dalits themselves practice discrimination and label "untouchables" within their own caste group, which has hindered Dalit participation in civil society, the political system, and in social and economic areas.

**Most Dalits live below the poverty line and have little or no land.**

90% of all Dalits live below the poverty line and some have little or no land. They suffer discrimination and marginalisation.

They are poorly educated:

Literacy rate:	18% for Dalits, 48% is national average 58% for Brahmins
Women literacy rate:	3% for Dalits 30% for non-Dalits

They have little access to health facilities:

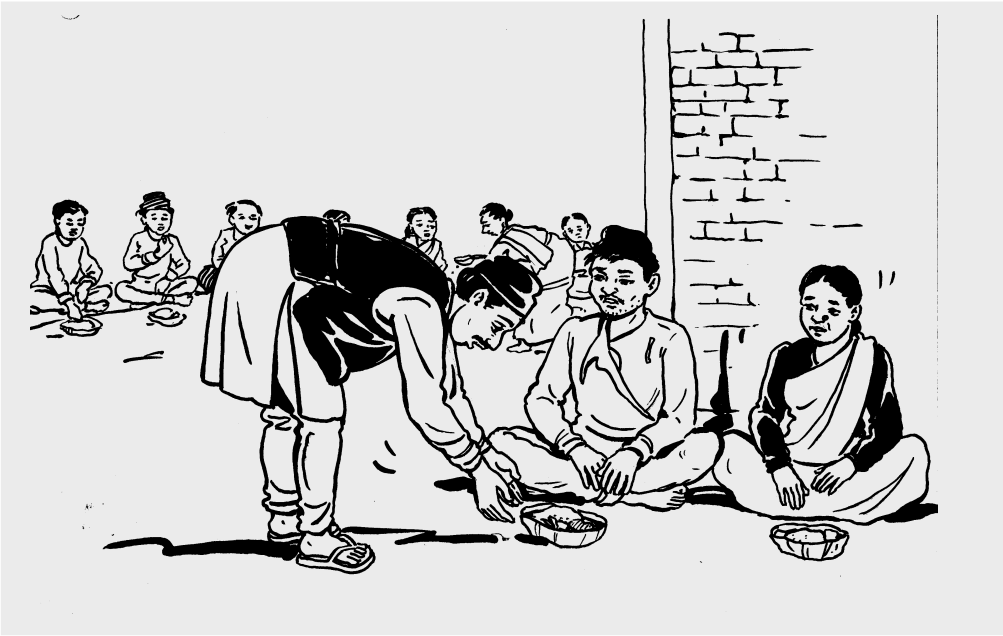
Average life expectancy:	42 years for Dalits 57 years is national average 61 for Brahmins
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They are not aware of good sanitation practices, and Dalit women suffer the double burden of being women and being Dalit.

**Dalit occupations include leather workers, sweepers, blacksmiths, tailors, and agricultural labourers (Haruwa or Haliya).**

Many Dalits are leather workers, sweepers, blacksmiths, tailors, and agricultural labourers (*Haruwa* or *Haliya*). Most receive only "some food grains" in payment for their work, and Haliya receive no payment as they work to pay off loans from landowners – they are effectively bonded labourers.

**Most Dalits receive only "some food grains" in payment for their work.**



Dalits are unable to produce sufficient food on small and poor quality landholdings, and have little or no ability to earn supplementary cash income. In most households, one or two family members migrate seasonally or permanently to urban centres or to India for low-skilled work.

Nepal's Muluki Ain (Civil Code) of 1853 legally institutionalised the definition and treatment of Dalits as "untouchable". The category "untouchable" was abolished in the Naya Muluki Ain (New Civil Code) in 1962. Nepal's new constitution of 1990 made caste discrimination punishable by law, however this is rarely enforced. Gradually over the last decade, the issue of caste discrimination has become more prominent and a national level Dalit commission has been formed to review the Dalit issues and make recommendations for future actions.

In the Mid and Far West Regions, the practice of untouchability continues despite these legal changes, and NGO advocacy and programme initiatives. Some development programmes aimed at addressing caste discrimination have actually neglected and further marginalised Dalits because of their design and the predominance of higher caste staff.

Helvetas has recognised that there is an urgent need for development programmes to find ways to address the issue of Dalits in the Mid and Far West, and to promote the issue at the national level through advocacy work. One of the operation objectives of the LLINK programme is to:

**To empower the disadvantaged – women and Dalits – to address the effects of discrimination and exploitation**

**Haliya receive no payment and are bonded labourers to pay off loans.**

**Untouchability is still practised despite legal changes, NGO advocacy, and programme initiatives.**

**Helvetas recognises the urgent need for development programmes to address the issue of Dalits.**

## Approach, Activities And Outcomes

**The LLINK programme's two approaches for working with Dalits include:**

- **Working with Dalits only groups**
- **Giving special attention to Dalits within mixed groups**

Helvetas follows a responsive, step-wise approach of social and economic empowerment to ensure that participants internalise their new capacity at each step and sustain successful activities. The LLINK programme is testing two approaches to working with Dalits in Achham and Dailekh districts:

1. *Working exclusively with Dalits* through the Centre for Agro-Ecology and Development (CAED), an NGO working in 5 VDCs in Achham; and
2. *Giving special attention to Dalits within mixed groups* through the NGOs RSDC and SPACE in 17 VDCs in Dailekh, and Sahavagi in 8 VDCs in Achham.

Both programmes work on raising awareness, addressing the distinct needs and obstacles faced by Dalits in economic and social programmes, and establishing linkages to regional and national networks and organisations to advocate and lobby on caste discrimination.

### Steps – Activities and Outcomes

**Step 1. Groups are formed through awareness and mobilisation activities.**

#### 1. Awareness Raising and Social Mobilisation to form groups

##### **Activities:**

- ***Dalit Sensitisation Workshops for Dalits and non-Dalits*** – open discussions on the issues and discrimination confronting Dalits, and ways to address them.
- ***Group formation and the introduction of confidence building activities:***
  - Concepts of saving-and-credit activities, accounting and management training, and access to local resources;
  - Discussions within groups on Dalit and women discrimination, rights, health and sanitation, group membership, and responsibility/confidence for speaking in group forums;
  - On and off-farm skill development/simple agricultural activities for subsistence level farming
  - Specific group activities, like constructing community buildings and school rooms

**Dalits have taken action to improve their situation through critical self-awareness and understanding broader issues.**

**CAED support has created unity and solidarity giving Dalits confidence and ability.**



##### **Outcomes:**

Within CAED's working area, unity, and solidarity have given Dalits the confidence and ability to develop a vision, and recognise their "hopes", opportunities, and potential – important stages in the gradual and incremental process of social change. Dalits are gradually changing their social environment and being able to enter temples for worship, to gain support from non-Dalits, and to be able to send their children to school.

One Dalit couple from CAED's working area, explained that when they were drinking tea in the local shop a Brahmin man asked them to move as he was about to be served. The Dalit replied, "I have no problem to drink tea with you. If you have a problem, you can move."

In Siladi, Dailekh district, members of the Dalit network, *Dalit Swabalambi Samaj* (DSS), on their own initiative, raised funds to construct a school in their area to make education more accessible for their children. Additionally, in CAED's working area in Achham, the local Dalits and their children's groups have run a campaign *Send to School*, which has helped increase school attendance levels as community pressure is encouraging families to provide education to their children.

## 2. Economic Development Activities to develop livelihoods

### Activities:

#### • **Advanced skill development and training in:**

- Marketing systems and linkages to develop small entrepreneurs, and cultivation and marketing of Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP);
- Building on traditional practices, cash-crop cultivation with improved and sustainable farm practices, and keeping small livestock; and
- Trade-based skills training and employment, such as carpentry, house wiring, hairdressing, tailoring, and leather work.

### Outcomes:

Dalit households have increased their income by participating in producer groups. Helvetas has introduced cash crops such as chilli, four season beans, and legumes in addition to kitchen gardening and crops for household consumption.

Dalits have had training in improved farm practices and technologies for semi-commercial production and marketing, which has allowed them to utilise: fruit grafting; multi-purpose nursery management (fruit, NTFPs, fodder and forage); improved forage and fodder cultivation; seed and vegetable production; and NTFP nursery management and cultivation.

Marketing groups have helped to secure better prices for farmers. Under DEC, a marketing management committee (MMC) was formed to market the group's agricultural produce and NTFPs in the CAED area. NTFP business committees have attracted good prices for *timur* (spring pepper), *amala*, *padhina* (mint), *tulsi* (basil), and *samayo*.

Dalits in Dailekh and Achham are participating in saving-and-credit programmes supported by RSDC and Sahayagi, in order to generate funds that can be used to meet urgent household needs and production activities. The loan/credit system reduces the opportunities for exploitation by moneylenders.

Dalits are now aware of the potential in occupation-based trades such as haircutting, tailoring, leatherworking, house wiring, and sewing machine repair. A number of Dalit beneficiaries have already received skills training and small loans to initiate self-employment.

**Step 2. Livelihoods need to be improved through Economic Development Activities.**

**Producer groups have enabled Dalits to increase their income.**

**Loan/credit systems reduce exploitation by moneylenders.**



### **Rising Solidarity against the Bonds of Halli (bonded labour)**

In 1983, Ranga Kham borrowed Rs 80 from the local moneylender. Eighteen years later, his debt had grown to Rs 12,000. During that period, he was forced to plough fields and do other work for the moneylender. His “reward” was two meals a day. Ranga was trapped in *hali* – a system of bonded labour that never gave him the opportunity to earn sufficient income for his own family, let alone pay back his growing debt.

Ranga finally got the support of a local Dalit organisation to help him argue for a reduction of the debt. After a series of tough negotiations, Ranga was able to reduce the debt by Rs 3,300. He still had to pay back the remaining debt, but could now work elsewhere. He realised that by working in India he could repay the amount quickly and free himself from the moneylender.

A CAED co-worker told this story in a Dalit meeting in the CAED centre in Turmakhand, Achham. “What can we learn from this?” he asked. After a few opinions were expressed, he tapped one finger of his right hand on his left palm. “Can you hear this?” he asked. The reply was “No”. He used two fingers, then three – a light clap was heard – four fingers and then the whole hand. “Yes, that’s how you can be heard” he shouted. “United we are strong”. This is the message now spoken amongst Dalits.

**Step 3. Organisations and Networks need to be strengthened to ensure continuity.**

### **3. Build and Strengthen Organisations and Networks to ensure continuation of activities**

#### **Activities:**

- Small project management, proposal writing, and accessing resources
- Group work dynamics, participation of Dalits and women, participatory review and planning.
- Coordination and linkages

#### **Outcomes:**

**Dalits are gaining strength, unity, and organisational skills.**

**Dalits have found strength in unity and organisation where previously little solidarity existed between their communities.**



Local Dalit organisations have been formed and registered:

- *Dalit Swabalambi Samaj – Dailekh* (DSS): this network is active in advocating Dalit issues and running simple income generating activities for its members. It has raised support from the VDCs.
- *Dalit Empowerment Committee – Achham* (DEC): this network represents Dalit organisations in 16 VDCs (including those outside Helvetas' working area). It is active in advocacy and lobbying, organising rural dramas on Dalit discrimination, and successfully submitting funding requests to Achham DDC and to VDCs. Tosi VDC, in Achham, is allocating a special fund to the Dalit groups formed under CAED. However, some individuals take time to change their attitudes. The Tosi VDC chairman said, "Now I can eat with Dalits, but only *outside* my village."

Non-Dalits are gradually recognising Dalits as active members of society. Dalit organisations have been invited to VDC council meetings and been given time to speak.

Local Dalit leaders are recognised at VDC level and are attracting widespread support from neighbouring communities and VDCs. In DEC's first General Assembly approximately 2,500 people from 16 VDCs gathered together. DSS has also hosted mass meetings in Dailekh in which all Dalit related organisations in the area participated.

At district level in Achham, Dalit groups and organisations, with the support of the DDC and other non-Dalit organisations, have formed the Dalit Unity Network.

Using both national and local media, Dalit organisations and members in Dailekh and Achham, have engaged in national events to air their own agenda and issues.

#### **4. Building on changes to promote changes across a wider area**

##### **Activities:**

At this step, changes occur and the programme gradually builds on the "new" situation in order to catalyse the next change.

- Alliance building and networking
- Ilaka and district level network formation
- Linkage development with regional/national level Dalit organisations
- Coordination and linkages with other stakeholders/institutions

##### **Outcomes:**

The formation of organisations and networks described above has led to the involvement of more and more Dalits both within Helvetas' immediate working area and beyond. Also productive relationships have been established with DDCs and VDCs, and linkages are being developed with other development organisations and projects.



**Dalits are being recognised as active members of society by non-Dalits and being given time to speak at VDC council meetings.**

**Step 4. The programmed must address the "new" situation and initiate changes across a wider area.**

**Dalits are beginning to form productive relationships with DDCs and VDCs.**

## Lessons And Challenges

**Dalits have been motivated by *The Dalit Sensitisation Package* to mobilise and take action towards improving their situation.**

**Sensitisation workshops for non-Dalits, local institutions, VDCs, DDCs, and NGOs promote the Dalit cause.**

**Dalit-only groups are more effective than mixed groups in the initial stages.**

**The sensitisation of stakeholders enables change, and minimises conflict.**

**Monitoring ensures equal distribution of benefits and access to them.**

**Institutions can become more important than the purpose of the movement.**

### 1. Awareness motivates

Critical self-awareness and understanding of broader issues around discrimination, motivates participants to mobilise and take action towards improving their situation. *The Dalit Sensitisation Package* has helped to increase the awareness amongst Dalits and non-Dalits, and has motivated the active participation of Dalits in the programmes of Helvetas' partner organisations. Helvetas has significantly increased its work to support Dalits in the last four years. Intermediary partners have targeted the SLOW more vigorously.

### 2. Sensitisation workshops for non-Dalits

Ways to build common understanding and support need to be promoted through sensitisation workshops for non-Dalits, local institutions, VDCs, DDCs, and NGOs. The status quo based on deeply embedded caste discrimination and social practices is challenged.

### 3. Dalit only groups in the beginning

At the grassroots in the initial stages, Dalit-only groups are more effective than mixed groups for enabling Dalits. They enable members to openly discuss issues, identify and address weaknesses, build on strengths, increase confidence, and develop leadership, which can be difficult to establish in mixed groups. Members are also more homogeneous in respect to the availability of resources – time, land, and finances for income generating activities. The poor involvement of Dalits in mixed groups indicates that other non-Dalit members need sensitisation.

### 4. Building broad agreement for change

The sensitisation of a broad range of stakeholders provides the opportunity for developing consensus for change, and minimising conflict. Dalit issues should not be positioned as antagonistic to so called "upper caste" interests. Dalit issues must be mainstreamed and a Dalit movement that will ultimately bring benefits to all must be advocated.

### 5. Access to benefits in mixed groups can be difficult

Mixed groups need to be monitored to ensure that access and benefits are distributed equally and fairly. In mixed groups, Dalits have received less access to saving funds and loans (hence the need for sensitisation of non-Dalits mentioned in an earlier lesson). More effort is needed to see that Dalits can influence and participate meaningfully in group activities.

### 6. Be aware that organisations can become exclusive

The question of the institutionalisation of Dalit groups/organisations requires further careful reflection and testing. It is important that they are strong and have a feeling of identity and pride. Then again, it is important that institutionalisation does not lead to a new kind of elitism and formality, since such institutions can potentially become exclusive rather than inclusive, and the organisation can become more important than the purpose of the movement itself.



## **7. Indicators help provide the right support at the right time**

Indicators that properly identify the stages of group/organisation formation and development can ensure appropriate support packages are provided at the right time. It is important to define the role/purpose of the group/organisation in order to clarify its vision, needs, and activities, and therefore the stages it needs to pass through.

**Indicators help provide the right support at the right time.**

## **8. Groups and organisations keep their activities at a manageable level**

It is important not to over-stretch the capacity, responsibilities, and expectations of the group or organisation. For example, the newly formed Dalit organisations in Dailekh and Achham should consolidate their activities on social mobilisation, advocacy, and lobbying activities before broadening to manage more complex economic programmes. The challenge lies in developing and implementing the appropriate support packages compatible to the growth stages of the beneficiary (group/organisation).

**It is important not to exceed the capacity of an organisation.**

## **9. Challenges facing groups:**

- Hand-to-mouth problem – immediate economic needs
- Real felt common issues – untouchability, discrimination, humiliation/suppression
- Defining purpose of group, roles and responsibility in group dynamics
- Confidence in articulating ideas, public speaking and interaction
- Basic skills acquirement
- Lack of solidarity among Dalits

**Groups face many challenges.**

## **10. Challenges facing organisations and networks:**

- Organisational vision and strategy building
- Participatory planning
- Accountability and transparency (in financial management, decision making, membership, etc.)
- Leadership and management
- Resource generation and mobilisation
- Alliance building with similar organisations
- Linkages to local government and other resource organisations
- Management skills for small projects

**Organisations and Networks also face many challenges.**

## **11. Impact of violent conflict**

The LLINK programme and its intermediaries are having difficulty supporting the newly formed DSS and DEC due to the violent conflict in the region. DSS in Dailekh especially, has been partially immobilised due to the Maoist activities for the last 12 months and has not been able to fully carry out its plans. Following the violent attacks in Achham in March 2002, it is likely that CAED and DEC will face similar obstacles. Consequently, there is a pressing need to build the capacity of local organisations to manage activities themselves.

**Conflict and violence have hindered the LINK programme.**

## **12. Helping Dalits improve their livelihoods takes time**

It has taken approximately two to three years to bring Dalit participants from a hand-to-mouth existence to a sustainable subsistence level of production for household consumption, from which income generating activities and cash crops can be introduced.

**Improving the situation of Dalits takes time.**

## **13. Importance of software work for income generation**

Awareness, social mobilisation, and group activities have given Dalits confidence and a vision of what they are doing as well as an understanding of why they are doing it. This has then helped make income generating activities a success.

**Income generation is a success due to social mobilisation efforts and creating awareness.**

## **14. "Tailor made" economic interventions:**

Economic programmes need to address the specific conditions and challenges facing Dalits in the region. Programmes and activities must be suitable for Dalit farmers who characteristically avoid risks, and therefore, must start by promoting a balance between food production and cash crops to minimise the risks. Short-term benefits with long-term economic development plans, goals, and activities are needed for Dalit farmers, who are adverse to taking risks.

**Economic programmes need to address the conditions and challenges Dalits endure.**



**Market support and linkages are essential for Dalit enterprises.**

**Dalits need to find alternative sources of income.**

**Communities should take up activities themselves and manage change in a sustainable manner.**

**There is immediate impact when working exclusively with Dalits on Dalit issues.**

**Dalits should be encouraged to facilitate programmes.**

**CAED's exclusive approach has enabled Dalits themselves to take centre stage in their own development activities.**

### **15. Market and linkage support required**

Strong support to creating markets and linkages is essential at the initial stages of economic programmes to build confidence and commitment in Dalit groups.

### **16. Diversification of income generation activities**

Modernisation is displacing many traditional occupations. As ready-made goods flood in from China and India, potters, cobblers, tailors, and others are facing less demand for their trades. Dalits need to diversify their skills.

### **17. Dalits need to develop the capacity to manage the change process themselves**

One concern is in what direction and on what scale can this momentum continue? Is there any real local capacity to continue and manage the radical process of change for which Dalit communities have now been mobilised? To address the interrelated political, social, and economic facets of Dalit poverty and discrimination in a balanced way, it is necessary when implementing programmes to enable the communities themselves to take up the activities and to manage the change process in a sustainable manner. So far, most intermediaries have been unable to fully deal with these issues.

### **18. Working exclusively with Dalits has more immediate impact**

When comparing the two different approaches taken by Helvetas' intermediaries to empowering Dalits, it is clear that working exclusively with Dalits, like CAED is, has had a more obvious impact on Dalit issues. In Achham, CAED's strong initiation and support leads to more participation, profile, and momentum in the active pursuit of Dalits' rights compared to neighbouring programmes.

### **19. Dalit programme staff**

A programme officer from the Dalit community has helped the LLINK programme team and its intermediary partners to follow-up on those activities focused on Dalits, and improve their effectiveness.

### **Why has CAED's exclusive approach been more effective, so far, in attracting the active participation and support of the Dalits?**

#### **1. Dalit ownership of the organisation**

CAED has a genuine, announced, and committed agenda to support the Dalit community and their needs and hence, is perceived by the community to be working *directly* for Dalits. CAED has earned the community's trust and now the community invites and welcomes the organisation's presence. Local Dalits believe that CAED is *their* organisation. This has helped Dalit communities to accept CAED. As CAED's programme director, Devendra Adhikari, who is from a high caste, states, "Where you first put your feet is extremely important."

#### **2. Interpersonal skills, relationship building, and identifying the Dalits' own issues are important**

Through close interaction, CAED has demonstrated patience, openness, and the ability to listen and allow Dalits themselves to speak out on what is important to them. CAED was able to identify and start with the issues of untouchability and social discrimination amongst the Dalit community. This is further reinforced by the LLINK programme's adherence to the *Credo of Rural Reconstruction* (see Annex ).

CAED's unique way of working with Dalit couples creates change from within by building on existing resources and knowledge

### 3. Working through local Dalit couples strengthens understanding and relations

Dalit couples selected from local Dalit families are responsible for establishing resource and learning centres, supporting their village area in the dissemination of new skills and knowledge, and promoting education on Dalit issues through the centres. The couples' responsibility and service to their area creates change from within, builds on the existing resources and knowledge, and generates confidence and a realisation of their own potential. However, it has also created some jealousy and resentment within the community. Others may perceive that the selected couples receive most of the benefits. These issues need to be addressed.

### 4. Outside intervention can help people change their attitudes

CAED has given the Dalit community a sense of hope. Previously, Dalits did not believe that external intervention and programmes could make a positive difference and bring beneficial changes in their lives. CAED has broken the fatalistic attitude of helplessness, so that they can realise their own potential. This is the point from where a change in perception can begin.

### 5. Community spirit and solidarity created

CAED has generated a community spirit and solidarity that is spreading amongst Dalits in the district. From this, they are forming groups and organisations.

### 6. Demonstrating in practice that traditional discriminatory practices are unfounded

Hiring a Dalit cook for the CAED centre in Turmakhand is an example of implementing small initiatives that generate huge impact. This action immediately changed and broke the practice of segregated eating due to untouchability. As CAED hosts meetings and workshops at its centre, non-Dalits, who usually refuse food from Dalits or do not eat in their company, have to either lose face by not taking tea and food, or to consent and eat with the mixed community. This small but effective action helps non-Dalits to realise that taking food and eating with Dalits has absolutely no consequences. Many other organisations now watch CAED's new initiatives with keen interest, and some have adopted similar activities.

### 7. Introducing new interventions first to Dalits builds relations with others in the community

Dalits cannot easily copy the activities of the higher castes because they lack the same resources – house, water, animals, land, education, knowledge, and exposure. If activities and skills are introduced to Dalits first, then these can trickle upwards, and the Dalits gain greater respect in the community. For instance, the higher castes have said, "If Dalits are doing it, why aren't we?" and copied kitchen gardening, toilet construction, breaking chaupadi customs, and cooperative registration. When the non-Dalits also benefit from these interventions, resentment is reduced.



## Future Directions

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### **Helvetas' future plan of action includes:**

- **Increase sensitisation**
- **Use specific support packages for Dalits**
- **Adopt a gradual approach**
- **Understand Dalits' perspective**
- **Build sustainable capacity of community organisations**
- **Follow up on support**
- **Strengthen linkages**

The outcomes and the lessons learnt from the experience of Helvetas and its partners demonstrate that to bring Dalits into the mainstream of the development process the following actions are required:

- Increase the effort to sensitise Dalit and non-Dalit communities about Dalit issues, including both government and non-government institutions;
- Work with support packages specific to Dalits that consider and tackle the distinct social, economic and political dimensions of the discrimination and poverty experienced by Dalits;
- Be patient and responsive to a gradual and incremental change process and have a clear view of the world as Dalits see it;
- Build the capacity of local community organisations/institutions to continue the change process activated by external intermediaries;
- Facilitate and follow-up groups with due attention to ensure that Dalits have the capability to carry out programmes independently; and
- Develop and strengthen linkages between Dalits and non-Dalits.

Based on these actions and lessons, the modifications to the steps for the empowerment of Dalits, like that of the Helvetas' LLINK programme, are:

### **Awareness raising and social mobilisation takes two to three years.**

#### **1. Awareness raising and social mobilisation**

Awareness raising and social mobilisation is a two – three year process with the direct intervention by the programme and its intermediary partners in the community.

### **The Dalit Sensitisation Package/Workshop is at the core of the programme.**

Begin by sensitising all programme and partner staff on Dalit issues, and ensure that the *Dalit Sensitisation Package/Workshop* is a core and regular component of the programme. After this sensitisation, the programme and partner organisation can develop a clear policy and strategy for implementation in the community.

### **Local resource persons must be trained to facilitate workshops.**

Intermediary partners and any newly forming organisations will train their own members to conduct Dalit sensitisation workshops. Local resource persons can then facilitate the workshops at the member, community, and broader local organisation level. Follow up will include workshops and support to identified technical and economic opportunities.

### **Action to eliminate untouchability has created interest and enthusiasm from Dalit participants.**

Continue to focus on identifying and starting from common, real felt issues. Experience indicates that action on untouchability has raised the interest and enthusiasm of Dalit participants. For future directions and action, this insight can help partners to address issues that will motivate and guide the participants constructively. In workshops with the groups, partners will facilitate discussions that are based on specific issues. Participants will be guided on how they themselves can address the issues of discrimination of Dalits and women, untouchability, rights, health and sanitation, and group membership and responsibility.

### **Various forms of media must be explored and utilised for advocacy.**

Explore and utilise various forms of media, including radio, posters and newspapers, to advocate and promote Dalit issues within the communities, districts and regions.

### **Dalits can interact with mixed groups and organisations once they have confidence.**

Wherever possible, intermediary partners continue to encourage the formation of Dalit only groups to run their activities. This enables intermediary partners to give Dalits the specific support and time required for the members to gain confidence. As members begin to gain more confidence and are able to articulate their ideas and arguments, then the partners can begin to help create opportunities for the groups and their members to interact with mixed groups and organisations of Dalits and non-Dalits.

Promote and support the inclusion of non-Dalits in Dalit community education programmes such as rural dramas, folk songs and dance competitions, gatherings, marches, and interactions with local government bodies. The involvement of non-Dalits will contribute positively to the process of social change, to build greater understanding and cooperation in the wider community, and minimise potential conflict and resentment that may emerge as traditional beliefs and practices are challenged.

**Non-Dalits can contribute positively to the process of social change.**

## 2. Building and Strengthening Networks and Organisations

Give special attention to build and consolidate the capacity of Dalit community and membership organisations in order to continue with the empowerment process and manage activities giving support to members. Community-based Dalit organisations can play a prominent role in the process of political and social change.

**Special attention must be given to strengthening networks and organisations.**

*Dalit Swabalambi Samaj* was formed to represent Dalits in Dailekh by working on social mobilisation, advocacy, and lobbying. The organisation carries out economic and income generating activities for members in coordination with other cooperatives, agencies, and programmes.

*Dalit Empowerment Centre* is an organisation formed in southern Achham to take over all the technological and social activities currently managed by CAED. It has been registered as a local network organisation representing Dalits in 16 VDCs.

**Community-based Dalit organisations can bring political change.**

Such organisations demand significant organisational development with support for:

- Identification and clarification of issues and purposes
- Organisational vision and strategy building
- Organisational management training and skill development – proposal and report writing
- Leadership development – vision, commitment and ability to mobilise
- Alliance building/strengthening, representation and influence at local government level
- Resource generation and access

**Dalit organisations need structural support.**

As the organisations get stronger and mature, the external programme can offer opportunities for support through small grants and the potential of entering into partnerships to implement activities as an intermediary partner.



## 3. Economic development and income generating programme

Introduce farm-led income generating activities based on people's interest and potential, once Dalit groups have stabilised their subsistence level of production for household consumption (a process of approximately two – three years after raising Dalit awareness and Dalit mobilisation activities).

**Economic development and income generating programmes are introduced after a period of mobilisation and awareness activities.**

**The risks involved in new commercial initiatives are minimised by a balance between cereal and cash crop production.**

Continue to initiate and support income generating activities that address conditions specific to Dalits households, including:

- Risk averse
- Small landholdings, often with poor soil conditions and irrigation facilities
- Minimal access to credit and capital
- Migration of household members
- Lack of demand for traditional occupational skills

Promote a balance between the production of cereals (food crops) and cash crops to minimise the greater risks of new commercial (small-scale) initiatives. Viable interventions are:

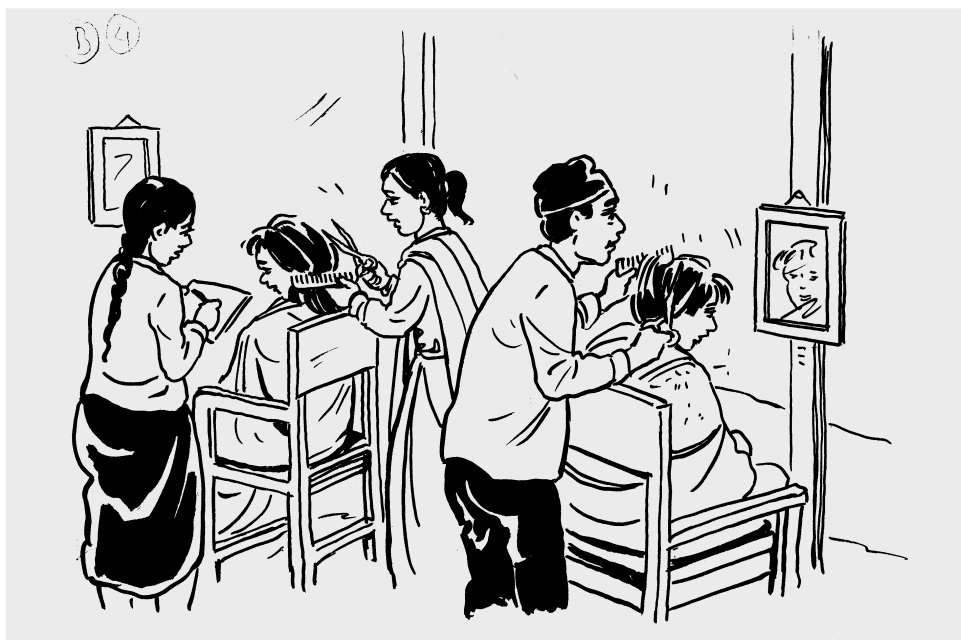
- Introduce inter-cropping of cereal and selected cash crops, such as chilli, legumes, and four-season beans (this will improve soil fertility).
- Continue agro-technical skill development with an emphasis on applying and consolidating the skills in the field.
- Offer special credit/loan facilities for productive activities and differentiated support subsidies for Dalits.
- Explore opportunities to foster and promote the role of Dalits (who have unproductive land or no land) as business agents to collect and market local produce.
- Give preference to Dalits for trade-based (traditional and new) skill development and employment opportunities.
- Develop and promote the potential of leasing community land or farms by Dalits for income generating activities.
- Expand the programme to promote small livestock with loan facilities and a revolving fund system, especially targeted at the participation of Dalit women.
- Continue to promote and support the participation of Dalits in the management of NTFP collection, cultivation, and marketing.

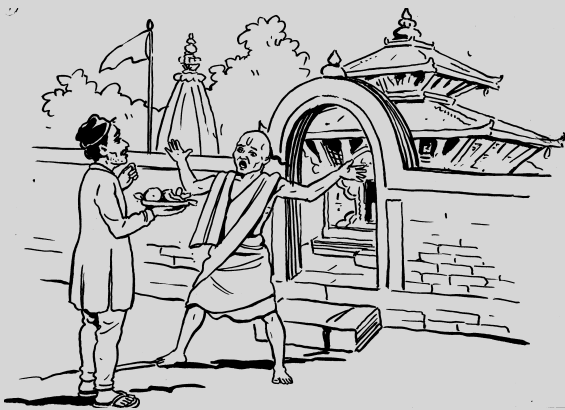
**Activities are improved by applying experiences and lessons learned.**

#### **4. Complimenting/Supporting Activities**

Learning from experiences and applying the lessons in future plans improve programme activities. In future:

- Encourage Dalits to lead the monitoring of activities and their evaluation.
- Institute the use of poverty oriented checklists and indicators to ensure activities focus on the poor.
- Incorporate lessons learnt in future activities.
- Support local governments in poverty/SLOW oriented planning, programme implementation, and evaluation.





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