



EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF DIRECT BENEFICIARIES

REALITY CHECK APPROACH STUDY

Undertaken for the Rural Access Programme 3 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Component

June 2015



Acknowledgements

This Reality Check Approach study has been made possible by the commitment, enthusiasm and teamwork of many. The Reality Check Approach (RCA) was originally an initiative of the Swedish Embassy in Bangladesh where it was first commissioned in 2007 and has since been adopted in other countries and other contexts.

This RCA study was carried out as a contribution to the mixed methods approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning commissioned by DFID Nepal to complement and assist the routine monitoring and evaluation of the Rural Access Programme 3 in Mid and Far West Nepal.

The study was undertaken by a team of Nepali researchers. Their passion for RCA, and considerable physical and emotional efforts were essential to the success of this study. These efforts are greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

The RCA study was only possible thanks to the many families who opened their doors to the study team. We thank the families in all four study villages as well as the scoping study village in Achham for contributing their valuable time and allowing the team members to live with them and share in their everyday experiences. We hope that this report reflects well the views and experiences of the families, their neighbours and others within the community.

All photographs have been taken with the consent of the people.

Terms, Acronyms and Abbreviations

APM	All Party Mechanism
B	Study village in Bajura district
Baari	Small vegetable patch
Brahmin	Higher caste Hindu (formerly regarded as priest caste)
Chettri	Higher caste Hindu (formerly considered as warrior/ruler caste)
D1	Study village in Doti district
D2	Study village in Dailekh district
Dai	Elder brother
Dalit	Lowest caste Hindu (formerly referred to as untouchable)
DFID	UK Department for International Development
Doko	Traditional Nepali basket
FCHV	Female Health Volunteer Worker
FHH	Focal Households (HHH neighbours)
GON	Government of Nepal
HHH	Host Households (families the researchers stayed with)
INR	Indian rupee
K	Study village in Kalikot district
Kodalo	Hoe
Kodo roti	Bread made from millet
MEL	Independent Third Party Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning of RAP3
NPR	Nepalese rupee
PWD	People with Disabilities
RAP	Rural Access Programme
RCA	Reality Check Approach
RBG	Road Building Group
RMG	Road Maintenance Group
Terai	Southern plains of Nepal extending from west to east
VDC	Village Development Committee

Exchange rate (approximately, April 2015) and numerical explanation:

1000 NPR: £ 6.6 UK pounds sterling

1000 NPR: 615 INR

One 'lakh' = 100,000

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1. Executive Summary

This Reality Check Approach (RCA) Study was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) as part of the Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) component of the third phase of the Rural Access Programme (RAP 3). It complements a 'baseline' RCA that was undertaken for RAP in May 2014.

The RCA study focused on RAP beneficiaries and their communities and was designed to understand:

- The lives and aspirations of RAP beneficiaries and reasons for their engagement with the programme.
- Experience and opinions of the selection process for RAP groups.
- Perceptions of RAP and the interventions it offers/provides. Comparison and links with other programmes and opportunities and the relevance and significance of RAP employment and socio-economic development (SED) support.
- The direct experience of RAP participants with project support provided, group dynamics and conditions of work and pay including how this influences future engagement, future decisions and aspirations.
- Changes experienced by RAP participants as a result of participation in RAP activities (e.g. cash flow, consumption, household and community dynamics, migration, acquired skills, connections).

RCA is an internationally recognised form of qualitative research that requires the study team to live with people living in poverty in their own homes for periods of time and use this opportunity for informal conversations with all members of the household and their neighbours as well as frontline service providers with whom they interact. The emphasis on informality in people's own spaces enables the best possible conditions for openness and for the team to triangulate the conversations with first-hand experience and observations.

This RCA study was undertaken in April 2015 in four of the RAP 3 districts (Bajura, Dailekh, Doti and Kalikot). A scoping/pilot study was carried out in Achham in advance of the main study. The districts were purposively selected to represent locations where RAP 3 has invested in road building, maintenance and socio-economic development support. A total of twelve households (three per district) were selected by the research team. While the team had intended to stay with beneficiary households at the start, the approach was later modified to include non-beneficiary households as it was thought important for the study to include their perception and insights of RAP 3. In addition to the households where study team members stayed, the team had intensive interactions with neighbours and other households as well as local service providers in the community. The views of more than 300 people were included in the study.

This report starts with providing context for the findings and structures the findings in the following themes 1) people's perceptions and experience RAP road work and SED opportunities, and 2) relevance of road work and SED support for people.

Findings

People said they depended on remittances from migrant workers as the main source of cash income in all study locations and families farm mostly for their own consumption. Some households sold surplus produce but on a very small scale within their village. We were told that migrant workers were predominantly men who migrate to India seasonally or in some cases for longer periods and secure these jobs through personal and community networks. Overseas migration, for example, to the Middle East and Malaysia, while increasing, is currently limited to a few households in all locations.

Most young men indicated that they did not want to stay back in the village and farm the family land. They saw education as a way to better their life chances and find job opportunities. People told us that moving to the district headquarters, Terai or Kathmandu for education was an option for 'school-minded' children, while migration to India was an alternative for boys who had no interest to study further.

Significant NGO activities were ubiquitous across all locations with as many as 7-8 NGOs working in each area and people noted duplication in interventions as multiple donor programmes were focused on agricultural assistance through asset transfer and vegetable farming inputs. There was at least one other organisation/programme working on similar issues and with a similar modality as RAP 3 in all locations and people said they could not differentiate between one NGO and the next as they *'all gave the same things'*

People in all study areas thought that roads were a significant development. In road construction districts, people saw the road in terms of improving the villages' accessibility in the future by bringing vehicles to their doorstep. In Dailekh and Doti, where road maintenance was on-going, people felt the roads were in poor condition and to them, road usage was mainly related to improved comfort, affordability and availability of public transport.

Road Work

In all locations, people said their main motivation for being involved in road work was the opportunity to earn cash. In Bajura, where people complained of insufficient and irregular pay, some parents said they worked on the road so that they could leave behind a legacy for their children. In Kalikot, some men explained that road work had provided them an option to stay back for a season or two with their families. They knew the work was short term and recognised the likelihood of returning to India for work after the road construction was completed. Migration was still seen as the surest and most risk-free way to earn cash.

People across all locations said they had a clear idea of the reasons for selection of RBG and RMG members but many in road maintenance districts complained that the notice for RMG selection had been posted at the VDC office and only those who had seen the notice themselves or been informed by others who had read it had been able to apply. People in D1 felt that RMG work had been given to one member who was comparatively better off and another member who got benefits from all programmes that came to the village.

The involvement of more women than men in the D2 RMG was explained in relation to men's mobility with the women telling us that men had the option to migrate to India or go overseas where they earned more money. Men are not restricted to doing work that pays less and see cash earnings from the RMG work as an opportunity for those left behind, mainly women.

In B, where people with disabilities (PWD) had been given work as RBG members, many felt that it was a good move on RAP's part to include them. It was thought that RAP had provided opportunities to widows and PWD and this was a step toward positive change.

Training on road building, maintenance and first aid was given to all groups across locations. People said technical training was focused on showing photos and videos of equipment and different types of road, and thought it was useful as they were shown technical aspects like building wire gabions and stone retention walls. Many also regarded the provision of incentives and allowances for training to be an added bonus.

While registered members of RBGs and RMGs were eligible for accident insurance, people thought it was unfair that RAP had no provision of insurance for substitute workers especially as the work was risky. Furthermore, as no technical training was given to substitutes, people were concerned that this lack of training could result in accidents and families would be burdened with additional treatment costs.

Miscommunication between RAP staff/LNGO and locals were prevalent in all locations, but especially pronounced in village B. People were confused about the basis for wages and were unsure why some groups were getting paid more compared to others. Additionally, families that had to give up land for the road told us that they were still in confusion about whether they would be given compensation for their land and held on to the hope that they would be compensated. One man who was going to lose a part of his house to the road said he had been seeking clarification on RAP's compensation policy, but had not got any thus far.

People did not consider the income from road work as making much contribution to household expenses as many households had alternative income sources like remittances and small businesses. In Bajura, where RAP wages were said to be insufficient and payments irregular, people said it was impractical to depend on these alone. We were told that income from road work made very little contribution to household expenses as cash needs were increasing to accommodate changing food habits of families, especially children who demanded packaged snacks. In other locations, payments were more regular and people were more or less satisfied with the wages they received, however, there was no standardisation in wages across locations.

People say that road earnings have increased their credit worthiness in local shops and have allowed for easy repayment of credit later. In D1, road work was the only source of income for two widowed RMG members who said it had allowed them to enter into arrangements with local shops which let them buy groceries on credit - *'they know we work on the road now and will be able to pay back once we get our wages'* (D1, RMG woman). People in village B told us the shops extended credit on alcohol too and on pay day, men usually headed straight to alcohol shops to pay off the credit incurred.

People said they did not understand why RAP had chosen to invest in labour intensive road building as this had increased workload for families, particularly women in nuclear families and those with more than one income source. This additional workload was also said to have an impact on children from some of these families who then had the added responsibility of looking after their younger siblings and also had to look after their family's business while parents work on the road or the farm land, sometimes resulting in them missing school.

Socio-economic development activities

People said SED support was given to different groups based on the land ownership of members, with people with less land holding getting excluded from vegetable/spice farming. Many also said

that groups had been given SED activities based on a 'first come, first served' basis and this had limited their choice of SED support since they had not got the activity they had wanted as other groups had registered first.

People said SED interventions had started about eight months ago and it was observed that activities were still being rolled out to groups. There were concerns among people who thought the support provided to different households was not uniform, with some getting more seeds and other farming aid (like plastic tunnels and water pipes) than others.

Confusion regarding SED support existed as people were unclear on whether goat rearing groups would be given goats or RAP would only be involved in facilitating the insurance of their existing goats. People also said that the follow-up on SED activities is very limited and weak for example, one vegetable group in B had requested help with a pest problem that had infected their cucumber plants, but had been told the pests were due to lack of water for irrigation and were promised two water pipes instead.

SED activities were carried out on a small scale and people mostly consumed what they grew or sold small surpluses within the village itself. Those families that sold vegetables at markets said they had established linkages with local shops where they had been selling vegetables before SED and we observed that RAP-SED supported vegetable collection centres saw very little use due to these reasons.

General disinterest for SED activities was also shared among people who were already cultivating traditional crops on their land and growing vegetables for own consumption. SED opportunities were not considered to be significant when compared to migrant worker incomes and this added to people's disinterest. Families, particularly in road construction districts, said their workload had increased as most of them were already engaged in road work and SED activities were an added burden.

Implications

As considerable NGO activity was focused on agricultural aid in all study locations, many families had already been targeted for income generation support through vegetable farming and asset transfer programmes. Also in some study locations, RAP's SED component is supporting existing groups that were previously supported by other programmes. This has made it difficult to attribute the success of the intervention to just one programme.

Migration is an established livelihood for men who have networks in place to find work in India. Many see road work opportunity only as a season's respite from migration. Wages earned by migrant workers are almost double of what they earn working on the road. This and the view that migration is considered relatively risk free means men will continue to migrate to India.

It is necessary for RAP to identify what are the actual problems facing people in order to add value to the roads it is constructing. RAP should evaluate whether it is feasible to overburden families who already have one or more members in India or abroad with more SED activities and to determine what approach would work the best. The basis of targeting development assistance should also be clearly understood as diversification of income opportunities and sources means that the traditionally marginalised and poor are not so anymore.

Given this, most of the benefits seems to be felt by people who could not earn abroad or did not have relatives earning abroad or providing help from outside the village. Rather than a blanket approach to targeting which assumes single women headed households, traditionally

disadvantaged groups and persons with disabilities are de facto 'in need' of support a more nuanced approach to targeting based on the range and sources of alternative cash incomes may be more useful.

2. Background

This report presents the main findings of the Reality Check Approach (RCA) study which was conducted in April 2015 to provide insights into the experiences of the direct beneficiaries of the third phase of the Rural Access Programme (RAP3). The RCA study is a qualitative element of the Independent Third Party Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) of RAP3 which is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). This is the second RCA study undertaken by MEL and is complementary to the 'baseline' RCA that was undertaken for RAP in May 2014.

The purpose of this RCA is to provide a rich qualitative understanding of the lives of RAP direct beneficiaries. Direct beneficiaries are those who are provided waged work on the RAP roads either as members of Road Building Groups (RBG) or Road Maintenance Groups (RMG) or are members of socio-economic development groups (SED groups) established for income generating purposes. Indirect beneficiaries, for example road users, trades people, service providers were not the focus of this study.

Table 1: Types of RAP direct beneficiary

Direct beneficiary	Description
RBG	Groups comprise 15-20 local people with targets aiming at inclusion of the poorest and marginalised from HHs in the 'zone of influence' (2 hours walk from road). Provide unskilled day waged labour on the construction of roads using labour intensive technologies ¹ . Provided opportunities for literacy, numeracy and savings enhancement (mandatory)
RMG	Groups comprise 3-5 persons responsible for routine maintenance for 3-5 km lengths of road. Their formation and activities are supported by local NGOs. In areas which RAP3 has designated as 'maintenance only', these groups were formed at the start of the project
SED	Groups formed around shared economic activity. They may be temporary or permanent. Some are newly established and some are existing co-operatives and farmers groups. Provided with training and market support in cultivation of fresh vegetables, goat rearing, non-timber products, spices, fruit cultivation etc.

The study sought to provide insights into:

- The lives and **aspirations** of RAP direct beneficiaries and reasons for their engagement with the programme.
- **Experience** and opinions of the selection process for RAP groups.

¹Special Building Groups are not considered beneficiaries as they are employed through contractors. Generally male only groups provide skilled labour when work is especially difficult, there are not enough local labourers, or special skills are needed. They may be local (non-typical RBG members) or from outside. These generally set up camp along the roadside or are accommodated locally during construction.

- **Perceptions** of RAP and the interventions it offers/provides. Comparison and links with other programmes and opportunities and the relevance and significance of RAP employment and SED support.
- The direct **experience** of RAP direct beneficiaries with project support provided, group dynamics and conditions of work and pay including how this influences future engagement, future decisions and aspirations.
- **Change** experienced by RAP direct beneficiaries as a result of participation in RAP activities (e.g. cash flow, consumption, household and community dynamics, migration, acquired skills, connections).

The study was undertaken by a team of six Nepali researchers under the guidance of the international team leader, who undertook field research during the scoping study and also provided advice and quality assurance for the study throughout design, implementation and analysis of findings. Overall management of the team, and logistical arrangements were undertaken by Foundation for Development Management, Nepal.

Twelve beneficiary families from four different districts participated as host households for three nights. The study design, areas of conversation and team information are given in the annexes.

3. Methodology

The Reality Check Approach extends the tradition of listening studies and beneficiary assessments by combining elements of these approaches with the researchers actually living with people whose views are being sought, usually those who are directly experiencing poverty. It could be likened to 'light touch' participant observation. Participant observation involves entering the lives of the subjects of research and both participating in and observing their normal everyday activities and interactions. It usually entails extensive and detailed research into behaviour with a view to understanding peoples' perceptions and their actions over long periods of time. The RCA is similar in that it requires participation in everyday life within people's own environments but differs by being comparatively quick and placing more emphasis on informal, relaxed and insightful conversations than on observing behaviour and the complexities of relationships.

Important characteristics of the RCA are:

- ***Living with*** rather than visiting (thereby meeting the family in their own environment, understanding family dynamics, how days and nights are spent)
- ***Having conversations*** rather than interviews (there is no note taking thereby putting people at ease and on an equal footing with the outsider)
- ***Learning*** rather than finding out (suspending judgement, letting people who experience poverty take the lead in defining the agenda and what is important)
- ***Being household-centred***, interacting with families rather than users, communities, groups
- ***Being experiential*** in that researchers themselves take part in daily activities (e.g. collecting water, cooking, cultivation, etc.), accompany household members (to school, to market, etc.)
- ***Ensuring inclusion*** of all members of households
- ***Interacting in private space*** rather than public space (an emphasis on normal, ordinary lives)
- ***Embracing multiple realities*** rather than relying on public consensus (gathering diversity of opinion, including 'smaller voices')
- ***Interacting in ordinary interaction*** with frontline service providers (accompanying host household members in their interactions with local service providers, meeting service providers as they go about their usual routines)
- ***Taking a cross-sectoral view*** although each RCA study may have a special focus, the enquiry is situated within the context of everyday life rather than simply (and arguably artificially) looking at one aspect of people's lives
- ***Understanding longitudinal*** change - understanding how change happens over time.



HHH girl playing with the study team member

The RCA research team comprised researchers who have undergone the full RCA training and were also fully briefed on the scope of this study. They worked collaboratively on the areas for conversations (see annex 3).

To test out the means to identify and engage with RAP beneficiary households in ways which would protect their identities and support open interaction, a scoping study was undertaken in January 2015. This involved a five-member study team (including the international team leader) staying with beneficiary households for two nights in Achham

district.

Unlike other RCA studies undertaken in Nepal, where the study team members have stayed with a range of families, this particular study required researchers to stay with direct beneficiaries, where possible. The approach was therefore modified slightly with team members staying the first night with people in the village who were well located (e.g. local social mobilisers, tea-shop owners) to enable gathering of contextual information about the village, community views on roads and road work, maintenance and small enterprises and the relevance of these, prior to staying with the RAP beneficiaries. Spending time like this helped to make identification of the beneficiaries' households easier, especially in the case of RMG members, where there were only 1-2 RMG members in each ward in D1 and also enabled acceptance in the village as independent researchers trying to understand the reality of village life.

The main study involved three nights and three days with the twelve families in the study locations, with the first night being spent with a non-beneficiary/indirect beneficiary household and subsequent two nights with direct beneficiaries.

Families in all five study districts (scoping and main study) were very open to the approach and readily welcomed researchers into their homes and soon understood the purpose of the study and the need for the researchers not to be afforded guest status. The emphasis on easy informal conversations allowed for openness. Staying with the families in their own homes enabled interaction with all family members and opportunities to accompany them during their everyday activities including those related to the RAP programme. The team members also interacted informally with local service providers through spontaneous and informal conversations.

Each team member discreetly left a 'gift' for each family on leaving, comprising food items and stationery to the value of NPR 1,500 to compensate for any costs incurred in hosting the researcher. As researchers insist that no special arrangements are made for them, they help in domestic activities and do not disturb income-earning activities, the actual costs to a family are negligible. The timing of the gift was important so families did not feel they were expected to provide better food for the researchers or get the impression that they were being paid for their participation.

Each team member kept their own field notes but they never wrote these in front of the people they were conversing with. In addition, they facilitated some joint visual analyses with members of host households on their incomes and expenditure and with others to map the village and its resources.

To illustrate the context of the village and the households, photos were taken with the consent of villagers but also sometimes by the villagers themselves. These narratives and visual records formed the basis of detailed debriefing sessions held with each sub-team as soon as possible after the study was completed.

Intensive one-day long de-briefing sessions were held with each of the village sub teams as soon as they returned from the village field sites. These served to ensure that rich and detailed stories and experiences were gathered and to provide further opportunities to triangulate the findings.

3.1. Locations

The study was undertaken in four core RAP3 districts, two of which were new road construction districts (Bajura and Kalikot) and the other two districts where RAP3 is investing in road maintenance and upgrading (Doti and Dailekh). The RCA team had been provided with a beneficiaries list by MEL that included names, VDC, ward, gender, ethnicity, land-holding and other household details for the RBGs and RMGs, which formed the basis for identifying the study location and participants. Villages were purposively selected, based on their proximity to the road corridor; presence of RBGs, RMGs; and SED support. Table 2 provides further information on the locations, categorising them on the basis of timeline of road construction, types of beneficiaries and presence of SED activities.

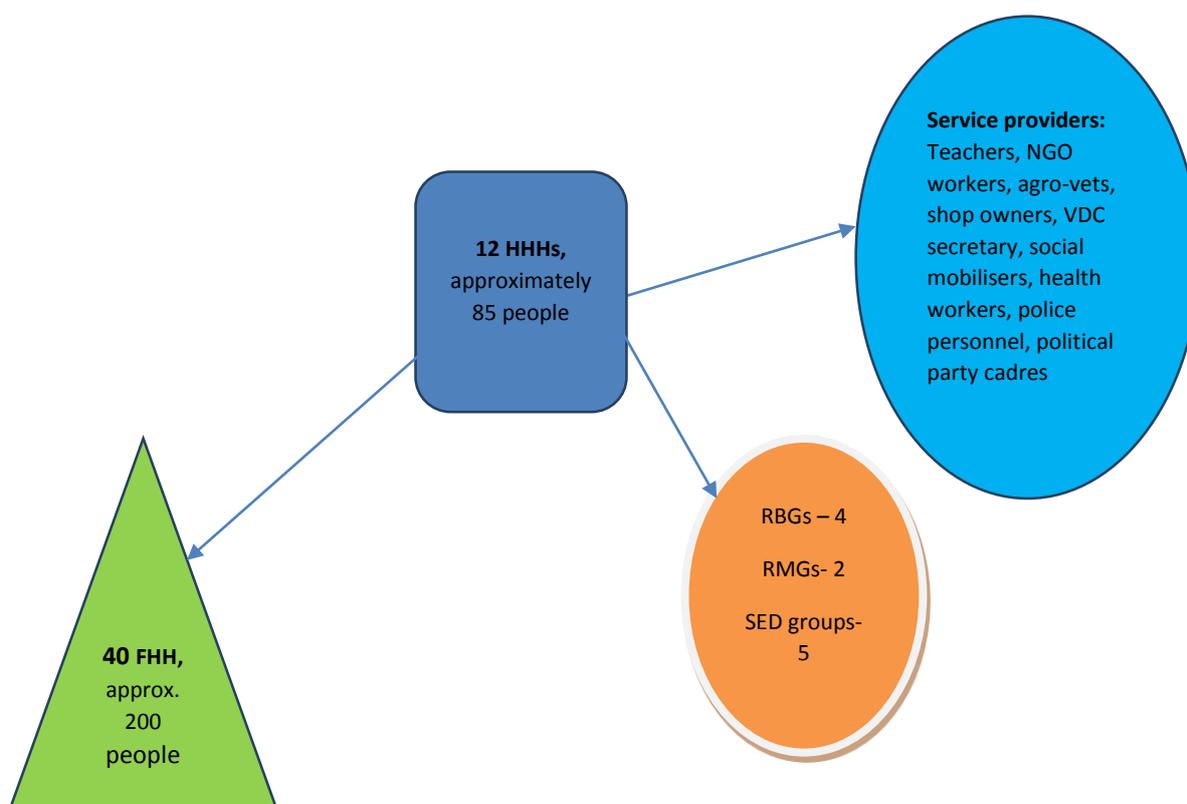
The villages are not named in this report in order to protect the identity and confidentiality of participants.

Table 2: Village description

Location	District	Village size (approx.)	Date of RAP road construction	Active RMG or RBG?	Presence of SED Y/N
B	Bajura	250 HHs	On-going	RBG	Yes
D1	Doti	150 HHs	Road built 10 years ago (RAP/ GTZ), road maintenance on-going	RMG	Yes
K	Kalikot	50 HHs	On-going	RBG	Yes
D2	Dailekh	30-40 HHs	Road built 10 years ago, road maintenance on-going	RMG	Yes

3.2. Study participants

Team members intended to select twelve households which were direct RAP3 beneficiaries. Where possible, host households which had members in RBGs and RMGs or were a part of a RAP3 supported SED group were selected. In cases where team members were unable to stay with a direct beneficiary, another host household (HHH) was selected based on its proximity to a beneficiary household. All host households were identified by team members through discussions with villagers and host households themselves. The following figure shows the participants who formed a part of the study:



Host households (HHH) selected by different members of the same team were at least 10 minutes' walk away from each other and, where possible, team members stayed in different wards of the same VDC to ensure their interaction with focal households (FHH) would not be duplicated. Each team member stayed for three nights in the village, the first night for context building and the subsequent two nights with their own host household. Table 3 provides information on the host households, categorising them based on their involvement with RAP3. Details of the host households can be found in Annex 2.

Table 3: Host households' involvement with RAP 3

Location	HHH 1	HHH2	HHH3
B	Orange	Blue	Orange
D1	Blue	Dark Grey	Dark Grey



The non direct beneficiary households that two team members stayed with in D1 were 20 minutes' walk away from a direct beneficiary household which had a RMG member.

In addition to host households, the study teams interacted extensively with their neighbours, involving at least 4-5 families (focal households, FHH) in their conversations. Opportunistic conversations were undertaken with local service providers including police officers, teachers, shop owners, NGO staff, health workers, local political leaders etc. In total the research team had conversations with over 300 people and the entire study represented over 350 hours of interaction (see Annex 4).

3.3. Study limitations

As the study required the team to stay with direct beneficiaries, the first night was spent on context building and identifying beneficiary households. The process was easier for road construction districts, where the majority of households were members of RBGs, but considerable time was spent identifying RMG members' households as there were only 1-2 maintenance group members in one ward, particularly in D1. The limited time left the teams with only three days to gather information from their host households.

While it wasn't difficult finding host households in road construction districts, two team members had to stay with non-beneficiaries in one road maintenance district, as RMG members in the area could not accommodate the researchers. The researchers then made the beneficiary household their focal household, but this limited their interaction with the RMG members.

In three study locations people used the local language and dialect while talking among themselves and at time even with researchers. This posed a challenge for researchers who missed certain nuances of conversations.

3.4. RCA methodological considerations: offsetting biases

Like all research methods, the RCA takes note of and attempts to offset potential bias. The following is an analysis of the potential for bias and the way the researchers in this study and through the approach itself sought to minimise these biases.

Bias from being researched

The approach benefits from being low key and unobtrusive. It seeks to provide the best possible conditions to listen, experience and observe ordinary daily lives and deliberately seeks to reduce the biases created by an external research presence. The team members take time to get to know the families they stay with, work alongside them and adapt to their pace and way of life. Ideally they seek to listen to family conversations and interactions rather than engage in lengthy question and answer sessions. Considerable effort is made to ensure the host families feel comfortable and

at ease so they tell their own stories and explain their realities in their terms and in their own way. This goes some way to ensuring that the families do not feel their answers should be filtered, measured or in any way influenced by the presence of the outsiders. The team members actively suspend judgment. Considerable effort is made in pre-field team training to make the researchers aware of their own attitudes and behaviour which may be conducive or obstructive to openness and trust among those they interact with.

Bias from location

At least three team members stayed in each village, each living with a different family. All homes were at least 10 minutes walking distance from one another (and most were considerably more than this) so that each team member could maximise the number of unique interactions with people and service providers in the community and avoid duplication with other team members.

Researcher bias

A minimum of three researchers were allocated to each village but they worked independently of each other thus allowing for more confidence in corroborating data. Each village team underwent a day-long debriefing to review information and findings emerging from each location immediately after completing the immersion. This enabled a high level of interrogation of the observations, experiences and responses and reduced the possibility of individual researcher bias. Furthermore, following completion of the entire study, a workshop was held with the entire research team to analyse and confirm the main findings and ensure that both specificity and diversity in the findings were captured, along with more generalisable findings.

Evaluation framework bias

Rather than using research questions which can suffer from normative bias, the team used a broad thematic checklist of areas of conversation. These themes, summarised in annex 3, provided the basis for conversation topics rather than prescribed questions. The team members engaged with family members and others at appropriate times on these issues. For example, while cooking the meal, opportunities might arise to discuss what the family usually eats, when they eat and who eats what and while accompanying children to school, field opportunities arise to discuss access to, cost and experience of schooling.

Triangulation

An integral part of the RCA methodology is the continuous triangulation that ensues. Conversations take place at different times of the day and night allowing unfinished conversations or ambiguous findings to be explored further. Conversations are held with different generations separately and together in order to gather a complete picture of an issue. Conversations are complemented by direct experience (for example, visits to SED activities, taking part in road works, and working with families on their farms) and observation (family interaction/dynamics). Cross checking for understanding is also carried out with neighbours, service providers (for example, NGO field officers, input suppliers, vets and agricultural services and teashop owners) and power holders (informal and elected authorities). Conversations are at times complemented with visual evidence or illustrations, for example by jointly reviewing group record books as well as through various activities, such as drawing maps of the village, ranking household assets, scoring income and expenditure proportionally, and so on.

Confidentiality, anonymity and continuing non-bias in project activities

The study locations are referred to by code only and the team is at pains to ensure that neither this report nor other documentary evidence, such as photos, reveal the locations or details of the host households. Faces of householders and images which reveal the location are either not retained in the photo archive or identities are digitally removed. This is partly to respect good research practice with regard to confidentiality but also has the benefit of ensuring that no special measures or consideration are given to these locations or households in the course of the programme. All families are asked to give their consent for their stories and photos to be recorded and shared.

4. Findings: village context

This section provides information on the villages where the study was conducted in order to provide context for the findings which follow and convey the perspectives of people themselves.

Though the main focus of the study was on the twelve direct beneficiary households, the researchers interacted with more than two hundred additional people to gather insights about the villages and the context. The findings emerged through conversations with the host households, with neighbouring households, other community members, local service providers and through researchers' own observations and experience. The findings therefore represent the locations rather than just the small number of host households.

4.1. Village context

All study communities were ethnically diverse but predominantly Brahmin, Chettri and Dalits living in separate clusters from the others.

4.1.1. Access and facilities

While locations D1 and D2 could be reached by a vehicle on a road '*built by our own labour*' (man, ex-RBG,-D1), village B was an hour walk from the local market centre. Village K was the most remote of the locations with vehicle access only up to the district headquarters and the team having to walk a further 10 hours to reach the village. The Nepal Army had started work on opening a road track to connect the district road to the rest of the VDCs and people are hopeful that this road, when joined with the RAP road, will connect them to Humla. As a consequence, the market centre that was on the district road is slowly shifting closer to the villages.

Though access to bigger markets was an issue people mentioned in all locations, all villages had small shops catering to people's essential needs (household items like sugar, salt, tea, soap, phone recharge cards) as well as tea and liquor shops within a 30 minutes' walk. All basic Government of Nepal (GON) services such as health post, police post and Village Development Committee (VDC) office were within an hour walk, except in village K where the police post was more than an hour's walk away at the neighbouring VDC.

Every location had at least one GON primary school nearby and secondary schools within one hour distance of all village households. In fact access is so good a man (Village D1) noted that the VDC had '*more schools than wards*'. Students in all locations either moved to the district headquarters or to Nepalganj and Dhangadi for tertiary education.

Access to water was regarded by people as good in all locations with communal taps less than 10 minutes away for every household. All households across all four locations had electricity which was either metered and powered by small micro-hydro projects set up through a District Development Committee (DDC) grant (villages B, D1) or families depended on solar panels for light (villages K, D2).

4.1.2. Livelihoods

People in all locations considered themselves farmers but their cash income sources were mostly from other sources such as remittances from migrant workers, shops, small businesses, construction work and salaried jobs. Farming was almost all for home consumption. Most family members, with the exception of small children, were involved in farming crops like wheat, paddy,

maize, millet and potato. Smaller plots of land near the house were generally used as a kitchen garden where vegetables like soybeans, onions, tomatoes, chillies, and spinach were grown.

Details of the main and supplementary livelihoods for all four study locations are provided in Table 3. The boxes have been shaded to indicate the importance of income from the source.

Table 3: Livelihoods

Location	Agriculture	Cash crops	Migration	Small trade	Road work	Construction work	Crafts
B	For own consumption		Primary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source	Tertiary income source	
D1	For own consumption	Secondary income source	Primary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source
K	For own consumption		Primary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source		
D2	For own consumption	Secondary income source	Primary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source	Secondary income source

Legend:

For own consumption	Primary income source	Secondary income source	Tertiary income source
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People linked both education and migration for work to future prospects to earn money. Even though they are traditionally farming families, most parents aspired for their children to better their life chances. Children generally shared these aspirations. In village B, it was generally accepted practice to expect one child to stay back in the village to farm the family land- *‘that is why we have big families’* (old woman, village B). Very few boys we talked with actually considered farming an option for them in the future. Those families able to invest in their children’s education sent their sons to the Terai for higher education, while daughters usually went to local schools as most parents felt more protective of girls than boys and were worried of their wellbeing away from home. Many boys as young as 13 years old talked eagerly about leaving the village and going to India. Only a few held on to the hopes of staying in the village and helping families with farming or shops.

In all four locations, migration for work to India, especially by men, was an established way of making a living. The pattern is mostly seasonal in villages B, K and D1 where men stayed in India (Delhi, Mumbai, Gurgaon, Chennai, Jaipur) for 3-4 months every year, working as cooks, construction workers, and in domestic work. Men with elderly or very young family members favoured coming back home during crop plantation and harvest periods to help. Those who had well-paying, secure jobs like a security guard, stay long term without returning seasonally. In village D2 the pattern was different where for most, migration was for long term employment with men returning every 2-3 years.

Overseas migration was limited to only a few households in all locations. Men told us they preferred to go to India than abroad as it is cheap and ‘free of hassles’ like working through an agent and applying for a passport and visa (villages K, D2). Returning every year to the same place means they have a network in place to secure jobs. Even with no networks, finding jobs in India is said to be easy as Nepali men are regarded as being hardworking (village D1).

Returnee migrant workers told us that the pull to go to India was mostly to do with how much they earned. The pay there is regular and if they find good jobs, men earn up to NPR 15,000 in a month and the family is able to settle any loans incurred in less than 2 months. In village B, men said the work opportunities in India were varied (waiting-staff and cooks in restaurants, security guards, porters, car wash, domestic work etc.) and the daily wage rate was INR 500 (NPR 800) compared to the NPR 300-400 they can make in Nepal. In most cases, returning migrant workers brought cash home with them or in case of long-term migration, sent it with others from the same village. Money transfers were rarely used as this required a family member travelling to the district headquarters to withdraw the remittance. Family members explained that they borrowed cash from neighbours who had salaried jobs or those with a working migrant in India during the periods when the man was working in India, and made repayments on his return. Apart from remittances, returning migrants also bring goods for the family. In village K, it was noted that families would measure their income in terms of the clothes that returning migrants brought back from India.

4.1.3. Development assistance

There was evidence of considerable development-related activities across all locations, with as many as 7-8 NGOs working in different sectors in each village. In one instance, the team in location K was told that they should report that people there had ‘no money, schools, clothes or food’, in order to ensure more foreign investment. In village B, people told us that the VDC office was mostly used as meeting venue for different NGOs that worked in the area. Though donor-funded programme activities ranged from awareness raising on different social issues like Chhaupadi and child marriage (location B) to sanitation and access to safe drinking water (locations B, D1 and D2), much of the development assistance was focused on providing agricultural inputs in all four villages.

In village K, people said organisations provided agricultural assistance to that particular area as it was considered the *Terai of Kalikot* because of its soil fertility. We observed at least three other NGOs in the area that had initiated income generation activities including vegetable farming and asset transfer programmes of a similar nature to RAP SED activities.

People were of the view that ‘all projects give the same things’, and if one household or person received a special or different assistance (different variety of seeds, more chickens, bigger plastic tunnels for planting saplings) it was attributed to them having greater leverage in the community (village B, K and D1).

Table 4 indicates the number of organisations (NGOs and GON programmes) working in each location, categorised as those working with RAP3 and those working on similar issues and with similar modality (either/all labour intensive, local employment generation, group formation, mandatory group savings etc.).

Table 4: Organisations in study locations

Location	No. of organisations working with RAP 3	No. of organisations working on similar issues	No. of organisations working with similar modality	No. of other organisations working	Total
B	1	1	1	5	8
D1	1	1	3	5	10
K	2	3	1	2	8
D2	1	2	1	2	6

4.1.4. Road

People in all locations thought the RAP road was a significant development, in the sense that it had or would improve their connectivity to district towns. In spite of this, the presence of a vehicular road did not *'matter as much as they (programmes on road construction) think it did'* to poorer families, who could not afford the two-way fare on pick-ups to the district headquarters (e.g. NPR 300-400 per person one way for a 4 hours journey on a Bolero pick-up) and thought it best to spend that money to buy every day household items in the village itself (village D1). The vehicle fare they saved was then used to cover the price differentials (in the range of NPR 5-10) of the goods between the village and town. Tractors were used to bring in goods to shops in village D2, but shop-owners said this was a rare occurrence and only used when bringing in clothes and other food items in bulk; small amount of goods were usually carried by people themselves or by neighbours and family members who were coming in from the district town.

People in villages D1 and D2 said that new shops opened along the road after the new RAP road construction and had increased the variety of goods available locally. Nevertheless, they thought markets had not thrived as they had expected (village D1). They explained that the reason for this was the hesitancy of shop-owners to take risks and expand their businesses. High transportation cost of goods (basic household items, clothes, toiletries) meant that these had to be sold at a higher price in the village, and people were less likely to buy items that were expensive, preferring to buy these goods in bulk if, and when, they went to town.

While people liked the fact that goods were more easily and locally accessible, they explained that the new roads had not particularly reduced their travel time. In village D2, there were no public vehicles for use. Locals preferred to walk to town as the ride on tractors was very uncomfortable and, people say, takes about the same time to reach there. In village D1, where Bolero pick-ups were in use on the RAP road, it was hoped the road would be upgraded soon so they could ride, as many put it, *'without the fear of our backs breaking'*. Though vehicles plied on the road during the rainy season, it was more expensive (NOR 600 one way) and considered perilous by both locals and drivers alike.

While older people talked of the prospects associated with the road, many young boys told us that moving out of the village was a requisite if *'one wanted to make money'* (village D1). The desire to join the civil service and leave the village was especially high in village K. Some older people were optimistic that with the advent of the road, markets would open in the area and their children

would eventually move back home. But parents in locations B, K and D1 thought their villages lacked opportunities and it was generally accepted that younger people would have to leave to find work outside as '*we did not educate them to be farmers*' (location B).

5. Findings: People's Perspectives

The findings are presented from the position of study participants, in particular direct beneficiaries of the RAP programme and are intended to convey their experience and views without overlaying the interpretation of the research team.

5.1. Road work: People's views and experience

"Everyone works on the road, so there is no shame in us doing it too." (Woman, RBG-B)

Road work was regarded as significant as it would contribute to *'bring vehicles to our doorstep and we will go collect firewood in jeeps'* (old man, K) and had provided additional cash income for daily expenses (K). Regardless, people complained about the difficult nature of work and how the pay was insufficient for hours they spent on road work, especially in village B. Women, in particular, complained their *'backs didn't stop hurting from bending all day'* from carrying rocks. In Achham where the scoping study was conducted, non-RMG members told us that they did not want to work on the road as it was hard work and there were risk of accidents. Some women said that because of the laboriousness of the road work their husbands had begun to eat more.

Box 1: Day in the Life of a RBG member

Dhansara is hard at work at 5a.m. when the rest of the family is still asleep. She washes the previous night's utensils and sets about making tea and *kodo rotis* for the family's breakfast. By the time she has fed the last of her children, it is 8am and she leaves, taking a *doko* with her to gather fodder for their animals. She is back in two hours, feeds the two cows and the goats, and just about manages to eat a hurried meal cooked by her 72- year old mother-in-law before it is time to go to work on the road. While she puts on her yellow boots, I ask her if I can come, she warns me that it is a steep downhill walk and we leave.

Though her husband is the registered RBG member, his job as an agro-vet requires him to be away from home most days in a month. Even when he is around, he is usually at the shop on the hill. In his absence, she looks after the family, takes care of most of the housework and goes to work on the road. She looks forward to school holidays as then her daughters can help her out at home. Saturdays are good too, as there is no road work and she can catch up on the rest of the work she missed during the week.

We come back home at 6 p.m. After a hurried wash at the near-by tap, she checks up on her son, *'he tends to ignore his books when no one is around'*, she says. As she sits down in front of the kitchen hearth she contemplates, *'we don't need the (road) work. We manage a fine income from the shop and his work. But the road work came along and we felt the need to leave behind something for our children- a legacy in the form of a road.'*

Field notes, B

When comparing road construction versus maintenance, RMG members recalled their road building experience with RAP's previous phase as being more difficult (D1). In contrast, road maintenance work was felt to be repetitive with group members having to fill potholes made by tractors and clearing bushes from the side of the road every day. A grievance heard commonly in D2 was that during the training they had been told the work will involve making earthen drains and maintaining ditches mostly but now they had to clear large boulders as well.

Box 2: Maintenance work can be an added burden

"*Aja bata yo bato mero bhanera sochnus*" (From today, think of the road as your own)

Before the accident, grandma was an active member on many committees in the village. As one of the nine members who had applied and been selected for the RMG from her VDC, she attended the initial training. She says she felt motivated when the instructors told them to think of the road as their own.

A month before the work was to have begun; there was a landslide right outside her house. She remembered what the instructors had repeatedly said and went to clear the fallen boulder. While trying to move the boulder she damaged her back and was bed ridden for six months. As she couldn't work on the road, her daughter-in-law substituted for her in the RMG.

They say the RMG wages have been helpful for the family, but the daughter-in-law finds the additional work stressful. As her husband works as a construction labourer most days, she not only has to do the household chores, work in the fields, take care of her three children and her mother-in-law, but also work on the road for 11 days every month. During my three nights I stayed with her, I could see, she was clearly struggling under the weight of added responsibility.

Field notes, D2

Though it means increased workload, some people told us they see the road work as a way for families to stay together, albeit for a short time. Returnee migrants told us that working on the road had given them the option to remain at home where previously they would have to leave every season to find work in India. While the wage from road work was less compared to India, it could be earned while staying at home with their family. Women with smaller families were especially glad that their husbands had got road work in village K as this meant they would not have to migrate and would be able to help with the work at home.

But young people did not feel that road work was an attractive option especially for those who were educated and eager to leave the village- '*I have studied till Intermediate (level) why should I work on the road?*'(young man, K). Most young men we met felt the same way about road work and expressed a desire to leave the village. The only option for those who choose to stay was farming the family land. Echoing this, one returnee migrant who had spent considerable time in India told us that road work was '*for older people like us who don't have many options*'.

Box 3: RMG work has been helpful

Radha *didi* vividly recalls the day when a rock falling down from a cliff wounded her head. The nearest health facility was far and there was no road linking her village to the place. She had to be treated using local healing methods due to which her small wound became a permanent ailment. She still travels to the district headquarters once every three months to visit a doctor there. Though the road was built a long time ago, the fact that there are no public vehicles plying on the road means she walks for nearly 2 hours to reach the town. '*The jeeps are expensive,*' she says '*and anyway, it takes about the same time if I walk there.*'

During road construction the family had to give up two separate plots of land located at two different points on the road corridor. There was no compensation for the land lost but *didi* was given an opportunity to work as a RMG member. As most members of the RMG are women, *didi* says she feels comfortable working with them. '*We talk about our lives and share hardships with one another,*' she says. Moreover, the work regulations are not very rigid and the work is easy to handle. '*As I can't do heavy work because of my ailment, I usually get left out when there is work in the village. But not this time,*' she says smiling.

Field Notes, D2

Where land had been given up for road construction, many criticized the lack of compensation for the land lost. Those who had lost more land and were losing parts of their house were angry that

RAP had not provided clarity on their compensation policy. In B, the team met a man who was about to lose a sizeable amount of land and a part of his house to the road. The issue was taken up with RAP, whose staff, he recounts, made repeated visits to his house and *'took photos, but no one said anything about compensation. Where am I to live now?'*

Others who have lost land say they were not consulted about road selection. The road was surveyed three times, it is believed, at the behest of those with influence in the village so as to keep their own land intact. Frustrations abound with those who *'try to convince us about the benefits of the road'* (man, B), *'it is easy for them, they haven't lost half their livelihood'* (woman, B). As some of the men had stayed back home this season to sort out the compensation issue, they work on the road grudgingly for now.

In village B, where people had heard of accidents happening during road building, road work was thought of as being risky. All of the team members were told of a woman who had sustained a head injury from a falling rock and had to be taken to Nepalganj for treatment. When talking about significant events related to the road in the village, people in village D1 almost always remembered the deaths of three women who had fallen down a slope and died during the RAP road construction ten years ago. If given an option, they said they would choose to migrate to India or farm agricultural land rather than working on the road with these risks *'at least the money would be better and work lighter'* (man, ex RBG).

Across all locations, people thought of RAP as an organisation that used local labour to build rural roads. They could also not make clear distinctions between the different RAP staff who visited the work sites and everyone who came to monitor the road work was simply referred to as 'sir' and 'RAP karmachari' (staff). In B and K, overseers were on the site most frequently and RAP staff were said to visit every 2-3 weeks to approve work completed before work could begin on other sections of the road. In village D1, people said RAP staff visited the site more frequently during rainy season to check the work was being done.

RBGs and RMGs in K, D1 and D2 thought the monitoring staff was helpful, instructive and listened patiently to their problems - *'he tells us what we are doing wrong and doesn't mind getting his hands dirty to show how the work is to be done'* (man, RMG-D2). People in B were generally dissatisfied with the new overseer who had begun work a few months ago. People said he was *'strict and rude'* compared to the previous overseer and made them re-work a section of the road three times. Some women told us that he was also particularly rude to them when they brought their children to work and shouted at them when they left work for a few minutes to tend to their children.

RAP road work in villages D2 and D1 is only for maintenance. A single group has been established comprising 6-12 members in each location. The D1 RMG has six members of which three are men and three women, all between 20-50 years of age, while the D2 RMG has 12 members of whom most (8) are women. D1-RMG members have been working together for 10 months and said they liked to work as a group as *'the work is difficult to manage for one person alone'*, Women in the D2-RMG thought the work was less monotonous when they work in a group as *'we can also chat while working'*. In Village D1, the RMG was given 9 kilometres of road to maintain.

In D2, where DDC is funding for additional road maintenance work on the same road, RMG members say they do not see the point in doing the work as it was temporary (3-5 days) and only available when the DDC budget was released. The work was managed by a contractor who kept track of who shows up for work and people are paid according to the number of days worked.

The number of working days for RMGs has been fixed by RAP at 11 days per month. In D2 members said that RAP had suggested they work for 4 hours a day and 22 days a month, but as people felt that there would not be enough time for other work, they



Men working to build gabion wires and retention walls

were able to negotiate and bring down the number of days by saying they would work for 8 hours per day. However, some RMG members now wanted work for the whole month and the pay to be increased accordingly. They had raised this with the RAP staff during a monitoring visit, but were told that this work would be guaranteed for the full four years of the project and so had not taken the issue forward. They were still dissatisfied as they felt the number of working days and subsequent earnings were insufficient. It was understood by them that if the number of working days increased, the pay would be more too.

Work mostly involved filling small potholes with stones, construction and maintenance of earthen drains which would allow water from fields above and small waterfalls to pass, clearing bushes on the roadside, and clearing minor landslides. RMGs also cut earthen drains across the road to allow water to drain from the fields above, which would result in muddy trenches when vehicles went over them. Group members in D1 complained about the tractors and jeeps that created potholes and muddy trenches but thought their own work was important as it kept the road in condition. For bigger landslides that required machinery to remove, contractors were called, though no one seemed to have a clear idea of who was responsible for calling them.

Road construction in locations B and K had been underway for four months this year (Dec/Jan-April). Members said the stretch of road to be worked on was decided by RAP overseers. The group facilitator was responsible for organising the group to get the work done. Work was described as *tough*, especially by women (village B) who said it was physically strenuous and time consuming to dig out soft soil to open up tracks, excavate and carry rock, construct and fill wire gabions and build stone retention walls. They also complained of having sore backs as it was usually them who had to go up and down the hill slopes to carry rock, while men worked on making wire gabions and retention walls.

In B people explained that construction had stalled the previous year because a few groups had protested over the course the road was to take. There had also been disputes because different RBGs had been given work for different number of days (ranging from 8 days to 1 month). Some men said the work provided was for 3-4 months per year, but were not completely sure as they had not worked the full duration yet. There was no official road work in the monsoon season.

5.1.1. Pay and conditions

'The work is easy - just like sweeping' (woman, FHH, D2 referring to RMG work)

In all study villages, people said that the opportunity to earn extra cash were one of their main motivations for being engaged in road work. RBG members often also talked about wanting to see the village become more accessible with new markets emerging in near future and *'making life easier for our children'* (woman, RBG-B) and so included 'the greater social good' among their motivations for involvement. In village B, the team found such views were confined to those who had not lost much land while people who had lost agricultural land to the road construction were more vocal in their dissatisfaction and less enthusiastic about working on the road. Rather than being positive, they worked on the road grudgingly and for wages only, saying *'we have nothing else (land) left'* (man, RBG-B).

Wages for road construction work varied by location and further varied within groups in a location as shown in Table 5. For example, different RBGs in village B had been able to earn different amounts ranging from NPR 3,500–8,200 over three months (which they were paid in the month before our visit). People here explained that the variation related to the number of days worked, but they also indicated that deductions were made if the worker did not come to work for two or three days in a row and had failed to supply a substitute worker. An attendance register was maintained by the group chairperson but workers said that if they had a genuine excuse like illness, marriage, birth or death in family for absence from work, the register would be adjusted so deductions were not made. They said payments depended on when RAP engineers came to measure progress on the road.

Wage rates and timely payment were continuing contentious issues in village B where people were confused about the payment system and blamed poor basic information about the modality of remuneration. This, they say, was further compounded by RAP personnel and RBG facilitators who have not explained it to them since. The workers say they have asked overseers about the delay in payments and the huge margin in the different groups' wages, but have not been given an explanation as *'they (overseers) think we are illiterate and stupid and won't bother with answering our questions'* (man, RBG-B). A team member in B was present at the work site on one such occasion when the overseer said *'you will get paid more if you do your work faster'* and walked off.

Table 5.1: Wage details of RBGs

Location	Working days 2014	Range earned 2014	Working days 2015	Range earned 2015	Payment made by	Frequency of payment	Perceived basis of payments
B	1 month	4-5,000	3 months	3,500-8,200	Group facilitator or Chairperson	2-3 months	Day rate
K	2 months	8-9,000	3 months	10,000-19,000	RAP staff	35-40 days	Every square metre of area worked

Table 5.2: Wage details of RMGs

Location	Working days 2014	Range earned 2014 (monthly) in NPR	Working days 2015	Range earned 2015 (monthly) in NPR	Payment made by	Frequency of payment	Perceived basis of payments
D1	11 days per month for 6 months	3,575	11 days per month for 3 months	4,000	Group Chairperson	Monthly	District wage rate (same across the entire district)
D2	11 days per month for 6 months	Not mentioned	3 months	4,400	Group Chairperson	Every 3 months (by choice)	District wage rate (same across the entire district)

By contrast, the RBG in village K said that wages earned were based on the square metres of road worked. They were satisfied that any difference in wages earned by different groups could be explained on the basis of how hard they worked (and how much earth they moved). Cash payments were made every 35-40 days directly by the group facilitator or chairperson. People preferred to refer to the money earned as a total rather than the rate for every square metre of road worked and did not talk about daily rates. Compared to village B, RBGs in village K also knew how much they would be paid for specific work like building wire gabions (NPR 700) and retention walls (NPR 2,500), but were unsure if only those who had worked on the gabions and retention walls would be paid or the group would be paid as a whole.

In village D1, people generally thought that NPR 4,000 per month paid to RMG members was reasonable and echoed the sentiment that it was *'good pay for a few days' work'* (man, non-RMG, D1). Both RMGs in villages D1 and D2 said they had no issues relating to wages. Monthly payments were made by the chairperson to the rest of the group. The RMG members were unclear on whether they each had an account at the bank or if there was one account set up for them. As making payments was one person's responsibility, D2 RMG had been told during the training that their chairman would be reimbursed for travel expenses to the town, but did not know how much money was given as *'she doesn't tell and we don't ask'* (woman, RMG-D2). Withdrawal and distribution of the money was left to the discretion of the groups themselves who preferred to be paid every month (D1) or quarterly (D2). D2 RMG said they preferred getting paid every three months as they would then have a large amount which could be used as they wanted. There was no mention of job contracts for RMGs in either location.

The RBGs in village K worked seven days per week while those in village B worked six. On rainy days, we observed in village K that RBGs did not go to work. Sometimes entire RBGs were absent from work. For example, an all-Dalit RBG in village B was busy helping to construct a new house in the Dalit settlement and they said they would compensate by going to work on the road that Saturday.



The soil levellers have been left in store as the RMG members do not know how to fix the wooden handles

Groups in all locations except D1 said they were aware that they had accident insurance. In K, people told us that in case a worker lost a finger then they would be given NPR 5,000 and if a life was lost then the family would be paid 3 lakhs (300,000). People in village B thought RAP had done a smart thing by insuring them as road work was full of accident risks, and recounted an incidence where one woman had sustained a head injury from a falling boulder. They said as

the woman was a registered RBG member, RAP was supposed to pay for her treatment, but the paper work had taken a long time and the family had to pay NPR 60,000 for the treatment and had not yet been compensated. The fact that RAP did not insure substitute workers was a concern in B as many families practiced substitution and were worried about having to pay for expensive treatment in case a substitute was injured.

5.1.2. Training and equipment

Group members in all study villages told us that 2-3 days technical training was provided by RAP staff for both road building and maintenance. Groups had been trained as a whole in all locations except village B, where training had only been given to the group chairperson or facilitators, who were then expected to pass on the knowledge to rest of the group.

The training was held at the local secondary school in villages B and K and at the nearest town in D1 and D2. In all villages group members said that they had been made to sit and listen to what the instructors had to say, except in D2 where they were also asked to sing on the last day by the 'fancy' RAP staff who were from Kathmandu. Group members in all locations explained that the training had been given by RAP staff who showed them photographs and videos of roads on the computer. When asked if they were given an on-the-field demonstration on how to use the equipment, a RBG member looked incredulous '*why would they show us how to do things, we know how to use a kodalo (hoe)*' (man, K). By contrast, D2 RMG had been given new soil levellers but did not know how to build and fix the handles on them. As there had been no demonstration on fixing the handle, the group had left all the soil levellers in store as they would be of no use.

Most people in B and K said they already knew how to use the equipment but videos of how stone retention walls are built was new to them. While the trainings had only focused on showing different equipment and their uses, people in B said that as RAP overseers visited and remained on site most days to give instructions, they could ask overseers for help when particularly technical work was to be carried out.

Groups in all locations had been given one-day first aid training on how to treat basic injuries. People said they had been instructed about the various injuries and accidents related to road work and thought it useful when instructors demonstrated how to revive a person who has

fainted (village B). There was a procedure in place in village B, where in case of accidents, a stretcher would be brought from the female community health volunteer's (FCHV) home and the injured person would be taken to the nearest hospital in the district town for treatment. In villages B, K and D1 groups had been given a first aid box (not observed in D2) which was stocked with antiseptic liquid, ointment, bandages, sling, etc. This was re-stocked only at the start of every working year. In village B people told us that when they ran out of first aid supplies, the group had to make do with whatever was available. The team in village K observed the kit at the work site, while in both B and D1 the kit was kept with a member of the group who *'ran down to the house and brought it'* (chairman, D2) in case of an emergency.

Group members regarded the provision of incentives for training and other meetings as an added bonus. The incentive could be anything, from food to training allowance. RBG members in B complained of having been given only snacks where an allowance had been promised. In D1, where the one-day training on road maintenance had taken place in a nearby town, RMG members had received NPR 400 as transport and food allowance.

All groups had been issued standard RAP helmets, caps and boots to be worn while working on the road along with other equipment like a wheel barrow, shovel, plough, hammer, soil levellers, etc. RMGs, in addition, were also given high visibility orange waistcoats. Group members in village K told us that wearing helmets and boots was mandatory and anyone not wearing them for two days in a row would not be able to get their attendance marked in the register. However, we observed that only a few workers were actually wearing them during our stay. In village B, the helmets and boots were a source of amusement with one man remarking they felt like the *'Nepal army, wearing these helmets and boots'*. Even though many told



RAP 3 caps were a favourite with men, who wore them for all occasions

the same story of a man who had had a rock fall on his foot but had been saved from serious injury because he was wearing boots, people preferred not to wear the boots, especially in the summer months as *'it was too hot to work in them'* (villages B and D1). It was noted that the caps were a special favourite with the men who were seen to wear it at all times.

5.1.3. Mandatory savings

In line with RAP programme's compulsory savings for RBGs, all the groups had set up a rotating savings fund. Savings pattern varied within groups with some setting aside 10% of each member's wages (locations B and K), or saving a certain amount as a group (NPR 4,000 deducted from group wages as a whole, B). The money loaned out from this fund differed within groups. In K, group members could take a loan of up to NPR 10,000 which had to be repaid in 2 months' time. The interest rate for loans to group members was fixed at 1% per month and people took loans for buying livestock - a few members in B had taken a loan to buy goats; and to cover direct cost of

seasonal migration. Though some informal savings groups² were functional in all locations before RAP, most families regarded RAP's mandatory savings as a good thing as this had enforced savings habits in the community and the loan people took was considered *'their own money'* (woman, B). A lot of women we spoke to in village B felt that they had worked hard on the road and the money was theirs, and this made it different from other saving schemes in the village where the money saved was their family's. They thought borrowing money through the groups' rotating savings was easier than taking a loan from moneylenders or neighbours, as the interest rate was lower and there was no embarrassment in borrowing from their own savings.

Group savings were small and no one could come up with an exact reason for this. Some said it was because groups were not paid on time and when payment was made, it was less than expected and what they saved *'did not amount to much'* (man, B). One group in B had saved NPR 16,000 in 2 years.

Even though the savings were small and not enough to be loaned out to all members, people said that they would prefer taking a loan from the savings group if possible than from the local moneylenders who charged a higher rate of 3-5% a month. Their own savings programme not only incurs lower interest but the group is less assertive in requiring repayment. It functions well, for example in providing loans for incidental expenses for transport of husbands and sons returning to India for seasonal migrant work.

5.1.4. Selection criteria and process

Most people had some idea of the selection criteria for road work and there were several reasons provided. People often explained that they had heard that one of RAP's criteria was that it did not give work to the actively employed, though they themselves were unsure about what was meant by *'actively employed'*, as many families involved in road work had other salaried and waged jobs and businesses. Two of the HHH families had their own small businesses (agro-vet and a tea-shop also selling basic household items). In village D1, the chairman of the RMG worked as an office help in the local primary school. In village K, one HHH had a son who worked at the local school. Several families in village B involved in the road construction had one or more male migrant family workers in India. In village K people told us of a family who had been offered but turned down RBG work as they had three shops already.

People also said that RAP had given work based on the proximity of the village/household to the road (*'people who have their house nearer the road only they get the work'*, old man, K) was another criteria for selection for RBGs. As a result, almost all households in village B are involved in road work, as most of them are on or near the road-corridor but households living 3 hours away had been actively excluded. In village K, members said that people from other villages had been given preference for RBGs as they lived closer to the road.

Most people seemed aware that the groups had to have a certain number of women. Women in village K told us that RAP focuses on *'Dalits and women, that is why my name got selected'* (FHH, woman RBG-K). They explained that pregnant women and new mothers were left out of the selection process. If a woman member became pregnant after group formation, then people said that they were usually replaced by another family member. Nevertheless, in village B we saw

²Team in D1 was told that the idea of informal savings group came from the outside through NGOs. Group members saved NPR 10-50 a month and loans could be availed of at 2-3% interest a month. In D2, a programme on poverty alleviation had a similar fund model set up 5-6 years previously.

women with small infants at the work site. We were told that there were talks of starting a day care centre for infants of women RBG members but nothing had come of it - *'we can't leave our babies home, so we bring them here'* (woman, B). Additionally, the local social mobiliser told us that RAP had selected women with husbands in India or overseas as it was thought the wages would help ease their cash flow and also contribute to the family's loan repayment. Widows who did not have other income sources were also included in the groups.

People also said that those households that grew less than six months' food on their land were given priority. In B and D1, these included Dalit and some other Chettri families with limited landholding, who supplemented their income through construction work locally and migration. In D1, people thought that while the women members were deserving of the work, there were others who would have benefitted from the RMG wages more than the RMG chairman and one other male member who already had other income sources. Other selection criteria were to include those who had given up land for road construction (D2). People also said that age was a criteria (18-59 years old). However, many said they did not follow the age criteria very strictly as sometimes the whole family could be busy and there was no option but to send young boys or older men and women for work. People also noted that those men who had stayed back from seasonal migration were given preference. In D1, two male RMG members told us that after the selection was finalised, they had been told by RAP staff at the training that they had been selected as they did not have intentions to go to India for work.

People in B had heard that an advertisement was sent to the VDC office by RAP a few months before the work began and they were informed about the project and related work by *'people with a say'* in the community. For the final selection, meetings were held in different wards and people's names were taken down from different HHs and were formed into groups *'They (RAP staff) informed us that a road would be built and every family has to have a member in the group-so we gave our names.'* (man, RBG-B). In village K, people said an All Party Mechanism (APM) meeting sat for general decisions concerning the VDC and had formed a Local Road Coordination Committee (LRCC) who then coordinated with RAP to select RBGs. The selection meeting was held in another VDC where the LRCC and RAP staff took down names of RBG members. Most people thought *'those who could talk'* and were vocal about their interest to work on the road got their names written and were chosen, ('talk' meaning those who were vocal about their interest to work on the road).

RBG composition was said to be based on the ethnic composition of different wards. Those wards with a Chettri settlement only had Chettris in the RBGs and ethnically diverse wards had ethnically mixed RBGs. Where families from a ward had been excluded because all groups had the required 20 members, they were formed into mixed groups. These mixed groups had families from different wards working together. Almost all households in village B (teachers were excluded) were part of RBGs, except those wards farthest from the road corridor. In K, people said poor families, Dalits, widows, and single mothers were

In village K, some observed that even though they were told by NGO staff and other community leaders that the programme was mainly for the poor families, shop-owners and school teachers' families had been offered work as RBGs. The fact that the shop-owners had declined the offer was irrelevant as people thought the work should never have been offered in the first place. However, there was also a general feeling among people that even if they had not got work under RAP, they would *'find something else'* if they *'waited their turn'*. They were referring to the multiplicity of

different development programmes working in the district and noted that as long as there was NGO presence they would receive some aid somehow.

In villages D1 and D2, an advertisement had come to the VDC office and people in D1 said they had been informed by members of Citizen's Ward Forum about the criteria (poor, single women/mothers, Dalits, age) and applied according to that. People in both locations complained about not being informed of the selection process on time. In D2, people noted that the information about RMG selection was not relayed at the village level, *'those who saw it (the advertisement at the VDC office), only they knew and applied'* (woman, RMG). Many non-RMG members we spoke to had had no information about the selection but seemed to accept it as *'the way things worked in the village'* (old man, D1). Additionally, the Dalits left out of RMGs in D1 were vocal in their displeasure and felt the ones selected were in a more advantaged position within the Dalit community and the man who was selected *'has a big house and a water tap for personal use'* (man, non-RMG-D1). It was noted by many that most programme interventions usually favoured just a few people in the community and RAP had consulted only with the community leaders and had given work to some of those who *'did not really need it'* (man, non-RMG, D1). People in D1 thought the RMG chairman who worked at the local school as a peon was not the right person for the work. They said that though they were told that the work was given to Dalits and disadvantaged *'there are comparatively well-off people in the group too'* (man, FHH, D1).

5.1.5. Substitution and replacement

The practice of substitution in road work was prevalent in all locations but worked differently in each. In K, people mentioned that temporary substitution was allowed within the family only twice a month and if a member was absent from work on the third day, their wage would be deducted. Because of this if someone was unable to go to work for longer periods for reasons such as migration, pregnancy, illness or family emergencies, the usual practice was to find a permanent replacement from within the family.

The practice was similar in road maintenance locations. In village D1, temporary substitutions were said to be discouraged by the chairman and only made when absolutely necessary like in case of illnesses.

In village B, men said as the minimum wage in India was higher (INR 500, which when converted is NPR 800) the wages they made was more. As substitution could be made as many times as needed from within the family, men continued to migrate seasonally and were substituted by wives or other family members. People said this practice of substitution had also allowed for some flexibility to those engaged in other occupations (shops, construction work). Families with multiple income sources said they usually prioritised their daily activities and if a RBG member was occupied elsewhere, someone else would work in their stead.

Despite temporary substitution being convenient, lack of insurance for substitutes was seen as a major problem for people. Only those registered as RBG members were said to be eligible for accident insurance. This, according to people was the primary reason for their hesitancy in substituting for family members in K, even when it was allowed twice a month. Women in B thought this unfair as *'it is still RAP's work we are doing, no matter whose name is on the list'* (woman, non-RBG). People were aware that they would have to bear all cost for treatment if they were injured when substituting a family member.

In K, people regarded lack of technical training as a problem for substitutes and those replacing family members in building groups. Technical training on road building was usually given to groups and replacements and substitutes had to learn on the job with help from other group members and RAP overseers.

5.2. People's perspectives of SED opportunities

All study locations had socio-economic development (SED) activities supported by RAP 3 and the team interacted with 5 SED groups who were involved in a range of activities like goat rearing (villages B, D1 and D2), vegetable, spice and fruit farming (B, K, D1, D2), and metal work (B). People said that RAP also gave farming equipment like water sprinklers, plastic growing tunnels, and water pipes to groups who were engaged in vegetable and spice production.

People said that the opportunities to be involved in SED activities had been given out to groups-existing RBGs and other poor people in B and K and to newly formed or existing groups who were already involved in these activities in D1 and D2. Table 7 shows the type of SED activities observed by the study team to be supported by RAP in all study locations.

Table 6: Presence of SED activities by location

Location	Goat rearing	Vegetable seeds/Fruit saplings	Spices	NTFP	Marketing support	Metal work	Farming aid like water sprinklers, pipes, irrigation canal etc.
B	√	√	√	-	√	√	√
D1	√	√	√	-	√	Not mentioned	√
K	Not mentioned	√	Not mentioned	√	√	Not mentioned	√
D2	Not mentioned	√	-	√	√	Not mentioned	√

5.2.1. People's perspectives on the selection process

People explained that SED activities were given to different groups based on the following:

For vegetable and spice groups, SED activities largely depended on the potential for growing a certain vegetable, fruit or spice in the area *'if your land can grow potatoes, they put you in the potato group'* (man, D1). Those groups selected were also given farming equipment like hand-

held water sprinklers, water pipes, plastic tunnel for planting seeds and saplings. Irrigation ponds and water canals had been built in villages K, D1 and D2 and some families in D2 had concrete manure pits which they said had been supported by RAP, who had given them training on how to build and use these pits. People said vegetables seeds and saplings for cucumber, chillies, bitter melon (B), tomato, potato (D1), apple, cauliflower and pumpkin (D2) had been provided to groups depending on area feasibility.

Land ownership was said to be another criteria for selection of a group or household. People reflected that poorer families with less landholding were mostly excluded from SED intervention in vegetable farming. Before the road work and SED activities had started, people had been told by community leaders that RAP was a programme for the poor. However, this exclusion of poorer families with less landholding had made people question if the programme was indeed for the poor. For example, Dalit men in D1 thought the traditionally well off Brahmins and Chhetris had got the better deal as they had comparatively more land than Dalits and could benefit from SED intervention most. However, there was no apparent interest to do extra farming among those who owned more land as this meant *'more hard work'* (young man, D1). People saw this as an added responsibility which gave little return as the vegetable production was limited to kitchen garden and even if they planned to increase production, there was no market for large scale produce.

Collective interest and willingness to take up a certain activity was also taken into account while forming groups. But we also met a few groups that had been given an activity on a first come, first served basis where if the required number of groups for a certain activity was already fulfilled, they would be given another activity by RAP- *'we wanted goats, but there were already two groups registered for goats, so we got vegetables instead, even though we did not want it'* (woman, SED group, B).

In B, where RBGs had been targeted for SED activities, some had yet to receive support. Those without SED activities asserted that groups which *'had a say'* with RAP were given SED interventions as early as eight months ago. People said that SED interventions were being rolled out to RBGs in phases. While we were there, two researchers observed staff from RAP SED component's partner NGO taking down names of group members for formation of a goat rearing group. A spice group had just been formed and training of group members was said to have happened recently.

People shared that there had been much miscommunication between SED groups and RAP. When goat rearing groups were formed, it was thought they would be given goats like most other asset transfer programmes. Some in B said it was later clarified that RAP would only be coordinating to provide insurance³ for the goats they already had, but most people we spoke to still expected to receive goats. In D1, a group had been waiting for a year to get their goats insured- *'they keep saying the process is ongoing, when will our goats be insured?'* (young man, D1). In B, there was talk of each group getting a buck/billy which would then be used to mate with other goats, but when we probed further they could not tell us if this was confirmed with RAP or not.

In D2, families were concerned about the different scale on which the intervention was allocated. Groups on the upper belt of the village had received more seeds and plastic for tunnels which were bigger in size than the ones on the lower belt. When this disparity came to light the issue was taken up with RAP who *'tried to manage the situation'* (old woman, D2) by giving two

³Insurance premium was said to be NPR 500 per goat in D1 and had to be paid just once, while insuring the goat.

households on the lower belt plastic tunnels and another two were given manure pits. Time and again, we heard that *'smarter people got a better deal'* (Dalit man, D2) as Brahmins and Chettris in the area were given plastic tunnels, water pipes and seeds while Dalits were only given seeds.

5.2.2. Supporting organisations

It was clear from conversations that at least one other programme in each location was working on income generation or had a similar modality to RAP 3. As a result people, mostly women, were unable to make clear distinctions between interventions of different projects-*'If one (project) gives chickens, all give chickens. We only know who gives what if we get it too.'* (woman, K). Discussing this further with a local NGO staff in D1, a team member was told duplication in interventions was *'as common as a fly'* in development and his job was to follow instructions from the head office and not question why such decisions were made.

In K, RAP was mostly associated with road building. People say they know RAP has initiated SED activities and indeed some are part of these groups, but the presence of many other NGOs working in agricultural development in the area has eclipsed RAP SED activities.

We tried to ascertain if our households were aware of the local NGOs that worked with RAP. Mention of RAP's local NGO partners was very rare and only came up in conversations with teachers, other salaried workers like RAP NGO staff and local social mobilisers and some RBG members. Even when organisations were mentioned, the connection was not because of their involvement with RAP but because of their long term presence in the villages working on different programmes.

5.2.3. Inputs and follow up

People explained that just after group formation, class room based training was given to SED groups at the local school which were followed by practical demonstrations in the field. While many did not think much of the videos they were shown on the computer, the field demonstrations were thought to be useful and informative, for example in K, men explained they had not known tomatoes could be grown in the area before. The training had also focused on how to preserve vegetable seeds and saplings for future planting. People felt they needed these inputs if they were to produce on a commercial scale, *'we need to know how to do things properly, if we are to get a better produce'* (woman, B). However, it was observed by people that most SED interventions were limited to kitchen gardens where tomatoes and chillies were grown for household consumption or sold to neighbours when there was a small surplus. While some men cited lack of market access as the reason for their hesitancy to farm on a semi-commercial scale, women felt it required extra work and *'who has the time?'* (Woman, B).

People told us that some villagers had been selected to be agro-vets by RAP to provide input support to different groups. Though no one could tell us about the selection process for these entrepreneurs, people said they were trained on goat rearing and went 'on request' to villages where support was needed. Technical support and vaccinations for goats were given with subsidy. In B, one agro-vet told us he had attended financial literacy training which enabled him to determine the subsidised prices for the seeds and pesticides he sold. The same man moved from village to village to give support to both RAP-supported and independent goat rearing individuals and also had been supported by RAP to set up a collection centre for vegetables in the nearby market. Some women complained that since he was away so much on *'RAP business'* the shop selling seeds was always closed.

In location B, while RAP had given vegetable seeds for free earlier, group members now had to buy the same at subsidised prices. The quality of the subsidised seeds was often questioned as people assumed that since they were being sold at a lower price, the quality would not be as good as other non-subsidised seeds.

People said that after the initial training, trainers did not come back and visit. People complained that while they needed advice on the red pests which had infected their cucumbers, they were told it was because of *'lack of adequate water'* and instead of a solution to the pest problem *'promised two water pipes'*. The promised water pipes had not yet been delivered even after a month (location B). In K, the RAP supported irrigation pond had been dry for two months but there had been no monitoring. Another irrigation canal built with NGO support was also non-functioning. This was explained as a regular occurrence with project follow ups- *'they (project) give things and then don't come back to see what is happening'* (young man, K).

5.2.4. Marketing support

People told us that RAP had set up collection centres to buy vegetables and fruits from those in the village who wished to sell their produce, which would in turn be sold by the centre. The research team visited two such RAP supported vegetable collection centres in B and D1. Both had started 2-3 months previously and had been supplied with a weighing machine, refrigerator and vegetable crates. There was a collection centre for apples in location K and another one for herbs in D2, but many could not say if these were private collection centres started by local entrepreneurs or supported by RAP or other programmes. RAP was also said to be assisting the community to make herbs collection from the forest more profitable by working to relax the tax they had to pay to the forest authorities.

Families in study locations sold their surplus vegetables to neighbours and local shop owners and did not feel the collection centre had made much difference to this trend as they had an established network with shops at the market. One NGO staff based in B stated that two SED groups had made good money by selling vegetables at the collection centre. This seemed an inflated estimation as few people were actually aware of the existence of the RAP supported

centre. Even members of those groups referred to by the NGO staff said that most vegetables grown are either consumed by the family or sold to neighbours. A woman had made NPR 8,000 selling cucumbers in the village last season without using the collection centre.

People thought selling vegetables locally was less exploitive in terms of money and time. In K, one host household had sold NPR 4,000 worth of cauliflowers to local buyers from the next village.



RAP supported vegetable collection centre- the boards are supposed to list market prices of vegetables but are empty

The cauliflowers would have sold for more money in the nearest market centre which is 4-5 hours walk away, but lack of vehicular roads meant they would have to be portered and the additional cost of mules would only help them break even. When asked why the produce wasn't sold at the collection centre, people said that the centre *'was closed and only opened during the apple season'* (man, HHH-K).

NGO staff in village B told us that market price listing of different vegetables were updated regularly at the collection centre, but this was not evident from our observation. The board at the centre also did not have any information about prices for vegetables.

5.3. Relevance of road work

While people seemed keen about the earning opportunities associated with road work, it was usually seen in terms of supplementary income rather than a main livelihood. As people in all study locations were using more cash these days, as compared to earlier when they depended on bartering with food, road construction incomes were said to be barely enough for daily expenses. Apart from rare exceptions such as one household in village K which had been able to pay off a part of their debt, and another family in village D2 which had bought a goat, the team was repeatedly told the income was only enough to assist cash flow. Comments about getting lower wages than expected were heard very often in village B and some of the men who had returned home from India when the road work started told us they were thinking about going back next construction season as *'what RAP pays is a pittance compared to what I make as a waiter in Delhi'* (man, RBG-B).

The work was also regarded by some men as a way to stay with their family, particularly in K. Admittedly they earned more working in India, but there were also expenses including accommodation, food and bringing clothes and other goods while coming back home. For some it was considered a season's work, albeit with less money but also fewer expenses.

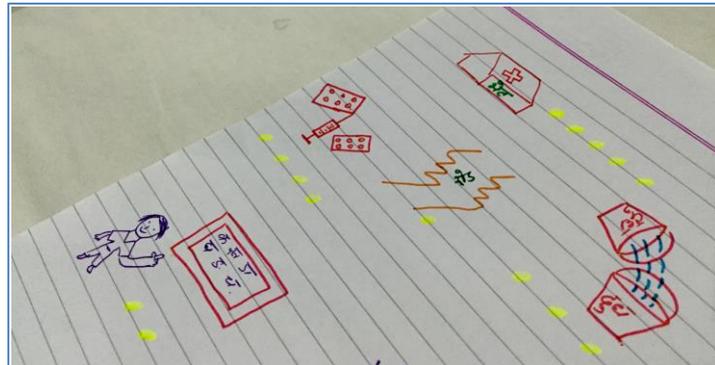
In the case of RMG members, particularly widows who had small landholdings and children to feed at home, road work was the only source of cash income. They said getting maintenance work was a respite as this had improved their credit worthiness among the local shop owners. While previously shops hesitated to give basic household items like cooking oil, salt, sugar, soap on credit, this had now changed as *'they know we work on the road now and will be able to pay back once we get our wages'* (woman RMG-D1). Working on the road means assured income for the two years that is left of the project and in the meantime *'my son will be sixteen and can go to India'* (woman, RMG-D1). Older men who had been former migrants had applied for the work as their *'migrant days were behind them'* (man, RMG-D1). Farming was a way to feed the family, and they also worked in construction and other income earning jobs. RMG work was viewed as a way to supplement their income and was *'just about enough to buy children's school things'* (man, RMG-D2).

The D2 RMG consisted mostly of women who explained that the selection was mainly due to men not wanting to commit to work that paid less and also restricted their mobility. The income was more in India where men worked in restaurants, car wash, construction work and portering⁴. *'It*

⁴Men were said to make anything from INR 30,000-60,000 (roughly NPR 50-100,000) after a season of work in India. Porters earned about INR 10,000 (NPR 15,000) and a dishwasher in a restaurant was paid INR 5-6,000 (NPR 8-10,000 roughly) for a month of work.

is possible for men to do all kinds of work, unlike us, they can work anywhere' (woman, RMG-D2) so women had been encouraged by family members to apply. The earnings from RMG work helped tide over family's expenses till men could come back home with remittances.

In location B, people thought RAP had given an opportunity previously denied to people with disabilities, when it had included two speech and hearing impaired persons as RBG members. As RAP was one of the first programmes in the area to help them earn an income, the community saw this as a positive change which other projects should replicate.



A family's income sources -the yellow dots represent the proportion of their total income. Income from road work (one dot) is the least

RAP road work was supposed to substitute for seasonal work in India. However, our conversations suggest it does not seem to do this but instead provides a cash earning opportunity for those left behind. Those left behind include those with caring roles and some who choose not to go (like men who want to be with family, older men, etc.). Local elites like a few teachers, NGO workers and social mobilisers were always quick to point out that migration had decreased in all study locations owing to the road work, but people themselves say otherwise. Migration is still a big part of their lives; first, it is their primary source of cash; and second, because many see road work as temporary and short-term. As the road construction work is only for four months in a year, depending on its earnings alone is considered impractical, particularly in B, where RBGs are paid irregularly. Even those men in K who have stayed back to work on the road say there is no option but to go back to India once the road is constructed in 22 months' time.

Questions regarding why RAP has invested in labour intensive road building are discussed time and again- '*why make us work so hard, when a bulldozer can complete the work in a mere month.*' (man, RBG-B). To some it is the road that is important, not the work that comes with it. Men already had work as migrants in India and expressed concerns that the road work had added to their families' workload. This was especially true for nuclear families that had multiple income sources (shops, salaried jobs, construction work) apart from farming. Two of our host households were clearly seen to be struggling with the extra workload. One family which had a shop and also worked on some construction jobs would sometimes send their 13 year old son who had to miss school to manage the family's shop when the parents had other work to attend to.

The incomes from road work were thought to make very little contribution to households and families depended on other sources like small businesses and remittances for most of their major cash needs. As migration has been a norm in these areas for generations, families have always had cash for spending, borrowing from neighbours when short, and paying back when migrants return home. People say that earnings from road work have supplemented families' income to an extent and the money is spent on buying household essentials. Changing food habits among

younger children and preference for packaged snacks⁵ also puts demands on these earnings and considerable amounts are being spent on buying instant noodles and biscuits for them. The team in locations B and K observed discarded snack food wrappers around the school area and one researcher accompanied children being sent to buy instant noodles by their mother at least two times during their stay.

RAP earnings have, nevertheless, helped ease the credit arrangement people have with local shops. With guaranteed income from RAP road work, people say shop owners are more open to giving credit. Shop owners who are locals know when RAP makes payments and collect what they are owed by families. The credit taking extends to alcohol as well. In B, men were said to retire to shops selling alcohol at the end of the work day where much time was spent on drinking with others. It was said, albeit with disapproval, that men lined up at these shops on the day they got paid, to pay off the credit accrued and '*celebrate pay day with more drinking*' (woman, B). The following tables maps the changes resulting from RAP, as noted by people.

Table 7: Changes resulting from RAP as noted by people

Changes in	What people think	Positive/negative
Status	Positions such as group chairperson, secretary imply a sense of status, particularly for women, who have traditionally been overshadowed by men from participation in mixed-gender village committees/groups (B)	+
Relationships	Tensions exist between those who got work on the road and those who didn't. Though not overt, people are nonetheless angry and think RAP's selection process was influenced by certain community members (D1) Group-level deliberations about not allowing households working on RAP road to be aided by other income assisting programmes (K)	-
Credit worthiness	Improved, which has allowed for easy repayment of credit from local shops later	+
Workload	Increased mostly for smaller families, particularly in areas where regular in-family substitutions are not encouraged. Even for extended families in locations where substitutions are allowed, one family member is engaged in road work all day and their share of chores have to be taken up by others	-

⁵The team noted that younger children tended to spend as much as NPR 50-100 a week on packaged snacks like biscuits, instant noodles and bubble gums. While some of this was bought with the GON provided 'snacks allowance' for children at school (K), this snacking culture among children is also seen to have an impact on household expenses.



Beans planted by the HHH, funded by RAP/SOSEC. HHH has very little time to work on these activities and as a result are not thriving

(K, B)The work is also felt to be hard and risky by people across all locations.

5.4. Relevance of SED activities

'We were already growing vegetables, RAP came later.' (Woman, D2)

In all study locations, many people were already involved in vegetable cultivation and goat rearing, either through their own expense or aided by various programmes on income generation. Even in RAP SED areas, people say vegetables grown are either consumed by the household or being sold locally as there is only a semi-functional market linkage in place. In K, very little value has been added by the SED component as there are no markets for produce. Another concern raised by a few people is that as RAP has supported various groups for vegetable cultivation, most families in the area have begun to grow their own vegetables. With limited market access and neighbours growing their own vegetables, people say that those families growing perishables like tomatoes have no option but to consume within the household.

There was a general feeling of disinterest among people regarding SED activities, who noted that they did not want to grow alternative crops on their land since this was cultivated to produce food for the family. Those part of goat rearing groups are thought to be better off as goats are low maintenance for larger families that already have livestock and enough people to look after them. As goats can generate a reasonable income when sold, people also saw them as assets ('savings') that could be sold to pay for family emergencies and social obligations like marriage, funerals etc.

Additional workload for the family was another reason cited for their lack of interest. One family in K had contemplated buying saplings from the nursery to start apple farming but did not follow through as they could not manage the time. In D2, one HH was already under a lot of stress looking after their agricultural land, livestock and though they were targeted for SED, could not manage time to look after the beans they grew.

Risks related to SED are said to be nominal as most families are growing vegetables in kitchen gardens and for own consumption. People say goat rearing too is risk free as the goats are insured, but there is an issue of grazing land. More than the associated risks, people see the activities as increased workload. Moreover, the income from SED opportunities are considered insignificant compared to migrant incomes. Families seem to prefer the security of employment in India, which they say is reliable and services their cash needs.

6. Study implications

As with all RCA studies, the study team prefers to draw implications from the findings and attempts to contextualise these perceptions with the team's observations from the field. The following are implications which have emerged from our detailed engagement with people in their own homes and subsequent reflection with the RCA team.

Some of the project assumptions made by RAP3 are questioned by people's own perception of the context and reality of the project and its outcomes.

Assumptions	Comments
Decreased migration	<p>Migration for work is a traditional income source across all locations and people indicate that road work does not change the trend of migration to India. Increasingly people are looking at other relatively lucrative overseas migration-for-work opportunities for example in the Middle East.</p> <p>The short-term and temporary nature of the work and availability of opportunities once the road is constructed are questions raised time and again. As migration is an established livelihood for men who have networks in place to find work in India, many see road work opportunity only as a temporary respite from migration. Furthermore, migrants do not want to lose their work networks by taking too much time away.</p> <p>As all households in B had not been provided work on the road, road work has not impacted migration on families that had been excluded from construction groups in K. In D1 and D2, where only 2-3 people from a village are included in RMGs, and with villages lacking other income opportunities, men have been returning to India every year.</p> <p>Wages earned in India are another reason for preference for migrant work. The earnings from road work are almost half of what men make in India. This is more significant for B, where issues related to lower wages than expected and timeliness of payment mean men will return to India next season even if work is still available.</p>
Meaningful savings	<p>Incomes from road work and SED were felt to be insufficient to make meaningful savings or build assets. Cash earnings from the road are mostly supplementary incomes which are used by families to buy basic household items, alcohol and snack food for children. As the road work is limited to 3-4 months a year and SED activities are still being rolled out to groups, incomes generated from them having an impact on people's savings is questioned.</p>

Relevance of SED activities

Limited relevance of SED activities to families poses a challenge to RAP's SED component. With regard to vegetable farming, groups point out that the produce is only enough for their own consumption. Even where production is on a semi-commercial scale, there is a gap in knowledge about market support through RAP, and in some cases, disinterest as people already have established networks in the village, local markets and businessmen to sell their produce, RAP collection centres see very limited activity.

Observations show that even where RAP has initiated a market systems development model by establishing one point of contact at local level, this is not working as expected. In B, where the agro-vet was the focal point for getting subsidised seeds, collecting vegetables and providing support to goat groups; it was noted by people that his involvement in many different activities has restricted their access to him.

There is also hesitancy to grow vegetables and spices in land that is traditionally cultivated to produce food for the family. These reasons and the semi-functional market linkage with limited market for produce has also raised people's concerns about RAP initiated SED activities.

Workload

People see SED activities in conjunction with road work as an increased workload for the family, for women, nuclear families and those who have alternative income sources in particular. Women are seen to be bearing the burden of extra work, especially in families of migrants and those involved in other occupations. In B, where those households who are part of RBGs get SED activities, it was noted that families were struggling under the workload. People here indicate that since activities are given, they feel a compulsion to do them.

Road work is considered risky and hard with people in D1 and B often referring to the different accidents that occurred during road construction. Also, as the more technical aspects of road construction like building wire gabions and retention walls are handled by the men, women, in particular, think they have the more tiring task of carrying rocks to and from the road site throughout the day, while the men's work can be done without much movement.

One unintended consequence of the road work can be seen on children from families that have more than one alternate income sources like shops and construction work. It was observed that as the elders in the family were involved

elsewhere, children often missed school to look after younger siblings or to look after the family's shop.

Duplication of effort

The noticeable duplication of donor programmes in all study locations is of concern as the team observed at least one other programme (other than RAP 3) in every location that was working to provide agricultural aid to communities. As we see from our interactions in village K, this poses a question on the potential of the communities to become aid dependent.

It is also noted that RAP3 had selected some existing SED groups which were already being supported by other programmes. In such cases attribution of success to any one programme is difficult and there are increased chances of double reporting of successful programme interventions.

As road work is not seen to be retaining men in villages or opening up many economic opportunities, at least in the short term, it becomes imperative for RAP to add value to the roads it is constructing. The team feels that the programme should take a look at the problems facing families with migrant workers that can be improved by the road e.g. encouraging banks to have mobile banks so cash can be transferred safely and delivered by bank staff in the village. Rather than support people with yet more SED activities in an area already overcrowded with development interventions, RAP could focus on other value added activities that would help families of migrant workers without over burdening them.

Changing needs

More care needs to be taken to understand the basis of targeting development assistance. Some ethnic groups and communities like the Dalits are not as poor anymore as they have diversified their income sources. RAP then faces a challenge in determining those within the community that are genuinely struggling.

More nuanced determinants of poverty need to be used to identify beneficiaries who need programme intervention, for example people with disabilities. However, RAP should also recognise what is possible for people without over burdening them.

Annexes

Annex 1: Study Team

Team A (Far West - Bajura and Doti)	Team Leader	Neha Koirala
	Members	Shalinta Sigdel Abijit Sharma
Team B (Mid-West - Kalikot and Dailekh)	Team Leader	Arya Sarad Gautam
	Members	Bijay Kumar Shahi Bikram Sherchan

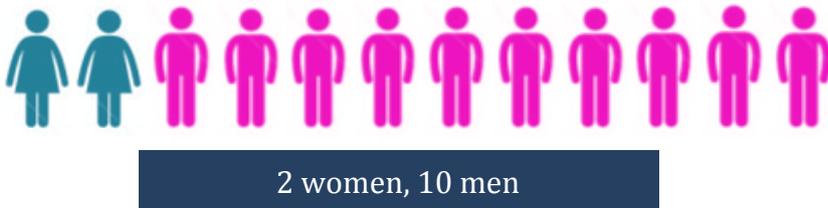
Annex 2: Host Household Information

*Total number of households- 12

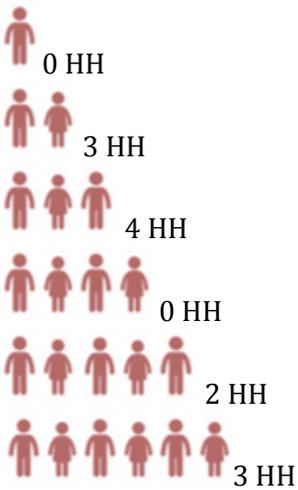
1. Family Type

Nuclear	Extended
7	5

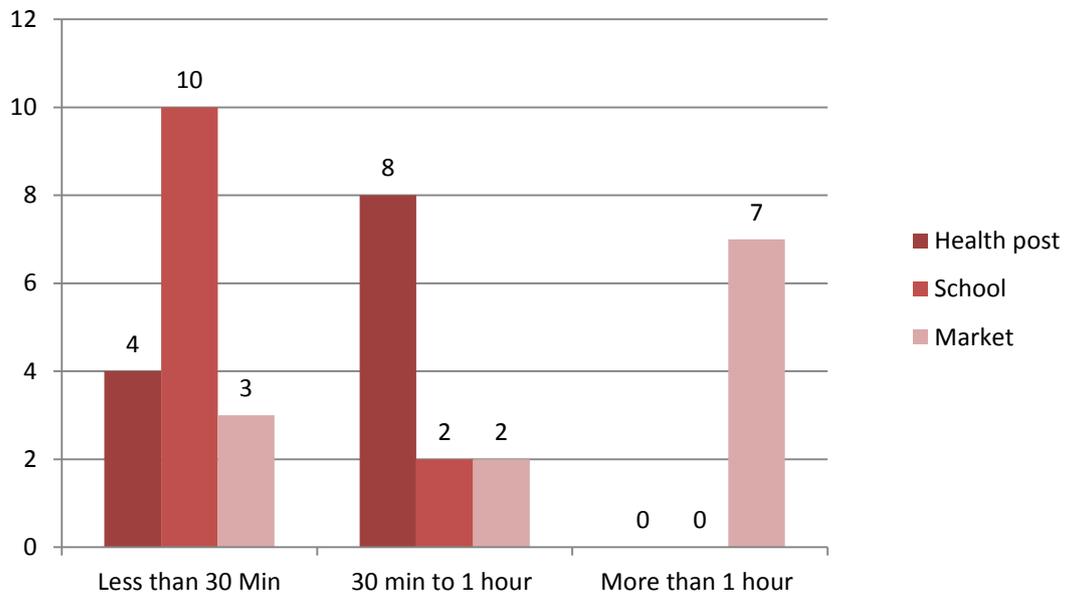
2. Head of households



3. No. of children in the family



4. Distance from the facilities



5. Status of electrification and sanitary facilities

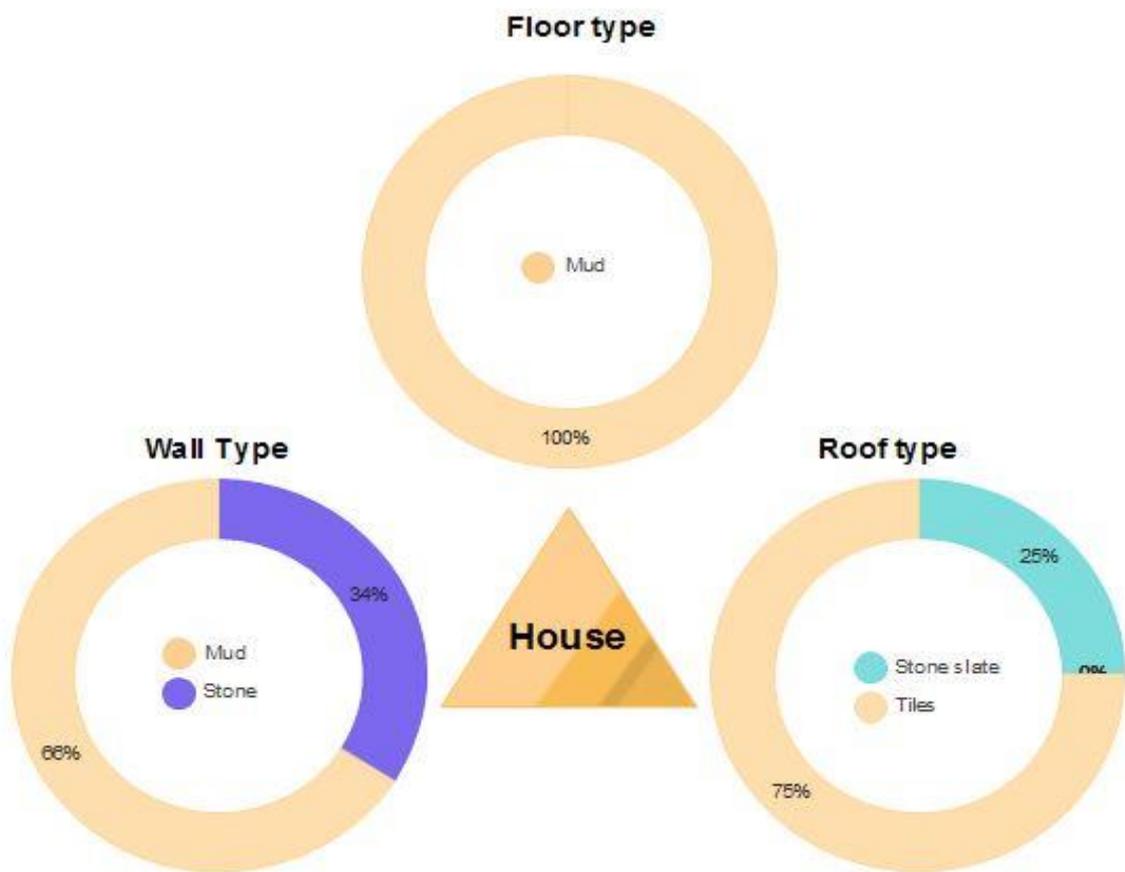


Metered electricity	50%
Solar Panel	42%
No electricity	8%

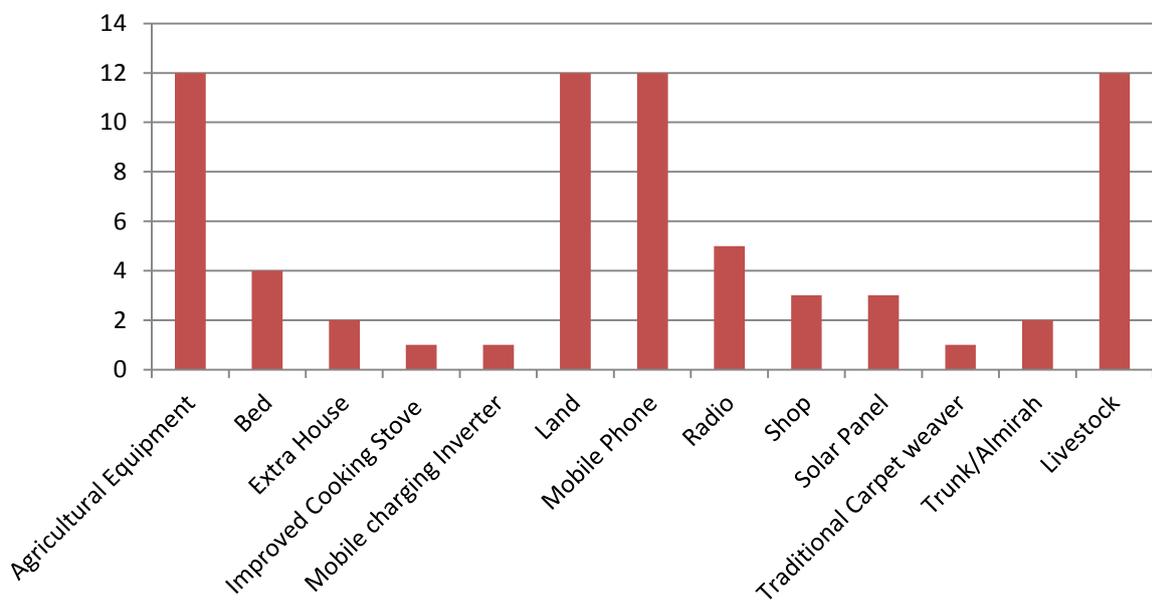


Toilet outside	92%
No toilet	8%

6. House Details

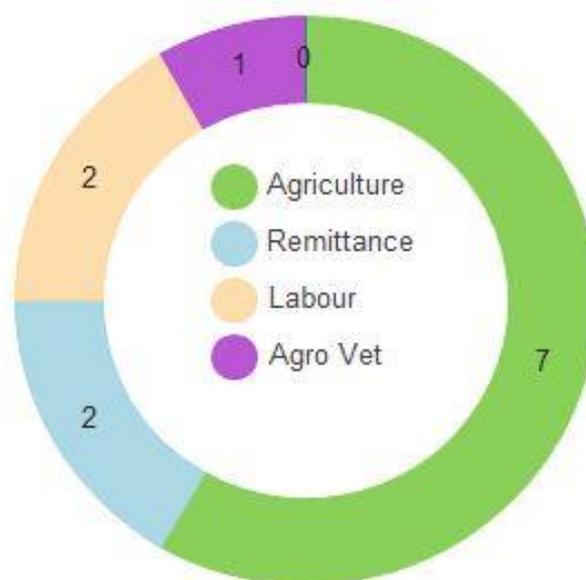


7. Possession of assets



8. Livelihood details

a. Main source of livelihood



b. Additional Livelihood

Additional → Main ↓	Agriculture	Remittance	Mill	RAP	Livestock production	NGOs	Hotels and Shops	Home brewed liquor	Teacher
Agriculture		3	1	5	1	1	1	1	2
Remittance	2								
Labour	1			2			1		
Agro Vet	1			1	1				

c. Details of additional jobs

Additional Job → Main Job ↓	None	+1 Job	+2 Jobs	+3 Jobs
Agriculture		2	2	3
Remittance		2		
Labour			2	
Agro Vet			1	

Annex 3: Areas for Conversations

Context (Day1)

Engage in conversation at teashop/equivalent- *somewhere that a lot of people have access to*

- Related to roads (the road just walked) –changes resulting from the road construction (positive and negative), road condition, construction, maintenance in order to identify if people in hamlet involved.
- Occupations and ways to earn income – migration vs. work at home, opportunities to work in the area, view of road construction work (status/relevance), Range of local and migrant opportunities. Preferences and basis of preferences (many ‘whys’).
- Range of organisations working in the village and what they do, how are they viewed?
- Village organisation- decision making, politics.
- Aspirations for themselves and children. What futures?

With RAP beneficiary families/neighbours (Day 2-3)

- **Composition** of family, ethnicity, education levels, location, livelihoods and circumstances, housing and assets
- **Selection process**– basis (why were they selected and others were not), triangulate with neighbours, how are the groups formed, what support do the groups get from RAP- bank accounts for the groups etc.
- **Motivation** to join, relevance to the family (monetary relevance, prestige or lack of associated with working on the road, men with young families not wanting to migrate so work on the road, road work as opposed to migrating-rite of passage: this (migration) is what the family has been doing for a long time). **Risks** associated (especially with SED activities- crop failures, no market access or linkages/information about market prices)
- **The work**- What are they supposed to do (**knowledge, attitude and practice**), duration of their work, relevance of the work (working 3-4 months a year make a difference to them-stop them from migrating). **Information** received, source, scope. **Training** received, location, duration, adequacy and relevance (Do they get trainings? Are they getting the trainings they need or something that the project feels they should have?), source (Who gave the training?), mode (lecture, hands on, demonstration), outcomes, conditions (travel, per diems, food etc.). problems faced (Grey areas of responsibility: what is beyond their competency - landslides?), work satisfaction
- **Contract terms**- pay [amount-who gets what, frequency, deductions (what happens when someone is ill- who gets the wages, the kind of social contracts they have between themselves), local/migrant wages], hours/months, savings (access to these), equipment, insurance and other allowances for equipment/travel etc.
- **Relationship with LNGO, others**- How do they refer to the project people (sir, brother etc.), frequency and nature of interaction, supervision (who checks your work- quality, sanctions) who is the boss (community leaders, RAP, LNGO, others), people’s perspective on what they are getting from RAP, go into details- there could be a bigger partner NGO which has a HQ in Kathmandu that is working with NGOs at the local level—partners working with partners - find out if people know these NGOs, who is funding the programmes - if a programme was being funded by one donor earlier and once the

funding period is over, is it being funded by RAP? Do people know that programmes are different, who do they attribute these programmes to?

- **Family finances**- income-expenditure and changes if there is more spending cash
- **Change** (if any) resulting from RAP (skills, networks, relationships (home, community and outside), income/debt, savings, status, health)
- **Aspirations**- short term/long term

Experience

- Walk along the road
- RAP beneficiary work-in case of RBGs might not be able to do the actual work- accompany them to meet co-workers to understand road work from different perspectives, sit and observe them (tools they use, other equipment-helmets, wheelbarrow etc.)

Observe

- State of road
- NGO and other activity- directly and through sign boards
- Road use- who uses? Local/outside? Who benefits?
- RAP related – helmets, rubber boots etc.-who has/why?
- Signs of change e.g. discarded wrappers -snack food, empty alcohol bottles, leisure activities, dogs etc.

Annex 4: List of people met

Teachers
Assistant Sub Inspector
Police Constable
Shop owners
NGO staff
Social mobiliser
Assistant Health Worker
Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
Female Community Health Volunteer
Medical shop owner and Lab Assistant
Traders
Political Party Cadres
Road Building Group Members
Road Maintenance Group Members
RAP Engineers
RAP Overseers

Annex 5: Household Stories

Early the second morning, my HHH mother, Dharni sets off to go to the community tap with one-year-old Lokendra tied to her back. *'I don't have to stay in line (waiting for water) if I reach the tap by 5 o'clock'*, says she. She brings water, collects firewood and cleans the house while the rest of the family is still sleeping. Slowly everyone begins to wake. It is her husband's turn now to take care of Lokendra. While Dharni goes to the *baari* to bring vegetables for the morning meal, *dai* makes tea and heats the leftover *kodo roti* from last night.

Dai runs a small tea shop at the village centre and after gulping down a *roti* with his tea, rushes to his shop saying he doesn't want to miss the early morning tea crowd. Dharni comes in with some vegetables and sits down to cook. *'We decided last night that I will go for road construction today. We try to take turns, but it's usually me who has to work on the road. The shop usually gets a lot of men throughout the day and it's easier for him to manage them'*, says she.

By 11 o' clock, all five children are fed, the goats have been tended to and Dharni is ready to set off with Lokendra snugly on her back. She reaches the road site which is 25 minutes downhill, puts Lokendra down with the rest of the children and starts work. Occasionally, she takes a break and comes to see if he is doing fine. At 5 sharp, we leave for the tea shop where I sit cuddling the infant while she cooks for the NGO crowd who come to eat there nightly. When the other children come to her wanting food, she shushes them and gives them a packet of biscuit. It is 8 o' clock by the time we are home and she starts to prepare dinner for the family.

'With the shop, managing time for farming has been very difficult. So we only plant paddy and some vegetables. The income from the shop ensures that we don't go hungry.'

Field notes, B

Ramesh is happy to be hired as a RBG as gives him some extra cash for the family. With one daughter and two sons to feed and school, he wants the best for the children. The shop that he had opened before being hired as a RBG is now run by his wife, Sita, with the help of the children.

The family wakes up before 6 am. Soon, after tea, each member has something to do. Ramesh feeds their buffalo whereas Sita is busy with the cooking so that the meal is ready before the father and children leave home.

At 9 am, Ramesh eats his meal with the children and leaves for work. He wears the issued rubber boots and cap and heads uphill towards the road. He says, *'I like the work as it allows me to earn some extra cash. Otherwise I would have to go to India for the money.'* With the income, he can also buy stock for his shop. The group is working on excavating rock and he says the work is tiring, *'I like building wire gabions most'*.

Sita is relatively free during the daytime. She stays at the shop selling tea and other snacks. Villagers also come to her shop to buy rice and other grocery items. *'I earn about 150 rupees a day selling tea and snacks'*, says she.

At 4 pm, the children return home from school. Most days, Sita roasts corn or soya-beans for them but sometimes the children demand noodles from the shop. Ramesh returns a bit late after work because he likes to sit around chatting with the rest of the men drinking home-brewed alcohol.

At around 7 pm, the family sits around the cooking area. Sita cooks the meal while her daughter helps her. While eating dinner, the family likes to talk about their day.

Field notes, K