

Deusa Secondary School Visit: 1-6 March 2008

After a year of involvement with Deusa Secondary School in Solukhumbu, my visit there was encouraging. Money donated by friends has helped to support the salaries of two extra teachers as well as provide teaching materials and books to start a school library. Money that has been raised by the Sheikh Zayed Private Academy for Girls in Abu Dhabi is covering the salary of a further teacher for the coming year and helped pay for land on which the school can build much needed additional classrooms.

Deusa people from Kathmandu had been bringing reports to Kathmandu of improvements in the attitude of some of the teachers and students at the school, so I was keen to see how the school might have changed during the year. In particular, members of Parivartan Abhiyan Nepal (PAN) have been providing useful feedback and support with work to help to improve the quality of education provided at the school. PAN is a community association that was set up in Kathmandu in 2006 to help to improve the livelihoods of the people of Deusa.

During the year, a small school library was set up from a donation sent by one of my friends.



Lila and son of one of the teachers by the new library. (March 08)

An anonymous donor funded some sports equipment and musical instruments that were sent to the school. Working with PAN, materials and books had been transported to the school by villagers visiting from Kathmandu. On my visit now, I brought some teacher books in Nepali to help the teachers with ideas on how to teach the various subjects and some art materials.

An additional primary teacher joined the school in the autumn, funded by Jalim Bihani Samaj, an NGO. This brings the total number of teachers including the head teacher to 17. Splitting two of the larger classes in April 2007, meant most teachers now teach 5 lessons a day, including the head teacher. The three 'volunteer teachers' who teach primary classes are paid a minimal salary of 30 US\$ a month from registration fees paid to the school. As the school cannot afford more, a donation of 5,000 rupees was made to each of the three teachers in appreciation of the importance of their work.

The major improvement of the year was the construction of a 5-toilet block replacing a single boys' latrine that had served the 600 students until now. MedHimal, a German funded INGO provided funding and with the help of the local community and students, who dug the hole and brought up sand from the Dudh Kosi river several hundred metres below, the new toilets are now the pride and joy of the school. MedHimal has also built a water tank with a pipeline supplying water to each toilet.



Toilet block - two far toilets are the original teachers' toilets.

The school had been able to negotiate with local farmers to acquire two pieces of land adjacent to the school costing around 1,500 US\$, providing the possibility of extra buildings. This has been paid for by a donation used as a deposit by a villager; money raised by the Sheikh Zayed Private Academy for Girls in Abu Dhabi; money donated by an anonymous donor via a friend; and a contribution to be raised by PAN.

The District Office in Sallery has allocated about 300 US\$ to the school to plaster the inside of two classrooms. Work is progressing on treating the floor of one classroom to prepare it for a wood floor that will make a better surface for the youngest children to sit on.

Most important however, was an improvement in the motivation of the headteacher and some of the teachers as well as students. This was reported in an improvement in punctuality and no doubt the splitting of Class 9 and Class 1 into more manageable classes was a benefit to

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the learning of these students. It was noticed that students seemed more interested in trying to practice their English with me. There had been great enthusiasm in writing to the girls from Abu Dhabi and in some classes English was reported as proving a popular subject among the students. In the new session, it is hoped to start correspondence to students at a school in Arizona, USA, which will particularly please some of the boys who were very disappointed at not being able to write to the girls in Abu Dhabi!

There is still a long way to go however.

- **Classrooms:** There is a lack of rooms to split any more classes, but now at least, with the acquisition of the land behind the school office and behind the temple, with funding, it will be possible to build more classrooms.
 - o Class 6 - progressing to become Class 7 still needs to be split (73 students);
 - o The new Class 6 is anticipated to be another very large class, as more students will join from the other local primary schools;
 - o The new Class 1 promises to be another very large class;
 - o Over a third of the children in Class 1 are under 6 years of age and should be in a nursery or 'KG' class.
 - o The classroom located under the school office that is being used for one of the split Class 1 classes is very small and dark.

There is an urgent need for at least four extra classrooms.

RRN (Rural Reconstruction Nepal) is an NGO working from Sallery. Backed by DFID and other governmental organisations, they have been working in Solukhumbu building schools, toilets and water taps for several years. They have provided estimates for extra classrooms and would be prepared to manage the building of the rooms given the funds to do so.

They recommend one storey, two class blocks as structurally safer (there is a risk of earthquakes in the area). This would cost between about 4,000 and 5,500 US\$ per room depending on how far local resources - rock, timber, sand and labour - can be used. Four rooms therefore would cost 16,000 - 22,000 US\$.



RRN propose building a one-storey two classroom block similar in design to the one under construction here (photo: RRN).

Ideally a further two rooms would be needed as a science room and a resource room (library-music-art room). This would cost a further 8,000 - 11,000 US\$.

In the longer term, the school would like to build a students' hostel to put up students who come from the furthest areas of the district and have to walk 2 hours or more to school.

- **School management:** The headteacher is a good maths teacher but is not a good administrator or disciplinarian. This means that the school is poorly managed. In order to address this, Mohan Shresta will join the school in the new session in April to assist the headteacher with managing the day-to-day administration of the school. Mohan has good experience deputising in a school in Helambu and as well as being a good administrator, he is a very good English teacher who also can teach music and art. Whilst these subjects are not included in the Nepali government school curriculum, it is hoped to provide the students at the school the opportunity to get involved in music and art on Friday afternoons when lessons finish at 1pm.

- **Teachers:** The teaching style of most of the teachers is very traditional and in particular the primary class teachers have little training in teaching. These teachers urgently need some training.

Global Action Nepal (GAN), a UK NGO is proposing a programme of teacher training in Deusa and a couple of neighbouring villages. Subject to funding, GAN will send trainers to help improve women's literacy as well as train teachers in all of the schools in the district.

In the mean time, teacher training books have been brought to the school and the teachers are being encouraged to read these.



Books in Nepali on teaching a range of subjects at different levels

- **English teaching:** Dev started teaching at the beginning of 2007. He has just registered to study for a BEd at the local college in Sallery. His English is a good standard as he spent most of his school years in India. Until now Kem, the other English teacher has been opposed to relinquishing senior classes to Dev, despite Dev's English is better. The headteacher is addressing this in the next session. He has been recommended to share Class 9 and 10 between Dev and Mohan to provide Classes 9 and 10 with a good standard of English teaching in order to help them pass their English paper in the SLC.

- **Drop-outs and absenteeism**

Forty five children dropped out during the course of the year: a few from every class. Whilst the reasons are expected to be due to change in school attended, sickness, poverty and working, the reason for each child is never checked and nothing is done to encourage parents to make sure that their children go to school. The headteacher promises that this will be monitored and acted on from the next session and I will check that this is happening.

Other schools in Deusa VDC

There is a lower secondary school and a number of pre-school nurseries and primary schools in Deusa VDC. About 6,000 people live in the district, with around 600 families scattered across a wide area that can take 2-3 hours to get from one side to the other.

Dudh Kausika Lower Secondary School, Ranmen, Deusa

This school has 320 students in classes 1 to 8, with 7 teachers and a 10-room school building (built by RRN). However there is **NO** toilet for either students or teachers. It will cost 75,000 to 100,000 rupees (1,200-1,600 US\$) to build two toilets and provided with the funds, RRN would also be willing to build the toilets for this school.

Dalit infant school

This school is located about 30 minutes from the secondary school. This three class school has 60 children but just one teacher (described as not particularly good). The building has several serious cracks in the end walls and there is concern that the building could easily collapse. Dev has made application to RRN and is also consulting with the Education Office on repairing the building. Ideally an additional primary school teacher is needed here (this might cost 3,000-4,500 rupees per month (600-900 US\$ per year).



Dalit primary school (photo: Keshab Rai)

Other projects

Good quality coffee is grown in Deusa, but there is little local demand. By selling this in Kathmandu, the farmer will get a good price but then also any profit I can make by selling it on can go to the school. It is anticipated that Arunjit can produce about 50 kg of roasted coffee that is to be brought to Kathmandu by villagers visiting the city. Assuming a wholesale price of 350 rupees per

kg going to Arunjit and about 300 rupees being earned as profit for the school, this could raise up to 15,000 rupees (250 US\$) for the school.

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Investigation is being made into selling cardamom and other plants in Kathmandu to raise money for the farmers.

Coffee plant



Costs	Jan - Dec 2008		
Deusa	Salaries	£	\$
English teacher	60,000	£500	\$1,000
Science teacher	130,000	£1,060	\$2,120
Asst to Head/Teacher (start 15 April 08)	90,000	£730	\$1,460
Total salaries	280,000	£2,290	\$4,580
Construction projects			
4 classrooms Deusa Secondary School	1,200,000	£10,000	\$20,000
Toilets for Lower Secondary School	100,000	£800	\$1,600
Repairs to primary school	?	?	?
Building costs	1,300,000	£10,800	\$21,600