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Inclusive Resource Management Initiative (IRMI)

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Inclusive Resource Management Initiative: Working Districts and VDCs

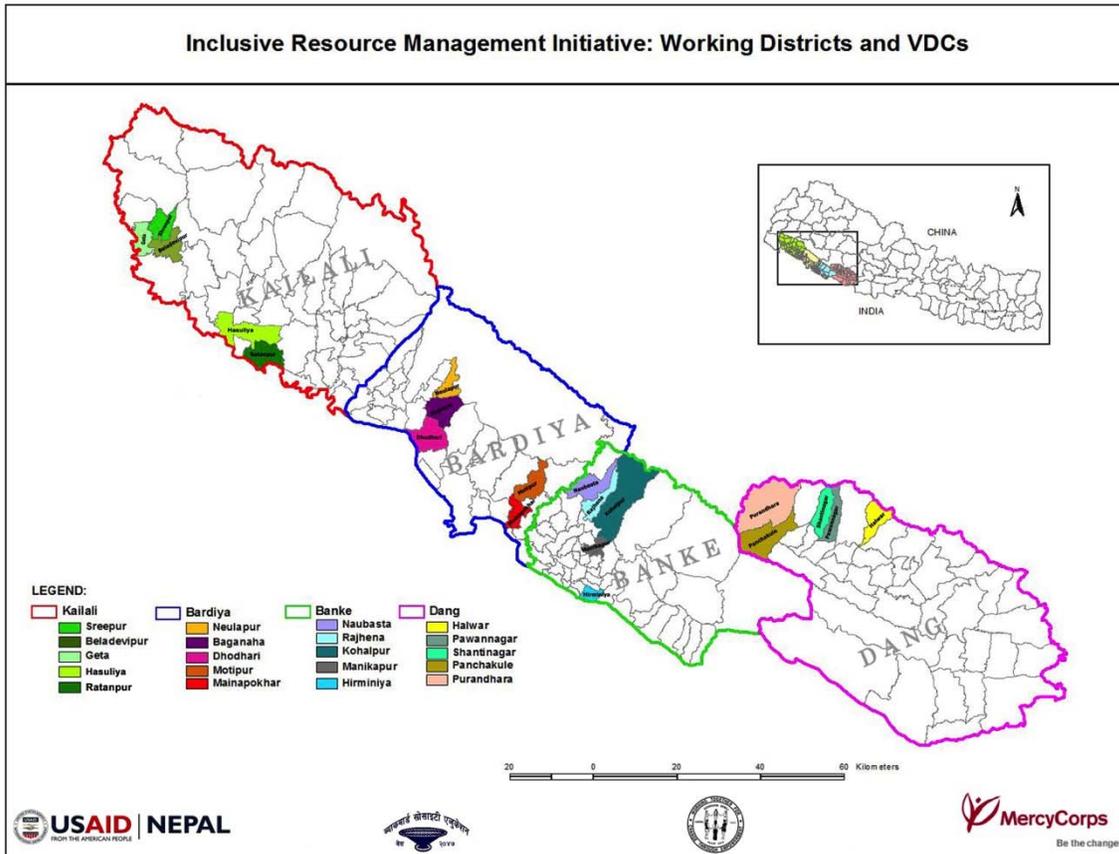


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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFO	Area Forest Office
BASE	Backward Society Education
CA	Constituent Assembly
CDO	Chief District Officer
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
DEO	District Education Officer
DFO	District Forest Officer
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest User Group
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
FNRM	Forum for Natural Resource Management
INGO	International Non Governmental Organization
IRMI	Inclusive Resource Management Initiative
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGCDP	Local Governance and Community Development Program
MC	Mercy Corps
SS	Sahakarmi Samaj
TAF	The Asia Foundation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCO	Women and Children's Office

1. Program Overview

Mercy Corps continues to implement the USAID-funded Inclusive Resource Management Initiative (IRMI) to support Nepal's transition to a more peaceful, equitable society. The program aims to enhance stability through natural resource conflict resolution and inclusive natural resource management in four districts. The program intervention strategy is through a holistic and people-to-people approach that:

1. Facilitates the resolution of resource-based conflicts;
2. Promotes inclusive decision-making related to natural resource use and management;
3. Reduces natural resource competition through joint environmental and economic initiatives.

Mercy Corps is successfully working with its two local partners, Backward Society Education (BASE) and Sahakarmi Samaj (SS), to implement program activities targeting 20 Village Development Committees (VDCs) in four districts of the western Terai, including Kailali, Bardiya, Banke and Dang. The expected program beneficiaries are approximately 237,000 people living in the target areas.

II. Overview of Achievements this Quarter

In building the future for resource-based conflict management initiatives, Mercy Corps and local partners have indicated that the greatest strength—and the key to IRMI's success—is building the capacity of key program stakeholders through the training of partners' staff (TOTs). During this quarter, these trained TOTs started rolling out trainings to some of the mobilized stakeholders at the community level on conflict analysis and resolution and interest-based community mediation skills for



IRMI TOT Training in May 2014

five days. The purpose is to create a reputable culture, strategies, and inclusive environment that enables stakeholders to contribute to their maximum potential, and to their mutual benefit, on Natural Resource Management (NRM) issues in their respective communities.

Objective 1: Strengthen the ability of key stakeholders to resolve community-level natural resource conflicts in an inclusive, sustainable manner.

Activity 1.1 Map natural resource conflicts. This activity was supposed to have been implemented in **June and July 2013** but was delayed due to in-country political transitional activities and cultural festivals. Due to this late kick –start, this activity was conducted from **December 2013 to February 2014**. The participatory mapping exercise identified 20 VDCs where the program is being implemented, as well as the core conflicts that the program aims to resolve. Mercy Corps designed the mapping tools and supervised the exercise, while BASE and Sahakarmi Samaj conducted the exercise. IRMI's selection process was designed with enough flexibility to allow for the inclusion of single or multiple, user groups in target VDCs, depending on the specific nature of the identified conflict (i.e. inter or intra CFUG).

Activity 1.2 Conduct joint training for key stakeholders in conflict analysis and resolution.

During this quarter, Mercy Corps and partners completed the identification, orientation and training of 345 out of 400 program stakeholders in the target VDCs. The two partners identified the stakeholders following selection criteria developed and discussed prior in community consultative meetings. Prior to this, as highlighted earlier, Mercy Corps and the two partners conducted 20 rounds of stakeholder orientation sessions in the 20 target VDCs, reaching out to some 345 participants out of the 400 stakeholders initially mobilized and selected by the partners. Of these, 103 were female and 242 male. The purpose was to introduce IRMI program aims and objectives and also to discuss their expected roles and responsibilities in the program. The stakeholders were very positive about the strategies and promised to work with Mercy Corps and partners to lay solid foundations for resource-based conflict resolution, and management.

From 21-30th May 2014, Mercy Corps mobilized IRMI partners' staff from Backward Society Education (BASE) and Sahakarmi Samaj (SS) to take part in a 10-day training on community

mediation and conflict analysis skills. The training provided basic skills related to identifying community and inter-personal issues that are often times fueled by lack of access to and ability to use natural resources in the target communities. The training was made possible through the support and consent of Pact Inc. to use their training materials, which are closely related to the IRMI program context in building local capacities for conflict mitigation through community mediation skills. A lead national trainer Mr. Hari Pandit facilitated the training in collaboration with the Mercy Corps team. The lead trainer handled most of the topics related to the concept of interest-based mediation and negotiation skills, while the Mercy Corps team collaborated to provide additional inputs and focus on areas of natural resource-based conflict and conflict analysis. The 10-day training brought together IRMI partners and Mercy Corps staff to discuss issues around the program objectives and how best we could forge ahead with some of the pending crucial activities. The sessions provided in depth discussions on NRM issues, planning for stakeholder's trainings at VDC levels, and also provided partners with the basic tools and skills, handouts, presentations and modules that will support them in kick-starting their own trainings.

Seven stages/steps of interest-based mediation

- I. Introduction, welcome & orientation on mediation processes. Highlights on maintaining confidentiality
- II. Ground rules/norm setting in consensus with the disputing parties
- III. Listening to disputes/stories one by one and then in plenary session.
- IV. Disputing parties understanding each other
- V. Caucus; Listening to both parties one after the other/separately, especially to identify hidden interests
- VI. Generating options for each issue, one issue at a time.
- VII. Reaching to agreements, generating

The training was participatory as trainees were asked to discuss key issues in groups and then to present group reports, which were further discussed in plenary sessions. Issues were related to natural resource use and conflict associated with them, and gender versus natural resource conflicts, to name a few. This provided in depth discussions on some of these topics and further related those issues to their respective districts and how they could be handled. Mediation role-play exercises were also part of the approach utilized. The seven steps/stages of mediation were roll-played and further discussed, allowing participants to give helpful feedback to each other in groups (see text box). The participants were further introduced to the concept of multi-stakeholders and group mediation skills, which will be more thoroughly handled in the next round of training in August/September 2014.

The training was also punctuated with sightseeing and jungle visits. Prior to this, the Acting Chief Conservation Officer of Bardiya National Park, Mr. Ashok Bhandai, made a presentation to the participants highlighting the prevailing conflict context between the game park and the community. Some of these conflicts, he says, including destruction of homes, crops, property and untimely deaths of some community residents by wild animals, continue to affect the population living within and around the national park. He mentioned that the government has not compensated some of the affected or bereaved families and this could lead to localized conflict and confrontations in the future if not carefully handled. These interaction visits within the community and heads of the national park provided interesting and relevant insights into the types of conflicts associated with natural resources and how the local residents have been negatively impacted and still continue to be marginalized in terms of access, compensation and inclusion in benefiting from the national park. One local resident, had this to say, *"We are normally attacked by wild animals here in the community. Some weeks ago, some wild elephants invaded the community at night in search of food. This is common here and we are always at a loss, no compensation from anyone"* Some 21 participants fully participated in the training. Of these, 8 were female and 13 male (see Annex 1 for figures).

In addition, the trained TOTs have also mobilized the stakeholders in their respective VDCs to replicate similar trainings which have been described by the participants as very “successful and mind opening.” Mercy Corps and USAID teams monitored some of the sessions in the target districts jointly. So far, 421 stakeholders have participated in five days training sessions conducted in 20 VDCs. The attendance and enthusiasm were demonstrated by (185 female and



IRMI Key Stakeholders Training at VDC level June 2014

236 male) participants (*See annex 2 for list of those targeted*). The successful submission of the baseline study during this quarter marks another milestone as program teams seek to identify resource-based conflicts affecting target communities.

Activity 1.3 Facilitate the development of conflict resolution agreements by key stakeholders.

During the last month of the quarter, having identified and trained program key stakeholders, Mercy Corps started preparations to pave the way for implementation of environmentally sustainable economic activities in the districts as per the original proposal. This activity was originally slated for **October 2013**, but again was delayed due to late program start. This is rescheduled from **July 2014** onwards. However, BASE and Sahakarmi Samaj, with Mercy Corps oversight, is currently conducting a market analysis study in the 20 CFUGs to determine activities capable of mitigating localized conflicts related to natural resource management and use. Stakeholders are currently busy setting up Forum for Natural Resource Management (FNRM) that would facilitate their ability to address issues that could possibly lead to violent confrontation between forest user group members. This will enable stakeholders to start developing conflict resolution agreements. The agreement will include a plan to support its sustainability through environmental and economic initiatives related to objective three.

Objective 2: Increase inclusive and participatory resource-related decision-making among community and government bodies.

Activity 2.1 Strengthen internal governance of community user groups.

In **April 2014**, the IRMI program team facilitated community user groups’ self-capacity assessment. The assessment was built on five main indicators: 1. Resource availability, 2. Organizational capacity of CFUGs, 3. Inclusion of the poor and the excluded communities, 4. Forest management and 5. Coordination and collaboration between groups/bodies. During these sessions, the user groups identified their gaps, some of which include lack of transparency, low participation of group members in meetings, exclusion of marginalized groups, internal leadership and coordination issues with and between like-minded organizations/bodies, no financial accountability system in place, and poor service delivery, to name just a few. Based on these organizational self-assessment gaps identified, Mercy Corps continues to design capacity building programs for each user group, being implemented by BASE and Sahakarmi Samaj with oversight by the Mercy Corps team. These include training in participatory facilitation and gender sensitivity; resource mapping; development of a strategic plan to improve internal governance targets for increased transparency, inclusion, and conflict management; advocacy and governance workshops; and ongoing mentoring through the implementation of this plan. Mercy Corps will continue to employ enough flexibility in

structuring these forums at the VDC and/or DDC levels to optimize stakeholder learning and information sharing opportunities.

Activity 2.2 Raise awareness of rights and responsibilities related to natural resources.

Following the training of IRMI program key stakeholder in June 2014 on resource-based conflict analysis, interest-based negotiation and dispute resolution skills, efforts are being made to gather some of the information, education and communication (IEC) materials in a bid to launch district and national based awareness raising campaigns on the rights and responsibilities related to natural resource use and management. During this quarter, Mercy Corps and partners have started coordinating with relevant DDC, VDC, DFO, and DLRO officials and user group networks to plan and execute an extension education program on government policies related to natural resources and the rights of various categories of Nepalis. The program will include mass media, such as radio and SMS as well as community outreach meetings, with emphasis on reaching women and marginalized groups. This will be fully reported in the next quarter.

Activity 2.3 Support community participation in government decision-making processes.

This activity was slated for March 2014, but will now be conducted in **October and November 2014**. Mercy Corps will explore opportunities to coordinate these activities with Local Governance and Community Development Programs (LGCDP's) Citizen Awareness Center and Ward Citizen Forums when appropriate. This will build on the extension education program by ensuring that community members have the skills and opportunity to voice their concerns and propose solutions so that government plans are shaped by community priorities. BASE and Sahakarmi Samaj with oversight by Mercy Corps will work with user groups and community members, particularly women's groups and marginalized communities, in the 20 target sites to identify opportunities for participation in government planning processes, develop strategies for articulating their demands, and participate in government planning processes.

Objective 3: Enhance the sustainability of negotiated agreements by engaging communities in joint environmental and economic development initiatives.

Activity 3.1 Community peace building forums. Shortly after stakeholders' trainings, in June 2014, trained members have started convening a series of forums in each target site to disseminate information about the conflict resolution agreement and to discuss how the agreement can be supported through changes in natural resource use and management and alternative economic opportunities.

Activity 3.2 Joint natural resource management initiatives. This activity will be implemented in **July and August 2014**. **Note: This activity has no budget attached to it. However, the program team will merge this with (Activity 3.3) below to support environmental preservation initiatives through well thought out activities.**

Activity 3.3 Support environmentally sustainable economic initiatives. These activities will build on Mercy Corps' value-chain development programming in Nepal as well as previous programs like the USAID-funded *Business Development Services – Marketing, Production, and Service*.

III. Contextual Update/ Operating Environment

Nepal is a country of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Geographically, Nepal is diverse and most people live in villages. Livelihoods of rural Nepalis are based on the traditional agriculture system and are typically heavily dependent on a limited natural resource base, the access to and sharing of which has for long been a major trigger of localized conflicts.

Politically, these days, Nepal is in a transitional stage after the fall of the 250-year long monarchy system following a 10-year Maoist insurgency and a further 10 years of stagnant political deadlock. The country is now struggling to move toward a formal federal republican system. After the end of the decade-long Maoist insurgency late in 2013, the country is now facing varying challenges of political transformation at state and local levels, leading Nepali society towards more reactive phenomena. In this context, access to justice and peace building and an established harmonious society at the community level have been urgent needs in Nepal. Local residents in the Terai regions continue to battle with resource-based conflicts, which Mercy Corps and other like-minded partners are trying to address through environmentally sustainable, community-endorsed activities. In this context, there is a demand for Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR) to bring peace and harmony between and among rural communities. From among the ADR approaches, community mediation is one of the most effective methods of dispute resolution conducted based on the interests of the disputants and settled using a democratic approach for both or all parties.

The Nepalese formal legal system has not adequately reached the poor, marginalized, women and religious minorities. As the legal system is costly and tardy, poor and marginalized people lack access to basic rights or have little to no opportunity to voice their concerns. In such a situation, community mediation programs can play a crucial role in resolving disputes and can substantively contribute to bringing long-lasting peace in the country. Mercy Corps through the USAID-funded IRMI program is strengthening capacities of key stakeholders on Interest-Based Community Mediation (IBCM) in Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Kailali districts in partnership with two local partners: Backward Society Education (BASE) and Sahakarmi Samaj (SS). The IBCM can be a useful tool for natural resources conflict management in the target districts.

IV. Challenges and Lessons Learned:

- Farming season and internal country politics caused some delays in key stakeholder trainings in Kailali district, where local elections prevented staff and participants' movements.
- Some forest user groups and some political leaders at district level continue to face challenges between and amongst themselves. This will be one of IRMI's next quarterly activities to help stakeholders find solutions to improve some of the strained relationships by holding district-wide consultative meetings.

V. Coordination Meetings:

- Mercy Corps held a coordination meeting with Pact Inc. to solicit support for interest-based training modules, which led to the sharing of resources, experiences and staff, culminating in successful TOT training at field level.
- USAID and Mercy Corps conducted stakeholders' training monitoring visits in the four target districts. It also provided time to discuss pending IRMI activities and how this could impact the overall intervention model. At the close of the monitoring visit, the team had an evaluation meeting. This was the first meeting Mercy Corps had with Ms. Reshma Thapa following the successful monitoring of IRMI key stakeholders training, which was held between 7th- 26th June 2014. Reshma Thapa, the USAID Democracy and Governance Specialist joined the team from the 17th through 26th June 2014 to participate in the monitoring of IRMI stakeholders training in Banke, Bardia, Dang and Kailali districts. In her remarks, Ms. Thapa thanked Mercy Corps and partners for a job well done. According to her, she was satisfied with the trainings and was overwhelmed by great turnouts and the

enthusiasm demonstrated by both trainers and participants in all the centers she visited. Ms. Thapa was quick to commend the inclusivity of women and girls in the program, which she noted is one of the key areas of the IRMI program.

- So far, some 421 (185 female and 236 male) IRMI stakeholders have successfully completed the first round of 5-day training on “Interest-based mediation skills” in 20 VDCs. The Mercy Corps team, headed by the Program Manager Samuel Koroma, also praised the untiring efforts of the TOTs and the eager participants who, despite the heat in some of the training rooms, were very active and demonstrated great interest.
- Reshma Thapa, however, was concerned about the age brackets of some of the key stakeholders participating to become community mediators. She said that, according to the latest *“The Mediation Act requires the age limitation of 25 years old to become a community mediator.”* She noted with reservation that the IRMI program calls for more inclusivity that could have led to the inclusion of some of the youth/under-aged members being trained as mediators. Samuel Koroma also confirmed that IRMI’s target remains more inclusive as indicated in the proposal. The meeting, however, maintained that IRMI would adhere to the national policy demands and would inform the trained stakeholders and their TOTs on what is being expected by the Government of Nepal. This approach is also a component of the IRMI program in that communities are made aware of Government policies and their rights and responsibilities thereunder. This will be communicated during up-coming consultative meetings with the trained stakeholders from July 2014 onwards. The meeting further resolved that IRMI would embrace more inclusive community dialogue and negotiation trainings separately that would ensure sustainability of negotiated agreements between and amongst different age groups.

VI. Monitoring and Evaluation

MC staff and partner teams are regularly monitoring the ongoing program activities in the field through field visits and coordination meetings with like-minded development partners and community leaders. Monitoring focuses on reviewing project achievements/accomplishments versus targets, identifying issues and concerns affecting project implementation, and recommending corrective measures when necessary.

MC continues to provide technical support to partner staff to conduct planned activities in an effective manner. On-site coaching is also being used to steer project activities. Partner executive members are also monitoring activities and supporting IRMI in the conducting thereof. Mercy Corps is documenting quarterly beneficiary data through partner activities. The Mercy Corps Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, together with the IRMI team, will continue to be an integral part of analyzing and reporting on data to the donor, stakeholders and, once relevant, project beneficiaries. IRMI program staff continues to analyze data on a monthly basis to inform project management decisions.

VII. Conclusion

Despite initial kick-start constraints, Mercy Corps continues to accelerate IRMI activities through close collaboration with like-minded partners and to build the capacities of local partners and community stakeholders. While we remain cautious of potential challenges around the current political transformation that may impact program activities in ways that are difficult to predict, including the recent serious illness of the current Prime Minister of Nepal and the political implications thereof, MC is well positioned to advance IRMI objectives and will

accelerate program activities in the next quarter as outlined below. However, Mercy Corps and partners are currently developing a no-cost-extension request to allow successful completion of all program activities.

VIII. Upcoming activities for the next quarter

Project activities for the next quarter will include the following:

1. Support the identification and implementation of 20 environmentally sustainable economic initiatives through conducting participatory market analysis study to determine viable economic projects capable of mitigating resource based-conflicts.
2. Facilitate the development of conflict resolution agreements by key stakeholders.
3. Strengthen internal governance of Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs).
4. Raise awareness of rights and responsibilities related to natural resources.
5. Joint natural resource management initiative.

Annex 1. List of Trained IRMI TOTs (BASE and SS staff)

SN	Name	Organization	Position / Designation	Address	Age	Sex	Caste/ ethnicity (B/C, Dalit, Janajati, Madhes hi, Others)	Disability (Please state if you have any)
1	Laxman Chaudhary	BASE	Project Coordinator	Dang	36	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
2	Tilak Chaudhary	BASE	Information & Documentation Officer	Dang	36	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
3	Shanta Chaudhary	BASE	District Field Officer	Dang	37	F	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
4	Lokjan Chaudhary	BASE	District Field Officer	Kailali	49	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
5	Manoj Kumar Tharu	BASE	District Field Officer	Bardiya	30	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
6	Renuka Chaudhary	BASE	Social Mobilizer	Dang	30	F	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
7	Tak Bahadur Chaudhary	BASE	Social Mobilizer	Dang	42	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
8	Rama Chaudhary	BASE	Social Mobilizer	Bardiya	23	F	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
9	Laxmi Bhandari	BASE	Social Mobilizer	Bardiya	26	F	Bramhan	NA
10	Shova Kumari Thapa	BASE	Social Mobilizer	Kailali	27	F	Chhetri	NA
11	Jagdish Chaudhary	BASE	Social Mobilizer	Kailali	33	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
12	Anta Ram Chaudhary	BASE	District Vice President	Kailali	41	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
13	Rameshowar	BASE	Chairman Area No. -	Bardiya	32	M	Janajati	NA

	Tharu		1				(Tharu)	
14	Hemanta Chaudhary	BASE	BASE District Committee Member	Dang	39	M	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
15	Man Bir Nepali	Sahakar mi Samaj	Team Leader	Banke	41	M	Dalit	NA
16	Tank Bahadur Pun	Sahakar mi Samaj	Community Facilitator	Banke	27	M	Janajati (Magar)	NA
17	Pratima Rana (Gharti)	Sahakar mi Samaj	Community Facilitator	Banke	38	F	Janajati (Magar)	NA
18	Geeta Budha	Sahakar mi Samaj	Community Facilitator	Banke	24	F	Chhetri	NA
19	Binita Chaudhary	Sahakar mi Samaj	Community Facilitator	Banke	22	F	Janajati (Tharu)	NA
20	Hem Raj Bhatta	Sahakar mi Samaj	Community Facilitator	Banke	27	M	Bramhan	NA
21	Rajaram Gupta	Sahakar mi Samaj	Sr Organization Development Facilitator	Banke	44	M	Madhesi	NA

Annex 2. Number of IRMI key stakeholders trained June 2014

SN	Distri ct	VDC	CFUG	Femal e	Mal e	Tot al
1	Banke	Kohalpur	Miteri CFUG	12	9	21
		Naubasta	Sungava CFUG	11	12	23
		Rajhena	Jana Ekata CFUG	13	8	21
		Manikapur	Jaya Saraswati CFUG	15	6	21
		Hirminiya	Hajrat CFUG	6	19	25
2	Bardiy a	Dhodhari	Kotahi Women's CFUG	4	16	20
		Baganaha	Jharsaluwa CFUG	7	13	20
		Neulapur	Kopila CFUG	8	13	21
		Mainapokhar	Bhadohi CFUG	13	10	23
		Motipur	Ekta CFUG	8	13	21
3	Dang	Purandhara	Devidanda CFUG	8	12	20
		Panchakule	Satpokhari Hurum CFUG	7	15	22
		Shantinagar	Sirjana CFUG	8	12	20
		Pawannagar	Viewdahar CFUG	7	13	20
		Halawar	Jarayotakuri CFUG	10	10	20
4	Kailali	Hasuliya	Kamalpokhari CFUG	11	9	20
		Ratanpur	Shivashakti CFUG	7	14	21
		Shreepur	Suryodaya CFUG	9	12	21
		Beladevipur	Sitaram CFUG	8	13	21
		Geta	Sahid Sanghari Bhim Dutta Pant	13	7	20
Total	4	20	20	185	236	421

Annex 3: Impact Stories (Partner Submitted)

On the Way to Improvement By BASE staff

Kotahi Mahila CFUG is located in Dhodhari VDC-5 Basanta, Bardiya and it was handed over by District Forest Office Bardiya in 2065. Since then, this CFUG had no proper management system, didn't hold regular meetings, didn't manage their documents properly, including the well-being ranking of users, proper records of budget, bank signatures and other such serious oversights. All these gaps were due to the fact that there was conflict between new and old committee members.

BASE started its portion of the IRMI program in this CFUG through different activities. We carried out a self-capacity assessment in April 2014. Then we began to develop an operational plan based on the assessment findings and are taking action accordingly. As per plan, the CFUG has conducted a participatory well-being ranking and, according to that ranking, they have ranked all 70 households into three categories; A -10, B -12 and C-48. They have also changed their bank account authorization signatures in the name of the current executive committee members from those of the previous



New Chair lady for the CFUG

committee members. Now new members Mrs. Yoga Kumari Gautam, Chairperson, and Mrs. Sun Kumari Chaudhary, Treasurer, are duly authorized. The previous committee had failed to change the check signatures because they had conflict between new and old committee members. But now they have started properly maintaining the official documents of the CFUG that were lacking and this is helping them to be more accountable.

The CFUG is now conducting regular activities as per their new operational plan, including the holding of monthly meetings, updating the check authorization signatures, following the members' well-being ranking, etc. Yoga Kumari Gautam, Chairperson of CFUG said, "The self capacity assessment has been a very useful tool and it has supported us in reflecting on the real status of our CFUG as a mirror." She also added that "After the SCA, we made a plan to improve the way we work as per the findings and it has helped us to strengthen our CFUG." They are also implementing a forest animal shelter management program, coordinating with the District Forest Office and they are continuing their regular CFUG monthly meetings the second week of each month. This is a positive change in the CFUG effected through the IRMI program.

Heading Towards Headway

By BASE staff

Shivasakti CFUG is located at Ratanpur VDC, ward no 7, Kailali District. It has 73 households with a population of 430. The Shivasakti CFUG had been dormant with no responsible management committee that could spearhead the day-to-day affairs of the VDC. The users used to bring wood and firewood without the permission of members of the Executive Committee. Users and other people of this area used to participate in the illegal hunting of wild animals unchecked. There was no regular monthly meeting for a long time. Those meetings used to occur sometimes in two and sometimes three months and, even with those meetings, there was no proper system in place to track action points that would remind officials what needed to be done. All these lapses caused the committee to be passive and totally indifferent to some of the conflicts within and between community residents. The fund of Shivasakti Community Forest Users Group was not separated from Lamki and Saraswati CFUG. The boundary of Shivasakti community forest with Shiva and Sahara community forest was not separated and this used to cause violent conflicts among users.



FCFUG Meeting with BASE staff

Shivasakti, Lamki and Saraswati community forest users didn't understand which community forest they belonged to, because there was no identity card system in place that could help clarify their membership in the respective community forests. There was total confusion between members and all the activities were being conducted with no one caring about the outcome. There was only one secretary to run the daily activities of three community forests. Although Lamki CFUG is not part of IRMI operational area, yet the management system in place was fused with together with no clear-cut distinction between the leadership structures.

After Baseline and Natural Resource Mapping exercises were conducted with the support of Mercy Corps, Lamki and Saraswati community forests users and members have been made aware of their duties and responsibilities. They have begun to manage their activities, such as bringing firewood and wood from their own community forest. They have their own separate fund or budget now. Moreover, they each have an individual secretary for day-to-day activities of each of the CFUGs that used to be manned by just one single secretary.

During the carrying out of the Baseline Survey activities, the users came to know to which community forest they belong. BASE staff has further facilitated each of the user groups to have identity cards to help sort out the initial confusion that have plagued them. After that, all the users and members of the Executive Committees of Shivasakti, Lamki and Saraswati gathered and discussed together. Following this new initiative, a consultative meeting was held and during this meeting, the newly formed executive members provided identity cards to their users/members.

The Group Self Capacity Assessment has created a sort of environment where the users of community forests are able to get identity cards with photos. The executive of the CFUG made these cards possible through the renewed coordination. This was done when BASE staff

motivated them to make identity cards for each CFUG member. Currently, they are using the community forest as per the identity card stipulation. Since then they have used these cards properly.

BASE staff have facilitated awareness raising between and amongst the once confused groups making them more responsible, motivated and well organized. Each user group is now responsible for the management of their community forest, consulting amongst themselves, and has now instituted monthly meetings. Previously, men and women didn't show any interest and didn't much care about the management of the community forests. Now, they are becoming more responsive for their community forests and are poised to manage the forests in a more inclusive and participatory way. There is an intimate interaction within the members of the youth club for the management of their community forests. They are now seen taking bold steps toward looking after their forests. These restructured committees have decided to hold monthly meetings with the chief of village (*Valmansa*), teachers and other intellectuals to make the forest management transparent, participatory and inclusive.

It is becoming a normal practice that there are regular monthly meetings held to discuss issues affecting them all. Planned activities are being taken into account as per their Action Plans. The fund of Shivasakti community forest is transparent, even though Shivasakti CFUG has a very small budget and no bank account. They mobilize the necessary funds as per their need.

Chhabi Lal Budhamagar, Vice President of Shivasakti Community Forest Users Group, said, "Before the implementation of the IRMI program, the members of our CFUG never really bothered to take care of the forest. But now they have started to do that. The distribution of identity cards has made them more aware, responsible and dutiful for the management of the community forest."

Bimala Chaudhary, user of Shivasakti community forest, said, "This IRMI program has encouraged and energized the female users of this community forest. Females are more active in preserving and managing the jungle. But before this time, they were not interested in doing that."

Chhaya Sapkota (the member of Wada Civil society) said, "All the members and users are ready to preserve the jungle/community forest. There are regular meetings and these meetings occur in a peaceful environment. But before the implementation of this project, there was no regular meeting."