Bringing up Children in a changing world

WHO'S RIGHT?   WHOSE RIGHTS?

Conversations
with Families
in Nepal

Child-rearing studies – systematic descriptions and analyses of how a culture raises its children — are few and far between. Those which look at indigenous child-rearing with a sympathetic eye are even more unusual. And those that do all of this within a framework of child rights are virtually unknown. This book on child-rearing practices in Nepal is therefore of particular value in the literature and practice of early childhood care and development.

Several things make this study important:
● Its starts from what families already know about raising their children and suggests a sensitive combination of insider and outsider perspectives on the process – one which attempts both to preserve stabilising, traditional practices and to introduce new knowledge and behaviours which can help children and their families adapt to the needs and challenges of a rapidly changing world.
● It demonstrates clear evidence of the need for more comprehensive, synergistic approaches to child care and development, with a concern for health and nutritional status as well as cognitive, psycho-social, and emotional development.
● It stresses the importance of using a child rights framework to assess the extent to which "dutybearers" – at all levels of society – are fulfilling their obligations to help fulfill the rights of children.
● It demonstrates an important methodological advance in the implementation of such child-rearing studies, through dialogue with, reflection by, and the active participation of families and communities in the research.
● It shows the strengths of using a broad combination of partners in such research, bringing to the study the perspectives and expertise of international and local NGOs, a UN agency, and both "southern" and "northern" academic research centres.

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A Roadmap for Readers

Not all chapters in this book will be of equal interest or utility to all readers. There are sections that are more pertinent for those in Nepal, others that are especially relevant for those involved in early childhood programming, still others which are of interest to those coming from a broad-based rights background. The following outline should serve as a guide to readers.

The chapters are guided by a child rights framework which places children at the centre, but recognises that their well-being is influenced by factors at many levels - not only by family, friends and school, but also the larger forces of culture, politics and economy that influence and define local experience.

Chapter one: An Introduction to the Study, outlines the central role that programming for young children has in helping to ensure children's rights. It discusses the goals and scope of this research, as well as the methods used. It also looks at the situation of children in Nepal, the policy climate and formal structures for dealing with children's issues, and the current state of early childhood programming in the country. This last section is especially pertinent for those in Nepal , but it can serve as a basis for comparison with realities in other countries.

Chapter two: Village Context, looks at the four villages where this study took place. It considers family structure, economic realities, gender, caste and class relations, social and political factors, change and the very terrain that villages are set in. These factors all help to shape how families operate and to define the lives and experience of their children.

Chapter three: Child Rearing Beliefs and Values. For early childhood programming to be vital and effective, it has to be built on the specific values and concerns that have currency within a particular setting. This chapter therefore looks at the cultural norms, beliefs and values underlying parental practices, and parents' hopes, expectations and concerns for their both their sons and daughters. It also considers parents' perceptions about the opportunities that will be available to their children in the future and the skills they will need to take advantage of them.

Chapter four: Daily Routines and Responsibilities, focuses on the children themselves and those who interact with them and care for them on a day-to-day basis. It is concerned with the everyday realities of children's lives - eating and sleeping, staying healthy and getting sick, play, work, school, discipline and special events. This chapter considers how parental practices are shaped by the realities of everyday life, by the actual time caregivers have available to them, and by the pressures they operate under.

Chapter five: Implications for Children, is an analysis of the implications of practices within the four villages for the rights of the girls and boys - their right to supportive secure families, to health and to protection from harm, to emotional security and identity, to opportunities for learning, and to participation as people whose opinions are respected. A significant aspect of this discussion is the impact of change for these communities' child rearing practices.

Chapter six: Summary of Key Findings, attempts to summarise both the strengths and the limitations in the efforts made in the four communities on behalf of their children, drawing on dialogue with community members and the observations of researchers. This section also considers the methodological lessons learned from the process.

Chapter seven: Conclusions and Recommendations: Strengthening Support for Children's Development, consists of guidelines for responding to the major concerns raised by the study. The chapter makes suggestions not only for action within families and communities, but also for mechanisms and policies at district and national levels that can ensure implementation and work towards systemic change.

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Preface

In our children we often see the best of our lives. How they live, how they play, how they think, how they grow – these are some of the most profound concerns of all adults, especially for parents. In each of our cultures and families, through raising children, we want to transfer the best of ourselves to the next generation. This often means that through our own children we return within ourselves to that very human search for what we value most and wish to maintain. Our children bring us back to our heart's deepest core and greatest fears. This eternal subject of raising children is spoken of within great literature, poetry and religious thought. In this early 21ᵗ Century, the subject of raising children in a fast-changing world concerns us no less.

Yet, within the world of international development, too often the effort to modernize and gain wealth neglects that which is most precious: our children. And within our development agencies — whose main objective is improve children's lives – often we have forgotten families' concern for their children. In our eagerness to do good for children, we have often entered into communities as if we were the ones who really know what is best for their children.

Therefore, the major aim of this research has been to put things back into perspective. Family, community and culture are the heart of Nepal. Nepalis of all castes and ethnic groups have been bringing up and nurturing their children for centuries. They have accumulated knowledge and developed a conventional wisdom as to what is best for their children. There is much for affluent societies to learn from many of these traditions. But, in Nepal, just as in Norway, or the UK or US, conventional wisdom is not always right. One of the gifts of our rapidly changing world is the opportunity to make new perspectives and knowledge available to families and communities. The great challenge is to do this in a way in which genuine discussion around different ideas is possible – resulting in the generation of new insights for all of us…..and better chances for children.

To this end the research has explored ways to initiate a more meaningful dialogue with parents and other caregivers about how to best build a positive future for their children. The study has tried to document beliefs and practices about children rearing in a number of distinct communities in Nepal. It has also tried to document processes which promote fruitful dialogue.

This report threrefore is the first step in the process of sharing our findings with a large public. It will be followed by a companion document which will provide more detail on the techniques and methods used that can serve as a framework for others who wish to undertake similar studies or wish to use the approaches as an integral part of parenting/caregiving programmes.

Lastly, we are proud that this has been a collaborative effort involving local communities, community-based organizations, national NGOs, local and international academic and research organizations, UNICEF and the Save the Children Alliance in Nepal. We look forward to continuing work with our partners in the practical application of its recommendations. And we hope that the study provides inspiration regarding the positive changes and possibilities available to both children and us their ever loving and struggling parents.

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Executive Summary

ECD programmes and children's rights: Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes have often been equated with the idea of pre-school. Within the framework of children's rights, however, these programmes are being called on to take on a much broader role. Indeed they are being asked to occupy the very position that the best of them have already assumed as a responsibility for many years - that is, to serve as an integrated set of actions for ensuring young children's rights. Programmes are about ensuring that children grow up healthy and well-nourished, with a sense of identity and self-worth, that they are able to learn enthusiastically and effectively and interact positively with others, and that they are protected from factors that might harm them or put a brake on their development.

Study goals: This study of child rearing beliefs, goals and practices in four villages in Nepal, was undertaken with the recognition that parents and family are the primary agents in the achievement of young children's rights. Therefore, the broad mandate for programming for young children can only be successfully addressed if these programmes work closely with families and proceed with a clear understanding of parental concerns and priorities. Central to the study was a concern that many child development programmes around the world fail to recognize and respect families' and communities' achievements and resourcefulness in raising their children. The study is an attempt to achieve a balance - not shying away from the very real issues but giving attention also to the positive. It is also based on the understanding that we all have much to learn from each other - no one group having a monopoly on understanding of how best to raise children.

The study had three specific goals:
- to encourage approaches to ECD programming that build on the strengths, traditions, achievements and resourcefulness of parents and communities;
- to develop effective participatory methods for initiating discussion and dialogue with parents and other caregivers on key issues for young children;
- to expand the shared knowledge base for stronger programming which can be responsive to both local values and rapid social change.

The situation for children in Nepal: This study is highly relevant to realities in Nepal, where poverty and isolation still contribute to an under-five mortality rate of over 10 percent, where 60 percent of young children are malnourished, and where school enrollment, attendance and quality remain poor. In order to address the rights of their children to health and the full development of their potential, Nepalese families, faced with a changing world, need informed and responsive support. The policy framework in Nepal includes much that is supportive of children's rights, but the potential opportunities need to be better realized. In particular, there needs to be a greater recognition of, and more flexible response to, the capacity of ECD to address to the broad range of children's needs, and to provide parents with the support they require.

The approach and methods: The four villages selected for the study represent a range of conditions within Nepal in terms of environmental factors, social composition and local resources. It was not assumed, however, that findings could be generalized to reflect realities throughout Nepal. Rather, it was the

methods and overall approach that were considered to have broader application.

The study was qualitative and participatory in its methods, and made use of approaches based on participatory learning and action (PLA), as well as ethnographic interviews and observation. Research teams worked at community level with groups divided by gender, age and caste or ethnicity to gain a broad understanding of local perspectives on child rearing and children's development. In-depth case studies were also conducted with selected households in each village, for more detailed understanding of issues raised at community level. A good deal of attention was given to understanding the material and social circumstances in each village, with the recognition that child rearing is grounded in this larger context - in economic realities, environmental conditions, household structures, local power differences and the pressures of social change. The research aimed to create a conducive space in people's lives for joint reflection and discussion. Community members welcomed this opportunity to think and talk about their children and their own lives with the teams, and to work towards suggestions for change in their villages. The key issues considered in this report were identified for the most part by both community and team members. A refined version of the specific research "tools" is being prepared for further use - both by additional studies and as an integral part of parenting/caregiving programmes.

Survival strategies: Despite significant differences among and within villages, it was clear that most families struggle for survival and security. Subsistence agriculture is an increasingly tenuous base for survival. Most households cannot grow enough food for the whole year, and many must go into debt just to eat. This has resulted in the need for a wider range of livelihood strategies - especially the market and labour outside the villages. New livelihood strategies help improve survival rates, but can also have less positive impacts for children - such as absent family members and increased work loads.

The level of access in each village to services and facilities, not surprisingly, has a considerable impact on the overall quality of life. The two hill villages demonstrate this most clearly. Within the range presented by the four villages, these two are at the extremes in terms of provision of health care, access to water, to rice mills, and to local political decision-makers - and also in terms of illness, child mortality, literacy and general welfare. Traditional community norms and systems within these villages maintain order and stability, and offer support and security in times of difficulty. But stability can also mask the power differences within a community or family which contribute to the isolation and vulnerability of some. Caste and gender discrimination, especially, can be the basis for life-long exclusion, contributing to low self-esteem and limited chances in life.

Child care: Families in these villages love their children deeply, and treat young children especially with affection, indulgence and tenderness. Young children for the most part have a stimulating social environment with multiple caregivers and the opportunity to interact with many different people.

All family members contribute to their care, and even fathers were observed in many cases to be more involved than is generally reported. While older siblings have always had an important role in helping take care of young children, the trend towards nuclear families has meant that in some families responsibility is moving increasingly from grandparents and other adults to child caregivers.

In spite of the attention given to child care by all family members, heavy workloads inevitably affect the quality of care. Children's need for care, attention and interaction must often take second place to the effort to provide for basic survival. Occasionally, especially during peak seasons, and in households with few potential caregivers, this verges on serious neglect. Small children may remain for hours at a time without any kind of stimulation or adult oversight, or be dependent on the attention of siblings, themselves often young enough to require care. It is clear within all these villages that extra child care supports are required, especially during peak agricultural seasons

Health: All the villages face considerable problems with health, and in one village every family had lost at least one child in recent years. Apparent awareness about health issues does not translate into practice in either hygiene or prenatal care, and this gap calls for further investigation. Modern health facilities are difficult to access in all but Koldanda, one of the hill villages. No village health records are kept, with the result that health status cannot be monitored. However, exposure to modern practices is generally believed to have changed food habits and hygiene practices for the better. A respected traditional health system has not caused either parents or traditional healers to reject what modern medicine has to offer. Traditional health care responses still tend to be the first resort for most parents, but faith in modern medicine is increasing in all villages, partly because modern treatments often take effect more rapidly than herbal remedies. Modern and traditional systems of healing often function in complementary ways, but can also contribute to confusion and added expense at times. In general, people are open-minded, willing both to hold on to the best of the old, and to try whatever is accessible and affordable in the new. The fact that in Koldanda, where there is a health post, children are no longer dying, suggests that good use is being made of accessible services.

Injury: In all four villages there is an emphasis on adapting children to the realities of their challenging environments by increasing their awareness, competence and capacity to cope effectively with danger - they use sharp tools skillfully, learn to manage heavy loads on steep slopes, and understand the hazards in their surroundings. This is in strong contrast to many affluent countries where environments are constantly adapted for children's protection….at times clearly limiting their experience of life and their ability to cope with risk. But, as in most areas, there is a need for balance. Injury is a significant problem in all these villages. Anxiety about the safety of their young children causes parents to keep older children out of school to act as caregivers. Child care arrangements, especially in the peak seasons, basic safeguards around the house, and easily accessible health services for response to injuries could all make a difference.

Work and play: Much of children's play, here as in all cultures, consists essentially of copying adult tasks. Play is valued, in part, as a necessary preparation for these roles. In these communities, where survival is dependent on the contribution of all, children are expected to help from an early age. Children's work in these villages is regarded by the community as essential to learning the skills and habits that are fundamental to life. Parents' primary interest in teaching their children revolves around these work skills. Their expectations of what children should know by the time they start school (which include items like taking care of younger siblings and herding) demonstrate a much greater emphasis on practical work skills and social responsibility than would be expected in most affluent countries.

In most cases children move into work gradually - what begins as a playful imitation of adult roles slowly becomes a more significant contribution, until by the age of five to seven, children are taking on a growing range of tasks like herding sheep and carrying water. Children are not expected to execute these tasks with total responsibility. The distinctions between work and play are often blurred - and the younger the child, the more this is the case. During the early years especially, their contributions to the family enterprise are a significant source of self-respect and satisfaction to children and a valuable opportunity to acquire the competence they so desire, as well as the regard of others. Affluent countries

might do well to draw lessons from this. Anywhere in the world children who are expected to contribute responsibly within the family develop more altruism and a stronger sense of social responsibility. The emphasis in many affluent countries on developing children's self-esteem almost in a vacuum poses questions about the sort of people this is producing. Again the need may be for a middle path and indeed very real issues emerge as children grow older. As workloads increase and become merely rote performance of familiar tasks, the satisfaction and potential for learning diminish. Work for older children eats into time for play and relaxation, and often undermines chances of success at school.

Interaction and learning: People's child-rearing practices have been cast in the matrix of survival in poverty, and very naturally focus more on physical skills and social responsibility than on cognitive and emotional development. In general parents appreciate the importance of their contribution in ensuring that children are well fed and safe from harm. They are also very aware of their role in teaching their children the practical skills needed for daily subsistence, and they are competent instructors, utilizing a range of teaching strategies. But on the whole they tend to underestimate the significance of their key role in supporting children's broader learning, language and sense of themselves. There is a lack of understanding of the vital part that day-to-day conversation and activity can play in developing children's understanding of their world, and in supporting the confidence and communication skills they need to interact effectively with a changing world - in effect those capacities that have the greatest significance in enabling children to break the cycle of poverty.

However, there are parents who do in fact (some more consciously than others) take advantage of the huge learning potential in everyday situations. This potential has important programming implications - families can be encouraged to build on activities that

are already part of their daily routine, such as mealtimes, washing up or caring for animals. Simply talking more with children about what they are doing and providing them with everyday materials to use in different ways is an easy, no-cost support for children's development. The fact that parents are eager to learn more about their children's development, and how best to support it, is encouraging.

Aspirations and a changing world: With some minor variation among villages and groups, parents tend to have fairly traditional aspirations for their children. They want their sons to find good jobs so that they can support their parents in their old age, and they want their daughters to acquire the skills necessary to marry well and enhance the prestige of the family. But it can be confusing for parents to assess how best to prepare their children for a changing world. Livelihoods are changing, and parents know that still further change is likely for their children. Creating new possibilities within the village, and taking advantage of a range of opportunities outside, will call for assertiveness, initiative, creativity and independent thinking. And yet the traits that parents continue to describe as ideals for their children are still those that are associated with a conservative agrarian life style - compliance, cooperation and respect. These long-valued traits continue in many ways to be functional and adaptive for everyday life within these villages and are of course characteristics sorely missed in many societies . The challenge is clearly to find a balance between the development of traits and skills that facilitate harmonious functioning of communities and those which will equip children to deal with rapidly changing futures likely to call for flexibility, curiosity and innovation.

Education: Parents in all the villages have increasingly come to view education as a primary goal for their children, and the means to a better life - in spite of the fact that few families have adult members who have had formal schooling. In terms of everyday practice,

however, there is still a good deal of ambivalence about the value of schooling as an investment, since there is no guarantee of a return in the form of good jobs later. Education for girls is seen as a particularly poor investment because they will not be supporting the family in future. The practical reality of covering the costs and losing children's help in managing the daily workload contributes to the ambivalence. Parents may enroll their children, but then not require them to attend; or if they attend, they don't allow them the necessary time for homework.

Gender issues: People in all four villages claim to love their daughters as much as their sons, and to treat them equally in their early years, but acknowledge that their long term expectations influence day-to-day life in significant ways. As is true all over the sub-continent, boys are simply more important to parents for very practical reasons - not only are they counted on for support in the parents' old-age; they are also essential to ensuring a smooth transition to the next life, since only a son can conduct a parent's funeral rites. There are implications in all aspects of life for boys and girls - their level of health, their opportunities for play, their work burdens, their access to education, their very self-confidence. Parents are clearly anxious about their daughters' well-being, but the practical realities of a discriminatory system result in systematic discrimination from the earliest weeks of life. It is not simply a matter of different opportunities being made available to girls - it is a matter of fewer opportunities and less choice. Everything for girls narrows down to one point - marriage; while for boys options stay more open. Discrimination around caste and ethnicity results similarly in more limited expectations and opportunities. Parents tend to be discouraged about their children's chances in life, and are likely as a result to reinforce children's low sense of self-worth.

Recommendations: The recommendations that grow out of this study are rooted in two particular perspectives:

● a recognition that, although poverty is a key factor in undermining children's rights, attention to poverty alleviation has not in itself been found sufficient to ensure that children's needs are met. Increased food production, for instance, does not always ensure that children are better fed. Instead, the focus here is on child development programmes which offer specific attention to the requirements of children and their caregivers, but at the same time serve as an entry point for many of the factors underlying poverty.

● an emphasis on the further development of more flexible, participatory approaches which recognize and build on families' and communities' achievements and assist them to address their concerns.

Child development programming is not seen as a product to be dispensed, but as a process in which families, communities, fieldworkers, professionals and planners work together.

While families were the major focus of the study the findings provided clear confirmation that action must be at every level. Strengthening caregiving practices within families and communities is certainly a part of the picture. However, programmes also need to be about changing systems which exclude or marginalize some children. The recommendations as a whole take a systemic view and focus on approaches and interventions that can empower families, equip communities and local government, energize agencies and expand the vision of policy makers - working to strengthen the systems at every level that support families and their capacity to care for their children.

An Introduction to the Study

Around the world, when parents discuss what they want for their children, they almost always come up with the same basic goals. They talk about helping their children grow up healthy, safe and happy, able to get along with others, to learn well, and to find a productive role in the world. When early childhood practitioners refer to "supporting children's development", they generally have in mind this same broad range of concerns – ensuring that children are healthy and well nourished, with a sense of identity and self-worth, that they are able to interact positively with others and learn enthusiastically and effectively, and that they are protected from factors that might harm them or put a brake on their development.

This is quite different from a widely held perception of early childhood development, or ECD, as simply a part of basic education. ECD programmes *are* about opportunities for learning. But they are also about this far broader range of concerns – aiming to influence the contexts in which children are growing up so that they are supportive

of children's overall development. They have a good deal in common, in fact, with the goals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes the right of all children to survival and health, to protection and participation, and to the full development of their potential. Indeed recently ECD programmes have started to be understood as essentially an integrated set of actions for ensuring young children's rights.

This holistic view of children's well-being, while by no means new, has been validated and encouraged by the Convention. Responses to the basic needs for food, healthcare and protection have long been a feature of government policies around the world, and have always been central to the work of child-focused agencies. With the acceptance of the Convention these concerns have become recognized not just as needs, but as rights. And in addition, the rights to love, interaction, security, stimulation and opportunities for learning have been formally identified as equally important.

The Convention is legally binding for state parties and has implications for government policies and initiatives, but the moral obligations to children extend throughout society and long precede any treaty. Children's rights are about the obligations of all adults to protect the best interests of children, and to create the conditions under which they can develop and thrive. For most children it is the family, in all its permutations, that is most closely involved in the day-to-day management and defense of children's rights. The younger the child, the more this is the case. The Convention recognizes the central role of families, but requires governments to assist families as necessary in their efforts. As part of the support made available to families, the Convention calls for the provision of programmes that will help children to develop to their best potential by providing integrated support for their rights.

Within the child rights framework, in other words, ECD programmes are called upon to occupy the very position which the best of them have already assumed as a responsibility for many years. With the impetus of the Convention, this interpretation of the role of ECD is increasingly being taken on board by many agencies and governments. This broad mandate for ECD programming, however, can only be successfully addressed if these programmes work closely with families, responding to their goals and concerns for their children.

This study was undertaken as part of the effort to ensure that ECD programming in Nepal meets this criterion. The study examines the child rearing beliefs and practices of families in four rural villages in Nepal. It considers their hopes and expectations for their children, as well as their concerns and frustrations. It looks at the subtle and contextual processes of children's development in the natural environment of the home, where learning merges imperceptibly into the rhythms of everyday village life. It looks at how families work to ensure that their children grow up healthy, with enough to eat, and protected from harm; how they support their developing identities and their opportunities for learning; and how they encourage their capacity to get along with others and to contribute to their families and communities. It considers their different expectations for their sons and daughters, and the effects that these expectations have for the socialization of boys and girls. Because families and their children do not exist in a vacuum, this study also considers the larger context of family and village life. It looks at the village setting, at social and economic realities, at gender and caste issues, at culture and the process of change. All of these factors have an impact on the survival strategies of families, on their values and beliefs, and on the way they shape their children's lives.

By presenting parents' perspectives on their own strengths and limitations in rearing their children, this study attempts to provide the kind of information essential to developing early childhood programming that is responsive to children's rights and relevant to communities. Equally important, it is an attempt to develop a process by which this kind of information can continue to be generated, as parents negotiate among themselves and with others how children's rights can best be interpreted within the realities of their own lives. We hope that the study will highlight families' frontline role in ensuring children's rights and encourage approaches to child rights and child development programming which work in new partnerships and at many levels.

The goals of the study

The study had three specific goals:

1) To encourage approaches which build on strengths

The range of "normal" arrangements in which children are brought up is vast, and it is vital to understand local child rearing practices and build on existing strengths – recognizing and enhancing the positive things that people are already doing. Many child development programmes around the world fail to recognize and respect families' and communities' achievements and resourcefulness in raising their children. Little time is spent on finding out what parents and other caregivers already know and do, let alone the value systems on which these practices are built. Although it has become fashionable to include KAP (knowledge, attitudes and practice) studies in project designs, these are often narrowly conceived, and programmes are seldom built on the findings.

Instead they use a "deficit" model, focusing on a "professional" view of what people lack both materially and in terms of knowledge and skills, and stressing the need for parents to be "educated" about child development. Too often programmes are message driven and we devalue or ignore what people are able to accomplish. As Salole says, "We have systematically allowed people to feel incompetent and inadequate in raising their own children."[1]

It is not helpful to romanticize the ways families and communities operate. There are often issues that need to be addressed – practices that may actually be harmful or a need for information. But there is almost always much that is positive as well. By failing to acknowledge existing positive child rearing practices, such programmes can undermine traditional cultures and cut away at the self-esteem of parents and caregivers as effective supporters and providers for their children. Tapping into the family and cultural stream in which children are nurtured, on the other hand, supports and builds on parental strengths. It also potentially presents a low cost delivery system capable of reaching vast numbers of poor children.

2) To develop effective participatory methods for initiating discussion and dialogue on key issues for children

It is remarkable that the family, as the institution most responsible in reality for the management and defense of children's rights, has rarely been brought into child rights consultations in

Many child development programmes fail to recognize and respect families' achievements and resourcefulness in raising their children

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[1] Salole, G (1992) 'Building on people's strengths: the case for contextual child development', *Studies and Evaluation Papers* No. 5, Bernard Van Leer Foundation

most countries. A major aim of the study was to develop and promote the widespread use of methods to facilitate collaborative dialogue with families and communities around children's overall development and rights, as the basis for practical joint planning for interventions which ensure improvements for children. This entails an emphasis on respect for different views, a commitment to developing processes that allow different voices to be heard, and an openness to creating new knowledge and new ideas with all involved learning along the way.[2] These methods also provide the basis for developing indicators which will allow communities not only to set goals, but also to monitor and evaluate their progress. Part of the goal here is to develop the capacity of researchers and other personnel to make good use of these methods.

3) To expand the knowledge base for stronger programming

Building rapport did not only mean building rapport with adults. Here a researcher gets to know a young villager in Jahbahi

We know that children everywhere have the same basic needs, and that certain fundamental principles are of central importance for their development. But there is a huge amount that we do not know – and there is a continuing need to expand our shared wisdom. How is children's need for security met in different communities? Their drive to explore? Their desire to become competent people? What are the implications for their development? No one group has a monopoly on understanding how to raise children. Given the extreme social dislocation of many young people in "developed" countries, it is clear that we all have much to share and learn about how best to achieve children's rights worldwide. Different traditions contain alternative understandings about child rearing that provide an invaluable pool of ideas about development which, once obliterated, are lost forever.

Well-conceived early childhood development programmes can be a powerful force in strengthening communities' confidence in their own culture – making it easier to borrow what is useful without losing what is strong in their own traditions.

More local and contextual knowledge will allow us to inform and encourage the development of broader based ECD approaches that take account of both cultural values and rapid social change. All children have the same rights, but there is no one right way to support early childhood development. Policy and programme decisions should be made within the context of particular cultures in collaboration with families and communities; not based on a generalized notion of what is good for children. Families and planners need to reflect on how best to equip children for a rapidly changing world, while ensuring that they retain a sense of locally relevant values.

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2   Pence, A and McCallum, M (1994) 'Developing cross-cultural partnership: implications for child care quality research and practice', in P Moss and A Pence (eds) *Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services: New Approaches to Defining Quality,* London: Paul Chapman

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Process and methods

Objectives

This study involved the qualitative investigation of child rearing in four villages, with the objective of informing potential follow-up programming. Although these villages were selected to reflect a range of conditions, it was not assumed that findings would reflect realities throughout Nepal. Rather, it was the methods and overall approach that were considered to have broader application. For this reason, process and methods were of double importance in this project.

NORTH

KathmanduKailali NEPAL TIBET

INDIA Palpa

Map of Nepal

The research was carried out in different districts to reflect some of the variation within Nepal. Two villages are in the middle hills of Palpa district, and two in the flat plains of the terai, in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts.

Because the research intended to draw on the knowledge and perspectives of caregivers, to engage with them in discussion and debate on child rearing, child rights and children's development, and to work with them in identifying appropriate strategies for action, participatory methods were called for. To this end, the study drew on approaches based on participatory learning and action (PLA), as well as on ethnographic interviews and observation. Central to the process was the involvement of various organisations working in ECD, who could contribute experience from a variety of perspectives and make use of research findings in their programmes.[3]

Preparation

A literature search was conducted, and research design incorporated lessons from other research on this issue. Selection of the field researchers was based on appropriate background (in participatory research, work with children or gender training) and on demonstrated research skills or aptitude. Training by experienced facilitators focused on participatory research methods, and an understanding of children's rights and early child development. Research team members were involved in the design of the research "toolkit", which was submitted to outside advisors to ensure methodological soundness. More detail on team selection and training, and on the research time line, is included in the revised toolkit (see page 8).

Sample

Selected villages had the following characteristics:

- Location within the catchment areas of participating organizations, which could follow up on the research. The organisations identified as having appropriate areas were Save US and Save Norway and their partner organisations;
- No current involvement in programmes supported by these organizations;
- Two *terai* and two hill villages, all experiencing some outmigration;

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3   The organisations involved included Save the Children US, Save the Children Norway, Save the Children UK, UNICEF, Seto Gurans National Child Development Services, CERID, Children's Environments Research Group at The City University of New York, BASE, NNSWA, Bal Bikas Samaj Sudar Kendra.
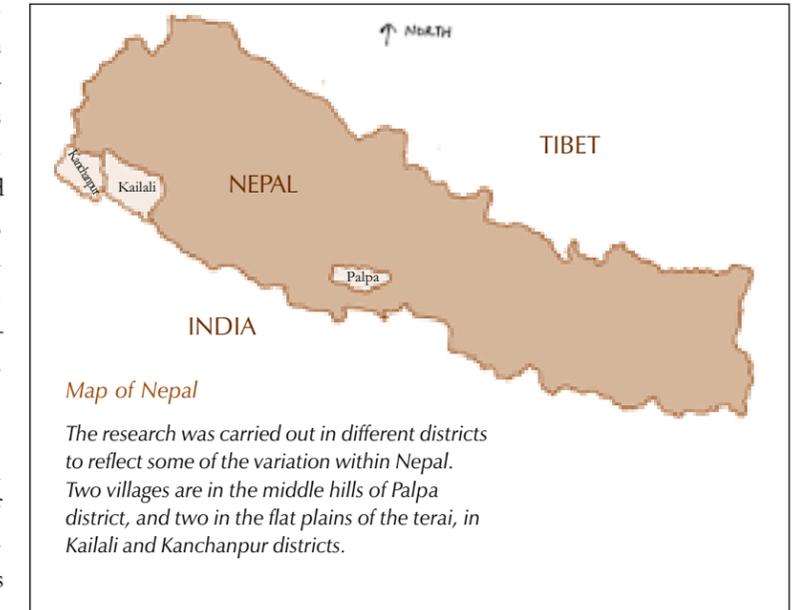
- Three villages composed of primarily single ethnic groups, and one *terai* village with a mixed population;
- Interest in participating in the study.

"Urban" households

The research also attempted to trace people who had migrated from the rural villages, and to investigate the lives of families now living in more urban areas. It was assumed that the move to less isolated surroundings would have important implications for child rearing. The objective was to consider the types of changes that might be experienced, rather than to provide conclusive evidence of broader trends. (See page 97 for a brief report of the findings.)

Beginning the research

Researchers, in teams of five, lived in the villages for a period of two and a half months over the peak agricultural season. They spent time initially introducing themselves to villagers and explaining the purpose of the research, became familiar with local routines, and quickly established rapport with the villagers. Work began with community level research, and moved on to research at the household level.

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Research was carried out primarily with caregivers, both mothers and fathers, grandparents, older brothers and sisters, relatives, friends or neighbours and teachers. The focus was on children under six, although attention was also given to older children in order to understand the opportunities available to them, and the hopes and expectations of both parents and children. Special attention was given to girls and boys who care for younger children, and attempts were made to incorporate the views of young children themselves. Although women and girls are often the primary caregivers, the study ensured that fathers' and grandfathers' roles were also given attention, along with their views on child rearing.

Discussions like this were held with older children to find out about their hopes for their future

Community level research

Using a variety of visual methods drawn largely from PLA, researchers worked with groups divided by gender, age and caste or ethnicity to gain an understanding of both the broader environmental and socio-economic context, and community perspectives on child rearing and children's development.

For example
- social maps were drawn by community members to establish how they saw their village and the most important places in it;
- wealth rankings within the community were established, based on the local understanding of what constituted well-being. This was an important basis for subsequent household selection;
- seasonal calendars were created to understand how villagers cope with the challenges of different times of year — peak workloads, disease, food and water shortages and particularly, what these meant for their child care strategies.

Other methods focused on peoples' perceptions and beliefs about child development and their concerns and expectations for their children. These included:
- life history timelines to establish how people understood the main events and turning points in their children's lives;
- matrices to rank the concerns they had for their sons and their daughters, the characteristics they considered important, the kinds of work different family members were involved in, and responsibilities for child care chores;
- venn diagrams to describe the interactions between different family members;
- semi-structured interviews and discussion as integral to the more visual PLA tools.

Household level research

Six households were selected in each of the villages with predominantly one ethnic group, and 11 in the mixed village for in-depth case studies. This was done in order to investigate a diversity of family types, to consider the implications for children of a range of household circumstances, and to develop a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the issues raised at community level. Selected households all had at least one child under six, and were selected to represent different wealth groups, as well as households with and without school-going children. Some households were chosen for special reasons – one included a disabled child, one was a family with two wives and one was a female-headed household. Interviews with family groups and individuals and frequent informal observation were supplemented by a structured 24 hour observation or time inventory. Selected PLA methods were repeated at household level in order to go in more depth into key issues raised at community level, and as a means of cross-checking this information. A combination of these methods was also used with the urban households.

A woman from Dekhetbhully uses stones to show women's workload on a seasonal calender

Dialogue

After the initial research, teams spent a month together identifying and comparing themes and issues from the research and developing a process for further discussion with the communities on their children's development and rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was used as a framework for thinking about key issues. Teams identified the strengths they had observed in the communities and the major concerns.

Guiding the design of these dialogue sessions was a recognition of the importance of sharing perspectives – acknowledging the validity of local knowledge and beliefs as well as the value of the principles that inform and guide the child focused agencies supporting this project. Bringing together these alternative vantage points could stimulate rich discussion about children's rights, as well as expanding the understanding of children's development. It was important,

> Guiding the design of these dialogue sessions was a recognition of the importance of sharing perspectives and valuing diversity…. different traditions with alternative understandings about children's development

acknowledging the validity of local knowledge and beliefs as well as the principles that inform child focused organizations

however, that an openness to local values not prevent discussion of practices that were at odds with the principles of children's rights – such as discrimination against girls in the provision of schooling. Whether such issues were the product of cultural norms or economic pressures, researchers had to find ways to address and debate them with villagers, drawing on their own experience and that of community members.

The communities welcomed the opportunity for these discussions, which became another chance to share information, an opportunity to clarify points and to confirm or challenge impressions that the teams had received earlier. What came out of these sessions was invaluable in terms of filling gaps and extending discussion, and it was integral to the overall information gathering process. Many lively debates were held, and communities and teams identified some initial action points to be taken up by the communities and the NGOs working in those areas.

Following the dialogue in the villages, community representatives were invited to attend meetings with district level representatives — including the Chief District Officer, the line agencies and local NGOs. The objectives were to present initial findings from the research and to engage district level representatives in the discussion of recommendations and follow up.

Analysis

A small team carried out further analysis of the data from individual villages, building on the outcome of the dialogue sessions, sifting through the raw data for evidence that supported or challenged initial hypotheses and findings, and working towards a richer understanding of community concerns and team perspectives. Initial drafts of the four village reports were prepared and discussed in workshops that brought together the research teams and advisory members, and their comments were incorporated.

The individual village reports[4], in turn, were compared, contrasted and considered with reference to one another – an exercise that inevitably raised new questions, and required researchers and advisers to revisit and reconsider the findings, and in some cases even to call for the collection of new data. The attempt to synthesize the findings from all the villages enriched the understanding of the individual villages. Secondary sources were also explored again, in order to find common ground with other relevant research.

Future work

It is hoped that the recommendations from the report, based on both the dialogue with the communities and discussion with people at various levels of policy and practice, will become the core of a subsequent phase of intervention, as well as further longitudinal study of the outcomes.

A new "toolkit" will soon be completed, reporting fully on the process of the research and on the lessons learned from it, and applying these lessons to a revised and improved set of guidelines for research and dialogue. This will be based on the first-hand experience of members of the research teams. An integral part of these guidelines will be a focus on building skills for carrying out participatory dialogue with community members about their children's development. It is expected that the methods detailed in the toolkit will become an integral part of parenting programmes, supporting processes that respond to the needs, existing knowledge and interests of communities.

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[4] The individual village reports are available as separate but complementary reports to this overview report.

Children's rights and early childhood programming in Nepal

Tom Kelly

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989. A year later Nepal ratified this international treaty, committing itself to recognizing and implementing a wide range of civil and political rights for Nepalese children. The Convention defines how children should be treated in various areas of their lives, and it establishes their rights to survival, development and protection, and to an active role in matters that concern them. All children under 18 are equally covered by the provisions of this treaty – rich and poor, girls and boys, children with disabilities, and the children of all castes and ethnicities. Children's rights concern their fundamental needs, and the obligations of adults at all levels of society to create the conditions under which these needs can be met.

All over the world governments, organizations and civil society are working to find serious and practical responses to the Convention.

The children of Nepal

Around half of Nepal's 21 million people are children under the age of 16. They are growing up in a country extraordinarily rich in cultural and spiritual traditions but struggling economically. Definitions and estimates of poverty levels abound, but perhaps a World Bank one-liner expresses it best: "By any reasonable standard everyone in Nepal is poor, except for a few professionals and businessmen and large farmers".[5]

An estimated 99,000 children in Nepal die every year before they reach their fifth birthday. Although there have been dramatic improvements over the last twenty years, under five mortality still exceeds ten percent; and ten girls die for every seven boys.[6] Discrimination against girls effects their healthcare, nutrition and education and is related to early marriage and childbirth and one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world.[7] Not surprisingly 29 percent of children are low weight at birth and nearly two-thirds of children under three are moderately or severely malnourished.[8] There have been significant increases in safe water supplies and waste disposal facilities, but little improvement in home sanitation and hygiene practices, resulting in high rates of preventable illness for children.

Ethnicity, caste and gender, along with poverty, have a major influence on children's lives and on the likelihood that their rights will be either ensured or denied.

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[5] Cited in UNICEF Nepal and National Planning Commission (1996) *Children and Women in Nepal: A Situation Analysis 1996*, UNICEF Nepal.
[6] CBS 1995 cited in ACTIONAID Nepal (1999) *Gender Strategy,* Kathmandu: ACTIONAID
[7] Estimated maternal mortality rates for Nepal are controversial, and vary from 515 to 1500 per 100,000 live births – see UNICEF Nepal and NPC Nepal (1996) *Children and Women of Nepal: A Situation Analysis 1996,* UNICEF Nepal
[8] UNICEF Nepal and NPC Nepal (1996) *Children and Women of Nepal: A Situation Analysis 1996,* UNICEF Nepal

While many Grade 1 classes are bulging at the seams there are still approximately one million children between the ages of six and ten who are out of school. Most of them are girls and children from disadvantaged communities, who work to support household survival. The vast majority of children in school also make important economic contributions. Despite significant investment in schools and teachers, the NET [9] enrollment ratio for girls is 56 compared to 79 for boys.[10] Attendance is poor amongst both children and teachers, with teacher attendance estimated at less than 60 percent. The Ministry of Education (MOE) acknowledges that it is essential to address quality issues effectively so that more children enroll and stay in schools that are capable of supporting their development.

Development agendas, both governmental and non-governmental, are increasingly informed by human rights principles, as set out in the both the CRC and CEDAW (Convention to End Discrimination Against Women), which has also been ratified by Nepal. Progress in this area is essential, as women's contributions frequently go unrecognized and their roles are often confined to those prescribed by Nepal's traditional patriarchal social, economic and legal frameworks. There is even some indication of a downward trend in decision-making by women despite increasing contributions to the household in terms of time and income.[11] In Nepal, as in most places, a disproportionately small part of the development endeavour is concerned with children, or with those activities that have the greatest impact on children's lives. However, child-focused activities do seem to be expanding along with the number of child-focused NGOs.

Understanding the policy context is critical in addressing the gaps between children's rights, what children are entitled to under national law, and what actually happens in practice

The child rights policy environment in Nepal[12]

Children's rights may be enthusiastically accepted as a moral imperative. Translating them into policy and practice is another matter, and one which can easily become bogged down in bureaucratic realities. The fact that children's rights are best addressed as an integrated whole, for instance, while governments operate in distinct sectors, results in messiness and confusion in many countries.

These bureaucratic realities do not make for compelling reading, and are rarely linked to this kind of micro-study. But as Bronfenbrenner has made so clear, the larger forces within society are an essential part of the ecology of children's development.[13] Understanding this background is critical in addressing the gaps between children's rights, what children are entitled to under national law, and what actually happens in practice. This section is especially pertinent for those involved in Nepal – but it can also serve as basis for comparison with realities in other countries.

9   NET – the number of primary school-aged children enrolled in primary school divided by the total population of that age group.
10   Basic and Primary Education Sub-sector Programme, 1998-2002, Ministry of Education
11   Shtrii Shakti (1995) *Women Development Democracy : A Study of the Socio-economic Changes in the Profile of Women in Nepal,* New Delhi: Raj Press
12   This section draws heavily from Murgatroyd, C. (1996 - unpublished) *Draft Report on the Legal Regime for the Protection of Child Rights in Nepal,* UNICEF Nepal; UNICEF (1996): Status of Women and Children in Nepal, UNICEF Nepal; and Arnold, C, (1999) *Review of Redd Barna Programmes Redd Barna Nepal;* Save the Children Norway and UK (2000) *A Mid Term Review Report of the District Child Welfare Committee (DCWC) of 10 districts of Nepal,* Kathmandu: Save the Children
13   Bronfenbrenner, U (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development,* Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press

The Children's Act

Following ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 by the government of Nepal, the Children's Act was passed in 1992, guaranteeing the equal rights of all Nepalese children to health, education, water, sanitation and protection, and defining the responsibilities of parents, and the welfare and protection provisions to be guaranteed by the government. The Act also defined a framework of administrative agencies to regulate and implement government activities with regard to children.

These measures were not considered fully adequate by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In response to Nepal's initial report on progress with regard to the CRC, the Committee in 1996 expressed concern about less than full compliance of national legislation to the principles and provisions of the Convention, particularly with regard to non-discrimination (Article 2). It specifically pointed to continuing son preference, early marriage and different marriage ages for boys and girls, lower school attendance and higher drop out rates for girls, and the caste system (all issues that are addressed in this study). It also pointed to the lack of efficient coordination between relevant ministries, and between central and local authorities, in the implementation of policies relevant to children.

The administrative framework

The administrative structures set up following the Act include the Central Child Welfare Board, established in 1996 under the National Council for Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare, and the District Child Welfare Boards at the district level, which have the mandate to advocate for, protect and promote child rights and to develop long-term district-level policies and plans to ensure child rights. The Boards are now commonly called Committees, and will be referred to here as DCWCs.

The DCWCs operate under the convenorship of the Chief District Officer who appoints committee members from a cross-section of government and some non-government organisations. DCWCs vary in terms of how functional they are, but many are largely non-functioning. Among the more active are those supported by Save the Children Norway and Save the Children UK in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare. There is continuing confusion over the role of DCWCs – uncertainty whether they should act as mobilizers or implementation bodies. Their work so far has been essentially preparatory, revolving around awareness-raising through training of DCWC members and others on the Convention, and district level situation analyses, which leave room for substantial improvement.

In spite of the potentially important role of DCWCs in protecting child rights, there is little doubt that the District Development Committee is the key decision-making body at district level. Significant recent shifts towards decentralization, including the government's Local Self Governance Act 1999, give new powers to local bodies. Municipalities, Village and District Development Committees (DDCs and VDCs) all have responsibility to give priority to programmes yielding direct benefits to children, including education, child welfare and protection of orphans, disabled people, women and girls. Specific functions include making recommendations for granting approval for the establishment of primary schools, monitoring and supervising these schools, formulating and operating programmes to eradicate child labour and rehabili-

tate child labourers, and promoting different languages, religions and cultures. They are also required to maintain accurate records and to register births. Since the Act was passed, UNICEF-Nepal has worked closely with the DDCs in selected districts through its Decentralized Planning for the Child Programme (see page 162**),** to ensure that protection of child rights is central to the district planning process.
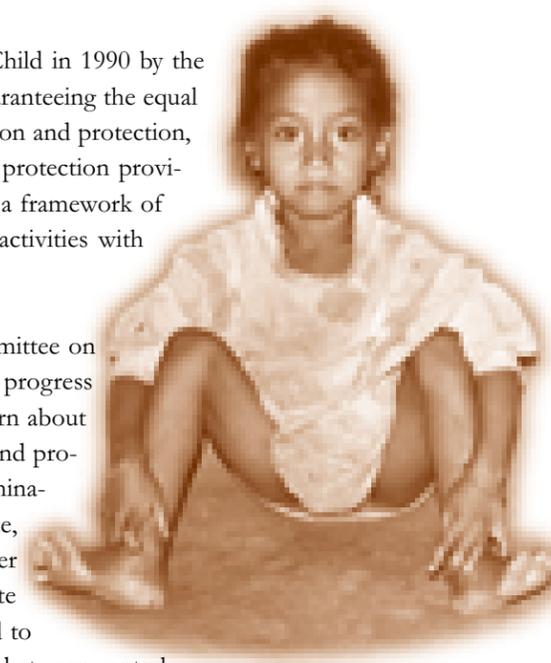
Child rights and child development in the Ninth Plan

In 1998, the Ninth Plan[14] was published by the National Planning Commission of the government of Nepal. This is the main guiding policy document for the government of Nepal, and all central and local level government agencies must follow its directives in formulating plans and carrying out development activities. The Plan includes commitments to provide children below five with necessary services through ECD programmes, to be funded by local communities. It set a target of 10,000 pre-primary schools under the Basic and Primary Education Plan (subsequently reduced to 5700). Other commitments include compulsory primary education, increasing girls' attendance in school, reducing inequalities on the basis of sex, region and community in education, eradicating child labour and helping children in especially difficult circumstances. Monitoring and evaluation of relevant activities is to be carried out by central and local bodies. At the policy level, the Plan commits the government to a review of discriminatory laws, to the passage of egalitarian laws, and to gradual reduction of existing discrimination through positive policies and programmes, and special priority to gender equality and rights.

The policy framework in Nepal includes much that is supportive of children's rights, but the potential opportunities need to be better realized. The recommendations will address this further.

Nepal's ECD policy environment

As part of the support made available to families, the Convention calls for the provision of programmes concerned with the whole child and his or her overall development. As such they should be an integrated set of actions for ensuring young children's rights – to survival, development, protection and participation.

Early Child Development (ECD) programmes, as noted earlier, have traditionally been viewed as a component of basic education, and they are often equated in people's minds with "pre-schools." There is also a common misconception that they are concerned only with three-to-five year olds. The potential of ECD programming as a vehicle for the integrated promotion of young children's rights is only now being fully explored. ECD programmes, from the perspective of a child rights framework, are certainly about education – but they also seek to

Tom kelly

How long will these children continue in school and what opportunities will they have?

a concern with the whole child

ensure the synergy of protection, good health and nutrition, supportive and affectionate interaction, stimulation and opportunities for exploring the environment.

Certainly in Nepal at present the vital contribution that ECD programmes can afford in ensuring young children's rights is not properly understood. ECD and child rights are viewed as being relatively separate, and the promotion of child rights is seen primarily as a "child protection" issue under the responsibility of the Central Child Welfare Committee. ECD, meanwhile, is seen as the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and is very much perceived as pre-school education. However the recent establishment of The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and the creation of a child development unit within it is a positive sign.

Around the world there has been a rapid increase of interest in and commitment to ECD programmes over the last few years. The Nepalese government's recent acceptance of ECD as a key component of basic education, and its commitment to assist the start up of 5700 *Bal Bikas Kendra* or community-based child development centres over the next five years is a reflection of this trend.[15] The Ministry of Education's recent interest in ECD is tied in part to the very real need to get underage children out of Grade 1.

The Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP), the government's sub-sector project for basic and primary education in Nepal, has made a commitment to ECD[17]; to the importance of working with NGOs; to strengthening the role of parents and community in facilitating learning and managing education facilities; and to decentralisation as set out in the Local Self Governance Act and the Education Act. Its focus is on institutionalised provision of guided development to help children prepare for primary schools.[18] The Plan specifically mentions that it concentrates *only* on the educational part of early childhood development for four to five year old children. It assigns responsibility to the Ministry of Local Development for "Early Childhood Care and Education" programmes. With the shift of the Women's Development Division, which had responsibility for child care, to the Ministry for Women and Social Welfare, it is not clear who will follow this up. The Plan has also proposed a National Committee on Early Childhood Care and Education, involving members from the National Planning Commission and other minis-

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Children in a community based child development centre

The potential of ECD programming as a vehicle for the integrated promotion of young children's rights is only now being fully explored

Parents often send children as young as three or four to school so they know where they are while they are busy working. Nationwide about 20 percent of grade 1 enrollment consists of this group. This contributes substantially to the high dropout (21 percent) and repeat (42 percent) rates in this grade, which act as a bottleneck for the whole system.[16]

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[14] National Planning Commission (1998) *The Ninth Plan 1997-2002,* Kathmandu: HMG Nepal

[15] Originally the Ninth Plan committed to 10 000 child development centres, but in the BPEP (Basic and Primary Education Project) implementation plan this has been revised to 5700).

[16] Basic and Primary Education Project, MOE 1998

[17] Interest in promoting ECD has been further demonstrated by the establishment in 1998 of a task force, comprised of BPEP, UNICEF, Save the Children (US and Norway), Seto Gurans and ECD experts, to develop a national policy on ECD, for presentation to the National Commission for formal adoption. Since this task was undertaken by the Ministry of Education, despite the goal of ECD being presented as the holistic development of children, the draft policy deals mostly with programmes and activities aimed at the children of the pre-primary age group. The draft has not yet been approved as policy.

[18] Shrestha, K. 'Current Policies on Early Childhood Development in Nepal' in *Education and Development* 1999

tries for formulating ECD policies and programmes.[19] This has not yet been set up. An ECD section has been set up in the newly established Department of Education of the Ministry of Education, and this is responsible for planning and implementation of the national ECD programme with a training, curriculum and materials development and support remit. School supervisors have been appointed as ECD focal points in some Districts with monitoring and technical support responsibilities for the *Bal Bikas Kendra* in their districts.

Local government responsibilities for ECD

The Ministry of Education has now abandoned *Sishu Kakshas* (school-based child classes) in favour of *Bal Bikas Kendra* community-based child development centres, the model which most NGOs working in ECD follow. The Plan emphasises establishing ECD centres with partial financial support to interested Village Development Committees (VDCs) for the facilitators' salaries and the Local Self Governance Act 1999 makes this an obligation of the VDC. The facilitators' salary of Rs500 per month is given by the District Education Office, and is expected to be complemented by the community. Management of *Bal Bikas Kendra* will be through the partnership of parents, village leaders, schools, the VDC, government organisations and NGOs.

The increased commitment to ECD carries both opportunities and risks. With decentralisation, there is great potential for working with VDCs to follow the kind of participatory approach piloted in this research in exploring communities' priorities with regard to their children's development, and setting up ECD centres that respond to these priorities. The risks are mainly associated with the pressures of rapid expansion and the dangers of a "blueprint model" which does not allow for real community ownership. Another risk is that with the rush to expand, programmes will be developed based on a narrow definition of ECD, as done earlier during the *Sishu Kaksha* programme. These issues will be further addressed in the recommendations section.

ECD programmes

In addition to the recent start-up of *Bal Bikas Kendra* through the Ministry of Education, NGOs (especially at first INGOs such as Save the Children and PLAN International, and the pioneering national ECD NGO, Seto Gurans) and UNICEF have always played a lead role in ECD programmes in Nepal. These initiatives have often been in cooperation with local government bodies, different Ministries, Development Banks or local NGOs. They have tended to take a broader more holistic view of ECD programming.

The main approaches used within these early childhood development programmes in Nepal consist of a number of complementary strategies:
- attending to children
- supporting/educating parents and other caregivers
- promoting community development
- strengthening national resources and capacities
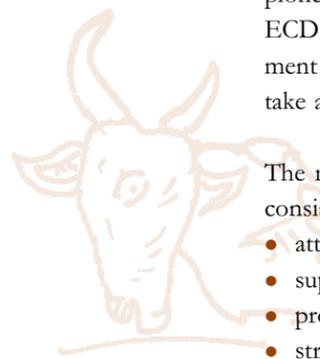
- strengthening awareness, demand and commitment through advocacy
- supporting policy development[20]

UNICEF, INGOs, bi-laterals and the World Bank are now placing increased emphasis on early childhood programmes within their overall strategies. Not surprisingly the number of local NGOs now supporting ECD interventions has mushroomed. Despite the expansion, coverage remains quite low, with probably under 2000 community-based centres scattered through not more than half the country's districts.

Interventions include

D Mckenzie

- Parenting/caregiving programmes which seek to influence interactions within the family (with family members as the child's first and natural teachers, and home as the major learning environment for the young child). These early parent education programmes (as they were called) used to focus almost exclusively on health and nutrition. More recently they have begun including a wider range of topics related to children's overall development. Early approaches were targeted at mothers. Recently there has been an emphasis on reaching men and other caregivers, including older children, as well.

Children enjoying opportunities for playing and learning

- Community-based child development/childcare programmes. Within Nepal these include community-based child development centres, operating two to three hours a day; childcare centres, operating five to seven hours a day; and home-based daycare run by mothers/caregivers on a rotational basis, with hours according to their arrangement. These programmes aim to provide a safe, secure and stimulating environment for children while caregivers work or attend school. Programmes generally offer children a variety of different play and learning opportunities which make the transition to school easier. They vary in the level of attention given to health and nutrition. Some programmes include a meal, but sustainability has been an issue. Some programmes have successfully addressed this through parental contributions, others have abandoned feeding programmes.
- Urban workplace daycare/creches – for example carpet factory daycare. These facilities provide on-site care for young children at the workplace so that mothers can breastfeed and play with children during their breaks.
- School-based pre-school classes (for example, the S*hishu Kaksha* within some of the BPEP schools and private schools).
- Private pre-schools/childcare. These facilities have mushroomed in urban areas over the last ten years and many pre-schools mimic the grade 1 curriculum, putting pressure on

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19 Ibid.

20 These strategies relate closely to the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development's framework for programming strategies (see Appendix 1) Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. (1996) *8 is too Late.* Fact Sheets created for the EFA Mid-Decade Forum, Amman Jordan.

young children to read and write at an age when broad and varied support for development has been found far more productive. There are also some excellent facilities that are a potential source of training and support for other centres.

The child-focused agencies which have traditionally worked through community development are increasingly aware of the need to ensure that broad-based programmes really do benefit children. These agencies have also given more attention to strengthening national resources and building capacity at different levels. Seto Gurans National Child Development Services (the leading national ECD NGO), for example, has been responsible for much of the start-up and initial training for many different organizations' initiatives. The organization is now building district level capacity, and graduates of its intensive three month training course are in 32 of the country's 75 districts. It aims to develop district level trainers for the whole country as resources for a flexible range of ECD interventions. While retaining important links with Seto Gurans, the graduates have set up and registered independent NGOs and are being used by UNICEF, Save the Children Alliance members, Plan International and both District and Village Development Committees to conduct training, supervision, monitoring and technical support for district level ECD activities. Other recent initiatives include an interactive national radio programme called *Bhanjyang Chautari* that provides stimulating opportunities through stories, games etc for children aged 3 to 5 years in an organised centre. Another initiative is the establishment of a Bachelors in Education with a major in ECD at Tribuvhan University. A distance education version of this is being developed to enable access to the degree course without actually having to attend on campus.

The Village Context

The four villages studied in the course of this research represent some of the extremes within Nepal. Two of these villages are set in the rugged and fairly isolated middle hills, two in the flat fertile plains of the *terai*. Two have mixed caste and ethnic populations, while two are composed of just one group each. There is a range of family structures too, from small nuclear families to extended families that can number over 100 members. Differences in health and affluence range as widely, both within and between villages. In one village, no children have died in recent years; in another just a few miles away, every family has experienced the loss of at least one child. In the wealthy belt of one community, some residents own impressive equipment and large tracts of land; in another part of the same village, poor landless families live in tiny mud huts, completely dependent for survival on employment from their richer neighbours.

Children looking out over the hills, Koldanda

It may seem to be out of place to elaborate on these differences in a report on child rearing. But in fact, this kind of background is crucial. Although child rearing practices grow out of beliefs and values, they are also anchored in material and social circumstances.

The significance of this larger context to child rearing has been widely recognized, not only in the ethnographic and cross cultural work of such investigators as the Whitings, LeVine, and Super and Harkness,[21] but also in more mainstream developmental psychology. A useful framework and precedent is the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, which describes a nested hierarchy of systems (see box on page 19), all of which have an impact on the developing child.[22] The *microsystem* consists of the people and settings which a child comes into immediate contact with – family, friends, home and school for instance. The *mesosystem* consists of the various relationships that link one microsystem to another – for instance the relationship between family and the health providers that care for a child. These two "layers" of the child's world will be described under *Daily Routines* (in Chapter 4). But children, says Bronfenbrenner, are also affected by layers beyond their immediate realm. The *exosystem* consists of neighbourhood and community structures, including local power relations of all kinds, that have an impact on the child's world. The *macrosystem* consists of the overarching forces of culture, politics and economy which shape and influence local experience. Children, Bronfenbrenner insists, are influenced not only by the people and settings they are in contact with every day, but also by all these larger forces, which will be described here.

Family structure, economic realities, social change and the very terrain that villages are set in all help to shape families' decisions, and to define the lives and experiences of their children. Power differences within communities and within households also structure the opportunities that are available to a given child. A real understanding of children's development and of child rearing practices must be grounded in this larger context.

Location

The hill villages

The two hill villages, **Koldanda and Biskundanda**, are in Palpa, in the Lumbini zone of the Western Development Region, and belong to Koldanda VDC. Both villages are a steep trek from Charchare, the nearest roadhead – Koldanda is three to four hours away, and Biskundanda

21 See for instance: Whiting, B B and C P Edwards (1988) *Children of Different Worlds: The Formation of Social Behavior*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press; Whiting, B B and J W M Whiting (1975) *Children of Six Cultures: A Psychocultural Analysis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Super, C M and S Harkness (1986) 'The developmental niche: A conceptualization of the interface of child and culture', *International Journal of Behavioral Development,* 9, 546-569; LeVine, RA (1988) 'Human parental care: Universal goals, cultural strategies, individual behavior', in R. LeVine, P M Miller and M M West (eds) *Parental Behavior in Diverse Societies: New Directions for Child Development*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass

22 Bronfenbrenner, U (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development,* Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press
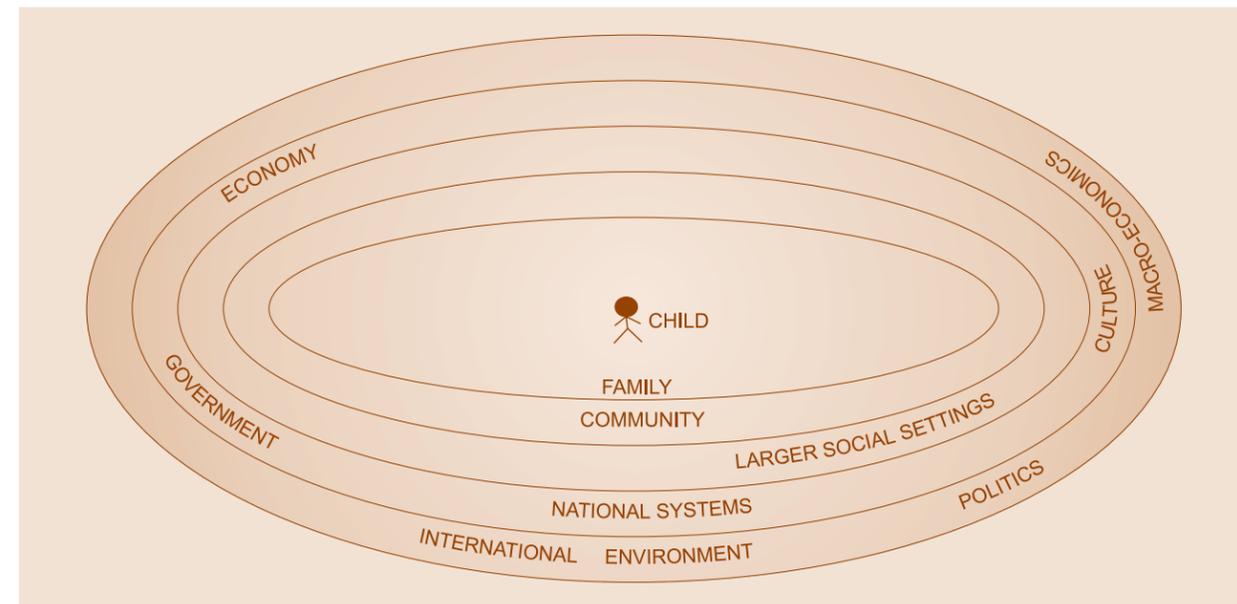
a bit closer. Charchare, on the main road, is about a 45 minute bus ride from Tansen, the district headquarters, and more than an hour by bus from Butwal, the major market for both villages. The construction of the Tansen-Butwal road in 1968 (2025) brought major change for people in these villages. They used to spend four or more days bringing necessities from the market. Now it only takes a day. The road has also meant increased exposure to outside influences.

Both villages are set in hilly terrain, but include a number of relatively flat areas (*bari* land) where planting occurs. Paddy land *(khet)* further down the mountainside is more expensive than *bari*, and not all families can afford it, especially in Biskundanda, the poorer of the two villages. Only the wealthiest families own sufficient land of either sort to feed their families for the full year. Adjacent to each village is a forested hill conserved for religious purposes, where no

District Sketch Map Palpa

Both Koldanda and Biskundanda are a steep trek away from Charchare on the main road between Tansen, the district headquarters, and Butwal, the major market town.
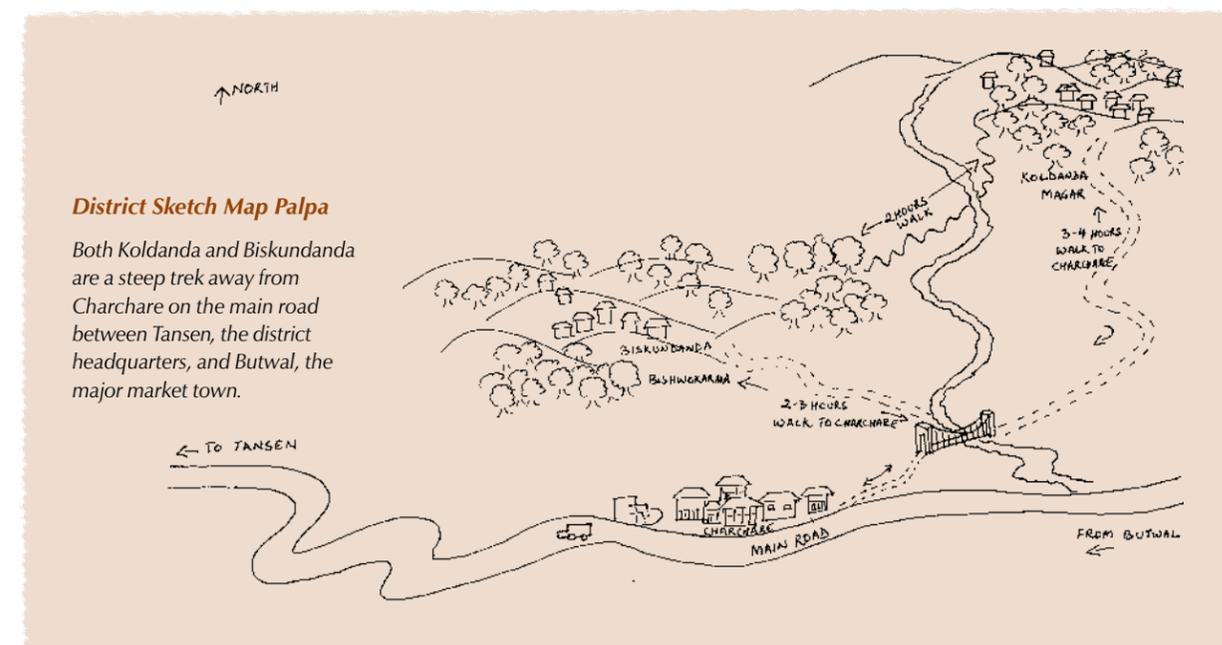
woodcutting is allowed. Both villages experience the typically cool winters of the middle hills, with warm summers and monsoon rains in June and July.

These two villages, although close together in similar settings, are very different worlds in other respects. Many of the researchers called Koldanda the "five star" village, because in almost every respect it was better off than the other three villages. Biskundanda, at the other extreme, was perhaps the most deprived in terms of both material and social resources; children here appear to die in greater numbers than in any of the other villages.

The terai villages

The two *terai* villages, in the Far Western region, are less isolated than the hill villages. **Jahbahi**, part of Joshipur VDC in the Kailali district, is connected to the outside world by a dirt road, motorable in the dry season. Joshipur, an hour's walk away, has a market, a health post, a cinema hall, a telephone communication centre, and access to public transportation. Jahbahi is surrounded by easily accessible paddy fields. A small wood, planted by local people, a nursery of mango trees and a forest lie north of the village.

Dekhetbhully, in Kanchanpur district, is linked to the main east-west highway, a 15 minute walk away, by a side road, impassable to vehicles in the rainy season. It is an hour and a half bus ride from Mahendranagar, the district headquarters, and about an hour's ride from Dhangadi, the headquarters of Kailali district. Nayabasti, the focus community
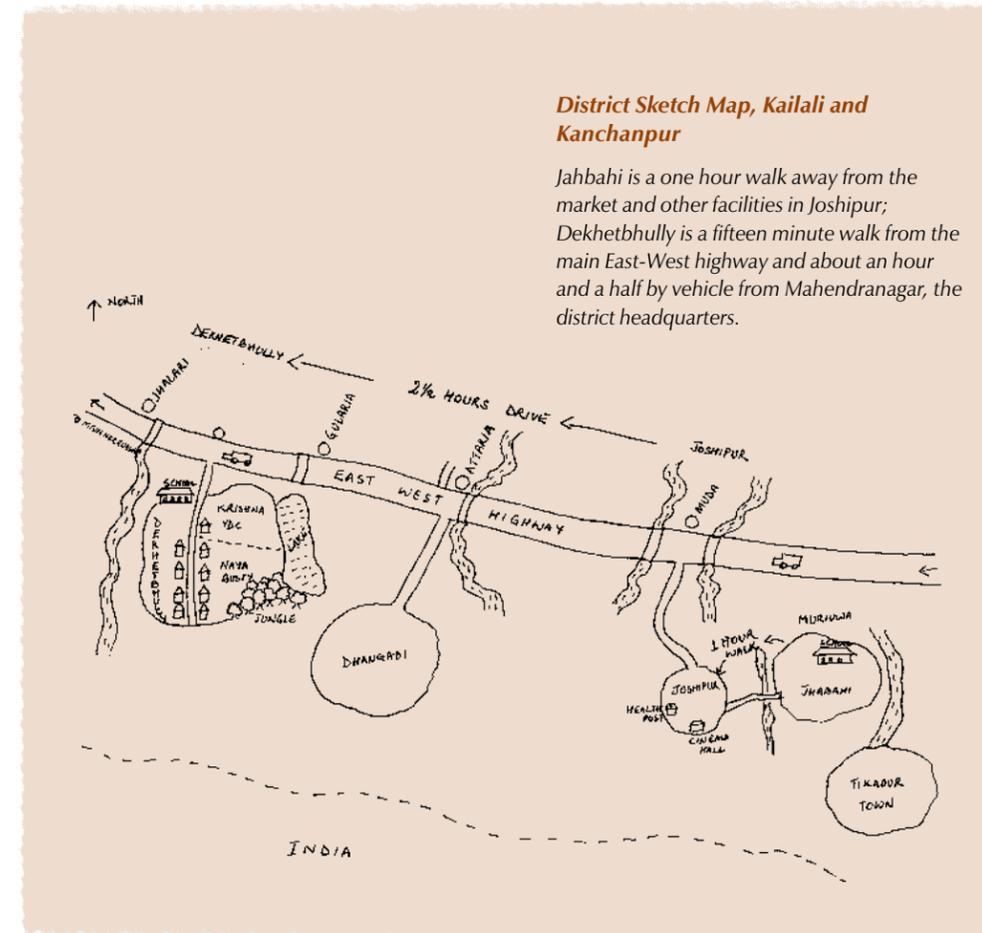
in Dekhetbhully, is a new settlement. People were moved here two years ago to make way for the expansion of a conservation park, and government-owned jungle was cleared for their resettlement. There is still some jungle around the village, and a number of wild animals, poisonous snakes and scorpions. There are rivers to the east and west about 20 minutes walk away, and a lake at the east end of the village. Both Jahbahi and Dekhetbhully experience the typical tropical climate of the *terai*, with temperatures as high as 45 degrees centigrade in summer, and heavy rains in June, July and August.

These two villages are distinguishable mostly in social terms: Dekhetbhully, struggling to become settled, is home to three distinct groups (see below.) Jahbahi, long settled, and home to just one group, has the most extreme wealth differences of any of the villages.

Population

Nepal is a mosaic of dozens of ethnic and caste groups, many with their own distinct language and culture. Many of these groups live side by side, and principles of integration and synthesis have been accepted from ancient times.

Biskundanda's population is composed of both Magar and so-called low caste Bishwokarma people. Although Magars predominate in the area, they are outnumbered in this village; of the 32 households, 25 are Bishwokarma (See box on page 31 for background on caste and ethnicity).

Bishwokarma children from Biskundanda

Koldanda is almost entirely Magar, and there are a total of 75 households, 12 of them joint households, and five headed by women. The Magar are one of several Tibeto-Burman groups who are thought of as the people of the middle hills. Scattered through many districts they have in large part adopted the practices of their area of settlement. Five families from Biskundanda and five from Koldanda have migrated in recent years to the *terai* in search of a better life, and they have maintained an active relationship with the hill communities.

A Magar boy carries his younger sister in Koldanda

District Sketch Map, Kailali and Kanchanpur

Jahbahi is a one hour walk away from the market and other facilities in Joshipur; Dekhetbhully is a fifteen minute walk from the main East-West highway and about an hour and a half by vehicle from Mahendranagar, the district headquarters.

Jahbahi, like Koldanda, consists primarily of one group, in this case Chaudhary, one of the two main Tharu groups, who were for many years the predominant indigenous group in the *terai*, as they were resistant to malaria. 70 households were selected from the larger population for the purposes of the research, 70 percent of them living in large joint families. A number of families in the village serve wealthier families as kamaiya or bonded labourers (See box on page 30 for background on kamaiya).

In the *terai* generally, Tharus have found their livelihood and land increasingly under threat, and have often been exploited by the wealthier hill people.

Dekhetbhully, the most socially complex of the villages, is a mixed community of Chaudhary Tharu, Brahmin and Chhettri, and Bishwokarma people. The Tharus, the largest ethnic group in the village, served landlords in

*Tharu girl and younger brother in Jahbahi.*

Tharu older brother with baby, Dekhetbhully.

Hirapur and Arjuni as *kamaiya*, but were freed from their *kamaiya* status during the resettlement. The Brahmin, Chhettri and Bishwokarma people, known collectively within the community as *pahadi* (or hill) people, in order to differentiate them from the indigenous *terai* groups, were part of the larger migration down to the *terai* after the eradication of malaria in the 1950s. Brahmins and Chhettris are so-called high caste Hindus; the Bishwokarma are considered untouchable in the caste hierarchy, and are traditionally iron-workers.

See Appendix II for population table.

Social maps – Biskundanda, Koldanda, Dekhetbhully, Jahbahi
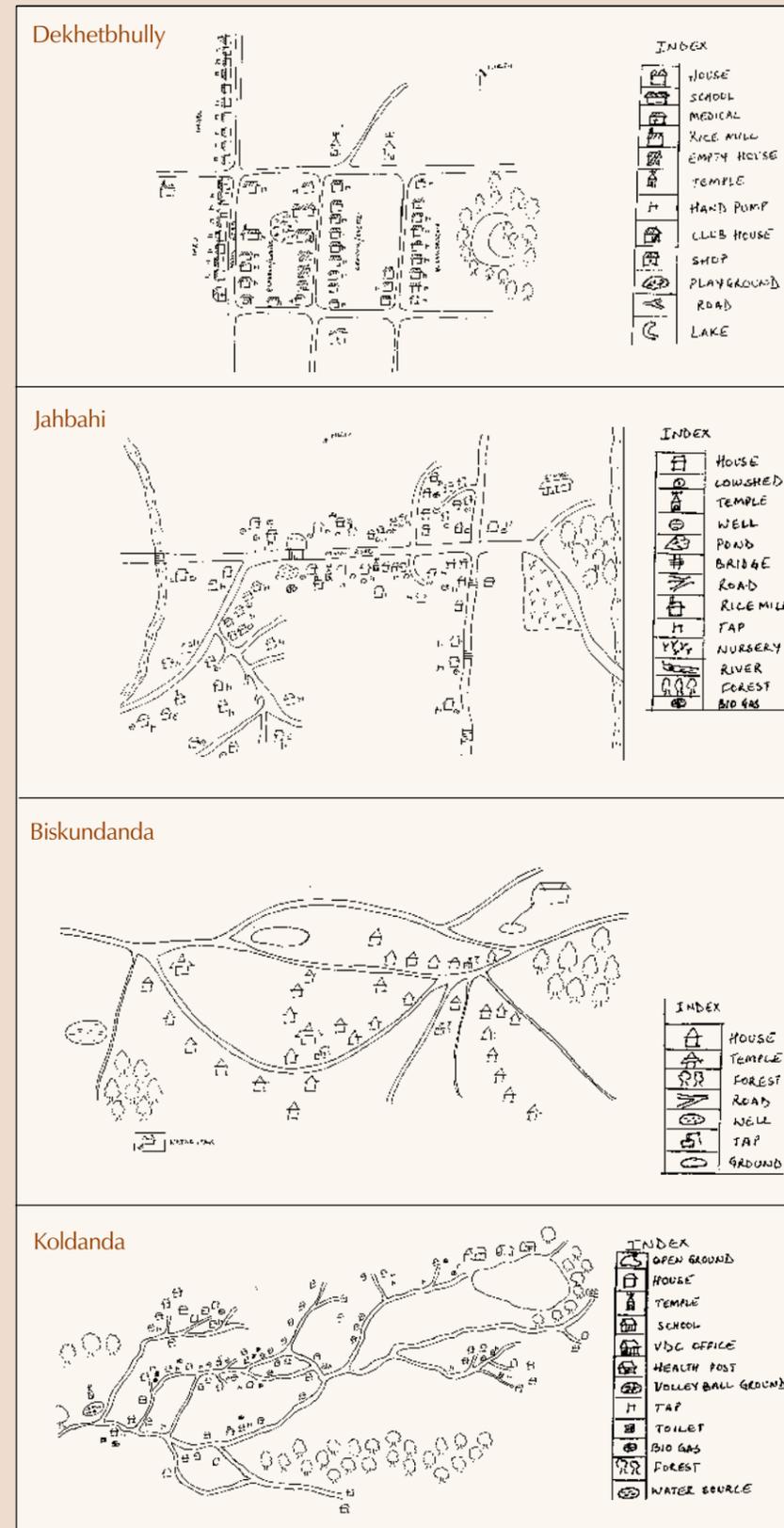
Community members drew maps of their villages on the ground, using stones to mark houses, leaves to show where forest was, twigs to indicate taps and so on. They were then copied for reproduction. The process stimulated discussion about the village and was an early chance to build rapport. Villages are described in greater detail in the text.

Biskundanda's small settlement, mostly Bishwokarma, can be crossed from end to end in about ten minutes, and as indicated here, it has few facilities relative to the other villages. The other three villages take about half an hour to walk across. Koldanda, a Magar village, is divided into many small clusters or toles. The terai settlements reflect caste and wealth differences. In Jahbahi, an exclusively Tharu community, wealthy landlords occupy the central area between the two rivers, and Kamaiya or bonded labourers live to the eastern side. Dekhetbhully, a planned village on a grid layout, is divided into three areas populated by the various local groups as indicated.

In the hill villages, people have to walk about two hours down the steep hillside to their good quality flat farm land (khet). In the terai villages farm land is close to the houses, but in Jahbahi, the Kamaiya own little or no land beyond their house plots.

In all the villages, forest and jungle areas are believed to be dangerous for children because of spirits and, in the terai, because of snakes and scorpions. Koldanda and Biskundanda both have protected forest areas sacred to the resident spirits.

Living conditions

Housing

Koldanda and Biskundanda are similar in housing and general layout, although in Koldanda surroundings are cleaner, neater and in better repair. Houses are generally clustered in groups of two or three, sharing a common yard. Most households have a cow shed and pig pen, usually within the yard, and every house has a cage for fowls. Yards in Biskundanda are typically muddy with animal waste all around. Most houses are rectangular, mud plastered stone or bamboo, with thatched roofs and a few small openings in the walls for ventilation, reflecting the concern for warmth in winter. Koldanda still has a few traditional round houses, and a few one and two storey cement houses with larger windows and corrugated tin roofs. Only the two most prosperous families in Biskundanda have tin roofs. Houses are surrounded, often on all sides, by covered porches used for seating and storage. During the day most activities occur in the yard and on these porches, where hammocks are hung for babies to nap, and where mats are placed for sleeping and seating. A central fire for both cooking and warmth is usually unventilated, and there are no separate kitchens. The poorest houses (almost all in Biskundanda) have only one room, and interiors are likely to be crowded and messy because of the lack of space, especially for joint families. In cool weather people sleep close to the fire, and when it is hot, they frequently sleep out on the porch.

> The quality of the living environment has immediate implications for child rearing – not only in terms of the effects for health and general well-being, but in terms of the amount of time that caregivers spend on basic daily maintenance.

Houses typical of the hills.

In the lower wealthier belt of **Jahbahi**, many houses are large square cement constructions built around an inner courtyard. A number of traditional rectangular mud and thatch houses are also built around a compound, housing big extended families. There are often separate kitchen houses with mud stoves, and five-foot high storage containers for grain form partitions. Houses in the poor upper belt are strikingly different. Here people who call themselves *sukumbasi*, or landless people, live in small mud huts. Traditional Tharu houses, like those in the hills, tend to be dark inside with little ventilation. This keeps them cool in the hot season and warm in winter. Houses are one storey and have porches, as in the hills. In the hot season, people congregate in the compounds in front of houses, sitting or lying on beds made of woven rope and wood, and frequently sleep outside at night.

Tharu houses around a compound, Jahbahi

The large storage jars behind this woman preparing vegetables are typical of Tharu houses, Jahbahi.

In **Dekhetbhully**, most people have one storey mud plastered houses with tile roofs; small single roomed houses in the case of Bishwokarma; larger and occasionally double storeyed in the case of Brahmin/Chhettris; and often divided into two rooms in the Tharu households. All houses, except those of the Bishwokarma, have front verandahs, and every house has a cooking fire in a far corner. Windows are small, and placed on both sides for ventilation. Tharu yards, generally larger, contain a cow shed, but animals are kept nearby in the case of *Pahadi* households. Although they lived close to one another in their former village, people of different groups are settled here in separate areas.

A Bishwokarma family in front of their house in Dekhetbhully.

Water and sanitation

Koldanda is well served with a regular year round water supply, and many yards have their own taps. No one walks more than four or five minutes for water. The community pens its livestock, and pathways are clean. About half the households have temporary pit latrines in their *bari* land, and there are two cemented latrines, one in the school. In **Biskundanda** there are only three water taps, and supply is irregular. During monsoon, lines often break down and people have to walk to a spring about 25 minutes away for water. Biskundanda is a far dirtier village than Koldanda. Nearly every household in **Jahbahi** has an affordable water hand pump. The water supply is good, but sandy. Drainage appears good, but is uncovered. Pit latrines do not function well, as they tend to flood during the monsoon. About 50 percent of **Dekhetbhully** households have pit latrines, and most have hand pumps. The quality of water is not as good as in their old settlement, but it is closer by. In all villages, even where there are latrines they tend to be underused. There is still reluctance to change old habits, and many people continue to use the fields and the forest (see page 69, sanitation and personal hygiene).

A boy pumps water outside his house in Jahbahi.

In Biskundanda and Koldanda, it used to take up to an hour to bring home one pot of water, and several trips meant that a significant part of the day was gone. Having water close by has also improved hygiene, and made it possible to grow green vegetable in kitchen gardens. In both hill villages they noted that women and children now get more sleep as a result of the time savings.

Improved water supplies in all the villages in recent years have resulted in dramatic time savings for women and children

Air quality

Respiratory health is poor in all villages, particularly in the hills, mostly as a result of poor indoor air quality from open fires. This is not considered to be an issue in any of the villages. On the contrary, the positive aspects of smoky interiors are stressed – the fact, especially in the *terai,* that the smoke helps to control mosquitoes, and in the cooler hills, that it helps to dry out damp air.

Services and facilities

The accessibility of schooling, health care and other services and supports has a significant effect on the overall quality of life. It is particularly interesting to note the dramatic differences in this regard between Koldanda and Biskundanda, and to see these differences reflected in overall well-being.

Schools

Schooling is available in all four villages, but both accessibility and attendance vary. In Biskundanda, the school is in a neighbouring, largely Magar, village about 20 minutes walk away. It has just started going up to Grade 8. Both Koldanda and Jahbahi have schools within the village; Koldanda's goes to Grade 8; Jahbahi's to Grade 5. Dekhetbhully is served by a number of schools: one in the village, built and managed by the community, which covers the first two grades; a primary school in a nearby village; secondary schools, which tend not to be used because they are at a distance through the jungle, and an expensive "boarding" (or private English medium) school.

Schools are run by school management committees, the membership of which tends to be composed largely of area officials. In theory they make decisions in discussion with community members; but since parents are poorly represented on these committees, and can be intimidated by more "knowledgeable" committee members, it is difficult to tell how participatory management actually is.

Health care

The availabilty of health care varies from village to village. All villages rely to some extent on traditional local treatment systems, offered by local *lamas, guruwas* or *dhamis,* and based on herbal treatments and mantras. Except for the poor upper belt of Jahbahi, all villages have trained mother and child health workers and either trained TBAs (traditional birth attendants), or *sudenis,* some of them trained, who live locally.

Koldanda has a government sub health post in the village, which also serves Biskundanda. Since Biskundanda residents have to walk almost two hours to reach it, the health post is of little use to them. Koldanda also has a family planning volunteer, and immunization clinics visit both villages every month. The nearest health post for Jahbahi is 45 minutes away in Joshipur, and there is a private pharmacy in the village. The closest health post for Dekhetbhully is an hour away; but an NGO village clinic provides monthly check-ups, and a private pharmacy in the community, as well as medical halls an hour away, are useful for emergency treatment and medication.

Rice mills and other facilities

Both Koldanda and Dekhetbhully have rice mills in the village, available to all. In Jahbahi many wealthier households have rice mills, which poorer households pay to use. Biskundanda resi-

Children at school in Koldanda.

dents walk to a village 25 minutes away to use a rice mill. As with improved water supplies, access to rice mills even at a distance has resulted in significant time savings. In Dekhetbhully, it has also meant a change in gender roles. Women used to wake up early to grind the grain by hand. Now men take the responsibility, enjoying a chance to chat while they wait their turn at the mill.

None of these villages is served by electricity. Nine households in Koldanda and one in Biskundanda have installed biogas tanks, using a government subsidy. Koldanda has a post office, and the VDC headquarters resource centre is located there. In Dekhetbhully and Jahbahi a number of shops sell biscuits, noodles, sweets, matches, tobacco, cigarettes, and in Dekhetbhully these serve as local gathering places for boys and men.

NGOs

In Koldanda, there is a full time representative of the NGO RSDC (Rural Self Reliance Development Centre), who has been active in promoting nonformal education, sanitation and a savings group. LISP (Local Initiatives Support Programme), a Swiss organization, supports the local production of herbals. A Tharu-focused NGO, BASE, which works in many Far Western villages, has a field office in Joshipur and is active in Jahbahi. NNSWA works in Dekhetbhully. No CBOs or NGOs work in Biskundanda.

Economy and livelihoods

Family livelihoods certainly affect the resources that can be made available for children, and the child care time that is possible for caregivers. Less obviously, but just as important for this study, they have been found in research over the years also to influence basic child rearing philosophy. Parents generally employ child rearing strategies that have been found over time to maximize children's potential for success in the world they occupy. A number of studies have shown a correlation between the traits supported in children and their assumed roles later in life.[23] (See also page 48 Important characteristics.)

Local subsistence

A Tharu man and his son go fishing, Jahbahi.

Tharu grandfather weaves a fishing net, while looking after his grand daughter.

In all four villages people are primarily farmers, relying on what is locally grown for subsistence. In the hill villages maize, rice, millet, and mustard are cultivated for local consumption, and rice is grown further down the mountain by those who can afford paddy land. Families also have kitchen gardens, and grow a range of vegetables as well as some fruits. In the terai they also fish. In Jahbahi, big landlords own

23   See, for instance, Ogbu J 1981 'Origins of human competence: A cultural-ecological perspective', *Child Development,* 52, 413-429; and Kohn M L 1969 'Social class and parent-child relationships: an interpretation', in R L Coser (ed) *Life cycle and Achievement in America.* New York: Harper and Row

Although time is invested primarily in subsistence farming, few families are actually able to survive on what they produce. Increasingly they are forced to rely on outside sources of income to supplement the insufficient food that they raise on their land.

Increasing migration out of the villages brings in money, but also results in increased work burdens for those that are left behind, and children are more likely to be pulled out of school
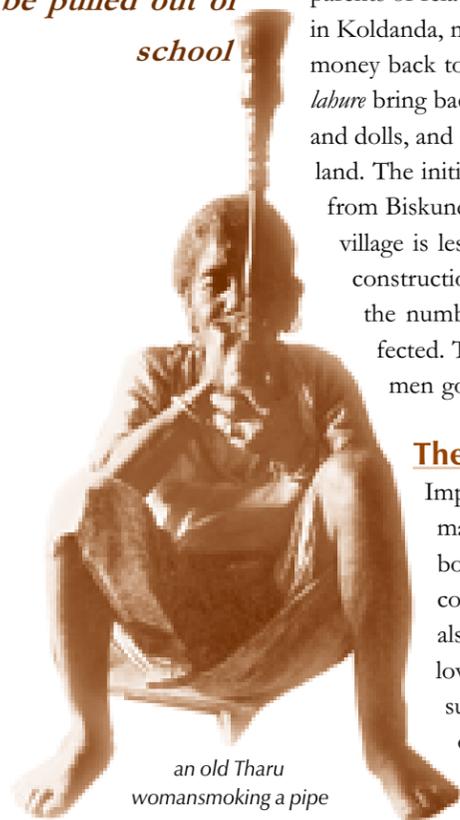
most of the land, and labourers (*kamaiya*) work for them in return for cash or kind. The main crops are rice and wheat. People also grow vegetables at different times of year, and a number of fruits. In Dekhetbhully people farm their own land, and sometimes work as sharecroppers, although this is less common than in their old settlement, because no-one has spare land for sharecropping now. The main crop is rice, and maize and cash crops are also grown. Because the land has only recently been cultivated, it still needs work, and there is no facility for irrigation. Women feel that their work burden has increased as a result. In all four villages, people keep pigs, poultry and goats for meat, and cattle or buffalo for ploughing, manure and milk.

Village workloads are heaviest during planting time (July and August for the hills, June to August in the *terai*), and harvest (October and November in the hills, October in the *terai*.) Rice planting and harvesting times are especially challenging in the hills, since these tasks happen at a distance. Often families sleep at their paddy fields for days at a time, taking their children with them for the duration. Over the more slack winter months people may build or repair houses, prepare fields and do other maintenance chores, weave baskets (*dhakia*), go fishing, and to the market, and participate in festivals.

Migrant labour

A number of people from all four villages leave home to work as seasonal labourers during the winter. In Biskundanda, 60 percent of the workforce, men as well as women, go to the *terai* or to Indian cities for varying periods of time in search of wage labour. Increasingly children from about 11 to 16, both boys and girls, are going out to work as labourers along with their parents or relatives, as construction workers or agricultural labourers in the *terai*. Especially in Koldanda, men also migrate to Indian cities or the Gulf on a longer term basis, sending money back to their families, but only returning for the annual festival of *Dashain*. These *lahure* bring back a variety of consumer goods such as cassette players, clothing, tin roofing and dolls, and are also able to repay family loans, and in some cases, to purchase additional land. The initial cost of going to the Gulf is so high that poorer families, especially those from Biskundanda, are more likely to go to Indian cities or to the *terai*. Work outside the village is less common in the *terai* villages, but in Jahbahi a few people work in road construction, rickshaw driving and portering in nearby towns or villages. Depending on the number of household members, the quality of child care can be adversely affected. This is especially the case in Biskundanda, where women and girls as well as men go out for work.

The market

Improved roads and transportation have given all the villages better access to markets, and the opportunity to sell cash crops and local crafts, such as bamboo baskets and umbrellas from Koldanda, iron goods from the Bishwokarma communities, fish nets and baskets from the Tharu. People in Biskundanda also sell the high quality rice that they grow, and buy back *kanika*, or broken low quality rice. Most of the resulting income is used to supplement local food supplies, and to obtain such necessities and consumer items as salt, kerosene, oil, fertilizer, matches, clothing, and tobacco, prepared foods and stationery. Market access has increased livelihood possibilities – but has changed life in other ways as well. In the past, for instance, women wove the fabric for

an old Tharu woman smoking a pipe

clothing, a labour intensive practice. Clothes were seldom replaced and were often torn and inadequate. Now they are available at low cost in the market and are generally replaced before they become too ragged.

Local economic practices

In the hills and in Jahbahi, people rely on mutual labour exchange systems for planting, harvesting and other work. In Biskundanda, if they cannot repay one another with labour, they may give a party instead. In Jahbahi, the poorer landless *kamaiya* families work as paid labourers on other people's land rather than as part of the exchange system. When every family has finished planting, they all throw mud at each other in celebration. In Biskundanda and Dekhetbhully, Bishwokarma families exchange their blacksmithing services with other groups for annual payments of grain.

A Bishwokarma man metal working, helped by his son turning the bellows.

A number of village practices can be seen alternatively as either protecting the local economy, or else as stifling entrepreneurship. People in the hills, for instance, are required to use the services of the local carpenter and mason, who are paid in cash, rather than hiring outside help; and pigs cannot be sold on the open market without group consent, but must instead be sold within the village at lower than market prices.

Wealth differences

Wealth differences within communities can be relatively minor or quite extreme. In Koldanda there are no great extremes of wealth or poverty. No one ever dies from hunger, and no family is so rich that it controls the lives of other families. The mutual labour system includes everyone, and the richest villagers can be seen working in the fields of the poorest. Even here, however, the poorest families, more than a third of the community, own too little land for subsistence and are dependent on credit to meet their basic needs. This village's relative lack of wealth differences makes it unusual for Nepal.

Jahbahi, at the other extreme, is a highly stratified society, with very wealthy landlords at the top of the system and poor landless *kamaiya* at the bottom (see box on page 30). The wealthiest households own tractors, threshers, rice mills, large houses and huge tracts of land. They often are people with a good deal of political power, including an ex-DDC chair and a member of parliament. The poorest *kamaiya* households in this village, whose debt is so heavy that they are essentially bonded to their wealthy neighbours, have little or no control over their lives. According to one *kamaiya* informant, they borrow food from wealthy landlords in return for work and are often charged as much as double the amount in the market, receiving in effect half of the going wage for their work. Most *kamaiya* in Jahbahi*,* however, express satisfaction with the the arrangement, claiming they are better off than *kamaiya* in other areas who work for *pahadi* landlords.

Because Dekhetbhully is a newly resettled community, land holdings, allocated by the government, are relatively equal, but there are still considerable wealth differences. Wealthier households have land and jobs elsewhere or assets such as a shop or inherited savings. Those in the
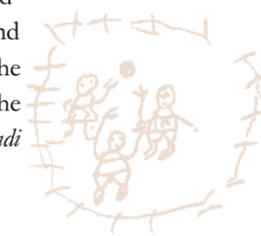
The term *"kamaiya"* originates from *"kam"* or *"work"*, and originally referred to any male working for cash or kind. Studies suggest that the *kamaiya* system originated amongst the Tharu because of a shortage of male labour in the family. A labourer would be hired from another family and granted privileges as part of the landlord's family, including food, housing and payment. This system has changed over time – from "a helping hand for the family farm" to a system of bonded labour, in which the labourer becomes indebted and thus bonded to the landlord. A contributing factor to the change was the migration of people from the hills to the terai after the eradication of malaria. Many Tharu people were displaced by the migrants who took advantage of the Tharu's traditional practices of ownership, community trust and lack of land registration. Nowadays, *kamaiyas* are generally landless and totally dependent on their landlords – whether hill migrants or Tharu – for survival. They become indebted to landlords through loans for emergencies or social obligations. They work for the landlord to pay off their debts, but they lack bargaining power and are often underpaid for their services. The debt accumulates so that the *kamaiya* often has to bond his whole family to meet payments. He cannot pay the debt in his lifetime, so bondage is transmitted from one generation to the next. In recent years this system has attracted attention as a significant human rights issue, and the Constitution of Nepal recognizes the right not to be enslaved or forced into labour.

Sources: Poudel M M, B B Niraula (1998) *Gender and Child Issues under Kamaiya System in Mid and Far- western Tarai of Nepal*, Nepal: ActionAid-Nepal ; INSEC (1992) *Bonded Labour under Kamaiya system*, Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press; Robertson A, S Mishra (1997) *Forced to Plough*, Kathmandu; INSEC and ASI; CWCD(1997) *'Situation Analysis on Child labour in Nepal*, Kathmandu; UNICEF-Nepal and NPC

bottom categories have no assets other than their land, find it difficult to get work and in some cases have had to sell off land in order to pay debts or interest on debts from their fathers' time, or to pay for health treatment. No group in the community finds their land plots sufficient for survival, since there is no irrigation. And because the land is still not formally registered, there is a fear that they might be forced to move again or that some powerful person might grab their land.

Biskundanda is certainly the poorest community overall. Only three households have sufficient land to meet their needs, as well as jobs outside the village. The majority of families cannot subsist from their own production for more than three months a year, and are frequently in crisis, struggling to find work as wage labourers, and taking on heavy debt loads.

In all four villages the majority of households are unable to grow sufficient food for survival, and must find other ways to make ends meet. Few families can draw on assets beyond their own time and labour, and survival in difficult times means increased work loads for women and older children, and decreased time for those who are young enough to require care. Borrowing is a fact of life for most families, either in response to crises such as flooding, drought or family illness, or as a more routine survival strategy. The high cost of traditional celebrations and rituals can require even more secure households to take out loans (see page 38). In some cases, loans may be short-term and interest free, to see families through until a crop is harvested, or a job comes through. For poorer families, especially the landless, it can be a crippling way of life, coping with chronic interest payments that leave little hope of escape. Breaking out of the cycle of poverty will clearly involve new approaches to livelihood – either through the continued exploration of possibilities within the villages (cash crops, crafts and so on) or through equipping children to take on a wider and more lucrative range of work possibilities outside.

borrowing is a fact of life for most families

Social and political structures

Social and political structures affect the degree of control that families and individuals have over their lives – which in turn can affect even the quality of interactions within a family. The degree to which men and women are able to influence local decision-making, in particular, can have a significant impact on the resources available for children.

Caste and ethnic differences

All over Nepal, caste and ethnic differences continue to be a significant factor in peoples' lives, contributing to isolation, vulnerability and reduced opportunity (see box)**.** In these villages it has been possible to explore some of the impacts of these differences on the ways parents raise their children.

In *Dekhetbhully*, many people claim that old distinctions are ending. All three local groups were given about the same amount of land when they moved, and the Tharus were liberated from their *kamaiya* status. The differences that persist, some Brahmin/Chhetri men argued in the course of a dialogue, are a function of engrained traditions and habits, and it is up to

Caste and ethnicity influence how families operate and the opportunities available to their children

The majority of Nepal's population is composed of Hindu Indo-Aryan people, with most of the re mainder consisting of Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups. The Hindu caste system is an entrenched part of Nepali life, and was for many years formalized under the law. The Muluki Ain (National Code) of 1853 categorised both Hindu and non-Hindu people into a hierarchy, with the lowest castes classified as *pani nachalne jat* (water polluting) or untouchables. Discrimination against untouchables was institutionalized, and any violation of this hierarchy was punishable by law. Although subsequently outlawed by a new Muluki Ain in 1963 and made punishable by the democratic Constitution of 1990, discrimination on the basis of caste is still widely practiced and "untouchables" or Dalits are socially ostracised.

Discrimination against Dalits permeates every aspect of life. For a higher caste person to touch a Dalit is considered to be contaminating, and Dalits are restricted in their access to drinking water, and prevented from entering temples, hotels, teashops, houses and even cowsheds. Dalit children are not allowed to mix with higher caste children at meal times or during festivals. As well as being socially excluded, Dalits are economically and politically deprived and are denied education, training, health services, and other opportunities to combat poverty and develop as full human beings. Most Dalit families are poor. Amongst Dalits, women and girls are the most disadvantaged group, marginalised because of their sex, caste and poverty, and for girls, because of their age. The word Dalit literally means person in a swamp, and Dalit activists use the term to represent the swamp of illiteracy, exploitation, marginalisation, absolute poverty and caste discrimination that is the lot of many of these people.

Nationally, ethnic groups are also socially and culturally discriminated against. The enforcement of Nepali as the official language and the medium of instruction in schools, for instance, has pushed non-Nepali speaking ethnic groups and their culture to the periphery. Their grievances also include lack of proportional representation in the legislature; and the need for recognition of religions other than Hinduism. Shrestha and Khadka have said that most people in Nepal, both men and women, take for granted a system in which sex, caste or ethnicity determine an individual's opportunities, because they are socialised and educated to transmit it, not transform it.

Sources: Jha H B (1998) *Terai Dalits: A Case Study of Selected VDCs of Saptari Districts of Nepal*, Nepal: ActionAid Nepal; Khanal, K P(1996) *Caste in the Nepal Terai: A Study of Dalit Communities in Siraha District*, Nepal: Save the Children US; Shrestha, L S, and P S Khadka (1999) *Draft Gender, Ethnicity and Caste Sensitive FACETS Program Manual*, Kathmandu: SC/US HFO (unpublished)

individuals to make changes in their own lives. Tharus, they said, are more reliant on alcohol than hill people; and Bishwokarma have not taken advantage of educational opportunities. Many Bishwokarma and Tharus, however, continue to perceive their neighbours' behaviour and attitudes as discriminatory. Bishwokarma are not allowed into the homes of other groups, and cannot fetch water from neighbours' hand pumps. Because they are excluded from local worship, they are in a process of building a separate temple. Researchers noted that the Brahmin Chhettri children tend to dominate others in mixed groups, and that they call Tharu children "rat eaters".

In **Biskundanda,** the Magars similarly claim they do not discriminate against the Bishwokarma. But the Bishwokarma feel dominated by the Magar, and speak especially of caste discrimination in the predominantly Magar school, claiming that because their children are made to feel unwelcome, they are more likely to drop out. Practices that are defended by the more secure groups in both communities as merely "traditional" and in no way intended as discriminatory, are in fact experienced as discriminatory by those affected. Being prevented from touching the food or entering the homes of higher caste groups inevitably reinforces their sense of inferiority, which can exacerbate the situation. Although there have been significant changes in terms of the opportunities legally available to groups, in practice strong social differences still exist.

Because the population in **Koldanda** is almost exclusively Magar, caste and ethnic differences are not a big factor here. Most households are related in one way or another, and this, together with the lack of wealth extremes, creates a high level of social harmony and stability relative to many other communities. Bishwokarma who visit to do ironwork, however, are not allowed into Magar homes.

Distinct social differences also exist in **Jahbahi,** although it is a purely Tharu village without caste distinctions. Because both families in the relationship between rich landlords and poor *kamaiya* are Tharu, it seems not to be perceived locally as exploitative, and researchers noted the cooperation and mutual respect between *kamaiya* and landlords. Other studies, too, have shown a strong relationship of mutual assistance between *kamaiya* and landlords, especially where both are Tharu. But the differences are significant, and *kamaiya* children lack the opportunities of their richer benefactors. The lack of apparent resentment may have to do with the spirit of community amongst Tharus, or may reflect the reluctance of the *kamaiya* to risk their security by discussing the situation critically. In spite of the security which many *kamaiya* said they felt, they clearly wanted other options in life for their children.

Most of Badhuram Chaudhary's life has been spent as a *kamaiya*, and now that he is old, two of his sons have become *kamaiya*. They said that being *kamaiya* ensures that they will have a steady flow of food. Their goal, however, is to ensure that their own sons study and free themselves and their fathers from the landlords. They said, "We became *kamaiyas* and freed our father from work, but we don't want our children to become *kamaiya* for us." They felt that if they had some land then they could fulfil their hopes. Otherwise their chances were not good.

Tharu grandfather and child from one of the big landowning families spending some time together.

Local administration

In keeping with the national system of administration, all villages are represented at district level through the Village Development Committee (VDC), and at the VDC level by their own ward representatives. Representatives are mostly men, but there is compulsory provision for one female member at both ward level, and VDC committee level. Because this provision is new, women are still inexperienced in this role, and are greatly outnumbered by more powerful men.

In contrast to pre-democracy days VDCs now control budgets of Rs 500 000 (approx. US $7000) to be spent on local development activities. The Village Self Reliant Development Programme of 1996 specifies that 25 percent of the total funds should be spent for human resource development, welfare and social security. Both this programme and the Local Self Government Act of 1999 emphasise the need to promote social welfare, with priority given to programmes for children. The interpretation of social welfare, however, is left to the local VDC, and the majority of this money has been spent on the construction of roads and irrigation canals. There is little auditing or monitoring of their spending.[24] However, an increasing number of villages are successfully accessing these funds for the establishment of ECD centres.

Although the administrative system is the same in every village, it does not always give the same level of control to each villages. **Koldanda and Biskundanda,** for instance, are part of the same VDC. But the vice chairman lives in Koldanda, and the VDC headquarters are here. Proximity gives Koldanda residents easier access to the decision-making process. Biskundanda's poorer and largely Bishwokarma population is not skilled at applying political pressure, and caste barriers may also play a role. As a result, Biskundanda's concerns are less likely to be expressed and responded to.

Jahbahi's political influence is very much affected by the powerful higher level leaders who happen to live in the village – a Member of Parliament, two ex-district level leaders, and the VDC chair. Joshipur's VDC, as a result, takes a lead in district politics, with tangible results for the village. For example, before elections many electricity cable poles were put up, although there was no electricity.

People in **Dekhetbhully** are politically aware and used to voicing their concerns as a result of their resettlement. There is some confusion, however, in local political leadership. Although the larger Dekhetbhully village has ward representatives, the ward chair and members from the community's old settlement continue also to work as local representatives, reporting back to their old VDC. The district government has made no ruling on this situation, and it is unlikely to be resolved before the next local elections.

Social governance

Traditional social and religious leaders, all male, still carry as much weight in the villages as the local administrative representatives, and sometimes more. Religious beliefs and practices in all villages are primarily Hindu, although in some villages there are also older animist practices. Bishwokarmas in Biskundanda have adopted Magar practices and language over time, and it is no longer easy to distinguish their traditions. Tharu *badghars, guruvas, jhankris* and *dhamis* in the *terai,* Magar *ravras, gurubas* and *lamas* in the hills, are all well respected, hold the power to

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[24] Paudel, K. 'Resources for VDCs: Funds that don't produce' in *Spotlight*, April 3-9, 1998 p16-21.

mobilize the community both socially and in religious observation, are consulted for both community and individual problems, and often are a source of assistance for those in crisis. When there are community concerns, decisions are made or facilitated by these individuals in local meetings. Although there is no formal relationship, local administrators and representatives generally act in consultation with traditional leaders. In Dekhetbhully traditional leaders are gradually losing their influence, as people, especially from the younger generation, become more influenced by education, cinema, radio and life in a mixed community. But in the other villages they remain a powerful force, and any attempts to initiate change in these communities would have to be undertaken with the cooperation and support of these leaders.

An important feature of local governance in Biskundanda is the *thar,* a solidarity group of neighbours for the exchange of labour and the distribution of some resources. *Thari* , or selected leaders, are responsible for making decisions for the benefit of the *thar*, and work together with other traditional leaders. All members within the group are in theory equally treated, but caste can sometimes become an obstacle to harmony.

All four villages hold community meetings for local decision-making, and residents are notified by special village messengers. Attendance and participation vary somewhat from village to village. Male household heads are the primary decision-makers, and women and children are generally welcome to attend but their views are not solicited or considered. In Koldanda, women never speak up in the presence of older men. In Biskundanda, however, if the male head is away, women and older sons may actually speak out. Decisions are generally made by male consensus, with heavy reliance on the judgement of community leaders. In Koldanda, meetings are sometimes called to discuss matters directly involving children. At one meeting, during a dry season, it was decided not to give matches to any children until conditions changed. On another occasion, when children were responsible for destroying some crops, they were sent to speak to the *rawra*, an intimidating and effective preventative measure.

Clubs and community organisations

Koldanda, Biskundanda and Dekhetbhully have youth clubs which are involved in various ways in local development. Membership is male, with the exception of a few token female members in Dekhetbhully. The club in Koldanda runs a non-formal education programme for women, pressures people to pen their pigs and keep the village clean, arranges recreational activities for children and works to raise money for various projects by donating their labour locally. These young men generally have more exposure than other residents to the outside world, sometimes through their studies, and are considered a source of information for the community. In Biskundanda the club has also tried to persuade people to keep animals penned, and have just undertaken a literacy class. In Dekhetbhully, the club cuts across ethnic and caste lines, and is a good forum for reducing discrimination. In the past it was supportive of the school, introduced modern games, and worked to eliminate gambling and drinking. People say the club is less effective than it used to be, but felt it still had the potential to help build the

community. In Dekhetbhully, there is also a separate Bishwokarma group intent on improving their own economic situation, and a Tharu group working for the benefit of the whole community. Throughout Nepal these clubs are becoming increasingly politicized.

Household structure and gender roles and responsibilities

Although it is less strikingly the case in Magar and Tharu communities, in all the villages women and girls unquestionably have lower status than men and boys. This can be reinforced by some local beliefs, such as those representing women as polluted during menstruation, or potentially threatening in some situations. In Jahbahi for instance, women often avoid visiting households with sick members for fear they will be blamed for causing the illness.

In all communities women and girls are considered to have primary responsibility for child care and household work, including fodder and firewood collection, and men and boys for outdoor work and income generating activities. These generalizations overlook the fact that women are also usually heavily involved in animal care and work in the field. Men sometimes do "women's" work as well, but this varies a good deal from village to village, and men seldom take on as heavy a work load as women. In most communities, women work for longer hours than men, and household work tends not even to be dignified by the term "work", usually defined as

women work longer hours than men
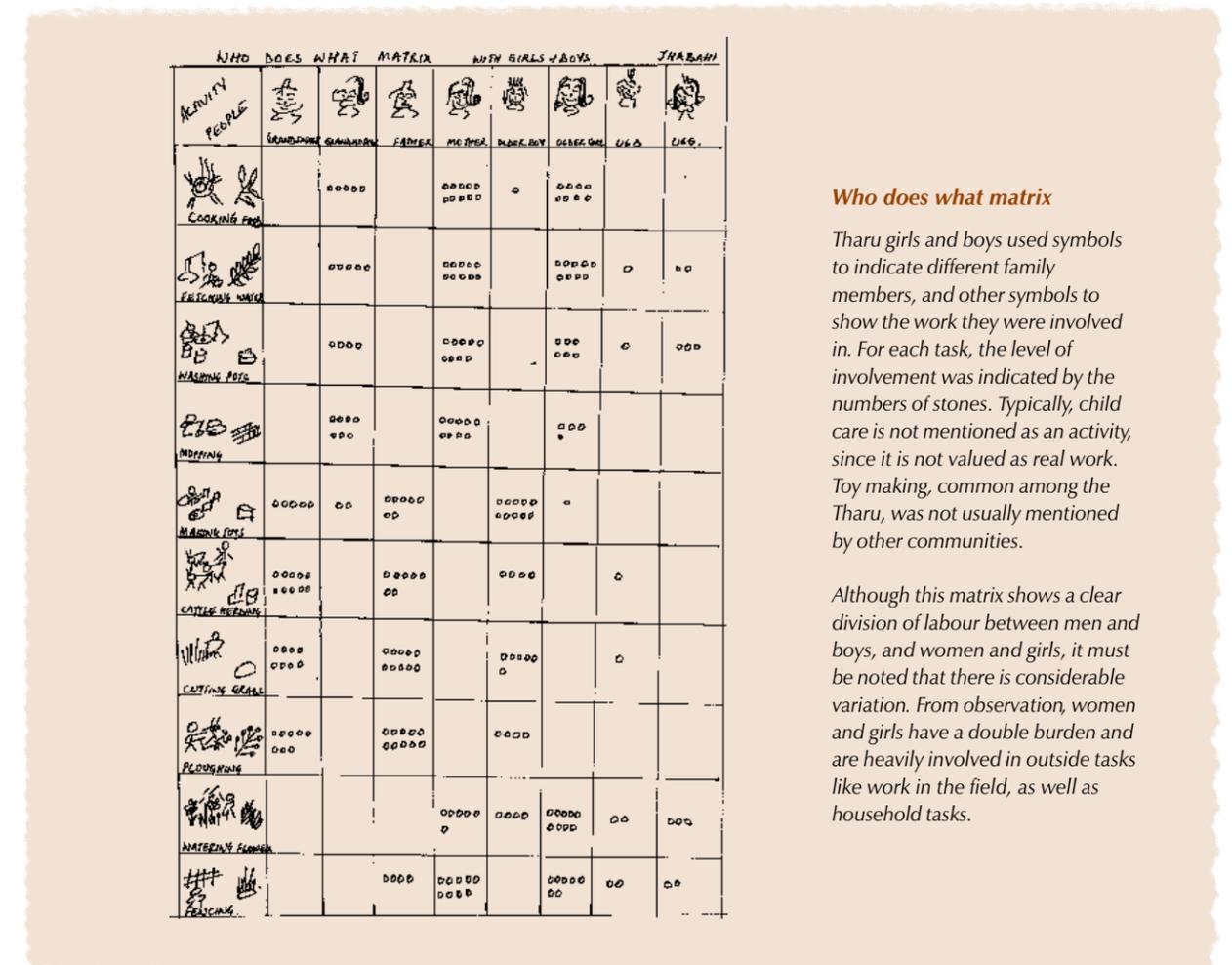
Who does what matrix

Tharu girls and boys used symbols to indicate different family members, and other symbols to show the work they were involved in. For each task, the level of involvement was indicated by the numbers of stones. Typically, child care is not mentioned as an activity, since it is not valued as real work. Toy making, common among the Tharu, was not usually mentioned by other communities.

Although this matrix shows a clear division of labour between men and boys, and women and girls, it must be noted that there is considerable variation. From observation, women and girls have a double burden and are heavily involved in outside tasks like work in the field, as well as household tasks.

Women's work: preparing the meal.

Men's work: ploughing the fields, Jahbahi.

those activities more generally associated with men. Only in the poorest *kamaiya* households, are men's working hours longer than women's.

In Magar households, the differences in men's and women's, girls' and boys', roles are not as sharply defined, and boys and men may be seen helping around the house when women and girls are out of the house or short on time. In other communities, men may help out from time to time, but only if there are no women or girls around to take on vital tasks.

In most households, men control resources, making decisions on how income should be spent, how assets (land, livestock) should be disposed of, and who should do what work. Household heads, especially in the hills and among the Tharu, tend to consult women and sometimes children about such decisions, although the ultimate decision still rests with men. When men migrate to work outside the village, women take on the responsibility for decision-making. If there is a major decision over selling or buying land, they get in touch with their husbands. In nuclear households, women generally have more say at the household level than in joint or extended families, where they are expected to defer first to the household head, then to their mother-in-law and finally their husband.

In the hills, an important opportunity for many girls and women to exercise some control over property and income, comes in the form of *pewa*, a traditional gift of a goat or hens given when a girl is young. Women take their *pewa* to their husband's house, and if they sell it, they control the income. Husbands sometimes borrow it, but must repay it. *Pewa* has legal status, and a gift of *pewa* is publically announced, ensuring that people know it is a girl's property. The very fact that *pewa* is remarkable, however, indicates how little relative control women have over resources more generally.

Marriage

Marriages in all villages used to take place far earlier and were more likely to be arranged, except among the Magar. In Jahbahi, for instance, children used to be promised to one another by the age of four or five, and early marriage was seen as a source of religious merit for parents. Most parents are now in favour of later marriage, in part because of the frequent failure of early marriages, but also because the household work load that accompanies marriage is seen as too heavy for young girls. Both girls and boys now tend to marry earliest in Biskundanda, somewhere between the ages of 14 and 16, and latest in Koldanda, where parents encourage their children to wait until their twenties. This trend towards later marriage has important health implications (see page 108).

In the *terai*, arranged marriage is still in practice in most cases, but in the hills young people most frequently elope, followed by a formal celebration. Elopement in increasingly popular in the *terai* as well, although it is more likely to mean a loss of prestige for parents. Parents in all villages worry about marrying their daughters to prosperous families, and start to teach them household chores from an early age to qualify them for this role. Once girls are married, they belong formally to their husband's family. If the couple lives separately from the older generation, girls are likely to have more contact with their own families, turning to them for support if necessary.

Culture and change

"Culture" is often perceived as a term that describes a particular group's more colourful and exotic practices and rituals. But it also includes the much fuller range of ways that people have of organizing and making sense of their day-to-day experience – including their child rearing practices. A group's culture is seldom static, but responds dynamically to changes in economic and social circumstances. The culture of these four communities has changed over time, and will continue to change, as they adapt to changing realities in their villages and in the larger world.

Access to markets and health services, increased exposure to the outside world through migration, and the savings in time resulting from improved water supplies and rice mills have all resulted in dramatic changes in the way of life in these communities. Radio has become a good source of information about hygiene, family planning, child marriage, gender and caste discrimination, and also exposes people to the national and international news. Schools have been an especially significant agent of change, increasing exposure to new ideas and habits, and also, in Dekhetbhully and Biskundanda, to different castes and ethnic groups. Schooling has also affected workloads, effectively removing a number of children from the labour pool for several hours a day.

Even celebrations and rituals have changed in these villages. All four communities observe a number of rituals and religious events, some of long-standing and some more recent adaptations to the practices of other groups. Among the Magar and Tharus especially, celebrations are frequently borrowed from mainstream Hindu culture. In the hills there do not appear to be strong feelings about these adaptations, although the *lamas* worry that their traditional knowledge is no longer as respected. Among the Tharu, especially in Jahbahi, older people are dis-

…ways that people have of organising and making sense of their day-to-day experience.

turbed by the changes they see, and concerned that their culture is dying. During a dialogue session they spoke of the importance of awareness raising programmes in school, so that children could learn more about their traditions. The loss of indigenous practices is not the only issue raised by these celebrations. Increasingly people feel that the financial pressure imposed by lavish events is more than they are willing to bear. Heavy expenditures on *raksi*, food and presents ensure prestige, but contribute to poverty. They want to maintain "traditional" practices, but not at such a price. Young people in particular feel that expensive and lengthy celebrations should be simpified and shortened, and that culture should adapt to current needs. In the hill villages there have been various attempts to make changes, but some old people are opposed to such efforts. Reform, it is acknowledged, will be difficult without consensus.

"There used to be no school, hospital or TV, so we didn't like the past compared to now. But what was good then was that people used to meet and gather together more. Nowadays it's good because we can move around easily with the road. We have the market and radio. Life is generally better than in the past. Children have better opportunities these days. There were problems of food, education, and clothes in the past, but now we can borrow money and give these things to our children. These days we parents try our best to fulfil the wishes of our children, in the past our parents hid money in a pit and didn't spend it on us". (Discussion with a group of 30 to 50 year old men in Jahbahi)

People in the hills are for the most part enthusiastic about the changes that have occurred over the last few generations, and find that life has improved and become easier in a number of ways. There is little sense that their cultural identity is being seriously threatened in the process. In the *terai*, there is enthusiasm about many changes, but also concern about the potentially negative effects of many external influences – probably in great part because of their proximity to the Indian border.

Terai villages have easy access to Indian videos and film, and families are concerned about the effects for children, feeling that these media undermine values of obedience and respect, and encourage fighting, drinking, gambling, elopement and the wasting of time and money. People, especially in the *terai* villages, also acknowledge a growing problem with alcohol, drug and tobacco use. These habits are not only damaging to health, but cost money which many people feel could be better spent on children's education. Especially in Jahbahi, some community members feel that modern conveniences have made people lazy and selfish, and that there used to be more unity, peace and cooperation in the community.

It tends to be those who are most established and secure in any village who are most likely to resist change. In Jahbahi, for instance, it is the ex DDC member who speaks out most forcefully about the "loss of community feeling" that has resulted from modern conveniences. And in Koldanda, it is a few of the more powerful and wealthy older people who resist the move to spend less on celebrations. Those whose lives are most affected tend to welcome change. This split is also apparent in people's feelings about discrimination and power differences. Inevitably, those who benefit most from current structures are inclined to argue that any apparent imbalance in power is simply a custom, and quite neutral or even beneficial in terms of its effects. Those who have less control in these relationships are more likely to interpret differences as painful and discriminatory, and to wish for change. Often, however, the desire for change is slow to be voiced when both the powerful and the impotent are gathered together.

Whether it is desired or not, change will continue to happen. The challenge for these communities is to find productive ways to make use of what the larger world has to offer, without compromising their strengths. A particular challenges is to help their children develop the skills they need to cope with a rapidly changing world, while keeping strong their sense of cultural identity and values.

Child Rearing Beliefs and Values

It is increasingly acknowledged that there is no such universal as "childhood", and that the meaning and experience of childhood, and the process of children's development, are understood and constructed differently by different groups. The field of developmental psychology has been justifiably accused of neglecting this reality, and of promoting an understanding of children that is largely shaped by studies of Euro-American middle class children.[25] This, in turn, has affected early childhood programming which too often has reflected the goals and preoccupations of those remote from the local context. For such programming to be vital and effective, it has to be built not only on the

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[25]   Burman, E (1994) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology,* London: Routledge.

core of experience that has genuinely been found, through cross-cultural comparison, to be more or less common to all children, but also on the very specific values and concerns that have currency within a particular setting.[26]

Parental practices and behaviour are shaped by a range of beliefs and values – not only understandings about how children develop, and how this development is best supported; but also ideals about the kinds of people their children should grow up to be, and perceptions about the opportunities that will be available to them in the future and the skills they will need to take advantage of them. According to developmental anthropologist Robert LeVine, child rearing practices depend on a hierarchy of concerns – first and foremost on what parents understand to be essential for their children's immediate survival and well-being, second, on what they believe will support their long-term economic security, and third, on adherence to local norms and customs for behaviour.[27] An appreciation of these concerns adds a critical perspective to an understanding of children's experience in these four villages.

D McKenzie

Perceptions of child development

Definitions of childhood

The definition of childhood in all four villages has less to do with age than with physical growth and evolving capabilities. The most relevant factor is a child's ability to contribute, as opposed to simply requiring care.

The early years, generally up to about five or six, are seen as a special time, deserving particular care and indulgence, and relatively free of responsibility. By the time they are six or seven, children in these villages, as in many societies, are considered to have developed new capacities, and expectations change.[28] They become more aware of family and community norms, are able to understand, to take responsibility and to contribute in dependable ways. Once they have reached this stage, they are no longer "children" in quite the same sense in the eyes of their families, although they are not yet considered to be adult. There are variations both within and between communities – children are more likely to be expected to take reponsibility if they are the oldest, or if the family is especially hard pressed.

The point at which children are considered to be fully mature, and able to handle whatever adults can do, varies more from one group to another, especially for girls. In Jahbahi, girls as young as nine or ten

A boy in Biskundanda carrying fodder

were reported to be considered adult, although the beginning of menstruation more generally marks this turning point. In Dekhetbhully and Biskundanda the age is more often between 12 and 15. In all three of these communities, boys are thought to reach maturity somewhere between 14 and 16. In Koldanda parents feel that both boys and girls are able to participate fully in work by the age of 15 or 16, but they are not considered to be fully mature until they are at least 18. In all villages, full adult status is related to being married and having children.

Important developmental markers

When parents were asked to describe significant events and landmarks in their children's development, there was a range of responses. In all the villages some parents pointed to indicators routinely used for discussing early development in the formal ECD world – their children's physical growth and capacities, their progress in language, their interactions with other people and their growth in understanding, generally with an emphasis on the development of work related skills. In some cases there appeared to be a greater recall for children's achievement of certain skills, and greater interest in some of the subtleties of interaction and achievement. This was especially true in Koldanda, where parents recounted in detail such events as their children's increased reluctance to deal with unfamiliar people at about eight months, or their growing ability to figure things out, and the pride they took in their competence (see box below).

D McKenzie
Gaining confidence in walking

A Koldanda timeline: The development of Naresh Gharti, a boy of almost four years

- At 7 months he started to walk holding on to things
- At 9 months his first teeth appeared
- At 18 months he could walk easily, eat alone, imitate dances and songs
- At 2 years he started to speak, and by 2 years 6 months, he could say short sentences
- At 2 years 7 months he could do what his parents asked, imitate and follow family members
- At 3, could count up to 18, catch and play with baby goats, do small tasks, go to toilet alone, shut the door, fetch the water in a small one litre jar, help to bring dishes at food time, swing alone, climb small trees and walls. He wanted to bathe by himself, could tease his elder brother, and could distinguish between more and less.
- At 3 years 2 months he would sneak up to touch his friend, then run to escape. Once he ran up on to the roof, fell back down and was knocked unconscious. They went to hospital in Tansen and the doctor gave him medicine.
- At 3 years 6 months he talked about the work other people were doing, fought with his brother, demanded the same amount of food. He was able to do the work he was asked for, and very much wanted to play with other children. He would count things that people gave him, and tell them how much they had given him.
- When Naresh is 4 years old, his parents expect that he will be able to go to take messages to the neighbors, say whether his clothes are inside out, button his clothes, and do a lot of chores.
- At 5-6 they expect him to be able to go to school, to transfer food neatly to his own dish, bath nicely and show respect.

26 Kagitcibasi, C (1996) *Family and Human Development across Cultures: A View from the Other Side*, Mahwah New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum.
27 LeVine, RA (1988) 'Human parental care: Universal goals, cultural strategies, individual behavior', in R. LeVine, P M Miller and M M West (eds) *Parental Behavior in Diverse Societies: New Directions for Child Development*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass
28 Barbara Rogoff, in an assessment of data from 50 societies, notes that in the great majority of cases, an important shift is considered to occur when children reach the age of about six or seven. All over the world, this is the age at which children are expected to take greater responsibility, and it is known in developmental psychology as the "five to seven shift." Rogoff, B, J Sellers, S Piraolta, N Fox and S H White (1976) 'Age of assignment of roles and responsibilities to children: a cross-cultural survey', *Human Development*, 19.

In the *terai* especially, there was considerable variation in the ages at which various markers were reported to take place, and men tended to identify changes as occurring far later than was likely (for instance, crawling at two-and-a-half years), which provoked amusement among the women. There was also a tendency, especially among the men, to respond to these questions by describing important ritual and ceremonial events, and health related problems, rather than developmental turning points.

These differences could be simply a function of the way the discussion was shaped by researchers in the different villages. But they could also reflect the fact that men in the *terai*, where work burdens are generally lower, are less involved in the day-to-day care of their children and more in the ceremonies that punctuate the early months and years. Whatever the case, researchers tended to be given richer and more nuanced accounts of development from some families, especially in Koldanda, where men traditionally have been more inclined to take part in child care.

"children are like chickens which need to be kept safe, guided, fed and loved"

Supporting development

Just as in the formal child development world, parents in these villages clearly see both nature and nurture as having a role in their children's development. On the one hand, a belief in *karma* is central in all these villages, and there were frequent references made to a certain inevitability in the way children turn out. A Biskundanda father, Prem Bahadur, said "Just as it is not necessary to sharpen the thorns of the forest, it is also not necessary to help children to become as we would like to see them. Children bring their luck by birth, so no one can influence them to be good or bad." A group of women in Koldanda noted that parents don't really need to teach children anything – if they just provide food when children are hungry and water when they're thirsty, they will learn by themselves whatever they need to learn.

Despite statements about children learning by themselves parents noted repeatedly that encouragement and support can stimulate learning and growth. In Jahbahi, fathers make *ghughuria*, or three-wheeled pushcarts, that provide support for children learning to walk, and they place small bells on their legs to encourage their walking. Parents in all villages say that they stimulate the acquisition of speech by reinforcing their children's attempts, repeating

phrases, and encouraging their responses. In Koldanda parents stress that if children have the chance to talk to teachers and outsiders, they are more likely to become "clever". Guidance and support is especially seen as important in the development of self-discipline and morality. In Biskundanda, for instance, parents believe that children under about six have no clear sense of right and wrong, but will learn if they are shown by example. By exposing children to a range of situations their decision-making capacity is developed.

The concept of "positive deviance" provides an interesting perspective on this issue. It recognizes that even amongst the poorest families, some children fare better than others and flourish. The concept has been applied specifically in the area of nutrition: in villages where large numbers of children are undernourished, an effective strategy has been to identify those children whose nutritional status is good, and to determine what family practices account for this "positive deviance."[29] Based on this knowledge, interventions can be planned with community members, focusing on locally developed strategies and locally available resources – thus departing significantly from traditional "needs-based" responses. This approach relates well to the commitment in this research to "build on strengths", and it has the potential to be applied to child rearing strategies in general – but with care, since it is more complex to define positive social outcomes than nutritional status. The application of this concept will be discussed in more detail in the recommendations section, but throughout the description and discussion of parental practices in this report, we will be drawing attention here and there to examples of such positive deviance – cases where parents give an unusual level of attention and support to their children's evolving capacities.

even amongst the poorest families some children fare better than others and flourish

A Tharu woman supports her baby to take a few steps.

A man from Jahbahi offered the following story as advice to parents: "Once Lord Krishna asked his mother to give him the moon, so the mother placed a pot of water there and told Lord Krishna to look in it. When Krishna saw the moon reflected there, he tried to catch it, but there was no moon there." This, said the community member, is how a mother should satisfy a child's curiosity. Others disagreed with him – no, this was a lie that Krishna's mother told. She should have told him that it wasn't possible to have the moon.

29 The application of this approach in community based programmes was pioneered by Save the Children in Vietnam. For a detailed description and guidelines, see Sternin, M, J Sternin, D Marsh (1998) *Designing a Community Based Nutrition Programme Using the Hearth Model and the Positive Deviance Approach – A Field Guide,* Save the Children US.

Differences in development between boys and girls

Many parents believe that boys and girls develop at somewhat different rates, a reflection of a difference in their natures, although there was not always agreement about what these differences were. Most often, people claimed that girls are quicker than boys – that they speak earlier and learn faster. In some cases parents related the difference to what they saw as an inborn recognition in girls of their future roles, and a desire to move on quickly to their husbands' homes.

Girls were widely described as more "simple", soft spoken and obedient by nature; boys as more aggressive and outgoing. In the *terai* villages, there was a sense that boys were more naturally drawn to gambling and drinking, and parents are aware of the need to work harder at helping them to become good people. In Koldanda, not all differences between boys and girls are seen as inborn; boys are considered to be wiser, but only because they have had greater opportunity for study. Tharu families in Dekhetbhully felt that while there can be individual variations between children, these are not necessarily by gender.

Delays and disability

In all the villages, people are attentive to whether or not children are growing and developing normally. They watch for wrist bands and clothes to become tight, indicating healthy growth, and they identify delays when they do not see a child acquiring skills at a pace relative to other children in the community. Various measures may be taken – in Jahbahi, for instance, if a child does not speak by one and a half years, the *sudeni* puts oil and turmeric on the back of the mouth, and if that fails, she cuts the underside of the tongue with a shell, a practice that is said sometimes to work and sometimes not. In the hills, if children don't start walking when they are expected to, parents will hold out a stick for them to cling to and pull them along, encouraging them to take steps.

Disability is not considered a major issue in any of the villages, largely because so few children are disabled. There are a few cases of blindness, a girl who cannot hear or speak, and a boy with a physical disability, as well as some cases of deafness in adults. People have a number of explanations for disabilities – they are considered to be the result of curses, of sinful behaviour in a past life, of intermarriage with another caste or group – but are also related to sickness or inadequate nutrition during pregnancy. There are no particular differences between villages in this regard.

A blind boy in Dekhetbhully reported being teased occasionally by friends, apparently a common event for those with diabilities. But on the whole researchers felt that attitudes in all villages towards children with disabilities were positive, and that people were generally aware of the extra time and care required by these children, and concerned about their futures. Some people believed that showing kindness to those with disabilities could be a source of merit for their future life. At the same time many people clearly felt that these children would have been better off if they had died at birth.

Celebrations and rituals

Religion and its expression through ceremonies and rituals is central to people's lives throughout Nepal. There are a number of ceremonies observed in the villages that act as markers in a child's early life, standard rituals that must be performed as prescribed by Hindu scriptures. These life cycle rituals are essential for all children, and mark turning points in their development and in the responsibilities they are expected to take on. Although there is much variation in the way different communities celebrate ceremonies and the extent to which they follow the Hindu scriptures, they are always major events for child, family and community. It is not surprising, therefore, that especially in the *terai*, as noted, accounts of the important events and changes in a child's life tended to revolve around these rituals.

The naming ceremony is common to Brahmin Chhettri, Bishwokarma and Magar communities, and affirms the significance and sacred nature of a child's name, identity and fate. On the sixth night after birth, the goddess of fortune comes and writes the child's fate. The name is determined according to the astrological chart drawn up by the Brahmin priest, based on the timing of the birth of the child. On the eleventh day the child and its mother are purified and the name is publicly announced. Children are often named after gods and goddesses and this can have a great influence on their lives. Parents remind them often of how their namesakes lived their lives. The father's role is critical in the naming of the child (as it continues to be in obtaining formal citizenship papers. At the age of sixteen, in order to get a citizenship certificate, by law a child must give both their birth certificate and their father's citizenship paper. The mother's is not sufficient.)

Some ceremonies are reserved for sons only, a reflection of the relative importance of boys. Birth celebrations, such as the new ceremony of *Shivaratri* in the terai, influenced by Hindi movies and their glorification of the boy child; or *Putra Badai* for first sons in Koldanda, are only performed for boys. The common theme is to celebrate and give thanks for the birth and to protect the child from evil. Other important ceremonies for boys include the first haircutting (or *Chewar*) ceremony done in all the villages for boys when they are four or five, a confirmation of gender identity.

There are some ceremonies that relate to physical turning points. The child's transition to solid food is marked by a special ritual in some communities – the rice feeding ceremony, when a boy is 6 months old and when a girl is 5 months old and ready to eat solid foods, happens in all

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Attitudes to children with a disability: 5 year old Reshma

Tantu Kari's five-year-old daughter Reshma cannot speak or hear. Her parents believe that she must have committed a sin in her past life, and that the god is angry with her. They also wonder whether she might have been affected in the womb when her older brother was sick. The family loves Reshma, and they worry a lot about her, helping her out and encouraging her to try to speak. They communicate with her by making hand signals, smiling and gesturing with their eyes. But Reshma doesn't always understand what they mean. She loves to be with her mother, because she is easiest to understand, and is very affectionate with her. Reshma spends most of her time with her two-year-old brother. They play together, eat together, follow their older brother to the vegetable garden and chase butterflies or pick vegetables. He helps her understand what is going on around them and she looks after him. Whenever he is in danger, she makes loud sounds and pulls him away. Once, when he was in the path in the way of some cattle, she pulled him out of danger just in time.

Sometimes she plays with friends, but often the neighbourhood children tease her. People in the community think she is stupid and call her "Lati!Lati!" This makes her unhappy, but her parents feel there is nothing they can do. If anyone else in the community had a disabled child, they say, they would feel sorry for them, because they know how painful it can be.

Tantu wants to save money to cure his daughter. If she cannot be cured, he wants to give her some land so that she has some security in the future. He knows she is unlikely ever to marry.

these communities except among the Tharu. When a child's milk teeth fall out, they are seen to be capable of undertaking religious responsibilities. Before this, they are allowed to mix with other caste groups, but afterwards they have to follow the rules of their caste group.

Hopes and expectations

Long term goals

When families and community groups in all four villages discussed their hopes and expectations, they most frequently stressed what they wanted *from* their children rather than *for* their children. Boys were expected to find good jobs so that they could care for their parents in their old age; ideally they should be well educated so that they could become teachers, managers or army officers. Well paid jobs outside the country as *lahure* were also desirable. Girls, for the most part, were expected to become capable and disciplined so that they could marry well and enhance the family's prestige through their respect, patience and hard work in the future husband's house.

what they want from their children rather than for their children

If these goals are taken at face value, they suggest that children's well being and achievement are significant only for their bearing on parents' long term security and contentment – an understandable concern where there is no other system of provision for old age. However parents' day-to-day behaviour and interactions make it clear that young children's satisfaction with their own lives is also considered significant and desirable.

These basic goals are shared by parents in all four villages, but there are certainly variations on the common themes. Residents of Koldanda, the most affluent village, were most likely to discuss seriously the possibility of girls as well as boys becoming educated people, capable of

Visioning with parents, Dekhetbhully

Parents drew pictures or symbols to represent their hopes for their sons' and daughters' future, and placed them in a circle. They were asked to identify constraints on arrows pointing outwards, and supporting factors on arrows pointing inwards. The hopes and concerns this group of parents have shown are typical of parents in all villages.

VISIONS
1. Not to involve in bad work
2. Go to school and study
3. Involve in play
4. Friendly
5. Become prestigious in family and do social work
6. Become a teacher
7. Help in agricultural works
8. Perform rituals and death ceremonies
9. Give happiness to parents
10. Earn money.

holding down important jobs in the future. This should not be overemphasized however – these expanded expectations may be discussed, but they are not reflected in an equal allocation of resources, or in the day-to-day demands placed on girls. Nonetheless, the chances of girls going beyond the routine expectations seem higher in Koldanda than elsewhere.

In Jahbahi, a commonly expressed hope was that children become *thulo manche* (important people), or heroes and heroines – a reflection, most likely, of their exposure to Hindi films. They acknowledged, however, that this was an unrealistic expectation for their daughters. Some parents in Dekhetbhully said they hoped that their children would have a happy life.
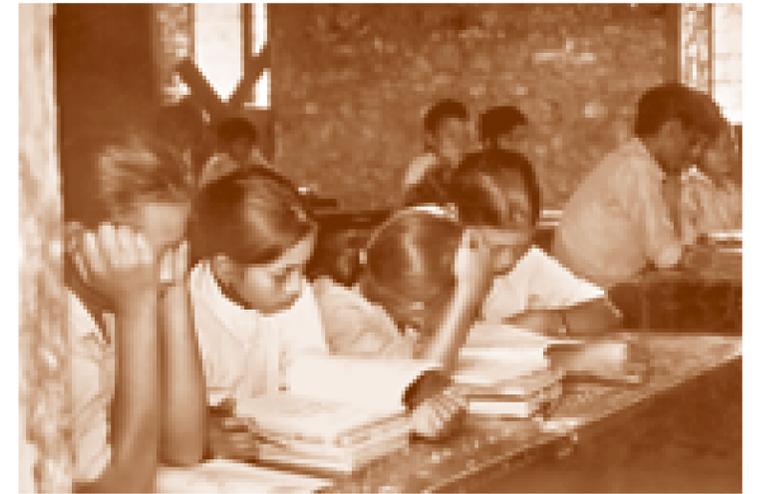
In Koldanda, parents are more likely to send their daughters as well as their sons to school than in other study villages.

In Biskundanda, while parents also express high hopes for their children, these hopes are somewhat overshadowed by their primary concern with survival. Considering the living conditions of the community, this focus is understandable. Only two or three households have food security for the whole year, and then only if the monsoon is favourable. Hunger and disease always threaten the survival of their children. One mother expressed her experience: "I had 13 children at the beginning, god took four and now I have only nine. Still I am not sure whether god may take others from me." As LeVine argues (see page 40), parents' goals are hierarchical; when survival is an issue, cultural values tend to become less of a priority.

"If we take care of children now, they will take care of us in our old age"

The hopes that children express for themselves for the most part reflect the expectations of their parents. Boys often have ambitious plans; in Dekhetbhully they speak of becoming engineers, doctors, soldiers and, in Jahbahi, musicians and painters. Girls generally have far more limited expectations, focusing on marriage rather than careers, and occasionally on the possibility of becoming teachers – a reflection not only of their parents' goals, but also of their more limited exposure to possibilities. Sometimes they chafe at their limits, and a number of girls said they wish for the much wider choices they see boys as having – from such everyday matters as time for play, to long term possibilities, such as the chance to go overseas for work or study.

Important characteristics and accomplishments for children

Various traits and skills are considered more or less essential to children's capacity to achieve their parents' expectations. In all the villages, it is hoped that both boys and girls will be obedient, disciplined and hard working, respectful and friendly with others, cooperative, honest and reliable. It is generally considered more important for girls to be well-behaved, soft-spoken and agreeable because of the fact that they will need to get along well in their husband's home. In Jahbahi, women felt it was especially important for girls also to be able to make good friends. For boys, especially in the *terai*, there is the concern that they avoid bad company, gambling and aggression.

Parents' expectations of what children should know demonstrates a much greater emphasis on practical work skills and social responsibility than would be expected in affluent countries

In Biskundanda, important as these other traits are, still more important from parents' perspective is that their children learn how to work, since without working, they cannot eat. In Koldanda, reading and writing are considered the most critical skills, and after that comes the capacity to
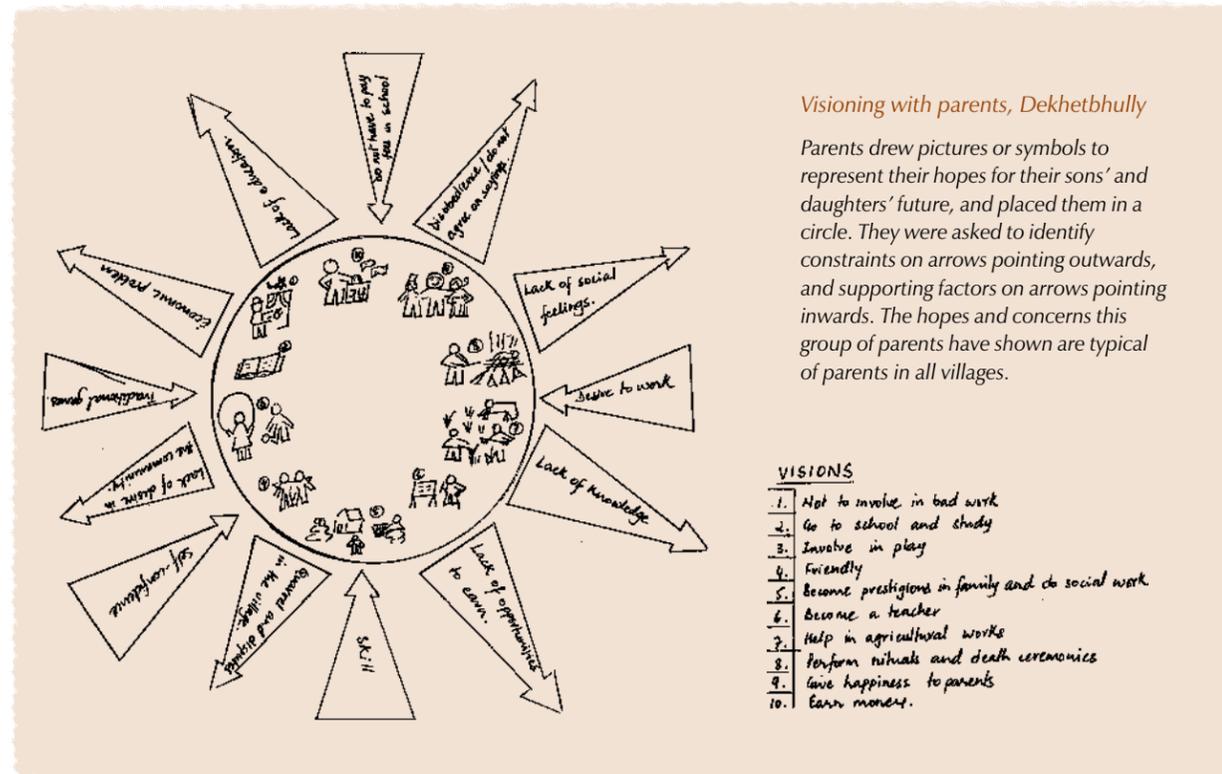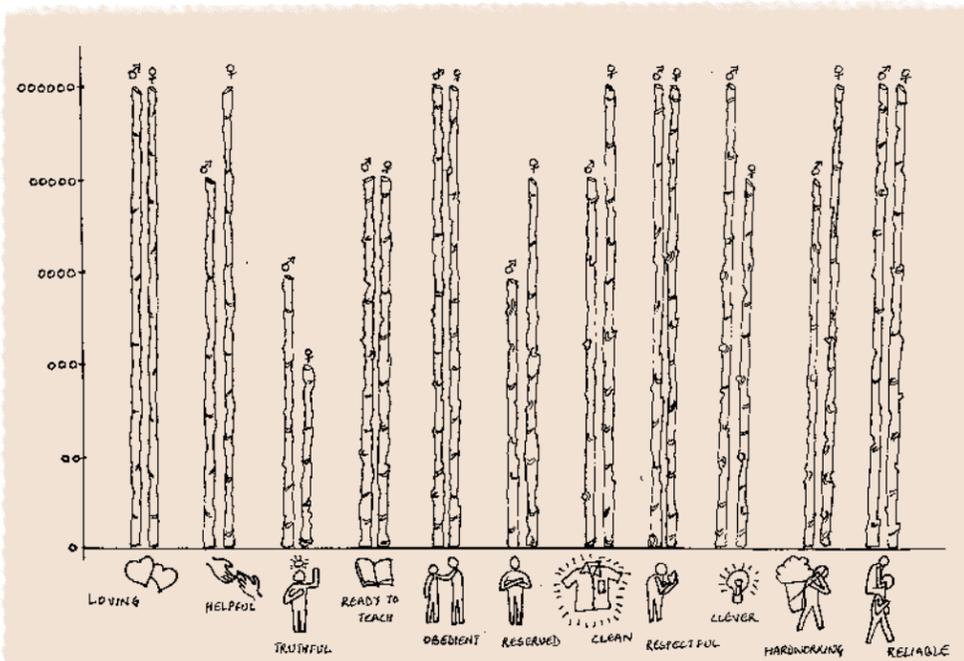
Characteristics calendar with girls and boys, Biskundanda

A group of girls and boys enjoyed acting out what good and bad girls and boys were like. Then, using coloured pens, they drew symbols for various positive characteristics, and with sticks of different lengths indicated the most important characteristics for girls and for boys, and discussed why they were important.

As in all the villages, children valued being respectful, obedient, reliable and loving most

highly for both girls and boys, but felt it was more important for girls to be helpful, clean, hardworking and reserved, so they would not have any problems when they moved to their husbands' homes. It was more important for boys, on the other hand, to be clever and truthful, as they would have the responsibility for the whole household. Children said, "It is only when we do lots of work that our parents are happy with us."

perform various daily chores. In Dekhetbhully all parents focused on the importance of school-ing, especially for their sons – but the Tharus stressed it in particular. They also spoke of their hope that their children would learn to follow their traditions and culture.

An important trait from parents' perspective is that their children learn how to work, since "without working they cannot eat"

As discussed earlier, the traits that parents desire and support in their children have been found to be closely correlated to the economic roles they are being prepared for (see page 40). A classic cross-cultural comparison, for instance, found that those societies dependent on cultiva-tion and high food accumulation tend to socialize children to be responsible, compliant and conservative. Hunter-gatherers, by contrast, tend to stress independence, self-reliance and im-agination.[30] The families in these four villages are in the process of change in this regard – moving from almost pure subsistence farming to a greater reliance on the market and on outside wage earning possibilities. They know, moreover, that still further change is likely for their children. Yet they continue to stress those traits that have served them well in the past. It can be confusing for parents to assess with any certainty what traits are likely to be most

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30 Barry et al (1959) cited in Ford 1967 cited in Harkness, S & Super, C M (1995) 'Culture and parenting', in M Bornstein (ed) *Handbook of Parenting*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum

valuable in a changing world. Rather than encouraging in their children the flexibility and creativity to make the most of new opportunities, their tendency is to rely on proven strategies for subsistence within the village, but also to count on the capacity of schools to prepare their children for their futures. These strategies are not always fully compatible – as will be discussed.

Concerns and constraints

Although there is relative clarity in parents' hopes for their children, this is not matched by a confidence in their capacity to meet those hopes. Most people feel that their capacity to help their children achieve their expectations is primarily constrained by their economic circum-stances. For those families who are chronically in debt, or bonded as *kamaiya*, this is particularly the case.

Although survival looms largest as an anxiety in Biskundanda, in all villages adequate food for children and freedom from illness and injury are real concerns. Education is the other major concern and is viewed by most people as the single most important means of achieving their goals for their children. As will be discussed below, however, this conviction is by no means a simple one, and can contain a good deal of ambivalence.

….adequate food, freedom from illness and accidents… education…

Although all villages pointed to the overriding importance of health and education, even within communities there can be differences in how these needs are framed. In Koldanda, for in-stance, the health concerns of a poor family revolve around whether they will have enough food for their children and enough money to afford medicine if they become ill. In a wealthier household nearby, they are concerned about the *quality* of health care that their children will receive. The poorer parents wonder if their daughter will be able to attend school; the wealthier parents are concerned that their daughter's schooling is good enough truly to broaden her wisdom.

Health
A number of parents said that poor health, both their own and their children's, was a significant obstacle in life. Women in Jahbahi said that sometimes they get little sleep because they are caring for sick children all night. Sometimes they go without food so their children can eat, and they fall ill themselves as a result. Insufficient food, poor environmental conditions and inad-equate access to health care are compounded, many people feel, by superstitious beliefs.

In all four villages, people have access, in varying degrees, to both traditional healing practices and modern medicine. These parallel systems can function in a complementary way, provid-ing options and back-up for families. But they can also contribute to a good deal of confusion, because people are not sure whether to rely on traditional or modern medicine, and often to added expense when parents choose to make use of both. Traditional approaches still tend to be the first resort for most parents. They turn to modern medicine only if the *lama*'s remedies don't work, or if he refers them onward for care, which hap-pens more often now. Faith in modern medicine is increasing in all villages, partly because modern treatments take effect far more rapidly than herbal rem-edies. It is generally believed that traditional and modern practices are useful for different ailments, and that treatment must depend on whether ailments are caused by natural or supernatural forces (see page 74).
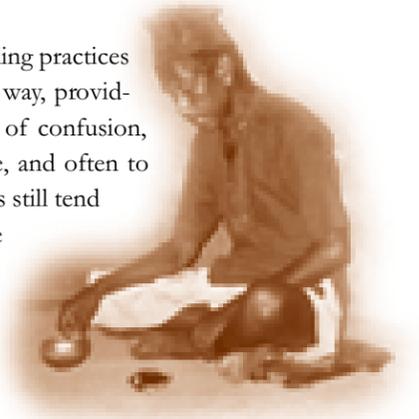
A Tharu traditional healer makes an offering.

Exposure to modern practices is generally believed to have changed food habits and hygiene practices for the better (although researchers noted that there can be a considerable gap between knowledge about hygiene and daily practices, see page 71) In Jahbahi people said that the establishment of the health post in Joshipur had stimulated change in the community, even though the quality of care was not considered to be very good. Binisara, the local health worker in Koldanda, also said that the presence of the health post there, and access to radio programmes has influenced local attitudes on immunization – even the *lama* now encourages the practice, although he was opposed in the past.

Education

Parents in all the villages have increasingly come to view education as a primary goal for their children, and the means to a better life – in spite of the fact that few families have adult members who have had formal schooling. In terms of everyday practice, however, there is still a good deal of concern about the value of schooling as an investment, since there is no guarantee of a return in the form of good jobs later. Education for girls is seen as a particularly poor investment because they will not be supporting the family in future.

Education…a primary goal for their children…the means to a better life……but doubts remain as to the value of this investment

Uncertainty about the value of schooling affects children as well as parents. Aita Bir's son, in Koldanda, failed in his Grade 8 exam. His sister-in-law encouraged him to continue his studies, but he could see no future in studying further because the family lacked "influential sources" to help him find a job. Also, if he left the village to study, there would be no one to continue his father's bee keeping if anything happened to him. He felt this was a more secure option for the future than an education.

Meanwhile there is the practical reality of covering the costs and losing children's help in managing the daily workload. Parents may enroll their children, but then not require them to attend; or if they attend, they don't allow them the necessary time for homework. A lot of teachers feel that a lack of real awareness about the importance of education, and a lack of support for children who attend, get in the way of success. Parents, on their part, feel that teachers are often negligent and poorly trained. Caste was also mentioned as a significant constraint, especially in Biskundanda, where parents feel that it inhibits children's success at school and their potential for finding jobs later. All of these issues will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter (pages 89-95).

Other concerns

Parents in most groups have concerns that relate to change and its effect on their children. In Jahbahi and Dekhetbhully there is a good deal of anxiety about children's exposure to video and cinema. Parents consider it likely that this contributes to laziness, disrespect and falling into bad company. Gambling and drunkenness are related concerns. In Koldanda, a group of women felt that their children were becoming increasingly quarrelsome, irritable and demanding. Although they were unclear about the reasons for this, it appeared to be related on some level to a growing preoccupation with consumer goods, and a resulting competitiveness. Parents bought things in the market to please their children, but seemed somewhat bewildered by the ever-escalating demands that this appeared to generate.

Parents have various concerns regarding marriage for their daughters. There is the worry that if girls elope, they will make a less than ideal marriage. Elopement is an acceptable practice in the hills, however, and definitely preferable to pregnancy before marriage, which undermines a family's prestige. Although the trend, as discussed, is towards later marriages, in many cases

Concerns with boys, Dekhetbully

A group of boys discussed the main concerns for children, and using stones, ranked their relative importance for girls and for boys. They also indicated the importance of the different concerns relative to one another, and the gap between the situation at present and the ideal.
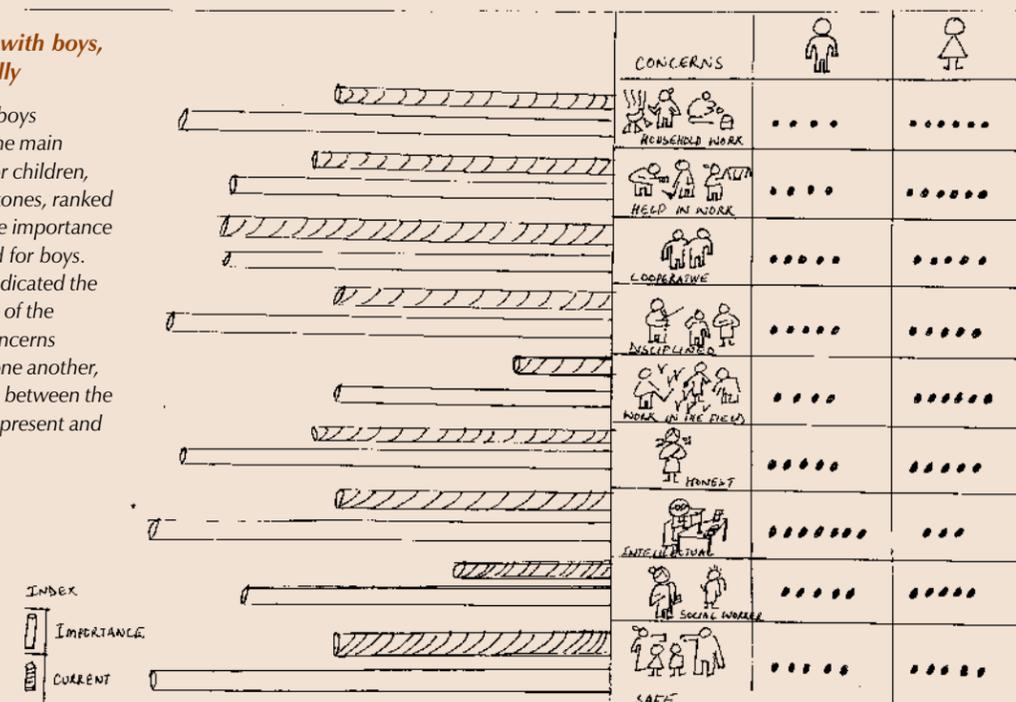
early marriage continues to be encouraged in order to avoid the possibility of pregnancy. Especially in the *terai,* parents worry that films will encourage love matches, and there is always the fear that school attendance will encourage inappropriate contact between boys and girls.

Many parents lack confidence in their capacity to respond knowledgeably to their children's needs. Their feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty cropped up repeatedly during discussions. In Dekhetbhully they claim that the community as a whole lacks the unity and harmony necessary to work together to address their children's needs. The want of good role models is also seen as a constraint; in Biskundanda, for instance, no-one in the community has ever passed grade 5.

Gender differences

Although people in all four villages claim to love their daughters as much as their sons, and to treat them equally in their early years, they acknowledge that their long term expectations for their sons and daughters influence their day-to-day lives in many significant ways. As is true all over the sub-continent, boys are simply more important to parents for very practical reasons – not only are they counted on for support in the parents' old age; they are also essential to ensuring a smooth transition to the next life, since only a son can conduct a parent's funeral rites. "In our hearts we don't discriminate," explained one father during a dialogue session in Dekhetbhully, "but girls have to go on to others' houses." A saying in Dekhetbhully reflects this difference: "Daughters make parents happy for two days, but sons forever."

Important things to learn matrix with men, Koldanda

Men in Koldanda, like parents elsewhere, felt important skills included learning to study, to do housework and to be disciplined. As in other villages, the emphasis was more on boys studying and playing, and girls doing household work.

chapter four

Daily Routines and Responsibilities

This chapter describes the daily routines and experiences of young children, as well as the responsibilities of all those who care for them – mothers and fathers, siblings, grandparents and others. The events that take place as part of everyday life, as well as the settings that they occur in, help to create what Charles Super and Sara Harkness refer to as a child's "developmental niche".[31] This integrated set of physical and social circumstances determines what scope for action (and inter-action) there is in that child's life, and what limitations. The range of developmental opportunities in one of these villages, for instance, may be different in many ways from the opportunities available to a child in a flat in Kathmandu, one living on a boat in the Yangste river, or one

[31] Super C and S Harkness 1986 'The developmental niche: A conceptualization at the interface of child and culture', *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 9, 545-569.

It is not simply a matter of different opportunities being made available to girls - it is clearly a matter of fewer opportunities and less choice

There are implications in all aspects of life for boys and girls – their level of health, their opportunities for play, their work burdens, their access to education, their very self-confidence in their capacities. All of these will be more fully considered in the account of daily routines, and in the discussion of children's rights in these four villages. Although parents clearly *do* love their daughters, and are anxious for their well-being, the practical realities of a discriminatory system result in systematic discrimination from the earliest weeks of life. Everything for girls narrows down to one point – marriage; while for boys options stay more open.

Every girl knows that there are practical reasons for this discrimination: while her brothers stay in the family and will inherit the property, she will leave for her husband's house. Local songs in Biskundanda reveal the emotional impact:

> *With tears in her eyes sitting on the verandah*
> *Who will show her friendship so that she can enter the house?*
> *Girls go home with empty bags*
> *Brothers divide the inheritance, driving stakes in the fields.*

in a suburb of London. These opportunities are a reflection not only of local circumstances, but also of local customs.

We discussed above the fact that the practices of parents and caregivers are shaped by their values and beliefs. They are also shaped by the realities of everyday life, by the actual time caregivers have available to them, and by the pressures they operate under. As Irving Sigel points out, important as parental beliefs are, the actual correspondence between these beliefs and parental practices may be quite limited at times.[32] This kind of discrepancy is seen repeatedly in these villages – in the tension between parents' belief in the value of education and the actual support they are able to give to their school-going children; in the gap between their knowledge about the importance of hygiene and the effort that is really given to ensuring that their children wash their hands after defecation; in their belief about the importance of respect and obedience, and the actual lenience that is frequently shown to small children.

Who does what in child care matrix, with men, women, girls and boys, Koldanda

This mixed group of caregivers used stones to rank the relative responsibility for various caregiving activities for children under six. The matrix clearly shows the primary responsibility of mothers for child care, followed by sisters. It is interesting to note that the only activity in which fathers, brothers and grandfathers show greater responsibility than women and girls is in giving children toys when they cry.

Roles and responsibilities

Mothers
In all the villages mothers are considered to have the primary responsibility for all aspects of child care. The amount of time they actually spend with children, and the care they actually give varies a good deal, however, depending on the presence of other family members and on their workloads. In nuclear families, older siblings are heavily relied on. In Tharu extended families, child care, along with cooking, is rotated amongst the daughters-in-law – although here too older children provide much of the actual care, because of the time that it takes to cook for a large family. In the peak season especially, because mothers have to

"No one else's care is like a mother's, because children get more love and learn more from their mother than from anyone else. But here in Biskundanda, children rarely get the time to spend with their mothers, because their mothers have to work so hard." (Father in Biskundanda)

[32]   Sigel, I (ed) (1985) *Parental Belief Systems: The Psychological Consequences for Children. Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum*

work in the fields, young children are more frequently left with grandparents and older siblings, particularly girls.

Even if there are other people at home, children in the hills who are still being breastfed are often taken to the fields with their mothers, and left in a hanging cradle while she works. In the *terai* older children are more likely to bring the baby to the mother. When older chil-

Kul Bahadur: "A father's love looks artificial compared to a mother's love. Children should get their mother's love, because a father cannot take care of a child as a mother can. We are now old, but still we like to have our mother's love. We remember our mother more than our father. This is not because we are angry with our father, but because children mainly remember the person who they spent more time with in childhood."

"As the mother teaches the child learns"

A mother looks after her baby while paddy planting in Jahbahi

Child care in the fields

Manisha, aged four years, and her sister, aged 10 months, were taken down to a paddy field in the valley about an hour's walk down from Biskundanda. It was rice planting time and many of the family went, including her mother, father, grandfather, father's sister and uncle. The parents hung a cloth cradle between two trees and put the baby in it. Later, when they saw a snake near the tree, they asked Manisha to stay near the baby. If the snake came again she could call to the parents, and if she stayed with the baby, her clothes would also not get dirty. The adults kept an eye on the two as they worked.

Manisha's father and grandfather ploughed one terrace to make it ready for planting, and her mother planted seedlings in another. Manisha watched them work. Her mother showed her how to catch hold of the seedlings and pull them up in the nursery terrace. She went to try and do what her mother was doing – plucking rice seedlings for transplanting and tying them into bunches. Manisha grasped a big bunch and could not pull it out. Her mother said, "When you pull out

the seedlings in big bunches then a lot of soil will come with them and then it will be difficult to pull them out and difficult for us to plant them later. Take the seedlings out one by one. If a lot of soil comes out, then beat it against the stick and all the soil will drop off." Her mother showed her from time to time how to pull the seedlings from the mud without losing the roots.

At one point her mother called Manisha to chase the ox away when it started grazing near the seedlings. Afterwards, she practiced balancing as she walked along the paths at the side of the terrace and in the mud. Her mother suggested that she take water to everyone. They all thanked her, which made her happy. When they stopped to have a rest at the side of the field, they asked Manisha to dance, clapping their hands and singing for her and holding her in their arms when she got tired.

When they climbed the long way up to the house, Manisha could not walk because the path was steep and her parents helped carry her.

dren go to school or out to work, mothers may also take children up to the age of three or four along with them, especially if they are working at a distance. (see Box on page 55). When they work closer to home, particularly in the terai where the fields are closer to the house, they are more likely to supervise from a distance, going back and forth for breastfeeding and overseeing the situation. In Dekhetbhully, because their land is closer to their houses than it was in their old settlement, child care is easier now. In the past, there was often no one to care for small children in the peak season, and they were commonly tied by the leg for safety reasons, and checked on occasionally. Now people can more easily watch their children while they work.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the child care responsibilities of mothers in these villages is not the time they put in with their children, but the anxiety they perennially feel when work burdens require them to leave children behind, especially with young siblings in charge. Responsibility never ends when they leave the house. Although child caregivers may be physically present, their mothers are always mentally present, apprehensive about children and their well being, checking back on things at home whenever they can spare the time, and worrying when they cannot.

Fathers

It was generally accepted in all the villages that fathers have a minimal role in child care. Although men claim to love their children and to enjoy playing with them when they have time, they make it clear that they consider child care to be a woman's job. Their support and assistance is expected during the time around childbirth, but otherwise they are not formally seen as caregivers.

Observation at the household level, however, indicates that the reality is more complex, and that fathers may be reluctant to acknowledge the full extent of their involvement. Especially in the hills, they contribute more to the routines of child care than they themselves report, and were observed feeding children, toileting them, cutting their hair, carrying them while they worked and comforting them when they cried (see Box). In Koldanda, Prem Bahadur Saru, at home weaving *syagu,* was the primary caregiver for his youngest children for most of each day. And in Biskundanda, when Prem Bahadur Sunar's wife went to work in the *terai* for two weeks, he took on all child care chores. Chudamani in Biskundanda was often seen carrying his infant daughter around, with Manisha, his four-year-old, holding on to his finger. He took the girls to the tap and washed them and combed their hair, while his wife did various household chores.

The extent of fathers' practical involvement depends to a large degree on the availability of other potential caregivers, and also on the age of the children – in the *terai,* for instance, fathers appear to have little contact with infants, fearing they will drop them or handle them too roughly. They become increasingly involved as children, particularly their sons, grow older, instructing boys in work, and helping children learn the alphabet and basic numbers if they are educated themselves.

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A father carries his baby while cattle herding, Koldanda

A father practices his skills

A father in Jahbahi held his nine month old on his lap, while his wife took a break to eat a snack. After a while the child started crying. The father tried to comfort him, but still the child cried. He bounced him up and down, and the child cried even harder. He tried shaking him and patting him, but the child kept on crying. Finally he gave him a toy cart and ox, and the child stopped crying and started playing.

In all communities fathers deal with school matters, deciding when children should go, and providing money for admission, books and uniform. They are also frequently responsible for taking children for immunization or medical treatment.

In the hill villages, many fathers are an important emotional anchor for children. Four-year-old Som Saru, for instance, has been intensely attached to his father since the birth of his younger sister, and spends hours a day at his side. Children often perceive fathers as a more exciting, stimulating alternative to their overburdened mothers during the times they are actually at home – a common phenomenon in many parts of the world. Savitra Ale (14 years) from Koldanda observed, for instance, that her two-year-old sister prefers their father because he brings her sweets and toys. In all villages, fathers were observed to be indulgent with their young children, playing with them, telling stories and singing songs to keep them happy. In some cases, though, children prefer their mothers and older sisters, finding them more patient and tolerant. In all the villages, fathers are seen as the disciplinarians, and children are often threatened with them, and fear them for that reason.

Although fathers were observed to be more involved with their children than they themselves admitted, for the most part they are less involved than their wives would like. In many group discussions, people said that child care should not interfere with fathers' primary responsibility of ensuring that the family is fed. Many mothers complained, however, that their husbands' free time (which mothers themselves are less likely to have) could be devoted more to children and, especially in Dekhetbhully, less to hanging out in tea shops and playing cards.

Older siblings

With the shift to nuclear families, the responsibility for child care is moving increasingly from grandparents and other adults to child caregivers, particularly girls. Children begin to help out at three or four, playing with younger siblings under the close supervision of older people.

In all the villages by the age of about five children are considered responsible enough to watch over younger siblings, but in the *terai* especially, parents prefer not to leave children fully in charge until they are about eight. Since most families in the *terai* do not depend on children's work in the fields to the same extent as families in the hills, nine and ten year olds tend to be available to care for their younger siblings. In

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more involved with their children than they admit but less involved than their wives would like

A father leading his daughter by the hand, Jahbahi

A girl feeds her younger brother in Biskundanda

Early in the morning, the six- year-old girl brings a plate of rice from the kitchen to the verandah to eat. Her step-mother asks her to feed her 10 month old brother also. She picks him up, sits him on her lap, and feeds herself and her brother. Suddenly he starts choking on the rice. She pats him quickly on the back and blows on his head, as is the usual practice when someone chokes. When she is finished feeding the baby, she wipes his face with water and cleans his hands. He looks at his sister, crying, so she puts him on her lap again and sings to him. After a little while, she goes to get more rice from the pot for her little brother. Her step mother feeds the baby, while she plays with her four- year-old brother on the swing.

In all the villages by the age of about five children are considered responsible enough to watch over younger siblings.

the hill villages, however, where these children are needed for field work, young children care for their even younger siblings.

Girls are the main care givers, but boys are involved in child care if there are no girls to take care of younger siblings. In Ambika's house in Biskundanda, the main caregiver in the mother's absence is the 12 year old son; when he goes out to work, the other children, aged three, four and six years, are left on their own. Although boys carry children around, entertaining them and sometimes feeding them, they are less often seen bathing or toileting them. Young children confirmed that their brothers were not involved in the same way as their sisters, who are often responsible for all the same tasks as their mothers.

Because children can become distracted from child care duties when they play with friends, accidents are common, and parents are always anxious about leaving for work. When mothers go to the fields, they generally instruct children not to leave the house, not to leave younger children alone, not to fight or climb trees. In the hill villages, because they go far away, they leave houses locked so that knives and fire are out of reach.

When left in the care of older siblings, children of two or three may not be as safe as with their parents, but they have more opportunity for play than if they're taken along to the fields, and can also eat more regularly. They usually get a lot of attention from older children, who tend to be patient, loving and protective, offering them food, hugging and kissing them, putting their

arms around their shoulders, steering them away from harm, wiping their tears and comforting them when they are hurt.

In all villages there are times when older children, girls especially, have to take small siblings with them to school as an alternative to leaving them alone at home. When the younger ones get irritable, hungry or tired, they may have to be taken home. Parents realise this disturbs the elder sisters' school work, but are driven by the need to get their own work done.

Older and younger children making models out of mud together Jahbahi

Children can be left in charge for extended periods. In the hill villages, parents often have to stay down in their fields during peak season for up to a week. They take the youngest children with them and may leave children who are no longer breastfeeding in the care of older siblings – for example 13-year-old Ram Bahadur in Koldanda was once left for a week in charge of the family house and his four-year-old brother.

Grandparents

In joint and extended families, particularly in *terai* villages, grandmothers are very much involved in child care, and grandfathers generally to a lesser extent, although they were frequently seen rocking small children to sleep in their hammocks during the day. Some grandfathers are in fact very important caregivers, performing many of the basic child care functions. Grandparents still help out when they live separately, often keeping an eye on children while their parents work; but tend not to be as deeply involved. In Biskundanda grandparents were observed to have less of a role in child care – as long as they can work, they join the rest of the family in the fields. When they can no longer do hard labour in the fields, grandparents stay at home and tend to take on a supervisory role of child carers – they can't run after small children, but they tell older siblings to do so.

A five year old cares for her sister alone

Before she heads off to work in a distant field, Kosala Devi feeds her two girls, washes their hands and faces, and prepares to leave. She locks the house behind her, and leaves with her sickle and hoe. Five-year-old Lalitha is left in charge of her two-year-old sister, Saritha. The only adult in the vicinity is their sick grandfather next door, and the girls have no interaction with him all afternoon.

Lalitha lifts her sister onto her back, swings a carrying cloth adeptly over her, and ties her on. Then she runs off up to the road, where she joins her cousin, a boy about six. They spend the next hour digging with sticks, filling a small bottle with soil, then emptying it back into another container back by the house – ready for plastering. Saritha is on and off Lalitha's back several

times; at times they play together in the dirt, and at times they are "mother" and "baby".

Two girls from the house down the road appear and pass by – there is a lot of calling back and forth between them and Lalitha – and soon it is picked up by another child across the field. While Lalitha is involved in this game, Saritha plays on the horizontal supports of the cow barn where the bamboo wall has fallen away, hanging, climbing, swinging. Across the field there is trouble – a mother shouting and a child crying. Lalitha swings Saritha onto her back, and the two of them run off through the high maize, eager to see what's happened. An hour later they appear again, wandering hand in hand down the road, waiting for their mother to return home and make their dinner.

A grandmother watches out for her grandson from a distance

Kul Bahadur's wife was working in the maize field, collecting pumpkin. The maize was so high that she could not see the yard, where her one-year-old grandson was sleeping while her sons' and neighbours' children, age three to six, were playing. Every 10 minutes or so, she would shout to the children, "What is Suresh doing? Is he still sleeping?". When she was sure that he was all right, she would continue with her work. Sometimes, she came out of the maize to check on him. At one point the children shouted that they wanted to go with the researchers, as they

walked around the village. She told them, however, not to leave Suresh because the pigs or chickens might attack him.

The great grandmother in the house also helped out at times. She spent her days on the verandah and rocked the baby in his cradle and shooed away the pigs and chickens. The grandmother and aunts took care of more active tasks such as feeding, carrying and comforting him if he cried.

Some Bishwokarma women in Dekhetbhully claimed that grandparents love children more than parents do. Tharu women said this was why grandmothers are the main childcarers in their joint families, although all family members take some responsibility. Grandparents said they were proud to take care of their grandchildren. A common saying expresses the love they feel for their grandchildren: *Saunko bhanda byajako maya,* or "People love interest (grandchildren) more than capital (children)."

In a kamaiya family in Jahbahi

Saroj, one and a half, laughs and hides behind his mother when his grandfather Bhuduram comes to pick him up. Bhuduram puts Saroj on his lap, and shakes his legs in the air to make the bells on his ankles ring. Both of them start laughing. Saroj gets down, and his grandfather shows him how to kick each leg up in the air to make the bells ring on his own. Saroj runs down the mud slope from the verandah and turns to look at the old man. His grandfather again kicks his legs in the air, and Saroj copies him, laughing. Then he runs towards his grandfather and hugs him.

Other family members

In joint and extended families, aunts and uncles, especially young ones who are more like siblings, are also important in child care. For example in Sitaram Chaudhary's family in Jahbahi there are ten family members, and Pushparaj, a boy aged one and a half and Sangam, his sister aged five years, spend much time with their nine-year-old uncle and six-year-old aunt.

Venn diagram with parents, Dekhetbully

Three year old Biswa's parents drew pictures of the important people in her life on paper circles, and indicated whom she spent most time with on a typical day by the relative overlapping of the circles. What is striking is the large number of family members – fourteen people - that Biswa has the opportunity to interact with. This is typical of large extended and joint Tharu families. In the hills and amongst terai communities of hill origin, families tend to be smaller, and this is reflected in their venn diagrams.

Beyond the family: neighbours and community

In times of crisis, when caregivers are sick, during festivals or during peak season, or when there is no other caregiver around, parents will leave children in the neighbours' care. The extent to which this happens varies across villages. In Jahbahi, when people are involved in mutual labour in the fields, they also agree to look after each others' children. This is less common in other villages; in Dekhetbhully there is less cooperative labour, and in the hill villages people tend to be suspicious of each other because of the fear that a neighbour might be a *boksi* (witch) and put a curse on the child. In Koldanda, women were doubtful about making formal arrangements with other mothers. Keeping an informal eye out, however, appears to be a routine event.

A typical day for five- year-old Jayanti Chunaro, Dekhetbhully

Jayanti usually wakes up at six or seven in the morning, a little after her parents. She goes to pee, and washes her face first thing, and then goes straight to the kitchen. If her mother is there she asks her for something to eat, but otherwise helps herself. Her usual breakfast is leftover rice or bread. Jayanti's two-year-old brother often gets up around the same time, and after she helps him wash, they eat breakfast together.

If her mother is not home, Jayanti is responsible for her brother. Usually she plays with him around the house, often letting him decide what they will do. Sometimes they go to their grandparents' house, and sometimes they just sit in the middle of the yard and play with whatever is around. Sometimes they sing songs and dance. Jayanti knows how to play *Lukimari* (hide and seek) and they enjoy this game.

Later in the morning her parents come back home from the fields. Mother breastfeeds her brother and cooks food. Jayanti and her brother get to eat first. After that they talk and play with their father, or they go to see their grandfather – both of them like to talk with him, and they love to help him in the *Aran* (iron working shop). He usually does not allow them to help, though. He says "You're too small and cannot work yet". Jayanti does not like this, and she goes to help her mother instead. Jayanti likes it when her mother says, "Daughter, you need to learn to work in the house. You should know how to cook, clean and care for your brother." Jayanti can bring firewood to the kitchen, prepare the fire, and fetch water in small water vessel.

Jayanti and her brother eat together when lunch is ready at about one o'clock in the afternoon. And then they go to community school to play. Jayanti's father has enrolled her in the school, but she doesn't like to go except to play with friends. They play there for about one or two hours, and then Jayanti walks back to her house holding her brothers' hand, or they go to the field where her parents are working. They eat at about seven in the evening and then go to bed. Jayanti and her brother sleep together.

Looking after her younger brother

DAILY LIFE

This section, describing children's day-to-day experiences, focuses primarily on children under six years, but also touches on the experience of pregnant women and older children.

A typical day for three-year-old Jiwan, in Biskundanda

Jiwan lives with his parents, his aunt Ambika, and the three older children of the household. On this particular morning, he wakes up at six, and goes outside to pee. He sings a song with his twelve-year-old brother, and plays catapult with his sisters, then asks his mother for food. While she breastfeeds him, she taps his head lovingly. Afterwards he plays *chari* with the sisters, and sings and dances with them, and talks to some of his friends, while his mother goes to the fields to work, and his brother goes to collect fodder.

But soon he is tired, and this time his aunt breastfeeds him until he falls asleep. When he wakes up half an hour later, it is already eleven o'clock. Although his aunt is nearby weaving, and can watch him, she knows that the older children won't let him come to harm. He plays *chari* with the sisters again, and while they are dancing, he uses the plastic bucket as a drum, and hits it with a broom.

At one o' clock he is tired again, and he has another short nap inside the house where his aunt is already sleeping. When he wakes up, his brother gives him some mango

and plays with him for a while. Then he goes to play with the other children. They pretend to cook, and Jiwan is the "father". But they get into an argument, and he bites his sister. His brother carries him off and gives him more mango to make him happy. Then he plays again with his sister and friends.

At 5:30 Jiwan's brother takes him to a neighbour's house, and they play, running and jumping, for a while. When he comes back, he sits near his aunt and shares some food with her. He starts to play with the sickle, digging the ground. Ambika tells him not to dig but he ignores her, and his aunt slaps him. He cries, and continues angrily to dig in the same place. Then he runs off, and his sisters chase him. He shows them a button which he found on the ground and puts it inside his mouth.

Later in the evening, his mother comes home from the field. First she breastfeeds his sister, then him. After talking to them for a while, she puts them to bed. She has her dinner at nine o'clock, and then sleeps herself.

Food and mealtimes

Prenatal diet

Infant health is contingent on the health and nutrition of mothers during pregnancy. In all villages, people agree that pregnant women should be fed nutritious food, recognising that inadequate food during pregnancy could result in problems for the baby. In Jahbahi, they mentioned green vegetables, beans, milk, curd, fish, meat and fruit as important foods and.also said that some foods are restricted for pregnant women, such as fermented beer which they believe might cause miscarriage, and hot, spicy foods which are believed to make the baby's eyes smaller. But in all villages except Koldanda, women said that in practice, they eat only what other family members eat, and nothing extra. In part this results from a concern that if they eat too well, the baby will be larger and delivery will be more difficult. In Dekhetbhully, it is common to restrict the amount of food eaten during pregnancy, so the baby will be smaller.

… concern that if they eat too well the baby will be larger and delivery more difficult

Breastfeeding

In the past, colostrum (the first milk) was believed to be indigestible for infants, and they were not breastfed until the regular milk came in. Nowadays, as a result of information from the health post, *sudeni* and the radio, all the villages except Biskundanda accept the value of breastfeeding infants from birth.

Women breastfeed babies on demand – in Dekhetbhully and Jahbahi about 15 times a day until the child is two years old, in Biskundanda only about six times a day. Feedings decrease to about four or five times a day when the child is two or three. Generally, children are breastfed until the next child is born or until they stop of their own accord. Most children prefer to stop at three or four, but some are breastfed until they are five or six years old. If the mother's milk is insufficient, babies are fed cow's milk, except in the Tharu community, where they do not keep cows or buffalo. Powdered milk is used instead by Tharu, but only rarely because of the expense.

Breastfed babies go to the fields with their mothers or, when she works nearby, are brought to her three or four times a day. If a field is not too far away, a child of three or four will go alone to the mother to be breast fed. In Biskundanda, and in extended Tharu
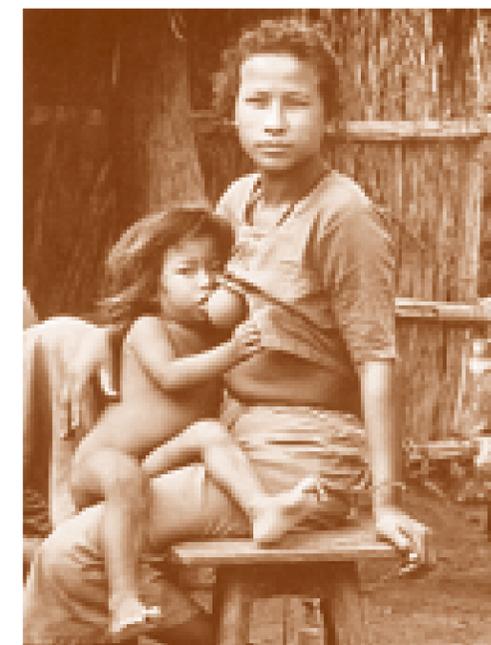
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A Tharu woman breastfeeding her four year old daughter in Jahbahi

A Tharu woman takes a break from transplanting rice to breast-feed her baby in the fields, Jahbahi

children generally eat whatever is cooked for the rest of the family, although they often eat more frequently

families, it is common for a woman to feed her sister-in-law's child as well as her own.

There are a number of beliefs associated with breastfeeding. In the *terai*, if mothers become very hot out in the field, they believe their milk will be indigestible, and do not breastfeed. Hot and sour foods are avoided for the first few months, and if children are sick, mothers avoid various foods; *chichinda* (type of gourd), chicken and *brinjal* (aubergine) in case of fever; pumpkin and unfermented beer in case of coughs, and *brinjal, kunuw*, onion and garlic in case of eye infections. If a child gets a cold, the mother skips a meal on the first day. It is common to give medicine to the mother if the child becomes sick, as they believe the medicine will be passed on through the breastmilk.

In *pahadia* communities in both *terai* and hill villages, infants are given gradually increasing amounts of solid food after the ceremonial rice feeding, at five months for daughters and six months for sons; in Tharu communities, where there is no formal ceremony, solid food is introduced when the child shows an interest. In the past, the *pahadia* community in Dekhetbhully made a dried mixture of rice, soy and maize (*sarbottam pitho*) into a paste for small babies and kept it available so that they could easily be fed if the mother is not around to breastfeed them. Despite knowledge that this is very nutritious, this practice has become "unfashionable" as it is not practiced in the terai. In Koldanda and Biskundanda, it is not known either. Instead, early foods include rice and dahl and fruits such as banana if available. In the terai, banana is thought generally to be for medicinal use and difficult for babies to digest.

What children eat

Children generally eat whatever is cooked for the rest of the family, although they often eat more frequently. There is a considerable variation across and within villages. In most villages, children were reported to get rice, dahl and vegetables in the morning and evening, and to eat plain leftover rice with perhaps salt or chilli between the morning and evening meals. Dried maize and soya beans, beaten rice are also common, often eaten for light meals or snacks.

Only in Dekhetbhully was real deprivation reported. In the Bishwokarma community here, children and adults were said to eat only bread, salt and chilli twice a day. They depend on bread more than rice, as it is cheaper, and eat vegetables perhaps twice a month. In the Tharu community by comparison, they eat green vegetables regularly as they have kitchen gardens. But few families in Dekhetbhully, whether Tharu or Bishwokarma, can afford to eat dahl except at festival times. They often eat "soyabean" – commercially made balls made from the soyabean husk after the oil has been

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Leftover rice is the norm between the morning and evening meals. This two year old is wearing protective charms to ward off evil spirits and bells around his legs which were originally put on to encourage him to walk

extracted. Although the reports of children's daily intake in other villages did not reflect this same scarcity, it is clear that rice, dahl and vegetables twice daily is unlikely to be the reality for all families – especially in Biskundanda, and among the poorer families in Jahbahi, where cases of undernutrition were clearly present. The reports received from these villages, describing fairly adequate daily nutrition, are more likely to reflect reality of more affluent families than to be a norm.

Children are given local fruits if available. In Jahbahi and Koldanda fruit is more widely available, and in Koldanda, but not elsewhere, is shared by those who cultivate it. In Dekhetbhully and Biskundanda cultivated fruit is scarce, and is limited to what is available for free from communal trees such as *Jamun* (blackberry) and mango, or rarely to fruit bought from the market. Meals are also occasionally supplemented with eggs, meat, milk and curd when available, but only the wealthier families can afford these protein rich foods on a regular basis. In Dekhetbhully, for example, only one Bishwokarma household can afford to buy meat – perhaps twice a month. Meat is mainly used to mark special ceremonies or big festivals, such as *Dashain* and milk is scarce in all villages, as people do not have many buffalo or cows. Tharus give milk only to children who are sick or malnourished. In Tharu communities, children have additional sources of nutrition from fish, snails (*ghongi*), crabs and bush rat – the *pahadia* communities do not eat such foods. In Koldanda, during the winter there is often chicken soup. In all villages, children are given *jaard*, a fermented drink with some alcohol content. Tharu people also make *maard*, a kind of fermented soup made from mixed food grains, beans and vegetables. In Koldanda, mothers mentioned that they often avoid chillies and cook what children prefer. Lalitha's mother notes, for instance, that Lalitha dislikes pumpkin greens, and that she gets tired of eating maize all the time. When children are sick certain foods are avoided, for instance garlic, onion or *kandru* during an eye infection.

Jamun Picking in Dekhetbhully

In the afternoon, Manno saw that people were cutting the branches off the Jamun tree and picking the berries, so she went to join them. All four children followed their mother. Suresh was walking on his own, but half way there he could not go any further, so Laxmi picked him up.

Under the Jamun tree, the children were eating more berries than they were collecting. There were hundreds of red stinging ants also feasting on the berries under the tree. Manno said to her children, "Keep jumping, otherwise the ants will crawl up your body and sting you." The children kept eating, while they jumped up and down. They did not seem worried by the ants, and kept brushing them out of their clothes.

Manno took a branch of the Jamun tree and they all returned to the house. She asked Laxmi to bring a flat bamboo tray ("*supo*" used for winnowing) and they put all the berries on the tray. The children were sitting round the tray with their mother, eating and playing with the berries – rolling them around. The children started to throw the berries at each other. So Manno asked, "Enough?" They scooped berries into their pockets and hands, and Manno took the rest on the tray into the house.

"Before the road came our children used to get plenty of milk and fruits, but when the road came then the milk and fruit began going to the market and our children started getting Horlicks and other similar things." (A man from Koldanda)

In the hill villages and in Dekhetbhully, people have started buying packaged convenience food, such as biscuits and waiwai (or instant noodles), as treats for their children. Busy parents use these also as snacks during the day when they are away, instead of more nutritious local food. Recent observations indicate that this trend is having an adverse impact on child health.[33] Parents face pressure from their children, who are eager for the small toys and games enclosed by manufacturers, and this can place a considerable economic strain on families. In Jahbahi, people tend not to buy packaged foods, but prefer to buy samosas and other locally prepared snacks in the market, which are less expensive and more nutritious.

When children eat

Children usually eat four times a day along with the rest of the family – early in the morning when they wake up, at mid-morning (lunch), mid afternoon (tiffin) and at seven or eight in the evening, right before bed. Sometimes young children fall asleep before the evening meal, and mothers were observed waking them to eat, or else preparing extra food for them early in the morning. In between meals, children ask for food whenever they are hungry.

Mothers, grandmothers or elder siblings are generally responsible for feeding. Children usually begin to feed themselves when they are one-and-a-half or two, and were often observed walking around balancing plates of food in their hands and playing while eating. When children are eating, parents remind them to keep the food away from pigs and chickens so that it doesn't get dirty. Parents in Biskundanda were observed telling their children not to quarrel with each other while they eat, or they wouldn't be satisfied with their food.

In Jahbahi some mothers noted that they make an effort to be present during their meal times, even when they are anxious to return to work, in order to ensure that their children eat well.

Food matrix of one and a half years old Saroj Chaudhary, Jahbahi

A line was drawn on the ground to represent the day and symbols of the sun drawn to show different times of day. Saroj's caregivers were asked when Saroj ate during the day and what he ate at different times of day. They said his mother was mainly responsible for feeding Saroj
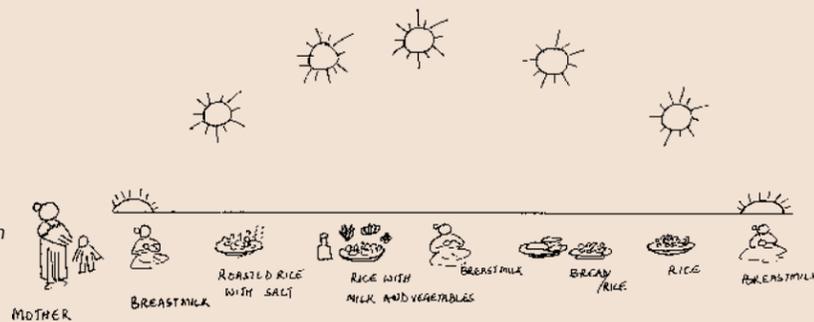
In the Tharu communities men, women and children eat together; or, if there are not enough plates and bowls, they eat in turn and children get fed first. Everyone over about six months is given the same amount, even with special food. If children cannot eat all their share, it is either given to the other children or eaten by the mother. By contrast, in the *pahadia* communities in Dekhetbhully, men receive the largest share of special food. Children are fed first along with men, and women eat last. In Biskundanda and Koldanda, small children are fed first to ensure that they get enough to eat. In these villages, when there is special food such as meat, children get the best bits first, then men and then women.

Mealtimes are when families are most likely to spend time together. Parents and children usually gather after eating, especially in the evening, and discuss what they did during the day and what their plans are for the next day. The Saru family in Koldanda makes a point of sharing time together after the late morning meal, since they feel children are often too sleepy at night. This is an important time, too, for small children to ask questions and to get attention from adults who are often too busy to take time out during other parts of the day.

Malnourishment

The lack of records and growth charts made it very difficult for researchers to tell when children were mildly or moderately undernourished.[34] Given children's extremely limited food intake in some families malnutrition is clearly a problem. Moreover, there were some cases of obvious and acute malnutrition. In the Bishwokarma community in Dekhetbhully, for instance, Padme Koli's two-year-old daughter showed signs of being badly wasted. She had loose skin and eyes running with a white discharge, and was generally sickly. She suffered from fever twice while researchers were in the village, and her father took her to the traditional healer who gave her an herbal tonic. Often she was observed sitting or lying around the house, not doing anything. Her mother complained that the little girl had been crying all night and that she, the mother, was very tired. Being pregnant and having to look after the house, the livestock and the other children was exhausting for her, and made it difficult to provide adequate care. Researchers in Dekhetbhully noticed one other child who appeared to be severely malnourished in the Tharu community. In Biskundanda too, at least one child was acutely malnourished (see page 113).

Eating quickly in Jahbahi

During peak season, parents want their children to eat fast so they can go back to work quickly. They encourage them to compete, to see who can eat most quickly without dropping the food. Whoever finishes first will be the cock; second will be the hen, and last will be the chick. The first child to finish goes "kukuri kahaa!" (cockadoodledoo). The parents know that if they tell the children to eat fast so they can go back to work, they will not. If they make the process fun, then children will eat all their food quickly.

In some communities, girls and boys may be fed different amounts of food: here two sisters share their food while their brother gets a whole plate to himself.

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[33] Personal communication from Kamala Bista, UNICEF Kavre District, based on observations in five VDCs, where children are increasingly refusing to eat anything but pacakged foods, with drastic effects for health.

[34] Figures for Nepal as a whole, however, suggest that 48% of children under five suffer from moderate to severe stunting — see *State of the World's Children,* (1999), New York, UNICEF.

Health and hygiene

Prenatal care

Prenatal care is an area where there tends to be a considerable gap between knowledge and practice. Although the general level of information appears to be good, a shyness about revealing or discussing pregnancy makes many women reluctant to take advantage of even the prenatal care that is available, and a fear of difficult childbirth causes them to avoid interventions that may result in a larger infant. We have already discussed this in relation to eating during pregnancy (see page 62) In Dekhetbhully, *pahadia* women even bind their stomachs to prevent foetal growth. Women often refuse immunization for fear that it will stimulate foetal growth[35], and it is generally accepted that hard work during pregnancy will help to keep the child small and make birth easier. This logic is understandable given the fear women have of dying whilst giving birth, and also the high mortality rates at national level.[36] The influence of a trusted health worker on pregnant women can be significant – various women in Koldanda who have used prenatal care, taken more rest and accepted immunization explain that it was Binisara, the local health worker, who persuaded them.

The importance of rest is acknowledged, but it is clear from both observation and discussion that women generally continue to carry a full work load until childbirth. In Tharu communities, in joint families, pregnant women tend to get more rest. Studies have shown that on average Nepali women work an average of 14 to 16 hours per day, and there is little indication that this changes during pregnancy. Partly as a result of this, they fail to achieve the expected weight gain.[37]

Birth usually takes place at home in all the villages, although women go to local hospitals if there is reason to believe that birth will be complicated. There are TBAs or *sudeni*s in all villages who are available to assist in birth. There is no capacity to deal with complicated births unless complications have become apparent in advance, and the family agrees to have the woman go to the hospital early in labour. The advice of *guruvas* and *badghars* is critical in these cases.

Pregnancy body mapping, with pregnant women and mothers, Biskundanda

A group of pregnant women and mothers advised researchers in drawing pictures of a pregnant woman at different stages, then indicated the main things that pregnant women needed. As in most villages, women showed a good knowledge of the importance of immunization, nutritious food, rest and the avoidance of overexertion. In practice, however, women work hard until delivery, eat what everyone else ate, and are reluctant to be immunized in the belief that it would cause a large baby and difficult childbirth.

Women often refuse immunization for fear that it will stimulate foetal growth, and it is generally accepted that hard work during pregnancy will help to keep the child small and make birth easier

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[35] The immunization rate for tetanus for pregnant women in Nepal is 19 percent. UNICEF (1999) Ibid.
[36] Estimated maternal mortality rates for Nepal are controversial, and vary from 515 to 1500 per 100,000 live births — see UNICEF Nepal and NPC Nepal (1996) *Children and Women of Nepal: A Situation Analysis 1996,* UNICEF Nepal
[37] Ibid page 56.

Keeping children healthy and clean

People consciously protect their children's health in various ways. In Jahbahi, for instance, parents mentioned the importance of keeping the house clean, cutting finger nails and cleaning ears, dressing children warmly in cool weather, massaging infants with oil, and giving children the opportunity to play and become strong. A range of traditional preventatives are also used. Tharu families in both *terai* villages, for instance, tie black threads around children's wrists to protect them from diarrhoea; a key or miniature sickle on the thread also protect against urinary problems.

A baby in Jahbahi wears a variety of talismans

Massage: Oil massage for babies continues as a very strong tradition in all the villages. This is usually done by the mother or another female relative who has children herself. Massage is performed daily (usually once and sometimes twice) after birth until the baby is 2 months, using warm mustard oil with *juano* (a herb).Massage continues until children are about four years old, but on a less regular basis – often after bathing. Oil massage is believed to make children strong and to protect them from cold. These beliefs are well-supported by a south Indian study which demonstrated that low-birthweight babies who received massage showed a remarkable gain in their weight and on a battery of developmental tests over a six month period. The study demonstrated a clear effect of mother-child interaction on both physical and psycho-social outcomes.[38]

Woman massaging her baby with oil

Immunization: A critical preventive measure is the use of immunization, which reportedly is increasing in all villages. This is still not automatic, however. Mothers in the hill villages, for instance, were heard discussing the merits, and pointing to infants that looked fat and healthy in spite of not having been immunized. Most families claimed that they take their children to be immunized at the monthly clinics that are available to all communities. In Biskundanda, however, at least 30 percent of children are not immunized. And given the lack of records in any of the villages, it is hard to be sure how many children have received the full regimen of immunizations necessary for protection.

Sanitation and personal hygiene: In all the villages, but especially in Biskundanda and Jahbahi, it is apparent that people's knowledge about the importance of sanitation and personal hygiene is not well reflected in their daily practices. Women in Jahbahi readily acknowledged this fact during a dialogue session—although they also suggested that men generally had a poor understanding of hygiene. Sanitation in all four villages is poor. Even where there are toilets, there is a general reluctance to use them. It is clear that old habits die hard, and that simply supplying people with information is not sufficient to ensure its use. In Dekhetbhully and Koldanda, for instance, there are a number of pit latrines, but here as in the other villages older children and adults tend to make more use of the fields and jungle.Young children routinely use their yards for *pisaab* and *disaa* (unrination and defecation), and usually mothers, older sisters or grandmothers clean up after them. Caregivers are not always around to do this however (see page 113, Suresh example). In the hill villages, children also use pig pens for defecation, and in the terai, it is common for them to squat by the roadside.

"Children are very necessary but they do all this dirty pisaab and disaab"

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[38] Landers, C. 1989 'Biological , cultural and social determinants of infant development in a South Indian community', in K Nugent, B Lester and T Brazelton, *The Cultural Contexts of Infancy*. New York: Ablex Press

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In addition to feces from small children, yards and paths can also be littered with animal waste. In Biskundanda, people talk about cleaning paths and yards, and building toilets, but they don't follow up. Handwashing after elimination is the exception, and although it is more common in Koldanda, even here children are unlikely to wash their hands if they are not being supervised. In Jahbahi, where women are well aware of diseases that can result from unhygienic behavior, people still don't wash their hands, and children continue to defecate by the roadsides.

Grooming: General grooming and personal care is more routinely observed. Mothers, elder sisters and grandmothers help small children with washing and dressing. When they are about four or five years old, children are supposed to take care of their own needs, but were often observed being helped at water taps by parents and older siblings. Because of the hot weather and the greater availability of water, children in the *terai* generally keep cleaner than children in the hills, and were often observed bathing and playing at the hand pump.

Children in the *terai* were observed learning to clean their teeth using a twig from a *neem* tree, from about the age of 3 years (see box on page 71).

Hair combing, Jahbahi

Bathtime in Jahbahi

Saroj enjoys a bath, Jahbahi

Saroj, aged one and a half, goes to the water pump for a bath. He picks up a small pot full of water and throws it over himself, laughing. When the pot is empty, he shows it to his mother wanting more water. When she starts to leave, he opens his eyes very wide and looks at her pleadingly. She comes back to the pump, laughing at him, and fills up the pot again. Then she fetches a huge pot from the house and fills it up with water for him. Saroj fills his smaller pot with water from the big pot, and pours it over himself again and again. His mother, washing clothes, laughs at him and he laughs back. He then sits down, picks the wet clothes out of the water and puts them back in again, imitating his mother. As he is splashing about, she shouts at him to stop and takes the clothes away to hang them up. Saroj goes back to pouring water over himself. When she has finished hanging up the clothes, his mother lathers him up with soap and washes him all over. He starts crying and she rinses him with water. When the bath is finished, Saroj goes over to his grandfather, who puts a small wooden stool beside him and moves Saroj to sit down.

A 3 year old gets up in the morning

The mother wakes up at four am, and after doing some cleaning, wakes up her 15 year old son. Her three year old starts crying when he wakes up and his mother runs to him. She picks him up, holds him and smiles at him, saying "You've woken up, good boy." They go out to the corner of the field so that he can pee, and then she washes the dishes and talks to him while she works. She asks if he wants to help, but he is not interested. Then she breaks a piece of stick for him to clean his teeth with, and tells him to chew on it and then spit. He doesn't chew it properly, so she says, "You have to do it like this." and shows him. The little boy starts chewing and she praises him, "Good boy." Then she says, "Now you're going to have a bath". He does not like this idea, and says "No, no, no." But she takes his clothes off and starts to pour water over him, warning him first. As she cleans him, she says, "You look lovely". She picks him up and puts him on the bed, saying, "You're so clean now and nice." Then she gives him to his older brother to look after.

When children are ill or hurt

Small children in the four villages experience frequent bouts of illness, ranging from coughs, fevers and diarrhoea to boils, sores and eye infections. Diarrhoea is so common an ailment that people seldom think to mention it. In all the villages people said that small children experience diarrhoea when they are teething, because they pick up dirty things to chew on. In Biskundanda, people call small children's frequent or chronic diarrhoea *moje*, and infant deaths result primarily from this and the lack of food.

Respiratory illness, especially in the hills, is also too common to draw comments, and many people have hacking coughs. Boils, sores and skin infections are routine for small children – in Jahbahi researchers estimated that approximately 70 percent of the children suffered from boils. Another common problem for children in Jahbahi is *hilo le khayo* (or "feet eaten by mud"), the result of long hours spent standing in mud during rice planting season. People leave these sores to heal by themselves or put some herbal treatment on them. More serious diseases include encephalitis and malaria in the *terai* villages. Four young boys were afflicted with suspected encephalitis (although possibly malaria) during the time of the research, and were being treated with traditional medications

Child care in the iron workshop

Dekhetbhully: A grandfather was responsible for looking after his 9 month old grandson. He took the baby with him to the blacksmithing workshop, put him in a cradle nearby and started to work. The furnace was very smoky and the grandfather was coughing because of the smoke. The baby's cradle was in the smoke, but this did not appear to be a matter for concern.

Seasonal variations: In all the villages, children are most likely to be sick during the monsoon season, when dirty standing water and ideal breeding conditions for pathogens contribute to the spread of disease. Unfortunately this is also the planting season, when parents are least available to care for their children or to take them for treatment. "We don't like to leave our children when they're sick," said a mother from Koldanda, "but if we don't work hard at this time of year, we won't be able to feed them." In Biskundanda it was noted during the peak season that older children, even when ill, have to continue caring for siblings and doing household chores. They are not required to work outdoors when they are sick, but they have little chance to recover fully from illness, and remain vulnerable to disease. Although twelve year old Moti stayed home from cattle herding because he had fever and boils, he was still required to look after his siblings and to feed the livestock.

most likely to be sick during monsoon when parents least available

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Accidents while playing

A five-year-old girl in Biskundanda, while playing with her friends, was poked in the eye with a stick. She had a rip on her eyeball and her eye was bloodshot. A few days later it was still clearly causing her distress. One of the researchers suggested that her parents take her to the health post to have the eye examined. Her parents said they couldn't take her because they had to plant the field, and the health post was too far. Once they got there they would have to buy medicine which they could not afford in any case.

In Dekhetbhully, a seven-year-old girl cut her heel deeply on a piece of glass. She put mud on the cut to keep it from bleeding, and continued running around barefoot. A few days later, researchers noticed that the wound was larger and she was limping. They were concerned that she needed stitches, and was vulnerable to infection and to tetanus. Her parents, however, were sure that the wound would heal by itself.

Small children often experience cuts from playing with sickles

Injury: The injuries that children experienced while researchers stayed in the villages mainly involved cuts and wounds, which then became infected. A number of children fell off stairs, terraces or trees. One six year old in Biskundanda bruised her stomach badly when she fell

from a tree; she was given some herbal medicine and was playing with friends again a few hours later. A number of boys sprained ankles from slipping on mud in Jahbahi. The most extreme accident was in the neighbouring settlement to Dekhetbhully, where a boy fell out of a *Jamun* tree and died.

Treatment: Home treatments are generally the first response for many ailments. In Jahbahi, eating raw bananas (preferably stolen) is believed to cure diarrhoea, and kerosene oil massage is quite a common treatment for pneumonia. In Biskundanda, lemon water is used if children have fever, lemon paste for headaches, a paste from mango and guava bark for dysentry and diarrhoea, and mother's milk is rubbed on minor cuts and bruises.

Treatment is a combination of traditional and modern approaches

**Accident ranking with main caregivers, Biskundanda**

Caregivers used various materials as symbols to indicate the vulnerability of children under and over six to a range of accidents. Children under six, they said, were at risk because they are curious and active, but not fully aware of the dangers. Children over six are exposed to injury because of the range of risky activities they undertake in the course of work each day.

Mobility map of where people take children for treatment, Dhaniram Chaudhary, Jahbahi

A father indicated where he took his children for treatment when they were ill or hurt, and the relative frequency with which they used each of these facilities. As with most parents, the guruwa was usually the first stop, especially for fever, stomach ache and other minor illnesses. If children are not better after a few days, or if they have more serious illnesses like pneumonia or measles, they go to the medical hall, or the health posts. For a major illness or accident, like encephalitus or a fracture, they go to the hospital. This father said that he had taken his children to Joshipur most frequently, because it was most convenient.

As discussed in the last chapter, treatment for illness and injury in the four villages is often a combination of traditional and modern approaches, depending in part on the accessibility of modern treatment, and in part on the kind of illness experienced. In all villages there are some diseases, believed to be caused by ghosts, spirits, or the displeasure of the gods, that parents feel can only be treated by the *guruwa, lama,* or *dhami.* One family in Koldanda described how they distinguish between ailments: when their children are made ill by ghosts, they close their eyes, refuse to respond, and just go to sleep. Consulting the traditional healer first is one way for parents to ensure that they are taking the most appropriate route.

Most parents in all the villages visit traditional healers for children's ailments before turning to local health posts or hospitals, a practice which results in increased costs for families. Faith in modern medicine is increasing in all villages, however, and many parents, especially in the hills, claim that it is far more effective than herbal treatments and mantras. Even the local healers are likely now to refer families onward for medical care, and the *dhami* in Biskundanda was observed to treat his own children with paracetamol. In Jahbahi some of the traditional healers have received training in first aid, and the use of modern medications. In all villages, however, there tends to be some confusion in parents' minds about the best route to follow.

The availability of modern medical care varies from village to village. In Koldanda, where there is a health post in the village, access is easy. In Biskundanda, only a few miles away, it means a steep and difficult walk over to Koldanda, and at least four hours taken out of the day. If they are going to get treatment, people prefer to take their children to the hospital in Tansen, although they have to pay for transport, because there is more likely to be qualified health staff and medicine available. Difficulty in accessing care or paying for medication in all the villages can mean that parents are more apt to persuade themselves that children's ailments will improve on their own (see box on page 72).

Buddhi is sick, and her father takes care of her, in Biskundanda

Four-year-old Buddhi was sick with diarrhoea and a fever for five days while her mother was away working in the terai for a few weeks. She missed her mother a lot , but her father, who is also the lama, took good care of her.

Early one morning while she was sick, he washed her after she woke up, and then made her a special herbal drink with a lemon from the garden, and told her it would help her to feel better. While she wandered around quietly, he fixed up her bed and made her comfortable there before he went off to cut fodder. Buddhi couldn't sleep, though, and she was up and down, sweeping the porch, picking flowers and playing on the swing. She also finished the drink her father left for her. Then she had a nap with her older sister Tulsi.

When she woke up, she felt better and played for a while, and her father made her some mango pickle. But soon she was crying again, feeling miserable. Her brother fixed up her bed, and she slept again. When she woke up she went behind the house to vomit, then returned to bed. Her sister talked to her and danced for her, to cheer her up.

In the evening, Buddhi's father made rice, but she didn't want to eat. He sang for her and tried to make her happy, but she just wanted to see her mother. Her father told her that soon her mother would come back and bring her a present. She went to bed early without eating.

Sleep

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At night children sleep together with other family members until they are eight or nine years old, most often the sons with their father and daughters with their mother. The youngest child always sleeps with the mother in order to breastfeed, and then moves next to the father, older sister or grandmother when the next baby is born. Children sometimes argue about who gets to sleep next to the mother. Often they will fall asleep near their mother and are then moved. One mother from Koldanda spoke of her small son's preference for sleeping beside her at night. If he was placed next to his father or brother in the dark, he would feel for earrings, beads, and breasts, and when he did not find them, would protest until he was placed next to his mother.

In the *terai*, where there is a risk of being bitten by snakes and scorpions on the floor, children sleep on beds, or if too young not to fall out, in hammock-cradles. People use mosquito nets to protect them from malaria and encephalitis, and usually cover children's faces when they are asleep to protect them from flies. In the hills, families sleep on the floor around the fire in the winter and sometimes on the porch in summer when it is too warm inside. Bed wetting is sometimes a problem, since families tend not to have extra bedding. Some parents in Koldanda noted that they wake their children during the night, and take them outside to urinate. A remedy used for bed wetting is to drink the water that has settled inside the hollow stem of bamboo.
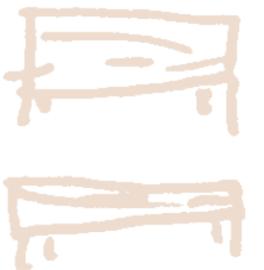
In the peak season, parents are too tired to tell children stories before they go to sleep at night. But in the winter slack season, families often gather around the fire in the evening, and adults exchange news about work, about the time they went to India, about who brought home what; they joke and tease each other while the children drop off to sleep.

Children are usually asleep by nine o'clock because of the lack of light. Small children are allowed to sleep as long they need, but children above five or six get up by dawn to help out around the house, as do adults. In the hot season in the *terai*, children tend to sleep for longer, and when the mother has to go out to work, she will ask someone to watch over the child. By the time children are about three, however, it is not considered necessary to have anyone around when they wake up.

During the day infants and small children are often put to sleep in their small hammocks hung out on the porch, where they can easily

Frayed tempers at the end of a long day

Bal Kumari starts to make the bed ready for her children, talking to them as she does it. Her 10-month-old is on her back and he stares at his six- year-old sister who has been looking after him for most of the day and is now playing with the fire in the kitchen. She picks up a piece of hot coal and throws it at the baby. It hurts and he starts to cry. Bal Kumari slaps her daughter, who also starts crying. She puts her to bed and goes outside to wash the plates, with the baby still on her back. Her four-year-old starts fighting with his sister inside. Bal Kumari calls him to come outside, and lies him on her lap, consoling him and trying to send him to sleep. He lies there rubbing his eyes and watching his mother. Meanwhile, his sister, crying inside, lies on the bed and drops off to sleep.

Children's drawing of sleeping and playing, Jahbahi

This drawing by a child from Jahbahi shows children sleeping and playing beside the bed. It also shows various kitchen tools and a grain storage jar typical of Tharu houses.

be heard, and where they will be safe if they wake up. When children indicate that they are sleepy, the mother makes the bed or hammock ready and puts them down. She may breastfeed the child first, then say, "Now go to sleep. I have to get back to work," and pat the child on the back for a while. Those responsible for putting children to sleep will often sing them a song or, more rarely, tell them stories to send them to sleep. Occasionally these may be threatening ("Look there is a strange man coming to take you away – quiet down, so he doesn't come.")

It is not only babies who sleep during the day. In winter, children in the hills sometimes wrap a straw mat around themselves to protect them from the cold wind and sleep inside together during the day while their parents are in the field. And in the *terai,* when it is very hot, children may take a rest.

Where children spend their days

Young children tend for the most part to play fairly close to home, while other family members come and go. They also wander freely in their yards and between the houses of close neighbours. In the *terai,* they have the advantage of large open spaces in the fields and pasture land close to the house. Although they are expected for the most part to stay near home, especially when parents are away working, children of four or five may actually go some distance from home on their own at times, and those even younger often follow their older siblings around (see box). Lalitha started moving around Koldanda on her own at the age of three. Now, at five, she goes almost daily to visit her maternal grandparents at the far end of the village, about a ten minute walk away.

In general, older girls, bound by household chores, stay closer to home than boys, who often wander from place to place in small groups. In the hills, however, both boys and girls were often observed at great distances from home collecting fodder and firewood, usually in groups.

Mobility map and house map, with six year old Sheela, Jahbahi

Sheela was asked to show where she went in and around her house – including where she played, where she went when she was happy or sad and the places she might get hurt. Then they drew a picture together showing all the places.
Inside the house, in the corner of the kitchen, there is an anthill and she likes to play with the ants. There is a sack of grain which she likes to feed to the chickens, and a rat hole and she likes to watch the rats coming and going. She says she can do whatever she likes in the house, as long as her parents don't see her.
Generally, Sheela's parents allow her to go everywhere shown in her map on her own. She goes to the cattleshed most of all to rest and play, as it is open and cool. She goes to her aunt's house when she is unhappy, for example when her parents have punished her. Her aunt comforts her and then after a while she goes back home.
Dangerous places include the mango tree and the rice mill. Sheela is afraid to go to the river behind the house in case she falls in because she does not know how to swim. She is also afraid to go near the buffaloes because once she was kicked. Her parents don't like her going near the open drains, because her younger sister once fell in.

Herding can take children even further afield in the hills, and one researcher followed a group of boys as they took cattle down a very steep trail to a stream more than an hour away.

The environment surrounding small children can be rich and stimulating – there are animals to play with, older people to watch, and a range of interesting activities taking place all around them that they can watch and learn from. But sometimes the interest is just not there. When most people are away working in the fields, and when small children are expected to amuse themselves for long hours without leaving home, the activities available can quickly become monotonous and boring, and
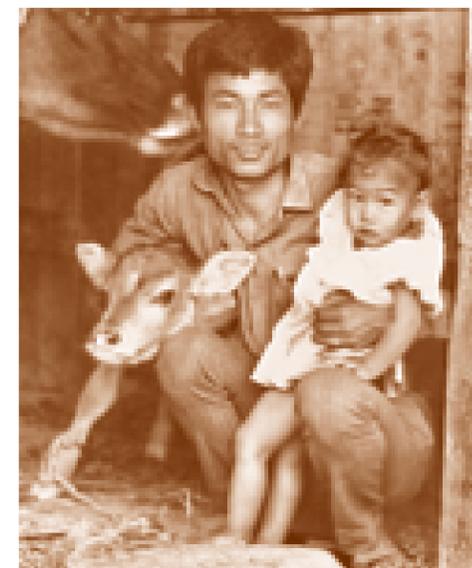

Tom Kelly

*......rich and stimulating.......or monotonous and boring…*

many young children of three or four were observed idly scratching in the dust for long periods.

Young children may, for safety, be left in their hammocks for hours at a time with no distraction at all. This is especially the case during peak agricultural seasons when everyone who is able may be working. There is a lot of variation in the amount of stimulation a child in a hanging cradle or hammock receives. The heavy cloth hammocks typical of the middle hills have only a tiny gap at the top and offer a child a very limited view of the roof above. By contrast, the open bamboo basket hammocks typical of many Tharu families allow a child to watch what is going on and signal to people, and also to enjoy the colourful cloth mobiles frequently hung above them. These flat baskets are usually used until the child is about 4 to 5 months. After that, cloth hammocks or larger open baskets are used to stop children falling out.

D. Mckenzie

Closed cloth hammock, Koldanda

variation in the stimulation a child in different types of cradle receives

Hanging around in the rain, Jahbahi
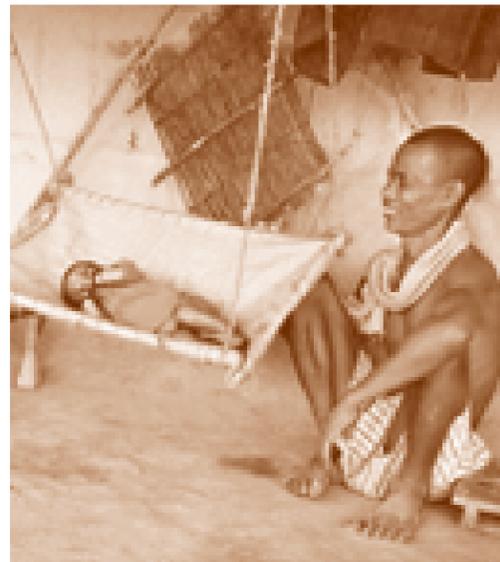
Open basket hammock, Jahbahi

Even slightly older children like 4 year-old Manisha, who had lively and involving days when she was taken along with the adults to the paddy field (see box, page 55), spent some very tedious days screaming for attention from her hammock on the porch, while her grandfather working nearby ignored her, satisfied that she was safe.

Although the larger environment surrounding children is full of opportunities for play, exploration and learning, it can also be a source of danger. There are some places where parents do not like children to go - in the hills, the jungle and the graveyards primarily, because of danger from animals and spirits; and in the *terai*, the jungle because of snakes, and the rivers and lakes because of the danger of drowning.

Pune spends the day in his cradle

Nayan Singh's grandson, Pune, is 2 years old. His mother, who is deaf, goes out for fodder collection everyday and leaves Pune in the cradle, tied up between two posts of the verandah, with his great grandmother. The great grandmother is very old and cannot move about much. When Pune cries, she rocks the cradle, while doing something else with her other hand and says nothing. Pune cannot see out of the cradle. One morning, from 6a.m. until 11a.m. he stayed in the cradle – sometimes sleeping, sometimes crying. During this time, he was given nothing to eat. The researcher asked the great grandmother, when she had eaten her food, "When is it time for his food?" The great grandmother said, "When he is hungry, he cries. Then I will give him food, otherwise there is no need to feed him." Later on, Pune cried and she fed him plain rice. Researchers observed that Pune's language

In the hill villages, the surroundings are steep and slippery. During the rainy season, the trails become dangerous, and children often fall while they are herding cattle. In both the hills and *terai*, children fall from trees while collecting fodder or fruit and may fracture hands or legs. In the *terai*, children, especially boys, are at risk of drowning in the local rivers, which become flooded and dangerous during monsoon. Parents also fear that small children will fall into water-logged ditches. Snakes, scorpions and poisonous insects are another *terai* hazard. Although they share the dangers common to the *terai* in general, there are some differences between Jahbahi and Dekhetbhully which make the latter a particularly hazardous place for children. Dekhetbhully is a newer settlement with less cleared land, and a jungle nearby. As a result, snake bite is more common than in Jahbahi. Children take cattle to graze in the jungle, as opposed to the more open scrub land around Jahbahi, and are more vulnerable to wild animals. Dekhetbhully has a number of very large *jamun* trees which children climb for their fruit, and falls from these heights can be especially dangerous. Whereas the river near Jahbahi is relatively shallow and safe, the river and lake in Dekhetbhully are far more hazardous for swimming.

Children's play

Development does not just "happen" to children. Through their involvement in the world around them they are active participants in this reciprocal process. Children have a deep urge for competence and understanding that drives them to watch, touch, imitate, experiment, and explore. "Play" is the term that we use to describe this quality of passionate engagement that is driven by the thirst for experience. Healthy, adequately nourished and emotionally secure young children, if they have the opportunity, will spend most of their waking hours actively involved in play, and this is an essential component of their development.

Children find lots to explore in a ditch, Jahbahi

Small children in all the villages spend most of their day in various forms of play – spontaneous physical activity, structured games of skill, quiet exploration, and imaginative pretense and role playing. Much of the play of boys and girls under six is quite similar, and it's not unusual for them to spend time together

Children's drawings of play, Jahbahi

Ten year old Bikram's picture shows children climbing and playing in a tree, watched by a smaller child and his father.

A boy with his home-made tractor

children construct their own toys and games

climbing trees, digging, collecting mushrooms, imitating household chores, running and jumping or playing with ropes. In the *terai*, children were observed playing on the wooden ox carts. They swing off the cart, climb all over it, use it as a slide or sit on top of it and sing songs with their friends. As they get older, girls' and boys' games tend to change, with boys becoming more involved in such activities as volley ball and cock fighting and girls in quieter games like jacks (*chari*). Girls tend to stay around the house and boys spend more time playing out-side in the fields.

Children construct many of their own toys and games. It's common to make butterflies, dolls and volleyballs out of rags and old clothes. In Biskundanda, boys make model ploughs out of wood and in Koldanda both boys and girls like to make toy guns – they clean the pith out of a stick, and then use a smaller stick to shoot out little bullets of moistened paper with a loud crack. The Tharu community was observed to have a particularly rich tradition of making toys for children. People hang colourful pieces of cloth as a mobile above the cot or around their wrists for babies to look at. Fathers and grandfathers make *ghurghuria* or a three wheeled wooden walkers to support children when they are learning to walk. They also spend a lot of time helping their sons make toy tractors out of

Games matrix, with children, Koldanda

Children were asked to list all the different games they played, and to rank them according to age group and whether girls or boys played them most. There was a striking number of and variety of games – this matrix shows only about half of the games children mentioned. Some games, such as football, volleyball and high jump are new and have been introduced through school. Although children under three were observed playing games as well, the children drawing this matrix did not mention this age group.

How play supports development

- social development – by interacting with each other children learn to share, compromise, negotiate and plan (as in sorting out the appropriate course of events in the wedding game)
- emotional development – children work through and become more in control of their feelings about events that frighten or confuse them such as parents fighting, the birth of a sibling, sickness of a family member (two little girls in Jahbahi, for in-stance, played a game in which they constantly discussed and rearranged the sleeping places of a stick and rag doll family)
- intellectual development – children practice language skills, try new ideas, develop and refine their ability in such skills such as classifying, sorting, counting,and create and solve problems(for instance, the many complex miniature "field sys-tems" that children worked together to create and the debates they had about what would work best)
- physical development – children develop both physical strength and the fine control and eye-hand co-ordination needed for writing, weaving, mending things and a host of everyday tasks (for example,*through "chari", hopscotch and other games*)

Boys spend much of their play time climbing trees, Jahbahi

old rubber flip flop sandals, which they then drive by pushing with a stick. Some of these are incredibly elaborate, with tires made from serrated flip flop discs. Tharu women also have a tradition of making play materials as a dowry to take to their husband's house. In spite of the great number of local games and the wealth of locally constructed toys, Dekhetbhully peo-ple claimed there were not enough play mate-rials for children.

Jacks *(chari or gatta)* is a popular game every-where. This game of skill involves rapidly counting, throwing up and catching stones, and it calls for a good deal of concentration and the capacity to take turns. Children often spend a lot of time preparing their stones, rubbing

Girls play chari, Biskundanda

away the sharp edges so that they do not hurt their hands when they are playing. Sometimes girls concentrate so hard on the game that they forget to watch out for their younger siblings.

Children's games and toys respond to external influences. Children play cricket with home made bats and balls, and a number of games actually depend on objects from outside the village – volleyball and carom especially. Children use matchboxes, sweet wrappers and other recycled materials from products brought from the market to make toys. They also play with

small games and toys from outside - either "free gifts" in the food packets from the market, or plastic dolls and other toys brought as presents from abroad by men who have returned from working there. Parents face increasing pressure from children to provide such commercial toys.

Children spend much of their time imitating what they see in the world around them. They pretend to grind grain, collect leaves to make plates, and cook imaginary meals. They make small ponds and put tadpoles in them for pretend farms, construct paddy fields and irrigation systems, build roads, and drive stones along them for trucks. Once a number of girls and boys between about three and ten were observed acting out a marriage. A big stone represented a buffalo for their feast, and they pretended to chop it up. Then some pebbles were divided into portions for eating. Flowers and leaves were arranged on one side, representing a *puja*. This

Children's drawings of play, Jahbahi

Ten year old Bikram's picture shows two boys playing on the cart, and two girls playing chari (jacks) beside the cart.

kind of play involves interaction with their environment and helps children in all aspects of development , from counting and sorting, and fine motor skills, to a growing awareness of their cultural and religious heritage. In Koldanda, it is quite common for boys to play games of pretense that in some places would be more associated with girls – old men remember even pretending to give birth. Children explained that boys more often play bride and groom, or make butterflies for pretend play, and that girls play with soil and stones more, making pots and houses, and doing other pretend chores.

Children spent a lot of time acting out the work they see their parents and older siblings do (see box page 83). In the *terai*, boys of about four were seen playing with their wooden toy cart, carrying and dumping soil to make a road. Small girls in the hills were seen collecting soil, and pretending to plaster their houses. The line between work and play can be difficult to draw sometimes. When children go along with an older sibling to fetch water, carrying their own small container, they are pretending to work, but at the same time, they are also making a contribution.

This child chose to spend hours digging his ditch in Jahbahi every so often persuading others to join his game

Parental support

Parents recognize the importance of play for young children, and for the most part are aware that it is somehow important for development (see chapter 3 page 42). They especially recognize its significance for physical and social development.

Even in controlled work situations, adults tend not to discourage play. Researchers in the *terai*, for instance, observed young children helping out in paddy fields. Their "work" often turned into spontaneous fun – pushing water from one paddy level to another with the aid of a dish might suddenly become a splashing game, for instance. Instead of admonishing children for such play, parents would work close by, modelling for their children the right way to do it.

At times parents actively support and encourage children's play. In the evenings when people come back from the fields in Jahbahi, for instance, younger and older children play together in the compounds of the houses, cheered on by adults laughing and clapping. Just as often, however, parents show no particular interest in what their children are doing. One three year old, for instance, busily engaged in his own rice planting game, had no response at all from his mother when she walked by and watched him for a moment. This lack of interest may not affect a child's play, if the child is absorbed, and if parental disinterest does not result in discouragement. Much of children's play does not require an adult presence. But there are times when the lack of parental interest and support may mean, as described here (see box) that young children have little chance to interact with a caring adult who supports, guides and extends their learning.

As children grow older, support for play often changes to a a greater concern with work, especially for girls (see box page 83). Play is acceptable for boys for much longer, and is seen as important in building the strong bodies that will help them find work later in life.

Playing on a rainy afternoon, Biskundanda

Nine children were standing together near the temple in the rain, and ten-year-old Kaley proposed that they play the rice planting game. All the children started to work with great enthusiasm, pulling up grass, or "rice seedlings". Older children showed the younger ones how to pull them up without breaking the roots. There was a lot of friendly competition, as they compared seedling, and made terraces in the ground, enjoying the water and the mud. After a while, Kaley delegated different jobs to different people. He did the ploughing with a toy plough he had made for himself, some planted seedlings, and others made canals for irrigation, all of them imitating what they had seen adults do, and learning from one another. Possession of the plough was the visible symbol of Kaley's leadership, helped by his capacity to organize others. When they finished, they were all happy and tired, satisfied with their good work and their time together.

A small boy in Jahbahi was excitedly trying to show his mother what his toy tractor (made out of sticks and an old flip flop sandal) could do. She was preparing a meal and was clearly irritated by his attempts to get her attention. After repeated attempts were rebuffed by "Can't you see I'm busy?" the boy threw the tractor across the floor and went away. Half an hour later he was seen alone, shoulders hunched, kicking at the ground despondently.

Support for play varies with age

Three-year-old Sona Loha, who is blind, was sitting in the yard with her mother and elder sister after the morning meal. Her mother, who was resting, directed her older daughter in some household chores, and talked to Sona about what she was playing. Sona had an empty ink bottle, some small pieces of stones, and pieces of salt. She was "cooking"— putting the stones in the bottles and shaking it, then pouring out the stones and putting salt on them. While she was shaking the bottle at one point, it suddenly flew out of her hand. "Oh! You lost the bottle," said her mother. "I'll find it for you." She looked for it, then handed it to Sona. "Ah! I found it. Here it is!" she said. Then she found some other materials for Sona – pieces of papers and some grains of rice, and put them in front of the child.

Meanwhile, as the older sister watched with interest, her mother said sternly, "What are you doing? Will you spend the whole day playing? You also need to learn how to work!".
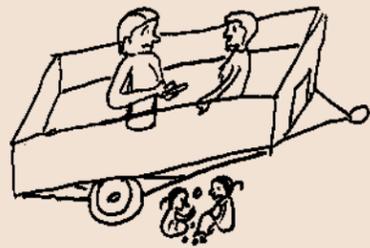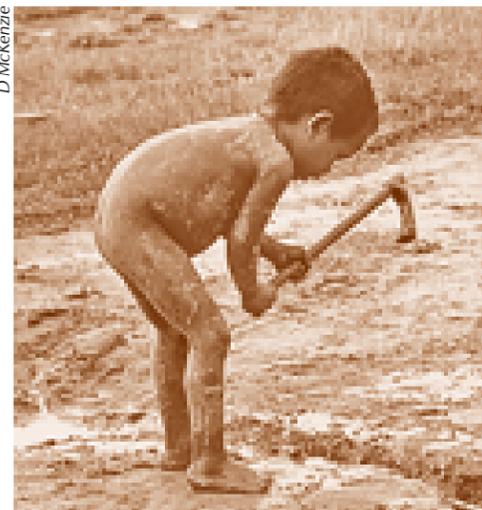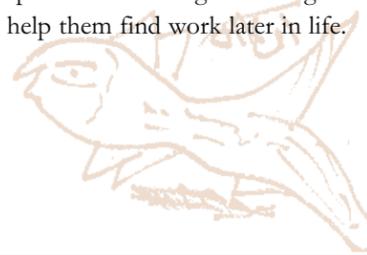
Children's work

Children are routinely involved at some level in most of the tasks undertaken by adults in these villages. They care for siblings, collect fodder and firewood, fetch water, herd cattle, work in the fields and around the house. Not all of this is necessarily defined as "work" within their communities. Heavy manual labour and tasks that involve going out into the fields and forest are considered to be work – household chores and child care are not. From the community perspective, the term "responsibility" might more reasonably cover the range of chores that are generally undertaken by children.

When children start to work

Children start to be involved in chores from an early age, usually at five or six years for girls and somewhat older for boys – although this often depends on how many other family members there are (see box over page). For the most part children under six or seven are not expected to take serious responsibility. In some cases, however, even children below this age begin to help care for their siblings, and in the peak season especially they may be responsible for looking after pigs and chickens, taking care of the house and the younger siblings. Gradually, by watching and through instruction, children become skilled in a range of tasks. By the time they are 12 or 13, they are considered to have the skills and capacity to manage adult workloads. Generally speaking work begins earlier for children in the hill villages than for those in the *terai*.

Play and work

It can be difficult sometimes to distinguish between children's play and work. Much of the work of children under the age of six or seven is regarded as play, and much of children's play, in fact, is an imitation of work performed by adults and older siblings. On one occasion, for instance, some girls and boys under seven were observed working hard, planting paddy in the fields in Jahbahi. It was clear that their parents regarded this as play, however, since the children did not yet know how to do it properly. Soon the children were asked to move and play in the empty part of the field behind their parents, so that the parents could replant the field.

What young children do for fun, older children have to do for the household's survival. Some parents in Jahbahi explained that when a child is responsible for getting something done, then that is work; if there is no responsibility, then that is play. If a child runs after the mother to get water from the pump, that is play, since the child has not been asked to collect water. If the child is asked, and people care whether the task is completed, that is work. Often work is defined as those activities which have a tangible product, such as collecting firewood, or earning wages.

Collecting fodder, Biskundanda

blurred boundaries between work and play

"when a child is responsible for something that is work, if there is no responsibility then that is play"

going fishing provides girls with an opportunity to play together, Dekhetbully

Beginning to work

The age at which children are expected to become responsible can depend a good deal on the make-up of the family. In Koldanda, five-year-old Lalitha is frequently left responsible for her younger sister. But Delisara, aged six, is herself treated as a younger child along with her two-year-old sister. If her brother Ram was not available for child care and various jobs around the house, far more would be expected from her. As it is, her older sister points out, she doesn't really like to work, and hardly even fetches water or wood from the corner of the yard.

There are times, though, when she plays with friends, imitating the work her older siblings do. At other times, almost as a form of play, she will enthusiastically light the fire and care for her younger sister for a while. Sometimes she likes to go off with 14-year-old Savitra to collect firewood and fodder. She asks a lot of questions then, wanting to know which plants are edible, and how to identify them. Delisara is gradually learning how to work, and increasingly her mother responds with irritation or a slap when she refuses to do small tasks.

An important consideration in defining work is what children themselves view as difficult or easy. Boys in Jahbahi said that the most difficult work was digging in the field, which caused pain in their arms and legs; their easiest work was taking care of younger siblings, because they get to play. Girls found collecting firewood painful and troublesome, and said the easiest work was sweeping the floor. Even when Buddhi was sick, she swept the floor almost as a pastime (see box on page 74).

Work and play, even for older children, can and do happen at the same time in many cases. When children herd cattle, for instance, although a good deal of responsibility is required, there is still ample time for play. A group of boys from Koldanda spent most of the afternoon swimming in a stream where they had taken their cattle to drink. In Jahbahi, boys often agree to take turns watching the sheep, while the others play. Collecting fodder and firewood also frequently happens in small groups, and can be a leisurely playful outing.

Work as an avenue to competence and respect

In general young children are eager for the feeling of achievement they gain through helping out and learning new work skills. In all the villages, work is seen as the most immediate way to gain both the respect of others and a personal sense of accomplishment. Children willingly take on tasks in order to prove their competence to parents, friends and older siblings – as well as to themselves. Girls in Dekhetbhully, for instance, were heard talking to one another, and comparing with pride the work they had managed to complete that day. As they grow older, work becomes more routine and taken for granted, an inescapable part of life within any community where survival is so closely tied to unremitting daily effort. The sense of achievement and and the scope for learning inevitably diminish.

For young children their "work" is a source of pride and a valuable opportunity to acquire the competence they desire as well as appreciation from others. Over time work becomes the rote performance of familiar tasks and satisfaction and developmental opportunities diminish.

Girls caring for younger sibling, Koldanda

The desire for competence

Dhane Lohar was working in the Aran (iron workhop), making a sickle. His seven-year-old son sat nearby, watching him work. After a while he asked if he might help. The father asked him to run the wheel, pumping air to fan the fire. The boy did this for a few minutes, but it didn't hold his attention, and he returned to watching his father, who was concentrating hard, sharpening the sickle and giving it the finishing touches.

The boy made it clear that he wanted to do the same work as his father. Dhane handed him the sickle and the sharpening tool with no comment, and the boy went off to the other corner to work on it, while his father turned to another project. After a few minutes, the boy came to show his father what he had done. Dhane's face turned dark as he realized that his son had ruined all his careful finish on the sickle. He did not

get angry, but said in a soft voice, "Son, you haven't learned yet how to sharpen a sickle, so you did it wrong. Now, I'll have to sharpen it again. But you run the wheel very well. If you want to help me, you can do that some more. If you don't want to, go inside and ask your mother for something to eat."

Helping to sharpen a sickle, Dekhetbully

Seasonal calendar with children, Jahbahi

The seasonal calendar shows the changes that take place during the year in children's workload. Work loads are greater for girls than for boys most of the year because they are expected to do household work as well as outside field work. The longest work hours are during the agricultural peak seasons.
Girls' household work includes cleaning house and cowshed, cleaning pots and pans, cooking food, fetching water, weaving baskets. Their outside work includes taking snacks to those working in the field, planting rice, planting vegetables, carrying hay and cutting grass. Boys said their main work is

outside and includes carrying rice plants, cutting grass, harvesting, ploughing, driving the ox cart, herding, making cattle fodder and going to market.
Children also showed the main festivals celebrated. Although children enjoy festivals, they add to the workload of girls, who have to cook food, make pickle and leaf plates, while boys walk around enjoying themselves.
Illness, as shown, is most common during the peak agricultural season. Children have less chance to recover as they are needed to work in the fields, and less care because their parents are busy working.

Boys' work and girls' work

From an early age , there is a difference in the jobs considered appropriate for boys and girls, and in the degree of responsibility expected from them. Both boys and girls do outside chores, but girls in addition tend to have far greater obligation to household tasks such as cooking, cleaning and child care. The distinction varies between communities. In Koldanda, it is not unusual for boys to help out in the house when an extra hand is needed. The more important distinction, perhaps, is that more work is expected from girls, and that the ratio of work to play quickly becomes different.

A boy herding, Jahbahi

Girls in Dekhetbhully said their parents' give them far more work to do than their brothers, although they claim to expect sons and daughters to work equally hard. In the Ale family in Koldanda, 14-year-old Savitra routinely works with her father in the fields, while her brother Ram cares for his two-year-old sister. This is not so much a bending of gender roles as a confirmation of them. Savitra, as a girl and the oldest, is doing serious work. Ram, a boy, is able to play with his friends much of the day, even though Sita is on his back. Girls in Jahbahi summed up the differences, "We have to stay at home and work, while boys come home, study, eat, play and sleep." As girls become older, especially if they no longer attend school, there is the danger that they may become quite isolated by their household work.

More work is expected from girls and the ratio of work to play quickly becomes different

Children's workload changes with the seasons. The heaviest work time for boys is during the peak agricultural season, when they are expected to help out in the fields. Girls work a lot year round, doing household chores and caring for children, but their work also becomes heavier during peak season. Even in festival times, girls have more work than boys. They cook food, make pickle and leaf plates, while boys walk around enjoying themselves. In Jahbahi, children whose fathers work as *kamaiya* tend to have heavier workloads all year round.

Taking initiative

Although parents usually assign children their tasks, it is common especially for older children to choose the work they want to do, and when they want to do it (see Box). Gopal's son, a 12-year-old boy in Biskundanda who was supposed to go for fodder collection, stayed home, and when his mother pressed him to do the job, he decided instead that he would take care of the cattle herding. His mother seemed quite satisfied with his decision. The general assumption appears to be that when children understand the family's needs and priorities, they are capable of making reasonable decisions on this front, and that they will also learn from these

Nayan Bahadur in Biskundanda went to the carpenter, and left his wife to sow the soya beans and his son to tend to the animals. When the son came home he was not in the mood for cattle herding, so he coaxed his mother to do it, and said he would sow the seeds. She asked him whether he knew how to sow soya beans, and he convinced her that he could do the job properly. When the father returned later and asked about the day, the mother told him about the change in roles. He was surprised and asked the son, "How did you do it? How many seeds did you sow in one hole?" The son replied, "Five or six." The father laughed saying, "That is too many, two or three would have been enough. You should have asked your mother or grandmother." The father was not upset. He knew that his son would know how to plant soya beans from now on.

decisions. Children were repeatedly seen in all the villages heading off to work on various tasks without any apparent direction from parents. Taking initiative and making judgements are also important in the course of performing many tasks. Children have to know what fodder to cut, to decide where there is likely to be good grazing, to be able to control stubborn animals, and to make quick decisions if younger siblings are hurt.

How children are disciplined

All villagers agreed that it is a parental responsibility to control and discipline children, but parents also recognize that overly severe punishment can affect a child negatively: Tharu women in Dekhetbhully said that children could be pushed too far by excessive punishment – they might become frustrated and leave home or even commit suicide.

In all the communities, parents feel it is preferable to encourage good behaviour through example and persuasion, and they try to convince young children in a loving way, explaining why something is wrong. Researchers were generally impressed by the high level of patience parents showed with their children. Especially in Koldanda, the tolerance shown to small children was noted to extend even to quite extreme demonstrations of frustration or anger. Children were observed, when upset, hitting their parents or siblings, throwing sickles into the field, throwing slippers around and so on. Small brothers Nirmal and Naresh in Koldanda, for instance, were observed to fight continuously, competing for toys, for food and for attention – sometimes driving their young mother to scream at them in frustration. This kind of behaviour on the part of young children is not encouraged, but most of the time it is treated with a good deal of tolerance. Sometimes when parents' patience wears thin, they may slap their children or admonish them, but generally they are responded to with composure. This kind of self assertion is less acceptable as children grow older.

Threats and fear are commonly used as an incentive to good behaviour in all villages. As discussed earlier, if parents want children to remain close to home, they may be threatened with spirits and jackals – or even child traffickers. If they don't go to sleep, they may be threatened with ghosts and spirits. Threatening to beat a child with nettles if chores are not done properly is quite common. When researchers expressed concern about the damaging effects of the resulting anxiety for children, parents disagreed. In every village they see this as a positive kind of control, a basic and effective child rearing tool of responsible parents that has no negative long term effects. Over time, they feel, the fear will pass, but the discipline will remain. Rather than being a potential source of psychological damage, they feel that the fears of small children are well founded, and a pragmatic response to possible harm, whether it be from falls, dangerous animals, the illnesses that can be caused by spirits, or simply the long term effects of disobedience. Fathers in Biskundanda explained further that threats were certainly preferable to beatings. Another method of controlling or punishing children is to deprive them of food. In Jahbahi parents said they might deny a child food or money, or

threats and fear- commonly used to control children's behaviour

sometimes even shut them out of the house at night. In Biskundanda children said if they were disobedient, they could expect to go hungry, or possibly to be beaten.

Despite a recognition that beating is not the best way to discipline children, people often mentioned it as a punishment. In Koldanda, there is a community rule against beating children, but in other communities it is considered a last resort, when other forms of persuasion have failed. In Dekhetbhully, parents said it was quite uncommon. The researchers never observed children being beaten, although they heard them being threatened with beatings from time to time. Mothers in Biskundanda explained that while they did in fact beat their children on occasion, they would not do it in front of guests. Fathers in Biskundanda say they rarely beat their daughters. Since girls do not stay with their parents for very long, they try to treat them with love and affection.

In all the villages, fathers are described as the main disciplinarians, and mothers often control children by threatening that their fathers will punish them. There was some concern both among researchers and some parents that this practice can create fear and distance between children and their fathers

School

The daily schedule

In all villages, school begins at 10 a.m, after children have had a chance to complete early morning chores. In the hills, they eat their large morning meal before going to school. Children often walk together in a group to school. Many younger children, especially boys, who are not needed at home for work, arrive at school by 9 a.m. so that they can play together in the school yard. There is an hour long break in the middle of the day for play, when children in the *terai* run back home for food. Often they do not return after lunch – Tharus and Bishwokarma in the *terai* have lunch times which do not coincide with the school break – and if they are late, they may be afraid to go back to school. During the hottest months in the *terai*, school meets only from 6a.m. until 11.30a.m.

Sitting on the floor, a classroom, Koldanda

During break at school, children play hide and seek, skipping and *chari*. Some schools have volleyball and football, skipping ropes, or carom boards. In Koldanda children often bring ropes to school, and make swings up in the jungle area above the school. School generally closes
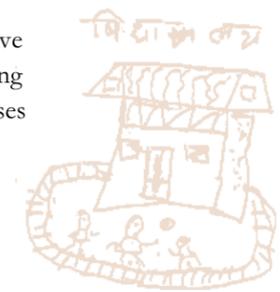
at 4 or 4:30 p.m., although earlier in Koldanda for the first three grades. Children then return home to help with chores.

Because of afternoon chores at home, it can be difficult for children to do their homework. By the time the family has eaten there is seldom enough light to see by. Children often get in trouble for failing to complete their work, and then become timid and reluctant to attend. This contributes to failure over time, and causes both parents and children to become frustrated.

In the *terai* villages, parents said they did not want children involved in extra curricular activities such as games or drama at school, but felt they should use the time for study. Because they play at home, and have chores there, school is the only place they can reasonably study. Parents can't answer children's questions about homework, and this is another reason they feel they should study at school where teachers can help them. A teacher in Jahbahi said, "The bitter fact is that society does not understand the importance of play: they have realised that their children should play, but they don't want them to play in school."

No time for homework

DREAM SCHOOL

Drawings of school – present situation and dream school, Biskundanda

*Children, both those who did and did not attend school, were asked to draw pictures of the school and of their imaginary dream school. 7 year old Bhim Kumari and 11 year old Chami Sara show that they would like a school with benches and desks inside , a playground and a Chautari (resting place with a tree), and a tap and temple nearby.
Other children included toilets, a garden to make the school look beautiful, volleyball grounds, a hospital and health post nearby*

The pictures of the non-school going children are very different; for many of them it was the first time they had ever put pen to paper. One child said, "How can I draw a school if I have never been inside one?"

Children in Koldanda said they would like their parents to come to the school more often, so that they could be familiar with what they're doing there and become more involved generally. They like to have their parents there on results day, and are happy when they see them there paying their fees. They feel their parents should know about the things they're learning, and they often tell then at home what they're working on.

The quality of facilities and teaching

Most classrooms are poorly equipped. There are not enough desks and benches to go around. The hill village schools have water taps and Jahbahi has a pump. In Dekhetbhully, the school's pump is not working, so if children feel thirsty they have to run home, first getting permission from the teacher. All the schools except in Dekhetbhully have latrines. There are few learning materials – in the hill villages there is a blackboard in each room, a globe and maps, but most of these materials are stored out of reach in the headmaster's office. The schools have no libraries, and if children wish to do any extra reading, they must buy books in the market. Materials are available only in Nepali and there is not enough of them to go round. In Koldanda, for the first three grades, teachers translate everything into Magar. From grade 4 onwards classes are conducted in Nepali, but teachers often explain things in Magar. There is no special class for learning Nepali – children just pick it up gradually. In Dekhetbhully, children speak to others from their own group in their mother tongues, but are expected to use Nepali for school. Many fail to do well because of problems with the language.

The quality of interaction between the teachers and children shows considerable variation among villages – some relying on rote learning and others, especially the Jahbahi headteacher, trying to introduce new approaches. These were not in fact appreciated by the community.

For the most part, there were no complaints from parents about teachers or their attendance at the school, although teachers said that parents often complain when their children fail. In Dekhetbhully's community school, parents complained that the teacher did not take his job seriously enough. Researchers observed that, given his semi-volunteer status, people were expecting too much from him. The ratio of teachers to students varies across the villages: in Jahbahi primary school, there is one teacher to every eighty students; in Dekhetbhully community school, there is one teacher to every forty students.

The primary education curriculum is standard throughout the country and some teachers point out that it is often inappropriate to local needs, and does not always prepare their children for the jobs that are available to them.

Enrollment and attendance

Children usually start school between six and nine years of age, although this varies. In Dekhetbhully, some children are sent to the private "boarding" school at three or four years. In Koldanda, most children don't attend officially until they are seven or eight, and some families wait until their children are still older. In Jahbahi, children start going to school between the age of seven and nine. In most villages, though, many children under six attend school with older siblings, particularly in the peak season. In Dekhetbhully the teacher said that small children cry

The preference of parents for "serious" work at school is interesting, given the general acceptance in these communities of the significance of hands-on learning. *"Ki padera siksha, ki parera siksha"* (learn by studying facts, and learn by doing things) – this Nepali proverb acknowledges that both kinds of learning are important. But in practice researchers often observed that families feel that schools should offer *"padne"* or real formal learning – the informal learning of everyday work and lifeskills is less valued, and not seen as relevant to the school experience.

Child care in the class: a teacher looks after a small child while teaching, Koldanda

in the class, which disturbs all the students. When children take younger siblings back home for lunch, most of them don't return afterwards. In Jahbahi, there used to be a *Sishu Kaksha* (pre-school) programme in the village, sponsored by BPEP. The room is still there, and a dedicated volunteer continues to take care of the young siblings. The headmaster said people were eager for a *sishu* class where play would be the focus, but there was no budget for it now.

Education, as we have noted, is considered by all communities to be of fundamental importance for their children. But actual attendance, together with the degree of support offered to school going children, reveals considerable ambivalence in parents, and indicates that in practice, education is not the high priority that it is in theory. It is surpisingly difficult to determine the actual attendance rates for school-aged children in each community. Where schools serve more than one village, they tend not to break enrollment figures down by village. Where the research focused on only a part of a given village, it further complicated the analysis of available records. Enrollment records were all that were available, and these are often a poor reflection of actual attendance. The following, then, are estimates at best.

In Biskundanda, just under half the school age children are enrolled, and less than a third were reported to attend school. These rates seemed to hold for both boys and girls. In Koldanda, almost 90 percent of boys and 83 percent of girls were enrolled; it was not clear how many of these actually attended, although attendance was reported to be fairly good. In Jahbahi, about 53 percent of boys and 37 percent of girls from the study area were enrolled; again attendance was reported to be good for both girls and boys. In Dekhetbhully, it is impossible to get a clear picture, because of the number of schools in the area and the fact that the research focused on only one settlement in the village. Figures are only available for the community school – 27 percent of local boys and 19 percent of girls were reported to be enrolled here and attendance was said to be about 75 percent. The picture is incomplete because it does not take into account the four other schools where people send their children.

In Jahbahi there is a trend of children dropping out as they move up through the grades, as they are pulled out of school to work at home. From total school figures (that is, including children beyond our study area) 39 percent of children attend Grade 1; 21 percent Grade 2; and there is a steady decrease to 12 percent in Grade 5. In Biskundanda, similarly, children drop out early. No girls have gone beyond grade four and no boys have passed grade six. The drop out rate for the school as a whole is currently about 10 percent, and the failure rate last year was about 20 percent. The fear of discrimination here adds to the reluctance of Bishwokarma parents to send their children to school. Most teachers do not discriminate, but the Magar students may refuse to share the same desks, humiliate the Bishwokarma children by accusing them of touching their food, and sometimes beat them up and threaten them.

Actual attendance, together with the degree of support offered to school going children, reveals considerable ambivalence in parents, and indicates that in practice, education is not the high priority that it is in theory.

In Koldanda a number of children, girls as well as boys, have made it through grade eight, and in some cases beyond. But the failure rate each year is around 50 percent, and many children are forced to repeat. No reason was offered for this – although a teacher did observe during a dialogue session that only about half the children in grade one actually show up on any given day. In Dekhetbhully, people have a great sense of ownership over the community school which they built and are funding themselves. There is an incentive to send children, since they are required to pay for the school whether or not their children attend. They take the school and their children's education more seriously as they have a direct involvement and investment in the school. However this school does not go beyond the first few grades at this point, and it is hard to tell whether this positive attitude will affect long term drop out rates.

There can be a number of reasons for dropping out, including failure and discrimination. Children aren't always eager to go to school, and have to be encouraged or even threatened by their parents. In some cases, though, parents don't insist – they are just as happy to have the children available for work at home, especially during peak season. Some older men in Koldanda noted that children would rather play than go to school, but when it's peak season and their help is badly needed, they suddenly become very eager to attend. School schedules attempt to accommodate parents' need for their children's help during peak seasons, and holidays from July to August coincide with most of the peak agricultural season, but parents can also need children's help at other times.

The costs are also a consideration. School fees are generally not prohibitively high, except for private "boarding schools" – it is often more a question of priorities. A teacher in Biskundanda pointed out that fees are only Rs 7 per month (although books and other expenses add to this). Some fathers earn Rs 150 a day, but then spend as much as Rs 100 in Charchare on alcohol. During a dialogue session in Dekhetbhully, fathers worked out what they spent each month on tobacco, and realized with chagrin that it was considerably more than the cost of local school fees. More significant than fees, though, is the potential loss of children's help in managing the daily workload – which in turn translates into a loss in productive time for parents.

Education for girls

For daughters, schooling is considered an especially poor investment, since they will leave home anyway at marriage, and any benefits will accrue to the husband's family. Girls, essentially, need enough education to find a good husband; boys need enough to get a good job. Assessments of what this means, in terms of years of attendance, may vary from village to village, but it usually means less education for girls. In Koldanda, the differences between the schooling available for boys and girls is relatively minimal up to grade eight, and expectations for girls are higher than in other villages. But in Biskundanda, no girl has ever gone beyond grade four, and in the *terai* villages, basic literacy is considered adequate for girls, and many stay home for lack of tuition money, while parents take out loans to send their brothers to expensive "boarding" schools. Fortunately there are some notable exceptions (see box overpage).

A young girl outside the classroom. Will she get the chance to study? And will she stay in school as long as her brother?

"Girls need enough education to get a good husband, boys need enough to get a good job"

There are other concerns beyond the ultimate value of education for girls. Since girls take on heavier workloads early in life, their presence at home is more sorely missed. As one girl in Dekhetbhully pointed out, if her brothers stayed home, they would only play anyway, so they might as well go to school. Some girls in Jahbahi noted that they had registered themselves for school, but then had to pull out because of the work that needed to be done at home.

There is also the concern that schooling may in fact reduce a girl's value in the marriage market. Brahmin Chhettri people in Dekhetbhully, for instance, expressed the concern that educated girls might find it difficult to marry because of the lack of educated boys in the community. In one family there were three girls who were high school graduates and the parents had been trying to find husbands for them for several years. This concern is balanced in some cases by a sense that education may actually make a girl more marriageable. More of a concern is the potential damage that school attendance may have for a girl's reputation. Parents worry especially about long unchaperoned walks to school, and the inappropriate contact that this provides with boys. Any value that education has for their daughters would be negated if their reputation was compromised.

It is not only parents, but girls themselves who are constrained by this concern. In Koldanda, where there is the most support for girls to go to school, girls acknowledge that they sometimes hesitate to go on to secondary school outside of the village because of the potential for rumours about their reputations.

It is interesting to note that the vast majority of children in all the villages are opposed to any kind of discrimination against girls in education. Girls, not surprisingly, tend to be most vocal in

their feeling that they should have equal opportunities, but in most cases their brothers back them up.

In spite of various problems – ambivalence on the part of many parents, little support for children's homework, conflicting demands on children's time, and the fact that schools run with insufficient resources – the schools still perform an important function for local children, broadening their opportunities and exposing them to new ideas. In the case of mixed communities schools serve as a forum that brings children of different castes and ethnic groups together to interact. Although there are quarrels between children from different groups, this is at least a setting where an attempt can be made to address these struggles.

Inspite of the various problems, schools still perform an important function broadening children's opportunities and exposing them to new ideas.

Special events

An exciting event for any village child is a trip to the market – a chance to see cars and trucks, strange people and unfamiliar objects. This is more common in Jahbahi where the market is relatively close, but a relatively rare event for those in the hills. Buddhi, aged three, still talks about her one visit to Charchare, the road head which consists of a few houses and one small shop, where she got sweets and beaten rice and saw some lorries and cars go by.

Another enjoyable time for children is going to visit their *mama ghar* or mother's brother's home, because they get a lot of love and special attention there, and are relatively free of work and responsibilities. They usually visit during festivals, such as *Dassain*, and good times are celebrated there. There is a special relationship between children and their mother's family. The uncle (or mother's brother) is often involved in performing the early life cycle rituals, such as a boy's haircutting.

Ceremonies to mark turning points in children's lives (see page 45) are special times for them as they are often the centre of the attention. When a six-year-old Magar boy in Biskundanda celebrated his *Chhewar* or haircutting, he looked proud in his new hat (*topi*) and decorated with flowers. He visited each household in the village, accompanied by a crowd of friends and relatives, and was given money. Everyone, including the boy, was laughing and enjoying themselves.

Melas or *jatras* (fairs) are another favourite time for children. They are held regularly every couple of months over the slack season or during festivals. People gather together from all around and traders come and sell things. People get together and sing and dance.

Festival times are a favourite for all children – a chance to eat good food, including meat, to meet friends and relatives from further away, and sometimes to get new clothes. During some festivals the whole community is involved in singing, dancing, drinking and feasting over several days, with children joining in. During *Holi*,

Festivals - a time for singing and dancing

A small girl dances

Children and adults often gathered in front of a house to dance and sing in Biskundanda. On one particular evening, a large group was there. A small girl of five or six was asked to dance in the center. At first she hesitated, but her mother encouraged her to go, and others pulled her into the middle to dance. She started dancing, moving her hands, fingers and legs freely in time to the music. She tried to sing the song along with the rest of the group. From time to time, she looked at her mother and smiled at her. Her mother smiled back at her and this encouraged the girl to be able to face the crowd and continue dancing on her own. Both the girl and her mother were proud that she could dance in front of the crowd.


Girl dancing, while their friends accompany them by singing, clapping and banging on an old plastic bucket as a drum, Biskundanda

they enjoy throwing coloured powder at each other, and in Tharu communities, girls sell bread during *Anhatari*, and can use the income to buy whatever they like.

Many festivals mark important agricultural events and the whole community, adults and children join in. For example, in Dekhetbhully they celebrate *Gaura*, with a god made out of rice plants. People pray for a good harvest and enjoy a week's singing, dancing and drinking. At the end of the rice planting, Tharu people cover each other in mud – celebrating the end of their hard work together. Through these festivals, the importance of cooperating together to complete work is affirmed and children learn this by their involvement both in the work and the celebrations. Every winter, people in Biskundanda celebrate the *Bhailo* festival, where they eat, drink and dance over a week to cope with the cold winter and welcome the new year. People collect money for this doing wage labour earlier in the year. Children are also involved and enjoy showing off their dancing and singing skills.

In the hill villages, following a Magar tradition, boys under 10 years are involved in the monthly Natuli ritual, where they go and offer milk to the god of the forest. During the main festivals, they offer pigs, buffalo and chickens to the god.

The various celebrations and festivals reaffirm the sense of community, as people gather and have fun together. In some communities, however, such as Biskundanda, caste differences mean that people do not extend togetherness to making offerings or eating food cooked by the other caste group, and this can sometimes result in conflict as described on page xx (box under caste in security and identity). Celebrations do, however, offer the potential for friendship and enjoyment across caste and ethnic groups.
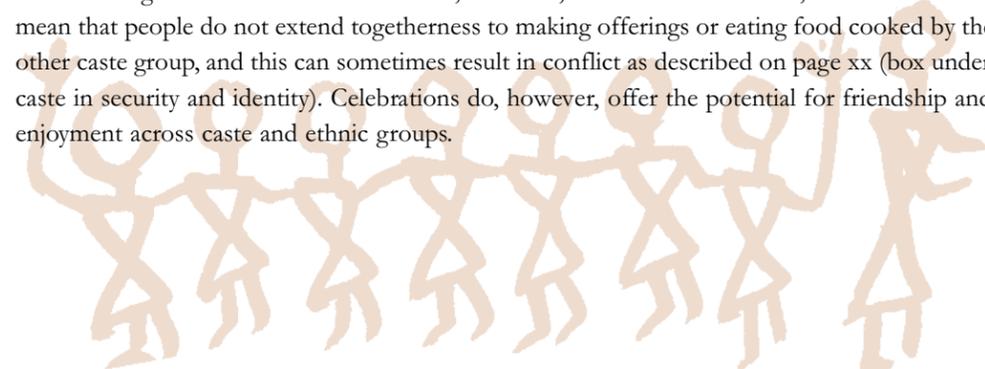
Migration and changes in child rearing

In addition to investigating child rearing in the four sample villages, the study also attempted to trace families who had migrated from these villages to less isolated areas (see page **xx).** Two families from Koldanda were found living in Tateracharpi in the terai, and two Bishwokarma families from Biskundanda were found living in Murgiya. Both Tateracharpi and Murgiya are peri-urban. These families migrated to the terai between 12 and 20 years ago in response to the government's redistribution of land. One household was traced from Jahbahi to Dangadi, the urban district headquarters for Kailali.

The families from the hills endured considerable difficulties during their early years in the terai – struggles with bureaucracy, with local people, land clearing and indebtedness. Now they have land and are able to grow food for their families, and are generally better off than they were in the hills. They continue to have a good relationship with their families in the hills, either going to visit or enjoying visits from relatives. All families are able to take advantage of being close to the market and a number of NGO programmes and supports, available in the more urbanized areas they have moved to.

Although many of the beliefs and practices with their children are similar to those in their home villages, there are some distinct differences too. The families originally from Biskundanda and Jahbahi say their children eat better food now – rice, dhal and vegetables on a regular basis – and have better access to medical facilities. Children are exposed to a wider range of people and influences. As well as neighbours in the settlement, they are used to interacting with people passing through and visitors from their home villages. Low caste children in the families in Murgiya feel more confident than their peers in Biskundanda because they face less caste discrimination. Other caste people even drink alcohol made by their families, which would not happen in Biskundanda. From the earliest years children in the more urbanised areas speak Nepali, and they learn a more formal and widely used Nepali than in the hills. They go to the market more frequently, are able to buy sweets and other treats, and are accustomed to vehicles and bicycles.

Generally, children have more opportunity to attend school than those in the hill villages. Work begins for them later: where Koldanda children actively contribute to family subsistence by the time they are seven or eight, Tateracharpi children mostly play and attend school until they are 15 years. This is partly an expression of the fact that livelihoods are easier in the terai.

Concerns that people raised specific to the urban setting include the risks from traffic. Their culture is also threatened by the greater exposure to Hindi films. In Murgiya they said that there is no worship or parties like they have in the hills. Instead they have adopted typical terai festivals.

Although children's rights appear to be better supported in these "urban" settlements in such areas as nutrition, health care, schooling and work, a more in-depth examination of children's actual quality of life would be necessary in order to draw meaningful conclusions.

The Implications For Children's Rights

The beliefs and values of parents and other caregivers, their daily practices with regard to their children, the social and physical environments they make available to them, all have significant implications for the rights of the children in these four villages. Rather than consider the rights within the Convention one by one, it makes sense to group them in ways that allow for more integrated discussion. We consider first children's right to supportive secure families that are able to provide for them, and then their rights to health and to protection from harm. We go on to discuss children's right to emotional security and identity, their right to opportunities for learning, and their right to participate as people whose opinions are respected.

Nine of these sections, can be read in isolation from the others – any more than programming which supports children's rights can realistically address one area of development while ignoring others.

Even among these broad domains there are inevitably areas of overlap, reflecting the integrated and interdependent quality of children's well-being and development. It is impossible, for instance, to consider children's opportunities for learning without considering their health. If a child is hungry, she cannot concentrate on playing and learning. The effects work the other way also; if an ill or malnourished child is understimulated, she is unlikely to absorb nutrients as efficiently.[39] (see also page 109). Similarly, if a child is being abused at home, he may be too upset and preoccupied to benefit from either nutritional or educational supports. The same synergy comes into play in other areas too and the younger a child is, the more difficult it is to differentiate between physiological and psychological factors. These interactive effects work in both positive and negative spirals. Children whose creativity and problem solving capacities are supported in their early years, are likely to have the skills to participate as effective community members later on. Those who are encouraged to participate actively in their families' concerns are, at the same time, likely to develop more sophisticated cognitive skills.

A significant aspect of this discussion is the on-going likelihood of change for these communities. It is one thing to assess the efforts that families make for their children in terms of the effects for children's rights here and now. It is another thing to consider how adequately parents are preparing their children for a future that may include quite a different range of both pressures and opportunities from those that parents themselves have experienced. Change does not happen overnight, and these communities have already experienced many shifts and changes over the last few decades. But child rearing practices are deep seated and inherently conservative – they tend not to respond rapidly to new realities, but to adapt gradually over

Tom Kelly

time. Nor are these shifts entirely controlled and conscious. Few parents, wherever they live, adapt their child rearing practices easily and appropriately to shifts in the larger world. Nor is an unquestioning "flexibility" ideal. In many parts of the world, where parents have lost faith in traditional methods, and have turned instead to the advice of "experts", the resulting confusion has been harmful in many ways. It is unfair to expect the parents in these four villages to know instinctively what preparation their children are likely to need. But the Convention provides a framework within which to consider change – an opportunity, precisely, to reflect on the confusions and contradictions that confront many parents and societies as they attempt to prepare children for life in the contemporary world.

[39] UNICEF (1998), *The State of the World's Children 1998: Focus on Nutrition,* New York, Oxford University Press.

The right to secure families

The Convention emphasizes that the family, in all its many forms, is "the natural environment" for the growth and well-being of children, and it recognizes the rights and responsibilities of families in the upbringing, development and guidance of their children (preamble, Articles 5, 18.)

The strategies that families employ to ensure that they can meet these responsibilities play a critical part in the achievement of children's rights. Family structure, livelihood strategies and the support systems within communities are all undergoing change. It is important to understand how families are adapting to these changes, and what effect this has on children's well-being. It is also important to consider the power relations within families and communities that perpetuate the vulnerability of some groups and undermine their capacity to provide for their children.

Changing family structures

There is a significant move in all the villages away from joint and extended families and towards more nuclear families – a reflection of a trend that has been observed throughout the world.[40] The percentage of nuclear families varies, from 30 percent of households in Jahbahi to 80 percent in Koldanda, but change is inevitably in this direction.

A Bishwokarma family from Dekhetbully

While traditional wisdom extolls the merits of the extended family for children, pointing to the richness of social connections and the number of potential caregivers, the picture appears to be more complex in reality. Community members pointed to both advantages and disadvantages of the various household forms. Child care is definitely considered to be easier in extended families, where responsibility can more easily be shared. In Jahbahi, for instance, daughters-in-law rotate responsibility for cooking and child care, and there is more likely to be an adult present to provide supervision. Children also tend to have more opportunity to learn about sharing and cooperation, and researchers noted, in fact, that in nuclear families, children were more inclined to be demanding and self-centred.

But many women described the increased control that they have over resources and decision-making in a nuclear family. Extended families tend on the whole to be more affluent, but because everything is equally shared in this social arrangement, individual children are less likely to have their particular needs specially considered. Children, for instance, tend to get more food in a nuclear family, despite their lesser affluence.

In nuclear families, daughters are able to pay more attention to their parents in their *maiti* (maternal home) than in an extended family. They can visit more often and, if they are economically able, can take gifts to their parents, which they would not be able to do in an extended family.(Traditionally, amongst Hindu caste groups, parents do not accept gifts from their mar-

[40] See for example Zeitlin, M F, R Megawangi, E Kramer, N Colletta, E D Babatunde and D Garman (1995) *Strengthening the Family: Implications for International Development,* Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations University Press

ried daughters. She now belongs to another house and has changed her family name. In the Magar communities, they are more likely to expect care from their daughters even after they have married.)

The tradition of the daughter going to the husband's home and becoming part of his family was cited everywhere as the primary reason for failure to invest in girls' education. The daughter is seen as a loved but temporary guest. The trend towards nuclear families may change this attitude. While sons will still be seen as having a different and vital role (because of their role in funeral rites in part) it seems likely that the daughter will not be "lost" to her *maiti* in the same way as before and may indeed be a source of future support. Parents may come to value their daughters more, and may feel that it is worthwhile investing in their education.
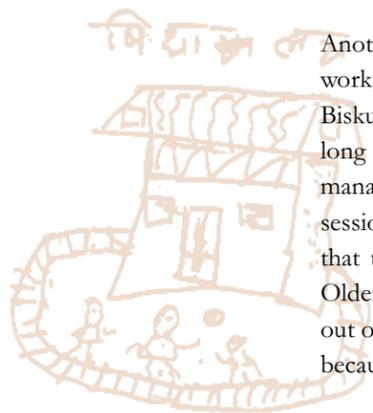
Another significant trend is the growing phenomenon of migration out of villages for seasonal work, or for longer periods. There are some cases of women migrating for work, especially in Biskundanda, but the vast majority of migrants are men. This brings in extra income over the long term, but also results in increased stress for women, who have to balance all household management tasks and decisions on their own. Some old people in Koldanda, during a dialogue session, acknowledged that migrant workers brought back luxuries like stereos, but they felt that the practice of working outside was an overall loss in terms of improving family life. Older children generally have to take on additional responsibilities, and younger children lose out on child care. One mother in Jahbahi noted that her children could no longer attend school because they were needed for work their father would normally have done.

But in some cases the situation actually improves children's prospects. In Biskundanda, where Ambika runs her household alone, her children were observed to be neater and cleaner than other children, and to attend school more regularly. Although it is often assumed that female-headed households are poorer than male-headed households, there is a growing body of research indicating that women and children may be better off in a female-headed household, even if the income is relatively low, because of more child-focused allocation of resources.[41] Male household heads tend to claim a disproportionate share of resources for their personal expenditure.[42] It was noted that in the hill villages where women have *pewa*, they spend some of it on clothes or food for their children. Households where women have more control are positive for children in other ways as well, providing positive role models for girls, and giving boys the opportunity to respect the capacities of women. It must be noted, however, that within Nepal as a whole, a recent study has reported an overall decrease in women's decision making powers.[43]

In responding to changes in family structure, the challenge is to support families, whatever their form, to provide the most nurturing environment for their children – to find ways to maintain the advantages of extended family, with its rich opportunities and capacity for care, and at the same time to promote increased control for mothers, who tend to put their children's needs first.

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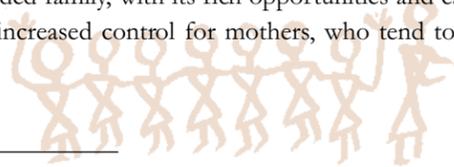
[41] Chant cited in Baden, S, K Milward (1995) *Gender and Poverty*, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex: BRIDGE; O'Connell, H (1994) *Women and the Family*, London and New Jersey: Zed Books

[42] Chand cited in Kabeer, N (1997) 'Tactics and trade- offs: Revisiting the links between gender and poverty', (28) No. 3, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

[43] Shtrii Shakti (1995) *'Women Development Democracy : A Study of the Socio-economic Changes in the Profile of Women in Nepal'*, New Delhi: Raj Press

Livelihood strategies and their effects for children

D Mckenzie

Although families in all the villages agree that life on the whole is easier than in the past, most households continue to struggle for survival and for year-round food security. Changes that families identify as having been beneficial for them – roads, improved water supplies, rice mills and greater access to health care – have been offset in many cases by other factors – increased dependence on consumer commodities, more labour intensive farming practices, high costs for celebrations, higher levels of drinking and gambling among men, and increases in migration. Some changes make households more affluent, but do not necessarily mean an improvement in women's lives – and this tends to have direct impacts for their children. In Nepal as a whole, women have been found to be contributing more time and income to the family than was true ten years earlier.[44]

Men are migrating out, leaving women to manage the household

The assets that a poor family can call on are limited and usually consist of their time and labour. Strategies to improve livelihood almost always mean increased time costs for caregivers, and decreased care for young children. When adults are exhausted and overworked, it is almost inevitable that their children will be neglected or overburdened to some degree. This may also be selective – girls, for instance, are far more likely to be kept out of school to help carry the family workload. Children may also be required to take on more work than is compatible with their right to play and rest.

In all four villages, women felt that their workloads resulted in difficult choices, and often in an inadequate level of care for their children. Infants are frequently left for many hours a day alone and unstimulated in hammocks, checked on occasionally by siblings or elderly care givers. Small children, vulnerable to injury, are left in the care of siblings young enough themselves to require supervision. Older children, especially girls, may have to take young siblings with them to school, or to drop out of school to provide childcare.

A relatively new livelihood strategy in Biskundanda is sending children out to work in the *terai* or India along with parents or relatives. During this most recent slack season, five or six children between the ages of 11 and 16 went to work as agricultural labourers or construction workers. They appeared eager to go because of the opportunity to bring back clothes and other items from outside, but further study would be needed to assess the conditions and demands of their work. The impact for younger siblings was clear. When 11-year-old Tami Sara left for 15 days in the *terai*, her 9-year-old sister, Taki Sara, had responsibility for the care of their one-year-old nephew Suresh. When both Taki and Tami are around, Suresh gets a lot of attention. When Tami left, there was very little interaction, and he was not regularly fed. Taki had to take on household and field work as well, and often left Suresh with his aged great-grandmother, who spent much of her time asleep.

In all four villages, women felt that their work loads resulted in difficult choices, and often in an inadequate level of care for their children.

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[44] Ibid.

Livelihood choices can have other sorts of effects too. In Jahbahi, the head teacher thought that the migration of men out to work over more recent years has had a negative effect on children's discipline. Children do not obey their mothers the way they obey their fathers, and if they choose not to go to school, their mothers cannot make them go.

Supportive community systems

Stable families need supportive community systems. In all the communities, there are traditional systems of social governance that provide support to families in times of difficulty. In the Tharu communities, the *badghar,* who provides guardianship in the community, ensures that people have enough to eat or supports families if someone dies. In Koldanda and Biskundanda, the *rawra* is responsibe for maintaining social norms and community harmony and cooperation. In Biskundanda, the *thar* is important for maintaining solidarity and support within a small group.

New kinds of community support are also forming – youth clubs are active in all villages except Jahbahi*,* and have been instrumental in improving local conditions. In Dekhetbhully, the influence of NGOs resulted in the formation of groups that have encouraged households to pool time and resources to provide a better environment; and despite caste differences, the community collaborated in building the school.

Although traditional community systems can work to provide support in times of difficulty, they often act to maintain the status quo. Stability can mask the caste, ethnic and wealth differences that contribute to the isolation of poorer or socially excluded families. When these families are powerless to effect change, there can be an appearance of community harmony. But this kind of harmony does not contribute to a family' s security – only to its isolation and lack of control. *Kamaiya* families are a case in point. Parents in this situation find it difficult to provide their children with confidence in their own abilities, and their sense of inferiority and helplessness may help to perpetuate exclusion. Even where differences appear minimal, as in Koldanda, apparent cohesion may mask an underlying mistrust. Local women here questioned whether any form of shared child care was actually feasible, and felt that only outside teachers could be expected to treat all children equally.

Stability at the household level may also disguise exclusion based on gender, which contributes to continuing deprivation for girls, and deprives all children, as already discussed, of the choices their mothers might make on their behalf, given the chance. Although stable families and communities are essential to achieving children's rights, this cannnot be a stability that denies rights to children on the basis of their age; to girls on the basis of gender, or to lower caste children on the basis of long respected "customs".

The challenge, again, is to achieve the best of both worlds – to encourage the traditions that provide for mutual support and cooperation, while contesting those that undermine the rights of families and their children. In Biskundanda, when Tulsi's father, for instance, encouraged her to help him out in his activities as a local *lama,* he was both upholding the traditional expectation that children will contribute to the household, but challenging the assumption that the *lama's* skills are the special preserve of males.

The challenge: to encourage traditions that provide for mutual support and cooperation while challenging those that undermine the rights of families and their children

Health and nutrition

The CRC recognises children's right to survival and to the highest attainable standard of health (Articles 6, 24) This implies a healthy environment, nourishing food, quality health services and parental awareness. Poor health undermines children's development in every area. It also adds to household expense, and can rob already overburdened caregivers of time and rest.

It is impossible to offer anything close to a precise account of the health status of children in the four villages, because there are no records available at village level of mortality, immunization rates, weight and height, or the prevalence of disease. Assessments and comparisons can be made only on the basis of informal observations and reports. The lack of record keeping presents difficulties not only for an effort such as this report – more importantly it makes it impossible to monitor health trends, an essential component in working towards improvement in children's health status.

lack of records makes it impossible to monitor health trends

Health problems and improvements

It is clear that there is considerable variation between villages. In Koldanda, the most affluent of the four villages, the local health worker and mothers reported that no children have died in recent years – a significant achievement in a country where the under five mortality rate has dropped dramatically, but is still over ten percent. In Biskundanda, only a few miles away, but at the opposite extreme in this regard, every family has experienced the death of at least one child in the last ten years, and in some cases a number of children.

Changes over recent decades in these villages are reported by villagers to have contributed to an overall improvement in health and survival. Even without figures to verify this, it can be assumed that this change is more or less consistent with larger trends in Nepal, where infant mortality has dropped from 199 per 1000 live births in 1960, to 75 per 1000 in 1997.[45] Better access to water is significant – research continues to show that it is the quantity of water available, not just the quality, that reduces the levels of endemic disease that are a major cause of child mortality.[46] The savings in time is also important, as is the improved capacity to cultivate kitchen gardens. The construction of roads and the introduction of health posts have meant that modern medical care is considerably more accessible than it was in the past – although access varies from village to village. Radios and schools have also meant that people have more information on health and hygiene.

However, a lack of sanitation, low standards of hygiene, poor indoor air quality and unreliable, inadequate, poor quality food supplies continue to contribute to problems in all areas. There are signs of undernutrition and worm infestations in all villages, even in Koldanda; in Biskundanda and Dekhetbhully there were at least one case each of severe malnutrition. Children in all villages suffer from colds and racking coughs, and fever and pneumonia are common. There are frequent bouts of diarrhoea. Skin problems, sores and eye infections are common. In the *terai* villages, encephalitis becomes a problem during August and September. Most of these illnesses are preventable, and have no place in a society committed to supporting children's rights to health and survival.

[45]   UNICEF (1999), *The State of the World's Children 1999,* New York, UNICEF.
[46]   Cairncross, S. *Sanitation and Water Supply: Practical Lessons from the Decade,* Water and Sanitation Discussion Paper Series #9, Washington DC, World Bank.

Nutrition

When children are malnourished, their bodies' defenses are weakened, they get sick more easily and their illnesses are more severe. Adequate nutrition is essential not only to children's health and growth, but to ensuring their development on other fronts as well. Children who are routinely undernourished cannot learn well, and are likely to have stunted minds as well as stunted bodies.[47]

Parents go to considerable effort in all four villages to ensure that their children get enough to eat. There is a general awareness of children's needs, and of their right to adequate nutrition. Universal breastfeeding in the early years is enormously important in protecting children's health and ensures adequate nutrition in the early months. Children are generally fed first (except in Tharu communities where they eat with adults, and are given equal portions) and children usually eat more frequently than adults in all villages. The Tharu in Dekhetbhully, who do not usually give milk to children, make a point of obtaining milk if they consider a child to be malnourished. And when fruit is available, most families make a point of seeing that young children are given priority. The situation has improved a great deal over the years – families in Jahbahi remember having to mix grass with flour in the past when food supplies ran short. Now they can buy food from the market, borrowing money of necessary.

But the fact remains that the great majority of households are unable to produce sufficient food for the year, and in some cases must go into debt simply to survive. Inevitably this affects the quality of food available to children. Although *dal bhat* and vegetables are standard fare for some families and children for at least a few meals in the day, for others, especially in Biskundanda and Dekhetbhully, even *dhal* and vegetables can be a rare treat eaten by some perhaps twice monthly. In Dekhetbhully many of the Biswokarma families routinely eat only bread, salt and chilli.

the majority of households go into debt simply to survive........ for some families even dhaal and vegetables is a treat

Mealtime in Koldanda

Nutritional status is not a matter of the availability of food alone. Even where children may be adequately fed, worm infestations and frequent bouts of diarrhoea can rob them of valuable calories and undermine their nutritional status. A relatively new issue in all villages, although less so in Jahbahi, is the growing consumption of packaged foods, which for the most part are high in cost and low in nutrition. Some villagers perceive these as being higher in nutritional value. There is a danger that an increase in purchasing power may have a negative impact on children's nutrition, and there are indications from other districts to back this up.[48] Changes in tradition may also have adverse effects for children. In the terai villages, *pahadia* who used to make nutritious grain flour mixes (*sarbottam pito or lito)* for their children while living in the hills, have now abandoned the practice.

Nutritional status is not only about the availability of food

Measures for preventing disease

Although there are still debates in the hill villages about the value of immunization, most families at this point appear to have their children immunized at the monthly clinics that are available, although it was not possible to assess how many complete the full regimen. It is a matter for concern, however, that in Biskundanda 30 percent of children remain unimmunized.

The most significant cause for concern is the continued lack of adequate sanitation, despite apparent awareness of its importance among the villages. Illnesses related to contact with excreta affect children most heavily. This is in part a function of their behaviour – the fact that they are in closer contact with the ground and have less appreciation of hygiene can result in higher rates of infection. But their relatively lower immunity to diarrhoeal pathogens is also a problem. Children's stools are more frequently infected and they often have higher worm burdens when they are infected.[49] As pointed out above, this affects nutritional status and overall health.

Awareness of the need to keep environments clean is high but often the surroundings remain dirty and hazardous

In all villages there is an acknowledgement that awareness of the need for hygiene is not adequately acted on – knowledge does not always translate into practice. This problem appears to be worst amongst groups where people have a lower sense of self worth, and little feeling of control over their lives. Keeping children clean is an essential protective measure, when they are threatened by parasites and disease. Yet too few households in these villages routinely practise even basic handwashing after defecation and before eating. In many cases families place more reliance on traditional customs to prevent illness. While these may be valuable, and should by no means be lost, they are not a substitute for basic hygiene, and most especially, for adequate sanitation.

awareness of the need for hygiene is not adequately acted on

Treatment for disease

The confusion caused for parents by the presence of both traditional and modern systems of healing, and the added expense entailed by making use of both, can definitely be a problem in these villages, as mentioned earlier. However, the willingness of parents to make use of modern treatments, as well as their respect for traditional systems of healing, is reassuring; as is the openness of traditional healers to modern medications and practices. There is considerable potential for building on this cooperation, and for each system to learn from the other. The value of locally available herbs, and the skills of local practitioners, should be recognized. In Koldanda, a Swiss organization, Helvetas, is in fact working with the community to support the production of medicinal herbs. Traditional practitioners are also important for their contribution to the psychological aspects of healing, which should not be underestimated.

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[47] UNICEF (1998) *The State of the World's Children 1998: Focus on Nutrition,* New York: Oxford University Press
[48] Observation of K. Bista, UNICEF – see footnote on p.68

[49] Feachem, R. G., D. J. Bradley and others, 1993, *Sanitation and Disease: Health Aspects of Excreta and Waste Management,* John Wiley & Sons, for the World Bank, Chichester UK.

The relatively poor access of some villages to modern treatment is a distinct problem. Distance, especially in Biskundanda, can be a real deterrent. Expense, and the time and effort involved in going to a hospital or health post, may prevent parents from dealing quickly enough with their children's ailments. An understandable preoccupation with short term work pressures may encourage a belief that children will heal on their own, even though neglect may affect a child over the long term.

Gender issues

There was some evidence that boys and girls maybe treated differently when they are ill. In Jahbahi, it was clear in some cases that medicine is more readily purchased for boys. And in Biskundanda, where child mortality is high, particular efforts are made for the survival of sons. In one household with several daughters, one had recently died. Her grandmother acknowledged that if she had been a boy, they would have provided treatment and medication for her.

The most disturbing "evidence" of differential treatment for boys and girls lies in the actual difference in their numbers. In all four villages, there are more boys than girls - and in Biskundanda the number of boys exceeds that of girls by 40 percent. Although small sample sizes make it inappropriate to draw hard conclusions from this sex imbalance, statistical analysis of these numbers suggests that there is reason for concern here.[50] The difference in the number of boys and girls is consistent with larger trends throughout Nepal, especially in the *terai*, which are considered to reflect the differential treatment of boys and girls.[51]

Prenatal care

Children's health is contingent on the health of their pregnant mothers, and this is a concern in all four villages. Here again, there are no records to confirm the rates of maternal mortality, or actual use of pre-natal care. It is clear, however, that the reluctance to discuss pregnancy, and the fear of giving birth to a large baby, contribute to a serious underuse of the supports available. Women are generally unwilling to take advantage of maternal immunization, or even to act on their awareness of the importance of rest and extra nutrition. They are frequently malnourished, and continue to manage heavy workloads throughout pregnancy. The fact that alcohol is regarded as a necessity during pregnancy by many (see Visual on page 63) is of some concern as is the continued heavy use of tobacco by Tharu women during pregnancy. To at least some degree, the care women are prepared to take depends on the level of trust felt for local TBAs or *sudenis*. In Biskundanda, there is not much faith in local health workers; in Koldanda, by comparison, the health worker Binisara is liked and trusted.

Although the age for marriage is increasing, the majority of girls in all villages still marry under the age of 19. This raises additional health concerns. Pregnant girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are twice as likely as older women to die in childbirth, and for those under 15, the rate is sharply higher. [52]

Alcohol consumption

Alcohol consumption by children, on some level, is a reality in all four villages. In Tharu and Bishwokarma communities, distilled alcohol (*raksi*) is an integral part of religious celebrations, and some children may partake in this context. More significant, though is the fact that both fresh and fermented beer are routinely given to children in all villages for its nutritional value. While this is not locally considered to be alcohol abuse, researchers questioned the potential impact on the health of children. Moreover pregnant women's identification of alcohol as a priority raises similar concerns regarding in utero effects.

Variations in children's health status

Variations in children's health status from village to village is related for the most part, not surprisingly, to the level of affluence, the quality of the local environment, and the degree of access to health facilities. Any "negligence" on the part of parents appears to be largely a function of time and resources rather than one of awareness or commitment. There are two exceptions:

1) Attention to basic hygiene could well be improved without a great time investment. This is clearly more than an information issue – strategies are called for that will encourage villages to apply their knowledge in their daily practices.
2) The difference in the numbers of boys and girls, even where it has not been explicitly related to differences in treatment, deserves attention and monitoring, reflecting as it does an alarming trend in many districts of the country. In all villages, record keeping is essential to ensure the capacity to track trends in children's health and well being.

The synergy between psychosocial supports and health

Our understanding of the two-way interactive relationship between psychosocial well-being and health has increased enormously in recent years. The effects of a child's nutritional status on her capacity to learn has been well-recognized for some time. More recently it has become clear that the effects are equally significant in the other direction as well – and that affection, interaction and stimulation are critical not only for psychosocial development, but also for overall health. Studies in Jamaica, Chile and other countries have been conducted, for instance, in which one group of children is given regular nutritious meals, while another is given a daily stimulation programme in addition. The children who receive the regular opportunities for play and learning as well as the food do better not only on psychomotor tasks, but also in terms of their nutritional status.[53]

It is impossible, therefore, in any assessment of the attention to health, to comment only on the traditional supports for health. For a fuller understanding of the health implications for children of local child rearing practices, this section should be read together with the section on opportunities for learning, (page 122-130). There are clear implications for programming, which will be discussed under recommendations.

50 Stated in formal statistical language, an examination of the 95 percent confidence intervals suggests a trend towards girl proportions of less than 50 percent, even though significance is not attained in the 5 percent level.[12] In less formal language, this means we can be 95 percent certain that the smaller number of girls is not the result of pure chance. Statistical analysis, D. Osrin, Mother Infant Reseach and Activities (MIRA) Nepal.
51 Seddon, D (1999) *Missing Girls,*Unpublished paper
52 United Nations (1991) *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics 1970-1990,* New York: United Nations

53 Monckeburg (1986) 'Nutritional rehabilitation in severe early marasmus', *Proceedings of the xviiith World Congress of OMEP,* Jerusalem; Grantham-McGregor, S M, W. Schofield and L.Harris (1983) 'Effects of psychosocial stimulation on development of severely malnourished children', *Paediatrics,*72

D Mckenzie

Protection from harm

The CRC asserts that children should be protected from all forms of maltreatment (Article 19). This includes not only intentional abuse, whether physical or psychological, but also the harm that can follow from neglect or exposure to danger. In all four villages, the chief concern of parents in this regard is the ever-present potential for injury. Because of challenging environments and the time burdens of caregivers, children cannot always be adequately protected from hazards. Again, because no figures are available, it is difficult to assess rates of injury. An underlying concern here is the inevitable neglect that often accompanies overly heavy work loads for caregivers.

The potential for injury

In all four villages children face considerable risk of injury. Parents try to discourage children from going to dangerous places, but accidents can be hard to avoid, and many injuries are associated with the work children do every day. Not only do they fall on steep slippery paths while herding, or from high trees while collecting fodder. They also cut themselves collecting fodder and fuelwood, both with their sickles or by running into sharp branches. As is the case with disease, the rainy season can be the most difficult – falls, drowning and snake bite all become more common during this time of year. But again, the demands of peak season make caregivers least available at this time.

Keeping out of harms way, a grandmother holding her granddaughter, Jahbahi

some neglect inevitably accompanies caregivers' heavy work burdens

Parents are also anxious about safety when they leave young children unsupervised or in the care of easily distracted older siblings, many of them young enough to require care themselves. Injuries are common from cuts, burns and falls from roof tops, terraced hillsides, or even off beds and porches. A common fear in Jahbahi is that children will be crushed by mattresses if they play where they are stored.

Parents try to keep sickles and knives in safe places, out of young children's reach, but especially in the households of Bishwokarma families, who make these sharp tools, they may not be that difficult to get hold of. Kitchen fires are one of the most significant hazards throughout Nepal, not only for small children who may stumble into them, but also for older girls who wear loose clothing, and work around the house. Last year in Jahbahi a girl died from burns after being treated by the *guruwa* for a month. Parents try to make a point of extinguishing fires before they leave the house, but even when adults are around, children can easily be burned. Often, when they leave for work, parents will lock the house, leaving knives, matches and other hazards inside.

D. Mckenzie

Climbing trees: a great opportunity for playing , but falling is a common accident, Jahbahi

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Khadgay Chunar's five-year-old son was playing with his two-year-old brother. They were at home alone The boy climbed up the tree-trunk ladder to the upstairs floor of the house and fell from the top – about six feet. He hit his head and screamed. His ten-year-old sister came running from the field where she had been working. She picked her little brother up, saying "What happened?" rubbing him gently on his back and hugging him. About ten minutes later he got up and started playing with his younger brother again.

Injury prevention in Biskundanda

Mashini Sunar has two children, both under a year and a half. Her husband is in India as a *lahure*. One afternoon, researchers passing by heard the sound of loud crying from her house. They ran to the door, calling for Mashini. When they looked inside they found the one-and-a-half-year old lying in the oven and crying, her face and body covered with ashes, but otherwise unharmed. Mashini, who had gone to the forest to defecate while her small children slept, had carefully extinguished the fire before she went. Without this precaution, it might have been a terrible disaster.

As far as parents are concerned, children of all ages are vulnerable to injury for different reasons. When they are very young, they lack the knowledge, and often the physical control, to avoid danger. When they become old enough to leave the yard and go further afield, there are new hazards to be coped with. And even when they are 10 or 12, they may be inclined to take unnecessary risks, or to ignore the warnings of parents.

Protecting children from injury

The common response to injury prevention in some more affluent countries is to adapt the environment for children's protection – for instance by building fences, "child proofing" kitchens, slowing traffic, and modifying public play space to the point where it becomes risk (and liability) free. In these four villages, parents take some steps to minimize danger. But it is not possible to remove all risks, and there is more of an emphasis on adapting children to the realities of the environment by increasing their awareness, competence, and capacity to deal effectively with risk.

There is a strong belief that children will learn from experience. Parents allow even the youngest children, for instance, to start experimenting with sickles, and by the age of three or four they use them adeptly. In Dekhetbhully, a father working in his blacksmith shop was observed

an emphasis on adapting children to the realities of the environment by increasing their awareness, competence, and capacity to deal effectively with risk

D. Mckenzie

As in most areas, there is a need for balance. The approach in more affluent countries may help to guarantee children's safety, but it clearly limits their experience of life and their capacity to cope competently with risk. At the same time, there is a very real problem with numerous injuries in the villages – particularly marked in Biskundanda and Dekhetbhully. While recognising the constraints that parents face in keeping their children safe from harm, it is also important to consider that serious injuries can affect a child's future and can sometimes be fatal. This points to a need (identified by the villagers themselves) for some sort of childcare arrangements at least during peak agricultural seasons, and some basic safeguards within households.

Vishna tries to manage a knife

Vishna, aged three and a half, sits inside the house, holding the handle of a curved knife with her foot with the blade pointing upwards, as she has seen her mother do when she is preparing vegetables. She pushes some fruit down on the curved blade, trying to cut it, but she cannot manage. When her great grandfather comes into the house she tells him she's trying to cut the fruit. He takes her out to wash the fruit at the water pump, then cuts it up for her, and she starts to eat it. "Is it good?" he asks her smiling. She nods, and gives some to her baby sister, who has just woken up.

allowing his young son to hammer a red-hot piece of iron. When asked whether this was not dangerous, the father replied that if his son burned himself, he would learn not to let it happen again.

An assessment of injury rates and patterns in all four villages, and further discussion with parents, might generate some useful strategies for prevention that could supplement current approaches.

Another approach to assuring children's safety in all the villages is the use of threats – young children may be intimidated into staying close to home, or discouraged from going out in the dark, by threats of spirits, jackals, snakes or strangers. The use of threats as a means of controlling children was questioned by many of the researchers, who were concerned about the negative impact of stimulating fear and anxiety. But in a context where supervision is unavoidably inadequate, this may in fact be a practical way to provide protection from a distance. In some cases it is also clear that parents feel genuine anxiety about the possibility of kidnapping, or of harm from spirits. Here again, the availability of adequate care might provide a level of security that would alleviate parental anxieties.

Treatment for injuries

As discussed in the section on health, treatment can be contingent on distance, affordability, and parental time. Many injuries which would heal quickly if promptly attended to, might, with neglect, become far more serious. On page 72, we described two situations – a girl who scratched her eyeball, and one who cut her foot – where parents' reluctance to take time from work might well have had long-term effects.

Work as a potential source of harm

Many of the world's working children are expected to perform work that is too demanding for their strength, and damaging to their health and physical development. While children by the age of eight or ten were certainly contributing significantly to the household within the four villages, parents appeared to be conscious of their limitations, and tended to adapt requirements to a child's capacities. In Biskundanda, for instance, when Nayan Singh's 10-year-old son brought in a small bundle of fodder, a researcher teased him, saying " What is that ? Is it for the cattle or for you ?" The father quickly responded, pointing out that his son's load was quite respectable, given his age.

Many children do in fact carry heavy loads, however. But an accurate assessment of the potential for physical damage was beyond the scope of this research. The more readily apparent cause for concern is the curtailment of opportunities for play, rest and schooling (discussed on pages 85, 119 and 143).

Abuse, maltreatment and neglect

In the few areas of Nepal where the issue has been investigated, sexual abuse has appeared to be a major concern, as in almost every country. The researchers in this study were not trained to investigate this difficult and challenging area, but no evidence cropped up during their time in the villages.

Physical abuse did not appear to be an issue in any of the villages. In Koldanda it is forbidden to beat a child. In other villages, while it was acknowledged that beating happened occasionally as a disciplinary measure, it was clear that this was neither a preferred, nor a routine way, of dealing with children. Rather physical punishment was considered a last resort when example, persuasion and finally threats failed to be effective in controlling children's behaviour. Some advocates would consider this to be a clear violation of children's rights – there are hot debates on the issue of physical discipline. But parents' reluctance to depend on physical punishment, and that fact that researchers saw no evidence of harsh treatment, suggests this is not a significant concern in these villages.

Some researchers felt that the threats routinely used with children might be considered a form of mental abuse. As discussed above, parents disagreed strongly with this perspective, and given the very real hazards that surround children, in many cases these threats appear to be a rational response to actual hazards, designed to protect children rather than to undermine their well-being. This issue will be further discussed on page 118 (Security and identity).

Neglect is a more troublesome issue. In many parts of the world, the notion of leaving a baby or toddler crying and immobilized for hours in a hammock might well be perceived as neglect; as would placing a five-year-old in sole charge of a younger sibling. But parents in poverty, coping with heavy work burdens, are often faced with impossible choices. Providing adequate care and supervision may mean failing to provide food . Researchers were unanimous in feeling that parents cared deeply for their children, and that for the most part they made the best choices they could under the circumstances. Nonetheless, it was all too clear that added supports at certain times of the year are required to assist parents in their efforts to provide adequate care for their children.

One case in Biskundanda was particularly troubling to researchers. A young mother had a severely malnourished son. At ten months, he was the size of a four month old, his skin loose and wrinkled. He cried constantly, and reached out his arms to be picked up, but she ignored him. "I've got too much work to do," she explained. "How can I possibly work holding him? A while ago, he was going to die, but now he seems to be okay. I don't know how he survived." This detachment, together with the child's physical state, certainly suggest neglect. But mothers coping with weak and ailing children face significant practical and emotional burdens, over and above the already heavy demands of daily survival. Experience in other parts of the world where poverty is severe has shown that, especially when death seems inevitable, mothers may respond by distancing themselves emotionally, letting go, in a sense, of a child who appears unlikely to survive.[54] The quality of emotional care can often depend on a family's circumstances, and on the potential for hope. Situations like this should be avoidable with adequate monitoring and support. Villagers identified the need for some sort of childcare arrangements to address both accident and neglect issues.

Too young to be left untended

Suresh, aged one and a half, was often left in the care of his great grandmother. She was very old and and spent most of her days fast asleep. Suresh defecated on the porch one day while she was asleep. He cried for someone to come to him, but his grandmother did not hear him. He was soon covered in his own faeces, as he sat crying. No one came except the chickens, which pecked at him and made him cry even harder.

parents in poverty, coping with heavy work burdens, are often faced with impossible choices pointing to the need for added supports at certain times

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[54]   See, for instance, the work of Nancy Scheper-Hughes in north-eastern Brazil, including *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Security and identity

The CRC affirms that children should be raised in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, as a support to their full and healthy development (Preamble). It recognizes also their right to an identity (Articles 7, 8), and to freedom from all forms of discrimination (Article 2). A positive sense of identity, essential to children's full development, depends not only on the more formal manifestations such as a name and a nationality, but also and vitally on a sense of self worth. This is undermined by discrimination and rejection, but supported by the love and recognition of others, and by the chance to contribute to their families and communities.

Love, affection and support

Children need to be nourished emotionally as well as physically. The profound importance of a trusting relationship early in life with reliable, caring, responsive caregivers has been recognized repeatedly as an essential basis for development on every front, fostering not only emotional bonds, but also intellectual and social growth and even physical health.[55] The security that grows out of such relationships has been found to be one of the most significant protective factors in the life of a child who faces adversity and disadvantage.[56]

In all villages, this universal reality appears to be well understood. Infants and small children are treated with a great deal of tenderness and physical affection – people hold them on their laps, cuddle them and make much of them. Older children were observed to be loving and supportive with babies, even when they are not responsible for their care. Five or six year olds, holding newborns, will kiss and fondle them. This eagerness to express love for a new arrival is reflected throughout the community.

the profound importance of trusting relationships early in life with responsive caregivers appears to be well understood

People tend for the most part to respond quickly to young children when they cry, consoling and distracting them. Mothers in Biskundanda say they start dancing in front of their children when they cry, trying to make them laugh. When small children are afraid or injured, they run to their mothers or other family members for comfort. Older siblings or parents keep them company if they have to go out to pee in the middle of the night. In all the villages, parents like to bring back sweets, chocolates and other small presents for their children when they go to the market. These early years in all the villages are marked by tolerance, warmth and unconditional love. This is balanced, however, by the need to get work done. While small children are generally indulged, they may also be left to their own devices for long periods and ignored when they cry, as long as their caregivers feel they are safe.

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55 This is a theme that reappears throughout the classic contributions to child development literature – from Erikson, to Bowlby, to Bronfenbrenner. Bowlby stressed the mother-child relationship . More recent research confirms the importance in many cultures of bonds with multiple caregivers. See E H Erikson (1950), *Childhood and Society*, New York: Norton; J Bowlby (1969), *Attachment,* New York: Basic Books; U Bronfenbrenner and S J Ceci (1994) "Nature-nurture reconceptualized in developmental perspective: a biological model", *Psychological Review* 101(4): 568-586.

56 See E E Werner and R S Smith (1992), *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood,* Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.

Small children may not get all the attention they want from their sibling caregivers

The early years are marked by warmth and love, as shown by a grandfather to his grandson in Jahbahi

As children grow older, the quality of attention tends to change. In Koldanda it was noted that for children over four or five, love is more likely to be expressed through the provision of care, than through physical contact. In the other villages, researchers observed that interactions tend to change earlier, at around the age of three. Love tends to be assumed, and there is less physical display of affection, less playfulness and indulgence, and verbal interactions start to lose their open-ended quality. While parents clearly love their children, responses to them tend to become more conditional, and appreciation relates more to their growing skills and capacity to take responsibility. Some older children expressed the feeling that they were not as well loved as their younger siblings.

earliest years are marked by unconditional love…quite soon love tends to be assumed and appreciation relates more to increasing capacity to take responsibility

Supporting children's sense of self worth

In Jahbahi, women explained that if children had a sense of self-worth – or more precisely, "feelings of self-respect" (*atma samman bhabana*) – they would be able to achieve whatever they wanted in life. Giving them good food, they said, and encouraging them to exercise would make them strong and confident. They were concerned that if they could not fulfill their children's wishes, it would undermine this feeling of self worth. If children were not bought the books they needed, for instance, men were concerned that they might feel inferior, and their studies

Lali is treated with care and affection -- Dekhetbhully

Lali, 9 months, defecates all over the cloth she is wrapped in and starts to cry. Her great grandfather exclaims and takes her out to wash her at the water pump, then sits with her on the bed, drying her bottom and making soothing noises as she continues to cry. Then he picks her up and pretends to run to the doorway, telling her that they must go and chase the chickens away. She stops crying and they go outside. Out in the yard, he finds a shiny biscuit wrapper, and crackles the silver paper for Lali to look at. When she starts to fuss again, he picks her up so that she can stand with his support. Her three-year-old sister Vishna gives her a piece of fruit off the floor. Lali drops it and Vishna puts it gently back in her mouth, then holds the silver paper up to Lali like a mirror. Suddenly, the chickens venture in across the doorway again, and Vishna chases them away with her flipflop. Her grandfather is still holding Lali, talking to her from time to time.

would be affected. The relationship between material provision and self worth was not stated directly except in Jahbahi by these groups of men and women. However, it was observed in all the villages that parents try whenever possible to obtain for their children the things they want and demand, sometimes going to quite considerable lengths given their resources.

Although a concern with children's feeling of self worth was not expressed explicitly in the other villages, in many situations parents were observed to support the development of children's confidence. Especially with very young children, and particularly around the acquisition of skills, they spoke of the need to encourage children's efforts and to praise them when they had done well. When ten-year-old Kaley in Biskundanda made a model plough, for instance, his parents responded with enthusiasm.

Parents, however, did not always seem inclined to bolster self-esteem; more often with older children especially there was an assumption that doing well was simply the expected behaviour, and required no response. The tendency to support children's confidence was balanced, especially among the Bishwokarma, with a concern that too much praise might spoil children, and encourage them to be "big-headed." For many caregivers the notion of building self-worth in their children clearly does not feature in any conscious way. This is not surprising in groups with a stronger emphasis on community than on the individual. Nor does it imply that children lack a sense of self-worth, which develops not simply in response to praise, but also through achievement.

Work as a source of self worth and appreciation

Children in all cultures have a drive for competence, and are eager to acquire the skills that will earn them the respect of others and a sense of achievement. In all the villages this growing sense of accomplishment and identity, within both family and community, is very much a function of the developing capacity for work. One mother of four in Koldanda felt that the small tasks that children begin to take on at five or six give them a strong sense of pride. Her own children, she said, were very involved of their own will in the care of the plants in her

Bamboo umbrella weaving: building confidence in Koldanda

Prem Bahadur was weaving *shyagu* (a typical umbrella made of bamboo). His four-year-old son was watching eagerly. Prem noticed this and asked, 'Where did you put the *shyagu* from yesterday?' The boy brought it out, and sat near his father. The father had already woven half of his *shyagu* and suggested that his son finish it. The boy hesitated so the father taught him: 'First catch the strip like this ... no, no ... like this, look here'. The son caught it as the father directed. The father again directed him 'Push it into that part like this' and the boy did what the father directed. The child laughed and repeated this. The father helped him again to do the job and he did well, although it took a long time and slowed the father down a lot. Both laughed and the father said "Well done, if you try this again tomorrow, you will be perfect".

nursery. Parents and the elder siblings in all villages praise young children when they help out, sometimes comparing their competence to that of other children their age. They are encouraged to take pride in their work, and they enjoy the chance to feel they are contributing.

People recognise that children's capacities differ at different ages, and adjust their expectations accordingly, generally encouraging the efforts of young children even when the contribution is minor. As noted though, encouragement is not always the norm. Especially for older girls, demanding work is an assumed part of their daily routine – parents often scold them when it is not done well, but they may rarely be praised or rewarded. Although their growing competence in a range of skills gives girls a sense of accomplishment, they lose the assertiveness of younger children, are reluctant to offer their opinions, and appear to see themselves as having little control over their own lives.

Helping with paddy planting in Jahbahi; this boy is not expected to carry the same amount as his elder siblings

Children's active role in family welfare is essential in hard-pressed communities. Although their workloads become burdensome and time consuming as they grow older, work can also be a valuable source of confidence from an early age. Perhaps one of the "lessons" for affluent countries is the very clear and significant role that work can play in the development of children's self respect. Recent research in the West has confirmed that children who are expected to contribute responsibly within the family develop more altruism and sense of social responsibility. The emphasis in many affluent countries on building children's self-esteem almost in a vacuum poses questions about the sort of people this is producing. Demands for attention and constant reassurance are perhaps to be expected in children who know they play no active contributing role.

Tulsi, Biskundanda

Seven year old Tulsi is more confident than most of the children in the village. She is not afraid of outsiders or adults and she can speak both Nepali and Magar. Because her father is a lama and many visitors come to the house, she has more exposure to people and ideas than most children in the village. Her father also goes to other houses and Tulsi comes with him. When he is given offerings, he feels embarrassed about taking the remaining food or drink away with him. If Tulsi comes with him, she can carry it back home. Tulsi also accompanies her mother when she goes outside the village.

If people come to the house for treatment when her father is out, Tulsi deals with them. For example, one day a woman came with her daughter, who was suffering from boils. Tulsi told them that her father would be back soon, and gave them a mat to sit on. She asked the girl "How are the boils? Are they getting better? Are you still feeling pain?" When they replied that the boils were no better, she asked them to wait for her father who would be able to give her some treatment. Tulsi knew from listening to her father what kinds of questions to ask.

Once, Tulsi's father was going out and he told Tulsi to look after the house and her younger sister. Tulsi called after him, "If people come for the bottles should I pay them or have you paid them?" The father remembered that he brought alcohol the day before on credit and said " If they come, tell them I will come in the evening and pay them. But you can give them the bottles". Tulsi suddenly remembered another task which they had discussed before, and again she called to her father, "Father, aren't we supposed to sow the mustard seeds today?" He explained,"Today it is raining so it is not a good day to sow the seeds. When the rain stops then we will sow the seeds".

Tulsi is very aware of the family's situation and feels a responsibility to remind her father of his debts and chores. Her father does not get irritated or short with Tulsi, but explains how she should handle different situations, with the clear expectation that she can manage. Tulsi is unusual in Biskundanda – a clear case of "positive deviance" and an example of how competently children can respond when parents make a range of opportunities available to them.

Discipline and threats

Parents seem well aware in all the villages that when discipline is harsh and punitive, it undermines children's sense of self worth and violates their rights. As discussed earlier, (see page113), this does not appear to be a serious concern in these villages, one of which (Koldanda) has even formally outlawed physical punishment.

But discipline also has a positive side, and can encourage the development of traits that are valued and supported within a community. Obedience, respect and cooperation are such traits within these villages. It is interesting to note, however, that adherence to appropriate social behaviour does not appear to be strongly enforced for young children. On the contrary, especially in Koldanda, parents are surprisingly tolerant of extreme behaviour, as described on page 88. When children have tantrums, throw objects, hit family members, and refuse to cooperate, parents remain composed. And yet, as children grow older, they tend to become compliant and respectful, and cooperative with others. Parents claimed that example and reminders were sufficient to bring about this change.

A disciplinary tool relied on routinely in all villages is the use of threats. This was one of the clearest points of disagreement between researchers and villagers. Researchers, reflecting an accepted stance in developmental psychology, argued that the use of threats would provoke anxiety in young children and undermine their sense of security. Villagers disagreed without exception, and claimed that any anxiety children might feel was an adaptive and practical response to the realities of their world. This will clearly remain a topic for debate if ECD programming is established within these villages.

Shyness

Especially in the hill villages, where there is less contact with outsiders, children are usually very shy. In Koldanda, villagers raised this as a real concern, feeling that their children's incapacity to speak to outsiders could deny them valuable opportunities. This concern was borne out in interactions with the researchers, and many of the children were reluctant to talk to them even after days of relatively close contact. In various PLA activities, children were often more willing to share information by writing and drawing than by talking. This reserve was not directed only towards the researchers – teachers noted that children were equally shy with them. The exception was children like Tulsi whose parents, by virtue of their occupations, had greater exposure to outside people, ideas and language. Health worker Binisara's four-year-old daughter, for instance, was outgoing and confident , and older children tended to push her forward when researchers had questions. Researchers felt that children's timidity was inevitable given the fear of hermits, strangers, and traffickers that parents so actively encouraged.

Parents discussed a number of possible solutions with researchers: trying to give their children more opportunities to accompany adults to town, bazaars and other outside events; developing children's confidence and communication skills by initiating discussions on a wider range of topics, and taking a more active interest in their thoughts, activities and questions; realizing that the community has much to be proud of in its preservation of valuable traditions and customs, and trying to find a balance between customary practices and the skills which will enable children to deal also with a rapidly changing world.

Girls in Biskundanda show their shyness with this typical gesture of covering the face

Gender identity

In all communities, parents maintain that that they love their sons and daughters equally, and that in the earlier years there is no difference in the way they are treated. Researchers found little reason to dispute this claim – small girls in all the villages appeared to have an equal claim on the affection and attention of those around them. But even if girls can count equally on the emotional security of early love and responsiveness, from the very earliest days there are reasons for them to develop a very different sense of identity.

The far greater reliance that families place on their sons over the long term is reflected in a very different quality of investment in boys, both in terms of the opportunities made available to them, and possibly even in the quality of care (see "Health and well being", page108). The implications for identity are clear. Even during the earliest years, when expectations may not in fact be that different, girls and boys are clearly aware of the very different roles that their futures hold for them. Over the years, as work burdens increase for girls, and as opportunities for play begin to shrink, their understanding of their place in the world begins to be reflected in concrete experience, and in a diminished level of control over their own lives. Added to this is the fact that the lesser work loads of boys are generally in areas that are more highly valued – so that while girls work harder, boys may actually get more positive recognition. "We should not involve our sons in cowardly work," said one man, referring to such tasks as cooking, sweeping and plastering. "They have to be brave (*marda*)." The greater willingness of parents to invest in schooling for their sons only confirms for girls their lesser value, and contributes to their sense of inferiority.

children's incapacity to speak with outsiders could "deny them opportunities in life"

Over the years, as work burdens increase for girls, and as opportunities for play begin to shrink, their understanding of their place in the world begins to be reflected in concrete experience, and in a diminished level of control over their own lives.

Unlike girls, boys have time to play cards in Dekhetbully

Although for the most part these gender differences are accepted, not everyone responds with resignation. In discussion, girls frequently expressed the wish that they had more time to play, and objected to the unfairness of being left at home to work while their brothers attended school. Parents also questioned the inequity at times: a woman in Dekhetbhully observed that women had been known to fly planes and do other important things, and that their daughters should not be denied such opportunities. Some men in Koldanda stated their belief that girls had as much capacity as boys to succeed at school; they felt it was important to lessen their workloads so that schooling could be given more priority. They also recognized that girls' sense of inferiority was a problem, and that they needed encouragement and support to continue with their schooling. Messages about girls' right to education are increasingly common, and it is hard to tell whether parents in these discussions are responding in a way that they feel is expected, or whether their concern is genuine. Given that as many girls as boys now attend grade eight in Koldanda, the situation in this village in fact appears to be in the process of change. The same optimism is not warranted in the other villages.

An important factor in addressing girls' lower sense of self worth was acknowledged to be the presence of successful role models. In Koldanda there are a few examples of girls who have left the village to continue their studies, and returned to serve as a support and inspiration to younger girls. In Biskundanda, by contrast, no girl has passed beyond grade four.

Group identity

Individual identity is considered especially important in western tradition. But group identity has been a more fundamental concern in the traditions of most of the world. Children's sense of identity as part of a group in these villages is strongly supported especially through a wide range of traditional celebrations, events and customs. This will be discussed in more detail in the Opportunities for participation section (page 135).

aware of the implications of caste from an early age.

Celebrating together but divided by caste

Every month, Bishwokarma and Magar celebrate the *Natuli* ritual together. Young Magar boys offer milk to the god, but Bishwokarma are not allowed to do so. Once, during *Natuli* a pig was sacrificed to the god. All had taken alcohol and one Bishwokarma youth inadvertently touched the meat. A conflict started and it took some time before the Magar excused him for his mistake. The children of the village saw the event and realized how serious it was to touch the things of people of higher caste.

There can also be a negative side to group identity in these villages. Caste differences, especially, can be a source of hurt, humiliation and feelings of inferiority. Children are clearly aware of the implications of caste from an early age. Bishwokarma children in Biskundanda, for instance, are very conscious that they are not allowed into Magar houses, and that whatever they touch becomes impure for Magars. Interactions at school based on caste can be hurtful, and discourage children from attending. They also hear their parents saying that they will not easily get jobs because of their caste. These everyday experiences contribute to a low sense of self esteem and can undermine children's confidence.

Although the extent of caste discrimination was widely disputed within discussions in Dekhetbhully, it is clear that children from Bishwokarma and Tharu communities feel inferior to the Brahmin/Chhetri children, who tend to dominate within the school and who were much more confident and outspoken in discussions than children from the other communities.

Although school can often be an uncomfortable place for children from lower castes or social groups, it also provides the most hope in terms of addressing the issue. Children who might never come together in other situations have the opportunity at school to use the same facilities, to be treated equally by teachers, and to see one another as peers.

In Biskundanda, it is clear that some parents feel the need to challenge the discrimination their children face. Dharma Bishworkama told the following story: "A Magar boy who studies with my son brought an offering (*Prasad*) on *Basanta Panchami* (day of worship for Saraswoti, the goddess of learning). While eating the *Prasad*, he bumped into my son. Then he became angry and scolded my son, saying, "How dare you touch me!" I went to the teacher and shouted, 'If you have discrimination like this in school, what's the point of worshipping Saraswoti? Why don't you all stay at home and eat *Prasad*?' If you don't become strong and have a debate with them, they will continue to insult you."

Formal identity

In spite of the legal requirement that VDCs maintain population records, in none of the four villages is formal record keeping a routine practice. Yet birth registration, along with health and school records, are important practical tools. Children have a right to the formal identity that these provide, as well as to the greater ease in dealing with officialdom.

There are a number of traditional rituals that help to establish children's identity within their own communities. In Dekhetbhully, for instance, if a Tharu man marries a woman with children, he is expected to accept these children as his own. In the traditional *godline* ceremony he takes these children on his lap and feeds them rice and milk, after which they are formally considered to be his own.

A name contributes to a person's sense of self and can be a source of pride. In some cases, however, researchers questioned whether naming practices might actually be a source of embarrassment to children. In the Biswokarma communities in Dekhetbhully and Biskundanda, for instance, it is common to call children a name ending in "ay", signifying something ugly, in order to protect them from evil spirits. In Dekhetbhully, people were proud of these names; in Biskundanda, however, one man was ashamed to share his "ugly" name with the researchers. Tharu children are named according to what their father was doing at the time of their birth. Some children were called *Risuwi* or *Risuwa,* indicating that their father was angry that they were born. Another girl was called *Bisne* (forgotten). Such names could result in a negative sense of self for the child, or could be a source of embarrassment outside of their village. There was not adequate evidence, however, to support this as a serious concern.

Overall, the emotional security and sense of self-worth of young children appears to be strongly supported by parents and caregivers in all the villages. A fundamental sense of trust is generated by the love and affection showered on small children. This is tempered somewhat by the many hours that some small children can spend in relative isolation, while older family members work – a problem that could certainly be alleviated by the provision of adequate childcare support.

The sense of competence and self worth is further supported by the early opportunity to contribute meaningfully through work. Over time, however, as skills become fully developed and work is taken for granted, this appears to become less gratifying as a source of identity and continued growth. Greater supports are needed in this regard for older children. Another very significant concern is the challenge to healthy identity posed by gender, caste and ethnic differences.

Opportunities for learning

The CRC recognises children's right to a standard of living adequate for their full development, physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social, and gives parents primary responsibility for ensuring this right, with all its implications for children's learning in different areas (Article 27). In addition the CRC specifies children's right to formal education (Article 28), and identifies learning's basic aims: to develop children's full potential, to prepare them for responsible life in a free society, and to ensure respect for others and for the environment

Discussions of learning often focus primarily on cognitive development or on formal schooling. But the integrated approach of the Convention encourages a much broader consideration of the issue. Learning, from this perspective, includes the more general process of acquiring the competencies necessary for life – of becoming capable people. It also includes the acquisition of social skills. In all the villages the degree to which families were concerned with their children's social development was striking. Children's ability to get on with others is considered just as important as "being clever" – a perspective that "developed" countries might well give more attention to.

becoming capable people and getting on with others

Patterns of early care, and the learning experiences that parents encourage for their children, tend to maximize the development of skills and traits that are considered adaptive for success within a certain group.[57] But as we have discussed earlier, the criteria for success in these four villages are beginning to change – subsistence agriculture is insufficient to guarantee survival, and a range of livelihood strategies are increasingly being drawn on to supplement traditional activities. This is likely to be even more the case for children growing up now. Creating new livelihood possibilities within the village, and taking advantage of a range of opportunities outside, will call for assertiveness, initiative, creativity and independent thinking. And yet the traits that parents continue to describe as ideals for their children are still those that are associated with a conservative agrarian life style – compliance, cooperation and respect.

childrearing patterns encourage skills and traits adaptive for success within a particular group.......these criteria are beginning to change in all the villages

These long-valued traits continue in many ways to be functional and adaptive for everyday life within these villages. Young children who are compliant, for instance, can handle the day-to-day realities of child care in these villages far more comfortably – waking up to find their mothers sometimes there and sometimes not, adapting without complaint to a range of caregivers, spending long hours alone in a hammock. An emphasis on cooperation, similarly, is vital in a community where survival depends on the efforts of all who can contribute. And respect for elders is also critical when they serve as the chief repositories of significant knowledge. As many observers have acknowledged, these traditional virtues are also appealing for what they add to the quality of daily life, and they are often missed in societies that are more characterized by competition and self gratification. The challenge is clearly to find a balance between encouraging the development of traits and skills that help daily life to run smoothly in a small, interdependent rural village, and those that will equip children to deal adequately with futures that call not only for knowledge, but for flexibility, and innovation.

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[57] See for instance LeVine et al (1994) *Childcare and Culture: Lessons from Africa,* New York: Cambridge University Press; Ogbu J 1981 'Origins of human competence: A cultural-ecological perspective', *Child Development,* 52, 413-429

Becoming capable people - everyday learning opportunities

Many of the skills that will help children succeed in life are gained through everyday activities around the home. Children's learning merges imperceptibly into the life-tasks and everyday events of village life. There is substantial variation in the extent to which the learning potential of these day-to-day activities is realized, but it has important programming and policy implications – being both natural and cost-free. Moreover young children in all of the villages spend much of their day engrossed in various forms of play - and parents and other caregivers almost all recognize the importance of young children's play for their development (see pages 42 and 82).

Opportunities for interaction: an older sister talks to her baby brother

The richness of the environment even in the poorest homes is often overlooked. Young children in these villages have:

- the experience of a stimulating social environment with multiple caregivers and peers, and the opportunity to interact with and learn from many different people – parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, cousins and neighbours. This is perhaps especially noticeable in the large joint families in Jahbahi but is true to a great extent in all the villages;
- opportunities to interact with a wide variety of natural materials - to play and work with earth, water, stones and leaves and to help with the care of animals. Children were often observed using mud and clay to make models of houses and paddy fields. They also display a keen knowledge of their environment - for example the four year-old girl in Biskundanda who identified the different types of fodder which cattle prefer. Bought toys or books are a rarity, but as we have discussed (pages 80-81) children in these villages make a variety of toys – miniature ploughs from wood, dolls from sticks and bits of old cloth -- and fathers quite often assist with this. The Tharu are especially involved in toy making – including toys for babies such as brightly coloured mobiles from cloth scraps;
- the chance to learn through a wealth of daily activities, such as washing, dressing, mealtimes, *pujas* as well as involvement in work activities such as cooking, cleaning up,

children's learning merges imperceptibly into the life-tasks and everyday events of village life

Many of the activities that formal ECD centers in affluent countries set up in special corners are an everyday part of children's lives in villages all over Nepal.

D McKenzie
Children in Jahbahi enjoy the chance to play in the stream while fishing

Making cattle fodder -an everyday activity provides an opportunity to learn

collecting water and fodder. These ordinary activities all provide natural learning experiences and can be opportunities for exploration and discovery. Although curiosity, initiative, and independent thinking may not be *explicitly* valued in these villages in the same way that compliance and respect are, there is in fact much that supports these qualities in the everyday routines that children are part of. The daily tasks that children are responsible for often call for a good deal of initiative – looking after either younger siblings or animals, for instance, is not a matter of passively following instructions. Some children are given considerable latitude in their everyday lives to make decisions as to how they carry out their responsibilities but there is a good deal of variation in the degree to which this is the case.

Some caregivers such as Manno (we have been calling them "positive deviants") maximize the potential of day-to-day interactions in building children's thinking, confidence and skills

Learning about different kinds of fish

Manno Chaudury, aged 22 and the mother of four, was observed to have exceptional interaction with her children in spite of her very busy schedule – an excellent example of "positive deviance". Her husband worked as a labourer outside of the village and returned home only briefly every few days, and so she handled most of the household work alone. She was very patient with her children, however, and took a lot of interest in what they were doing.

One day she returned from fishing and the children ran to her excitedly, crying "Mother has come! Mother has come!". They were all jumping up at her, except baby Suresh who was being carried by his seven-year-old sister Laxmi. Manno smiled at them and asked six-year-old Sunday to bring a large flat dish for the fish that she had just collected. She emptied out the fish and Sunday started sorting them out. He tried to keep the others away at first so he could see all the fish himself. But then Manno sat down next to the dish and all the other children sat around in a circle.
There were many fish of different types and four-year-old Dinesh looked at them with great interest and asked the names of each one. Manno told them one by one what they were and started to sort them out into piles – there were prawns, flat fish and crabs. The children helped her and discussed the size of the fish, and which ones they liked to eat most,

Two big crabs started moving and Dinesh backed away, frightened. Sunday said, "No need to be scared. It won't do anything. See!" He held up one of the crabs to show that it would not bite. Manno took four small crabs from the dish and said, "These are small ones – one each for you to play with. The small crabs were moving and again Dinesh was scared. Manno said, "Look you can touch it" , touched it herself and then took Dinesh's hand and touched it with him. Dinesh seemed quite confident so Sunday put a small crab on the palm of Dinesh's hand. The crab started moving and Dinesh laughed.

The children played crab races and later ate one of the big crabs which Sunday helped Manno roast.

Some caregivers such as Manno (we have been calling them "positive deviants") seem quite consciously to affirm and maximize the potential for active learning and problem solving. For other parents, it is a matter of becoming more aware of the advantages in an expanded repertoire for children, so that opportunities are more systematically supported.

Infant learning: Dankumari's morning in Koldanda

Early in the morning nine-month-old Dankumari is being breastfed by her mother out on the porch. There are numerous breaks in the feeding, as her mother talks and smiles at her, getting a laugh from the baby and laughing, talking in return. After the feeding she ties the baby to her back while she tends the animals. Dankumari is tied on quite loosely, so that she is able to pull herself over to the side and peer under her mother's arm, watching as she feeds the goats. Then when her mother squats to scrub a large copper pot, the baby's legs are able to reach the ground, and she flexes them up and down as she reaches for stones on the ground, and watches what her mother is doing.

Later, while her mother is away washing clothes, Dankumari sits on the porch on some rags, playing with a set of keys. Nearby in the yard, her father is weaving*shyagu*, with four-year-old Som by his side. When Dankumari is bored with the keys, he passes her some colored rags to play with. Various children, her own siblings and neigh-bours, take turns holding and amusing her. Indra, her 8-year-old brother, back from cutting fodder, and two neighbour children, put her in her hammock and play with her there, bouncing her while she laughs loudly. Her mother, passing by from fetching water, reminds them not to over-excite her. When the boys go back to work again, a small girl from next door takes over, standing the baby in the doorway where she can hold on to the threshold, about 12 inches off the ground, and move herself around. After a while her mother picks her up and takes her into the house to clean her up, and then she sits on her father's lap while he takes a break from weaving.

Through these simple interactions Dankumari has the chance to learn a lot – about human relations and mutual exchange, and about language. In her activities she practices her physical skills, explores with her feet, hands and eyes, manipulates objects, learning in the process about colour, shape and texture.

Teaching strategies

Parents and other caregivers, often unconsciously, use a wide range of formally recognized pedagogical strategies, such as demonstration learning, peer learning, active learning, reinforcement of learning, and application of learning. Developmental opportunities are often made age or maturity-specific without disrupting the everyday life-tasks which form the contextual vehicle for learning. A child, for instance, plays at making a miniature bamboo umbrella while his father makes bamboo umbrellas to sell in the market.

Post-Piagetian research into learning emphasizes the key importance of social influences on cognitive development, and the role of various forms of "instruction" and learning opportunities. Time and again researchers observed the perfect correspondence of everyday situations in which village children gain mastery of specific skills, with the formally recognized value of "scaffolding", or the means by which parents (and others) provide the conditions that allow for the next developmental leap in children's learning.

Many examples were observed. A mother preparing cabbage leaves, for instance, asks her child to pick out any leaves that can't be used because they are old or spoiled.The child is sorting, a key cognitive skill, according to different criteria – colour, freshness, insect damage and so on – and has regular "spaced practice". She works on fine motor skills and eye-hand co-ordination at the same time that she learns diligence and responsibility. This learning event is not designed for the age of the child in any formal way (as compared to formal pre-school activities which are decontextualized and designed for the level of the child). Rather, the child fits into a real life event in a way that matches her maturity.

the child fits into a real life event in a way which matches her maturity

Making dough snakes with mother while she cooks

One day, while his mother was rolling out dough to make bread, three-year-old Suresh, as usual, sat very close to her. She gave him some dough to play with. and Suresh made a long "rope" using both his hands.

His mother asked what it was and he replied that it was a snake. She asked him to make another one and then told him to put it in the fire to cook. He did this very carefully and then asked his mother to make him a frog. She agreed that she would once she had finished making the bread which she did. She took his "snake" out of the fire and he ate it as soon as it was cool enough. While she made the frog she let Suresh use the board and rolling pin, to his great delight.

This is an excellent example of a busy mother managing her household chores while providing her son with some exciting learning opportunities, encouragement and a sense of achievement

Children's work in these villages is regarded by the community as essential to learning the skills and habits that are fundamental to life

Learning skills vital for life: a girl waters the vegetable garden, Jahbahi

Children's work, and imitation of work, as an opportunity for learning

Much of children's play, here as in all cultures, consists essentially of copying adult tasks. Play is valued, in part, as a necessary preparation for these roles. The distinctions between work and play are often blurred – and the younger the child, the more this is the case. By the time they are five or six children begin to take on more and more household tasks and are involved in a range of activities like herding sheep and carrying water. They are not expected to execute these tasks with total responsibility – young children practice the skills they need to perfect over time in a zone somewhere between work and play.

Children's work in these villages is regarded by the community as essential to learning the skills and habits that are fundamental to life. Through work children become adept not only in a range of physical skills, but in the capacity to make judgements and decisions and to take responsibility.

Parents' expectations of what children should know by the time they start school are a good indication of how significant work skills are considered to be. When parents in Dekhetbhully listed what was important, they included skills that might be stressed in any country with universal primary education – "speaking properly", "able to read some letters", "able to dress", "self-care skills" and so on. But these parents also listed "taking care of siblings", "cattle herding", "starting the fire in the kitchen" and "cooperating with others" – demonstrating a much greater emphasis on practical workskills and social responsibility than would be expected in most affluent countries.

Parents' primary interest in teaching their children revolves around these work skills. Girls are taught household tasks and boys outside work. In all communities they are encouraged to learn by doing. There is a recognition that children will make mistakes and that in fact they also learn through these. A small girl is encouraged to sweep by her mother even if she makes a mess of it. Children start helping pluck rice plants for transplanting before they can do it properly – all so that they will learn by doing. Most parents emphasize encouragement and reward as learning tools, although punishment for poor work was also observed.

A five-year-old girl in Jahbahi was sitting with her mother, watching her make a basket. The mother went inside to the kitchen, so the little girl picked up the basket, took the needle out and started trying to weave it. Her mother came back and said, laughing "Eh! You're spoiling my basket". She then made a small basket base and said, "First you put the needle like this, then this…", while showing her daughter what to do. Then gave it to her to try herself.

Learning to weave a basket, Jahbahi

If the opportunities are so rich, why are we worrying?

The potential for learning, based on everyday activity, is tremendous within these villages and offers a wealth of opportunities to build on with families. But the constraints families face mean that too often the potential is not acted on.

1) There is a great deal of variation in the extent to which parents and other caregivers take advantage of these opportunities, either consciously or unconsciously.

Some parents were clear in their understanding of their role in helping children learn. When Man Kumari's daughter wanted to know how to plant rice, for instance, her mother not only explained the process step by step, but then decided to spend the time taking the child to the paddy land to see for herself. Many others do involve children in everyday chores, but tend to see this only as a practical response to necessity, rather than as a chance to feed a child's mind and develop skills which may be of wide-ranging use. Still others may ignore a window of opportunity for teaching entirely, unaware of the value of what they have to offer.

Watching it rain: a chance for encouraging questioning

2) Poverty often forces repetitive, routinized behaviour with verbalization reduced to a minimum. Curiosity, questioning, creativity, experimenting, discovering may well be discouraged.

It was observed that parents and other family members take a great deal of effort to teach their children until they start to speak and walk, after which their efforts diminish. In Koldanda and Jahbahi especially, adults were very involved in encouraging the language development of babies and toddlers. Once children have started to talk, parents may no longer see their responses as critical to development.

Verbal interactions with children over four or so were often limited to discussions of work, and instructions for work. The focus on work is understandable, given the necessary emphasis on day-to-day survival. A wider use of language is not generally encouraged (for instance, open-ended questions, descriptive vocabulary, analysis of cause and effect, and so on). The study found considerable variation in the extent to which children's questions were given attention, with Koldanda residents being the most responsive. In Biskundanda and Jahbahi parents admitted they were often irritated by children's questions unless they were related to work. They often pay little or no attention to children's questions, especially when these questions are about topics beyond their immediate knowledge ("Why do birds fly? Where does water come from?"), or when children are not satisfied with the first answer.

Taking an interest in children's play is an important part of developing their ability to think and ask questions

People's child-rearing practices have been cast in the rigid matrix of survival in poverty and very naturally focus more on physical and social development with less attention to cognitive and emotional development. These survival strategies have been honed over generations, and are evidence of remarkable skill. However, they have not helped break the cycle of poverty. Taking an interest in children's thoughts, activities and feelings is an important part of developing both their ability to think clearly and their confidence. Guiding children to ask questions, think of alternatives and solve problems is essential in helping them acquire the wider range of skills they will undoubtedly need to cope effectively with a rapidly changing world.

There does not appear to be a general recognition that children's chances of success in a changing world may depend on different characteristics from those currently valued, and hence on changes in emphasis in patterns of care and interaction. However parents respond with enthusiasm to discussion of the issue. They want support and advice and make it clear that they feel bewildered and inadequate in many ways. A good example is their sense that their children's shyness prevents them from making full use of their teachers or of people and opportunities from outside (see page 119).

Safe but frustrated

Manisha, aged four years, had been left in her cradle (a piece of cloth tied between two poles by ropes). She screamed continuously, but although the neighbours were nearby, nobody came to see what was happening. Her grandfather was in his workshop about 50 metres away while her parents were out at work. He was in the middle of his ironwork and could not leave it, although he could hear her screaming. He said, "She will cry and cry and then eventually she will get tired of crying, keep quiet and sleep." He finally came to see her, when he came to get some food for himself. By that time she had fallen asleep again, so he went back to his work. She was left on her own for about 2 hours, restricted in her movement, and unable to see beyond the end of her nose.

3) *Workloads can result in children being left alone for long periods – especially during peak seasons.*
In Dekhetbhully and Biskundanda researchers frequently observed babies and young children left for long periods, sometimes crying miserably, in baskets out of which they could see nothing (see box**)**. In other cases young children are left in the care of four or five-year-olds. There are some opportunities for play and learning, but without the occasional intervention of a guiding adult to support and extend learning these may end up being limiting for both the older and younger child. Especially during peak seasons, young children can sometimes be left for many hours with not much to do while parents work in the fields.

4) *The connections between learning and overall health status may be a cause for concern.*
Children are active learners, and can be effective in stimulating the interactions they require for learning. But the connections between children's interest in learning and their general health and nutritional status implies a particular responsibility on the part of parents. When children are enervated by illness, worm burdens or undernutrition they may be lethargic and lacking in curiosity. More than ever, at such a time, they need parents to take an active role in stimulating their interest. But parents, concerned with their children's health, and worn out by caring for them, may be even less inclined to respond in this way.

School

A rights-based approach to education is concerned not only with getting more children into school, but also with providing the kind of experience that will foster their overall development. Children need high quality, relevant opportunities for learning in secure and inclusive environments.

It is beyond the scope of this study to enter into an analysis of the quality of primary education in these villages. Our purpose is chiefly to outline the main issues, especially those that fall within the overall context of child rearing, as a basis for discussion (in the recommendations section) of ways in which ECD programmes may be able to support and strengthen schools. Parental attitudes are central in this area.

The opportunity to interact with many different children in school is particularly important for girls as boys usually get to move around more freely. Schools have also stimulated greater attention to health and hygiene issues and offered exposure to the Nepali language. For many children this is their only access to written materials and the opportunity to learn about the world beyond their communities. There are still significant concerns however, in the areas of access (especially for girls), attendance, quality and achievement.

The avenue that parents are most inclined to depend on in preparing their children for less traditional futures is the skills to be acquired through education. As some old women in Koldanda pointed out during the dialogue phase, without schooling, no-one is able to earn a living outside of the village. But in spite of their dedication to the *idea* of schooling, the vast majority of parents were very disengaged from the schools. Much of this stems from their own lack of educational opportunity and a resulting lack of confidence in dealing with anything "official". The community school in Dekhetbuly which they had started themselves stands in marked contrast.

Although education was expressed everywhere as one of parents' main concerns for their children (right at the top along with health) this was not reflected in the practice of sending children to school regularly (or even enroling them). Enrollment varies from village to village but, is under 65 percent everywhere except in Koldanda. Education is an area where gender is a major issue. In all the villages even poor families will often make an effort to send sons to school – but not daughters. In the *terai*, it is not unusual for girls to remain at home while boys are sent to expensive private schools. One father from the Bishwokarma community expressed what many of the others were thinking, "Who would do the work at home if we send our daughters to school?" However, in all villages girls are becoming increasingly vocal in their desire to enroll and stay in school, and parents are increasingly likely to discuss the importance of girls' attendance.

poor families will often make an effort to send sons to school but not daughters

Everywhere attendance is unreliable and is especially tied to the agricultural seasons – with very low attendance during peak seasons except for underage children who are sent to school for childcare purposes. Drop-out is high in all the villages – due to workloads at home and lack of support for homework, according to the teachers. The discrimination faced by low-caste children in school no doubt contributes to their especially low enrollment and attendance rates. A few *kamaiya* boys have started to attend the school in Jahbahi but very erratically and no *kamaiya* girls attend. Schools *can* be an arena for tackling discrimination, but day-to-day behaviour there can also further reinforce it.

The schools in these villages are no doubt bringing about changes that relate directly to the realization of children's rights. Children from different castes and ethnic groups mix together and in places like Biskundanda and Dekhetbhully, despite difficulties at times, the school clearly has the potential to contribute to a more inclusive community.

Learning by doing: helping granny to prepare vegetables

The shortage of equipment and especially of books in all the schools limits the capacity of children to access information and increases reliance on rote learning. The use of Nepali as the primary, and in some cases, only language, inhibits school success for many children – experience has shown that the transition to school is more successful when children in the earlier grades are taught in their home language. In all villages achievement is poor throughout with extremely high repeat rates in the lower grades. In Koldanda, for instance, there is a 50 percent failure rate.

A major challenge is convincing both parents and many teachers that children learn more easily and effectively through active learning methods (where they are manipulating concrete objects and discovering things for themselves), rather than through a reliance on rote learning where the child is seen as a passive recipient of information. When children become actively involved in their own learning process, they are more likely to become curious lifelong learners, able to solve new problems and adapt to new situations. Parents clearly understand the value of children learning by doing in their daily lives – but were reluctant to accept this approach in schools (See also page 91)

ECD programmes can be an effective example for both parents and teachers in this regard. While there is often pressure for early childhood programmes to push children in "ABCs" and "123s", there is more openness to accepting that children learn by doing at this age than later on. Experience from different parts of Nepal indicates that parents and teachers are more open to child-centred teaching and learning in schools when they have witnessed the progress children make through ECD programmes' more informal methods. Where successful early childhood development programmes are linked to primary schools in some way they can have a powerful positive influence on the opportunities for learning, discovery and participation that children are offered in primary schools.

Getting on with others

Many of the characteristics that people value most in these villages, and most want their children to acquire, relate to the capacity to get along with others *(samajmaa milne)* and to be good people *(asal manchhe)*. They want their children to learn to be cooperative and polite, respectful and obedient to elders, tolerant, friendly and honest, and not to quarrel or fight. It is also important that they not be proud. These are not communities that value loud self-assertion or competitiveness.

Parents in all the villages agreed that children learn how to get on with others by seeing and listening to other people, and they are very conscious of their role as adults in teaching these values though example. But as in any area of child rearing, parents' behaviour does not al-

Many of the characteristics that people value most in these villages, and most want their children to acquire, relate to the capacity to get along with others and to be good people

ways reflect their values; nor does children's behaviour always correspond to the ideal.

The children in these villages are, in fact, faced with a fairly complex range of examples from the adults around them. The issue of co-operation is a good example. There are many models of highly co-operative behaviour in these villages. The traditions in Tharu families are particularly striking. There is a strong emphasis on sharing food equally between family members, and on mutual labour co-operation in the fields, excellent examples for children of the values of co-operation and fairness. In Biskundanda, the *thar* serves as another fine example for children of the virtues of mutual support (see page 34).

But there are also areas where co-operation might be expected, and where it is distinctly absent. People seemed dubious, for instance, about entering into any sort of formal co-operative arrangements for child care. Although their need for child care is apparent, there is a good deal of mutual mistrust and suspicion in this area. In Koldanda and Dekhetbhully, during discussions of child care possibilities, both adults and older girls were quick to point out that any acceptable caregiver would have to come from outside the village, to avoid inevitable favouritism and discrimination from people within the village.

The situation with harmony and mutual respect can be equally complex. In Biskundanda, for instance, people seem extremely tolerant with one another. Groups of neighbours decide together on the solution to problems in accordance with accepted rules, and children have a chance to see how effectively conflict can be avoided. But life is not always harmonious, and girls said it was not unusual for their parents to get drunk and fight with each other. In Jahbahi, too, people can be volatile, and were observed fighting when they were drunk or had disagreements over land. During one dispute over land, children became involved as well, and eleven year old Bahadur told his grandfather that if the other man disagreed with him, his grandfather should hit him.

Tharu children working together to catch fish, Jahbahi

In spite of "mixed messages" from their elders, however, most children in most situations exhibit the traits that their parents value. Researchers found that they tended on the whole to be compliant and hardworking within the family, kind and patient with younger siblings, respectful with older people, and little serious fighting was observed amongst children. It is important not to romanticize the reality however – there are exceptions of course, as there are with adults. *Kamaiya* children in Jahbahi were found to be less controlled and respectful on the whole – researchers speculated that this was due to the fact that their fathers, who are responsible for discipline, were absent working for so much of the time. Parents in both *terai* villages spoke of the influence of film and video, and the growing tendency among young people to waste time and money, to fight and gamble, and to ignore the advice of their elders. Mothers in Koldanda also felt that their children were becoming increasingly irritable and demanding – a response, they felt, to their desire for consumer goods.

An older brother teasing his brother, Jahbahi

As more time was spent by researchers within individual households, it became clear that within families, and even between friends, there was plenty of squabbling among young children. Respect and obedience, like the capacity for harmony, are clearly expected to develop over time, not to emerge early in response to pressure. Small children are often demanding and irascible, but over a few years become more even-tempered and compliant. The general kindliness and patience shown to them by others, and the emphasis given to consideration, appear to have an effect as children grow older. The demands placed on children for responsible and considerate behaviour also begin to increase as they get older – generally at the age of three or four, although behaviour may not change dramatically until they are five or more.

The Traditional greeting gesture is learnt early

Children are actively taught how to show respect for others from an early age. They are expected, by the time they are three or four, not to speak too loudly, and not to disagree with older people. When guests come to the house, they are encouraged to fetch a mat for them. Especially in the hill villages, and especially for girls, a premium is placed on a polite, modest, self-effacing demeanour. Girls are supposed to be quiet and soft-spoken and to sit with their legs together. Hill children generally are so shy that they have difficulty speaking to outsiders and even to their teachers, as was discussed on page 119. Researchers noted that this incapacity to deal with strangers and older people could undermine children's ability to make full use of the opportunities available to them; parents also saw it as a problem and wanted advice on remedying it. In Biskundanda, where abusive language is routinely used but not taken negatively within the community, there was the added concern that this could affect the way children were perceived by outsiders.

Caste relations in these villages add another important dimension to children's social learning. Although the standards of behaviour between caste groups are said to be based on "respect" and the promotion of social harmony, they also perpetuate social injustice and violate rights. When Magar children bully Bishwokarma children at school, and when Brahmin Chhettri children dominate Tharus and call them rat eaters, this is unhealthy for both sides, and is a perversion of the strengths that otherwise characterize much of the social relations in these communities.

vital interweaving of rights and responsibilities

The Convention stresses social development, respect for others and respect for difference. In all these communities the strong emphasis on children's responsibilities towards others, whether through obedience, cooperation or respect, is an interesting and important reminder of the vital interweaving of rights and responsibilities and one that other societies would do well to learn from. Given the social dislocation and conflict affecting the lives of people in almost every country, efforts to ensure mutual support and respect within these villages are praiseworthy and should continue to be central. They should not, however, be used as a means for perpetuating social injustice. Nor should they preclude the development of other traits and the learning of other skills which will equip children to cope effectively with new challenges in their changing worlds.

Opportunities for participation

The Convention asserts children's right to express their opinions freely, and to have these opinions taken into account in any matters that affect them. (Articles 12, 13). This implies not only the opportunity to express feelings verbally, but more generally the chance to have some control in life, to be able to make choices and decisions, to participate in a meaningful way, and to be taken seriously.

Participation, which has become one of the more "fashionable" topics of discussion in the area of children's rights, is often considered to be an issue that pertains only to older children, and primarily to their opportunity to have a presence and a voice in formal events and decisions. But in fact, the right to participate is exercised every time a child's efforts and capacities are taken seriously by those around them. The capacity to make responsible use of this right can and should be developed from the earliest age. During the early years skills and attitudes are established that are critical to the capacity to participate effectively – the ability to formulate and express one's views; the sense of control in life, the feeling that one is taking part and is included; and the knowledge that one's opinions and contribution can make a difference.

While young children don't "participate" in the same way that older children can, it is during the earliest years that the seeds of participation are sown.

Expressing opinions and having a sense of control

Even in the first weeks and months of life, infants express their opinions in their cries and signs of contentment, and they solicit responses from those around them. During these early interactions their sense of effectiveness and their skill in expressing themselves begin to be established. As children grow older and learn to talk, the degree to which they are encouraged to communicate with words influences their comfort with language and their capacity to use it as a tool for participation.

The responsiveness of people in all four villages to the needs and desires of very young children help to establish a sense that their wants are understood and taken seriously. The fact that infants are nursed on demand, that children can eat when they are hungry and sleep when they are tired, contributes to a sense of active involvement in their own lives. Even very young children have the chance to feel that they have some control. In Koldanda, when the Saru's nine-month-old, for instance, is tied loosely on her mother's back while she squats to clean a pot, the child is free to sleep, to reach for things on the ground, to bounce up and down, and to look under her mother's arm at what she's doing. There are also times, however, when children this age and older, for the sake of safety, are trapped for hours at a time in cradles while caregivers work away from home; a sense of control is not necessarily a given at all times in a small child's life.

As children grow a little older and are able to move around on their own, they have many opportunities to express their preferences and make choices – as they follow older siblings around, play with animals, imitate chores and play around the yard.
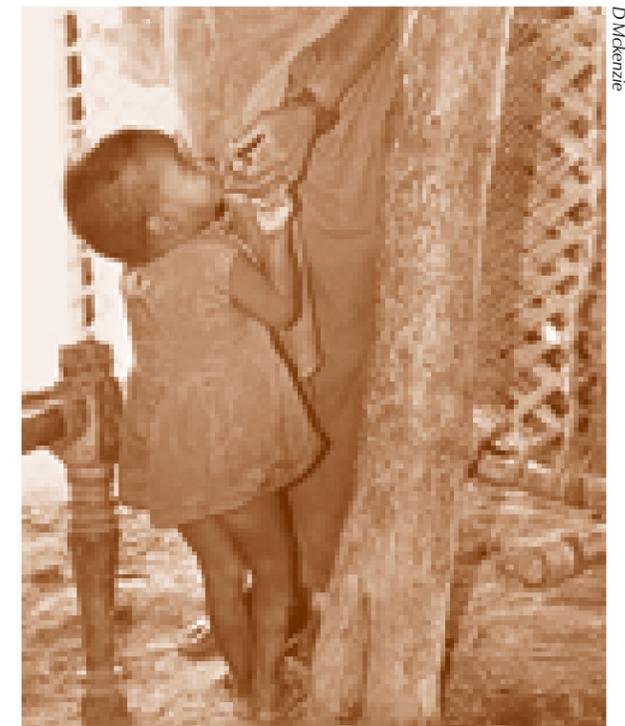
Lift me up! From an early age, children learn how effective they are at expressing their opinions, Jhabahi

In all the villages, there is a good deal of variation in people's attentiveness to young children's questions, opinions and preferences. In Koldanda, Lalitha, aged five years, decided she no longer wanted to eat with her hands, as is the local custom; but insisted on having a spoon, and her parents responded with equanimity. And in Biskundanda, when Chature's daughter was distressed by her parents' decision to sell a cow she felt close to, they changed their mind. These are perhaps unusual cases, but they are examples of the lengths to which some parents go to show respect for their children's opinions.

*Sometimes groups had to be separate to give girls a chance to speak, Biskundanda*

This level of interest in a child's preferences and opinions is not routine however. Parents in Jahbahi said that adults should respect children's views, but that this should not interfere with parents' work. Exhausted after a day's work, their patience often wears thin when children want to talk to them. Older children especially often noted that their opinions were overlooked by adults. Boys in Dekhetbhully, for instance, argued that it was unfair for their sisters not to be able to attend school, but felt that their parents ignored them.

While self-assertion is supported early in life, the confidence so gained is often undermined in later years, especially for girls. Many of the visioning exercises undertaken with older children in the course of the research demonstrated this vividly. In some cases their reluctance to present their ideas was a function of their shyness with outsiders, especially in the hill villages. But girls, in particular, raised to respond to the needs of others, found it difficult to formulate their ideas and express them.

In many ways they experience a greater range of choice and more access to the life of the community than is true for children in more affluent countries.

Children have a good deal of independence from early on. Ram Prasad Chaudhary in Dekhetbhully noted, "Children themselves decide what to do, as parents do not ask them about their activities very much. Children above the age of three get on and do most things like eating, drinking, cleaning, playing, and looking after younger siblings by themselves independently." As children grow older and become responsible for a wider range of tasks, they often have the opportunity to decide what work to do and when. The easy acceptance by his mother of Gopal's son's decision to collect fodder rather than herding cattle as requested is a case in point. Parents believe that when children are exposed to a range of situations, their capacity to make responsible decisions will be developed. In this spirit, children of 12 or 14 who are doing wage labour have the opportunity to take some of the earnings and decide themselves how to spend it. Girls who own *pewa* also decide themselves how to use and spend it.

They may be free to decide which of several tasks to do on a given day; but deciding that they prefer to go to school instead may not be an option.

Some researchers raised the issue of protection in this context – at what point does it become inappropriate for parents simply to accept the decision of a child? In Biskundanda, for instance, a 13 year old boy announced to his parents that he planned to leave school and go to work in India; they raised no objection, but found it a reasonable decision.

There are also significant areas where children may have little chance to make choices or exercise control over their own lives. Nor are parents always supportive of the decisions children make on their own: because of their own busy work loads, they are often not able to give much guidance or attention to what children do, until they do it wrong, at which point children may face trouble – especially if it is a work task.

Being included

Participation does not have to be limited to active involvement and control – it can also be a matter of what children are included in and exposed to. The chance to watch and learn from older people, rather than being excluded on the basis of age from the activities and concerns of family and community, is an important component of the right to participate.

Children at a community gathering in Dekhetbully community school: a chance to watch and learn

In all the villages, usually in the evening when they sit together after eating, parents will share what they did during the day and show an interest in their children's activities. Conversation revolves chiefly around food, work, planning for the next day, and general strategies for survival – topics that reflect the concerns of families whose main challenge is daily subsistence. Rather than excluding children from these "adult" concerns, parents feel that it is important for them to understand the family situation from an early age.

At the community level, children also have the chance to watch and learn. Although their opinions are not considered in community meetings, they are able to listen and gradually to understand the concerns of the community, an important step in becoming actively involved themselves. As they grow older, boys will increasingly have the chance to represent the family if their fathers (or other adult males in the family) cannot attend. Once girls are about 14 years, they no longer attend meetings, and women will only attend in circumstances where the husband has gone outside the village and there is no older son to represent him. Girls learn quickly that their verbal participation in community affairs will not be welcome.

An important aspect of children's inclusion in the community is their involvement in local celebrations and ritual events, whether it be a hair cutting ceremony, a wedding, or the mud throwing that follows the completion of planting. In some cases they are simply observers; in other cases they are more active participants, whether by dancing, preparing food or making offerings to the god, and in still others they are the focus of the event (see page 45.**)**

Dancing gives these small boys an opportunity to feel involved in on-going traditions, Dekhetbully

In every case there is a sense that they are part of an occasion that brings the community together around a shared focus, and in a still larger sense, participants in an on-going tradition.

The expense of many celebrations, as noted (page 37-38), has had the effect of undermining community enthusiasm for some events – and exposure to outside influences in many cases contributes to the loss of shared customs and traditions. The importance to children of maintaining traditional events, crafts and customs which contribute to a sense of belonging and involvement cannot be overemphasized. Economically burdensome events should be modified where necessary, but it is vital to find ways of maintaining the underlying values of identity and continuity in celebration and tradition, especially in the face of rapid change.

The chance to contribute in a meaningful way

Children in all four villages have the chance to be meaningfully involved in the life of their communities from an early age. They can watch parents and older siblings at work, learn from them, and become rapidly skilled enough to contribute themselves. From the age of 3 or 4 years, a range of small tasks can provide them with the chance to feel competent and involved, knowing that they are making a difference to those around them. When children start receiving the same wages as adults, people recognise them as fully participating community members.

Children feel a sense of pride in their contributions, and this is actively encouraged when parents praise them for doing well. In Jahbahi, a five year old was looking after her two-year-old brother. When her mother returned after being out for some time, the five year old hung on her, telling her all the things she had done to look after the baby – what she fed him, what games they played. The mother listened with interest, and responded, "You've done a great job."

Also in Jahbahi, a small girl was observed talking with her father who listened carefully while she told him how one of the chickens got lost and how she found it. He responded with interest, wanting to know more about what happened. The girl was clearly proud and pleased to have played this part in protecting her family's interests.

Researchers observed that girls are particularly likely to have a serious sense of responsibility, and that they seem quite mature compared to boys of the same age. Eight-year-old girls were

From the age of 3 or 4 years, a range of small tasks can provide children with the chance to feel competent and involved, knowing that they are making a difference to those around them
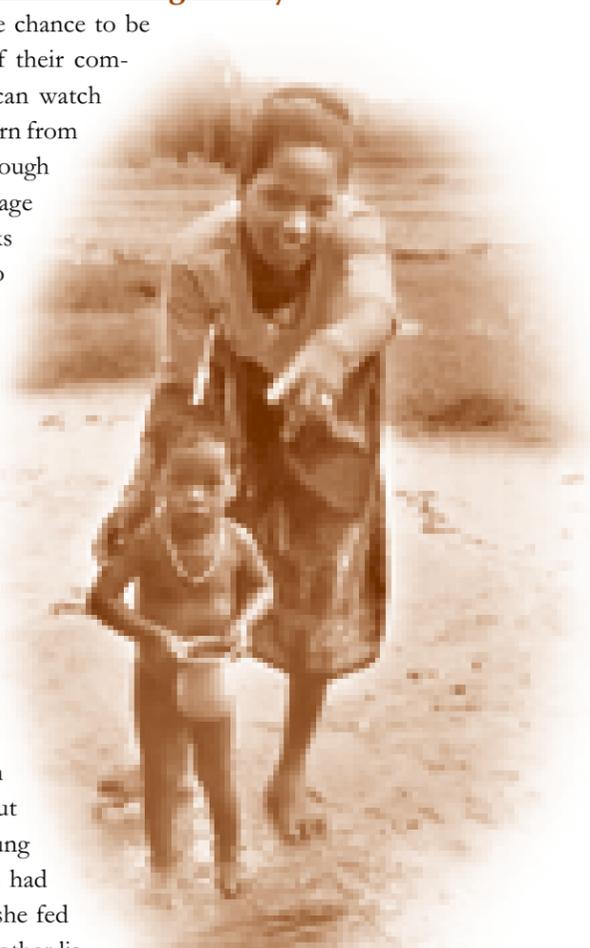
These tiny day-to-day events lay the foundations of participation. It is during such interaction that children develop self control and self-confidence (or a sense of failure). They learn how to relate to other and what behaviour is culturally acceptable. They develop (or suppress) their curiosity. In other words they develop the skills to take an active and responsible part in the life of the community. The ways in which families encourage children to participate in their families and communities is what really counts.

An opportunity to feel helpful: a girl pumps water for her father, Dekhetbully

observed comparing the tasks they had completed during the day, or telling their friends that they could not come and play until they had finished their work. Especially for girls, however, the knowledge that they are depended on can quickly become something that restricts opportunity rather than expanding it, but early in life work provides the chance for children to feel useful, involved and competent.

In the hill villages, children's involvement in community work activities, such as water supply maintenance or trail upkeep, is also encouraged and their efforts are respected. One day, when one of the village water points had become clogged in Koldanda, researchers observed a group of three young boys fixing the

Taking an interest in what a little girl has to say; encouraging confidence, Koldanda

plugged line with great enthusiasm, and without any adult involvement. In the *terai*, because adults are less inclined to be involved in such community development activities – like road repair – children are also less involved.

Within these villages people tend to see children's participation mainly in terms of the work that children are involved in. This identification of participation with work limits potential opportunities. It is important that parents realise the strengths of the other ways they involve their children – through family discussions, traditional events and so on – so that they can also build on these.

…expanding opportunity… or restricting it?…

Although there are many opportunities for younger children to build the skills required for participation, continued opportunities for such learning do not present themselves as children grow older. Both boys and girls take increasing responsibility for the work they do, and their participation grows in this sense. But especially for girls, there are not wider arenas in which to hone and expand their capacities. Boys can move on to become active participants in community decision-making, and can join youth clubs as they grow older, but girls are restricted to the same world that they already managed fairly competently at seven or eight.

Children need the opportunity to keep developing their experiences of participation in order to interact with the wider world – so important as they get older, if they are to have a real say in local and national democratic processes. This is particularly important for those groups who are marginalised because of caste or gender. School offers the potential for children to interact with those from other castes and ethnic groups, and often with teachers from outside the community, and it has the potential to broaden children's access to information essential for participation. But otherwise there is a gap in the opportunities available now for older children. Inclusive children's clubs could be an important resource. This will be discussed in the recommendations.

Tom Kelly

chapter Six
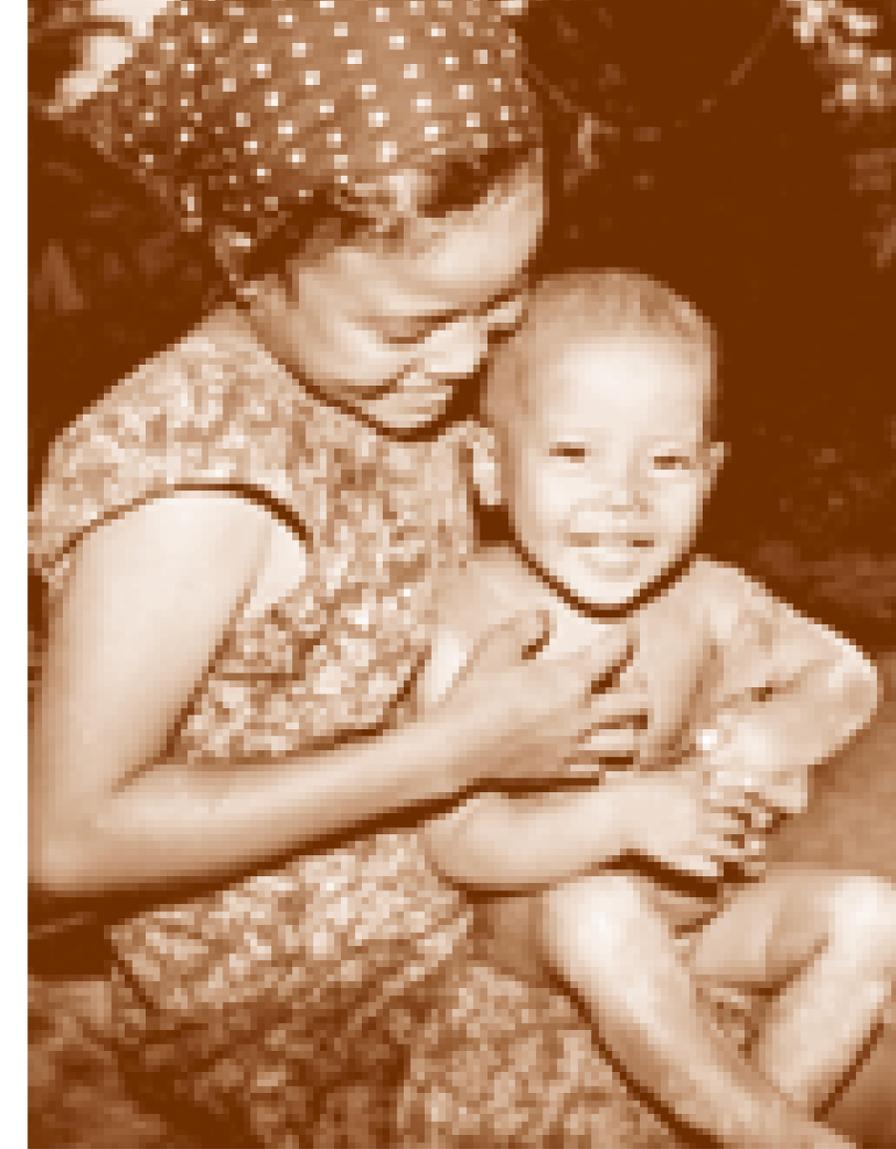
Summary of Key Findings

Strengths and concerns

This section attempts to summarise both the strengths and the limitations in the efforts made by the four communities on behalf of their children, as identified both by community members and by researchers. The findings point to a need for balance. Researchers found on the whole that families care deeply for their children and try hard to support their well-being within the constraints and challenges that they face. The challenges are considerable, however, and there are many areas for concern. Life is easier in many ways than it used to be, but there are still major stresses in people's lives, some of them new and the product of change. There are many areas of life over which parents have little control – the workloads necessary to support survival for instance, or the quality of health care available. Although parents are effective teachers, the world is changing rapidly, and the skills that

children need in order to cope adequately are changing too. A primary cause for concern are those children who, because of their gender, caste, ethnicity or class, are denied even the limited opportunities available to other children.

The strengths and concerns within these villages cannot easily be separated – they are often two sides of the same coin. Fortunately, this means that for many areas that sorely need attention there are existing practices and sources of strength that serve as a constructive place for communities to build from.

Strategies for survival

Families in these villages struggle for survival and security. Most households are unable to raise enough food for the whole year, and many must go into debt to survive. In the past this meant hunger and high death rates. Hunger is still an issue, but now there is access to a wider range of survival strategies – the market, for instance, and labour outside the villages. Fewer children are dying than in the past, but new livelihood strategies may also have less positive impacts for children. They seldom take children's more subtle needs into account. Migrant labour patterns, for instance, may leave a family without a father for months and even years at a time. Although overall income increases, so do the workloads of those at home, generally women and children. In Biskundanda, where women and children also go out to work for weeks at a time, small children may be left without their primary caregivers.

Families need support in improving their livelihoods, but in ways that do not further decrease the time that is available for the care of small children, or further increase older children's workloads. Because change is not new to these villages, people have the capacity to assess how it has affected their lives, and to be both open to, and critical of, new possibilities. With encouragement and guidance, they can also look at the potential impacts of changing livelihood strategies for their children, can discuss the tension between short-term and long-term gains, and decide what they want to make use of and what they want to avoid.

Family structure

There is a significant move in all the villages away from joint and extended families and towards more nuclear families - a reflection of a trend that has been observed throughout the world, but that has generally been more associated with a move to urban areas. The percentage of nuclear families varies (from 30 percent of households in Jahbahi to 80 percent in Koldanda), but change is inevitably in this direction. There are some significant implications for child rearing - child care is considered to be easier in extended families, and children have more opportunity to learn about sharing and cooperation. But many women described the increased control that they have over resources and decision making in a nuclear family and the benefits to their children. Even though they tend to be less affluent on the whole, it is possible to pay greater attention to the needs of individual children. Children tend to get more food, for instance, in a nuclear family. The challenge is to support families, whatever their form, to provide the most nurturing environment for children.

The quality of care

Families in these villages love their small children deeply, and treat them with affection, indulgence and tenderness. All family members contribute to their care, and even fathers were observed in many cases to be far more involved than is generally reported. In discussion, parents focus primarily on their capacity to feed the family. However, their behaviour confirms that they have a holistic sense of their children's welfare. They are clearly aware that it goes beyond mere survival, and that love, security, delight, and the chance to play and learn are also critical to well-being.

But heavy workloads inevitably affect every aspect of child care and child rearing. Children's need for care, attention and interaction must often take second place to the effort to provide for basic survival. Occasionally, especially during peak seasons, and in households with few potential caregivers, this can verge on serious neglect. Small children may remain for hours at a time without adult oversight, or be dependent on the attention of older siblings, themselves often young enough to require care. It is clear within all these villages that extra child care supports are required, especially during peak agricultural seasons.

A girl struggles with caring for two younger siblings

Discrimination

Traditional community norms and systems within these villages maintain order and stability, and can offer support and security in times of difficulty. But stability can also mask the power differences within a community or family which contribute to the isolation and vulnerability of some. Caste and gender especially can be the basis for life-long exclusion. Caste discrimination contributes to humiliation, low self-esteem and limited chances in life. Parents of Bishwokarma children, for instance, believe that even when their children are educated, they are unlikely to find jobs because of their caste. These children may be humiliated at school and often drop out. Parents in such situations find it difficult to provide children with confidence in their own abilities.

Gender based expectations, similarly, undermine girls' confidence and reduce their opportunities. Although there is some variation among villages, the daily lives of girls are more constrained from an early age, the work expectations are higher, and their chances for education, rest, play and time with friends more limited. A significant difference in the overall numbers of boys and girls may also be a reflection of differential treatment. At the same time, there is a growing awareness of girls' rights – among girls themselves, eager for greater opportunities, and among parents, especially in Koldanda, some of whom point to models for change . It is interesting to note that some of the more exceptional children observed in these villages (Tulsi in Biskundanda, for instance, and Binisara's daughter in Koldanda) are girls.
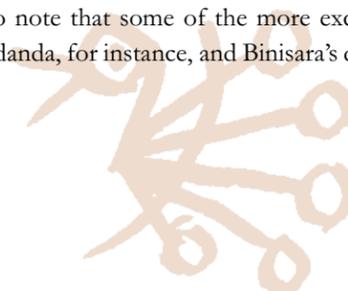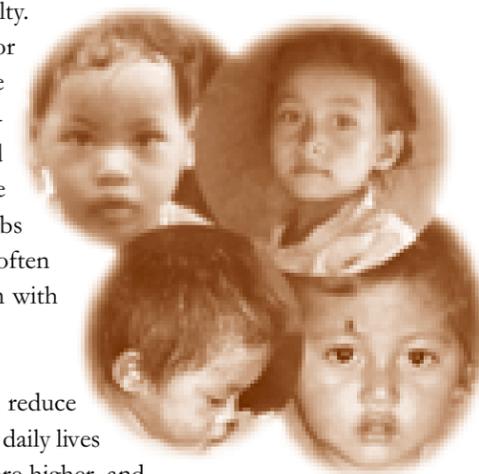
Health and safety
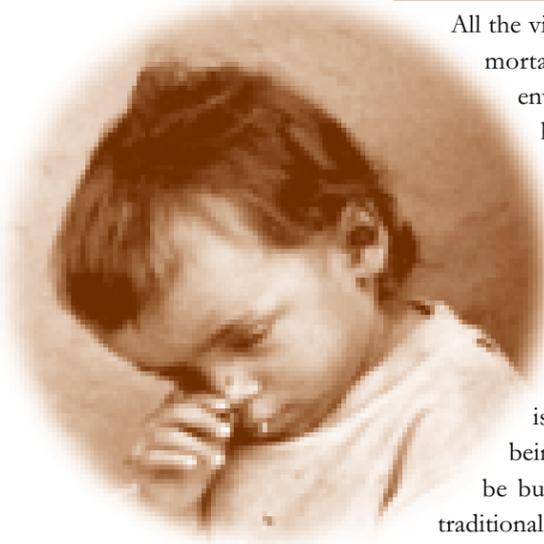
All the villages face considerable problems with health, and high rates of child mortality are a problem at least in Biskundanda. Levels of hygiene and environmental health vary, but require attention in all villages. Modern health facilities are difficult to access in all but Koldanda. The lack of health records means that health status cannot be monitored. It is reassuring, however, that a respected traditional health system has not caused either parents or traditional healers to reject what modern medicine has to offer. In spite of some confusion about the relative benefits of the two systems, people are open-minded, willing both to hold on to the best of the old, and to try whatever is accessible and affordable in the new. The fact that in Koldanda, where there is a health post, children are no longer dying, suggests that good use is being made of accessible services. This is something that can and should be built on. There is a need to improve access to health posts, to train traditional healers and local health volunteers, and to coordinate their efforts with the formal health system. Reliable records need to be maintained.

Injury is a significant problem in all these villages, the result of both challenging environments and a lack of adequate child care coverage. The anxiety of parents about the safety of their young children causes older children to be kept out of school as caregivers. In all four villages children learn early to cope with danger – they use sharp tools skillfully, manage heavy loads on steep slopes, and learn through often painful experience to avoid harm. But more effective measures are called for to prevent avoidable injuries. There is a need for child care arrangements, especially in the peak seasons, and for basic safeguards around the house to protect children from harm – and here too, for accessible health services to ensure adequate treatment.

The gap between awareness and action

As is true with any group of parents, there can be significant gaps between awareness and action in many areas. In these communities, however, the stakes are very high. In all the villages there is considerable knowledge about hygiene and sanitation, the health needs of pregnant women and the importance of girls' education for instance, but this knowledge is poorly reflected in practice. Programmes and interventions which assume that the problem is simply a lack of information are unlikely to stimulate change. More work is needed to understand the dynamics underlying this phenomenon. Approaches need to be adapted to individual communities, and to respond to the levels of local knowledge, attitudes to specific issues and practical constraints.

Children's learning

There is generally poor understanding of family members' key role in supporting their children's learning. Parents are very aware of their role in teaching their children the practical skills which assist the family enterprise, and they are competent instructors in this regard. There is much less understanding of the vital part that day-to-day conversations and activities can play in developing children's broader understanding of their world, and in supporting the confidence they need to interact effectively with that world.

Parents' heavy workloads can make it difficult for them to devote time to facilitating and supporting children's development. Children are sometimes left on their own for many hours,

without any kind of stimulation. Many caregivers do not use even the available opportunities for interaction as fully as they might. Verbal interaction, for instance, is often restricted to issuing work instructions, where it could be used to encourage curiosity and learning. However, children are surrounded by a rich and stimulating environment, and there are parents who *do* in fact take the time to pause and take advantage of the learning potential in everyday situations. They need to be shown the value of what they're doing on these occasions, encouraged to take advantage of such opportunities whenever possible, and given a chance to discuss how such interactions might be built into everyday routines without calling for a great investment of time. The fact that parents are eager to learn more about their children's development, and how best to support it, is encouraging.

In the paddy field with mother: an opportunity for learning

Opportunities for three to six-year-olds: In all cultures the way children are treated changes of necessity as they grow older. However, this more general adaptation to their developmental change is not what we are concerned with here. Rather it is the quite dramatic shift that appears to take place in these villages at about the age of two to three years – and maybe a bit older in Koldanda . At this time there is a shift from a good deal of demonstrative, rich interaction between adults and children, to considerably less time and attention for children. More and more of children's needs begin to be met by siblings. While the richness of the experiences that children have together is reflected throughout this report, there is no doubting the importance for young children of also being able to interact fairly frequently with interested and nurturant adults, who can support and guide their daily exploration of the world in different ways. In too many families the limited possibility for this kind of opportunity has negative implications for children's full development.

The issue of work and opportunities for older children: In these communities, where survival is dependent on the contribution of all, children are expected to play their part from an early age. In most cases they move into work gradually – what begins as a playful imitation of adult roles slowly becomes a more significant contribution, until by the age of seven or eight (older in the *terai*), children are fully responsible for a growing range of tasks. During the early years especially, this is a source of pride and satisfaction and a valuable opportunity to acquire the competence children so desire, as well as the respect of others. Over time, however, as work becomes the more rote performance of familiar tasks, the burdens increase while the satisfaction and potential for learning diminish. Work for older children eats into time for play and relaxation, and undermines the chances of success or continuation at school. Some new opportunities open up – boys for example have the chance to take part in community meetings and to join the local youth clubs when they are older. But for girls especially, the range of choice and discovery continues to narrow down.

McKenzie
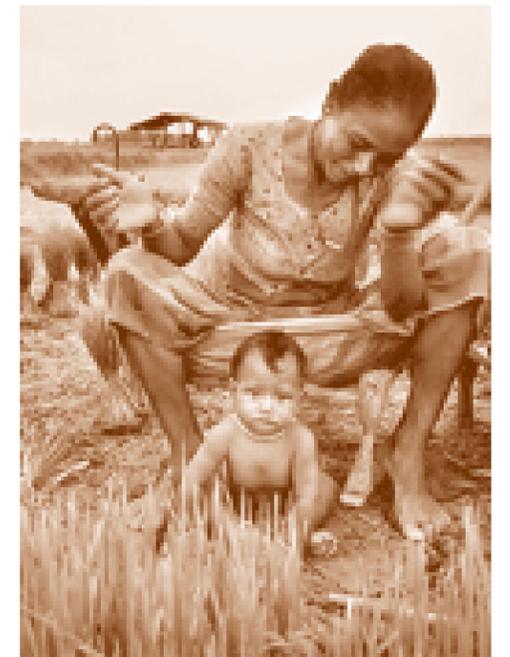
A girl carries a basket, Jahbahi

There is a good deal of evidence for the high relative significance of early opportunities and experience. But development does not end at three years or at six. Children's minds and souls continue to grow, just as their bodies do, and they continue to need appropriate nourishment in these areas too. When children have challenging opportunities and supportive role models, they are likely to be among the more creative, idealistic and productive members of any society. When their capacities are nurtured through relevant schooling and stimulating experiences, older children will become increasingly able to apply critical thinking in constructive ways, and to take a moral stance on issues that affect them and their communities. These children are a potential resource that their communities should cultivate more fully.

Preparing for the future

Subsistence agriculture, as we have noted, is an increasingly tenuous base for survival. Tomorrow's citizens in both rural and urban areas will need to learn new skills, and be prepared possibly to do many different things during the course of their lives. Yet child-rearing practices and education are geared more towards encouraging compliance and respect for authority than stimulating initiative or creativity. Parents rely heavily on schools to prepare their children for more complex futures. Yet the vast majority of children enter grade 1 unprepared to make best use of the learning opportunities that are available. In schools, moreover, learning by rote is still the standard – an approach that stresses the passive acquisition of information rather than the capacity to ask pertinent questions and to find solutions. Ironically, at least for younger children, daily experience herding animals, finding firewood and tending children, may do more to encourage the initiative and independent thinking needed for success (although they certainly will result in a limited range of concrete skills and repetitive experience for older children.) Teaching methods and child rearing practices that build children's confidence, initiative and problem-solving skills are essential. Such approaches are mainstays of quality ECD programs, and this is where ECD and its linkages with both primary schools and parent education is particularly significant.

It must be acknowledged that it is not simply a matter of adding to what children already have. When one thing becomes a priority, something else must shift. Children who are socialized to expect more routinely stimulating interactions with those around them may become reluctant to settle for less. Children who are encouraged to ask questions and devise new solutions may be more inclined to challenge accepted wisdom.

The challenge is clearly to find a balance between the development of traits and skills which facilitate the harmonious functioning of communities and those that will equip children to deal with a rapidly changing future. The essential thing is that parents have the opportunity in their lives to discuss and debate together the implications and the value of what is made available to their children, so that they have some sense of controlling change rather than having it control them.

Adults' supportive interactions with children are important for children's confidence and acquiring new skills, Biskundanda

Differences within groups and differences between groups

It would be reasonable to expect that this study might identify and list differences and similarities between the child rearing practices of the different ethnic and caste groups which were part of the study. There are, of course, real differences in some areas: Magar and Tharu groups, for instance, tend to involve women more in household decision-making; and in Dekhetbully, while the Tharu households regularly feed their children vegetables from their kitchen gardens, their Biswokarma neighbours, with approximately the same landholding, rarely grow any vegetables.

But a range of other variables can equally be related to differences in practices – the level of economic well-being, for instance, or geographical location. Moreover, in a study like this, where close attention is paid to subtleties of interaction, the differences within groups quickly become as striking as any differences between them. Although a clear identification of caste and ethnic differences might have interesting implications for programming, these implications become less important in the context of a bottom-up process which attempts to ensure the ongoing input of all community members. More significant, perhaps, than group identity as an *absolute* factor in determining group practices is the very real power of caste and ethnic relations within any given village. It is these relations and their impacts which should remain the focus of careful attention.

Positive Deviance

The concept of "positive deviance", which has has been applied in recent years to child research and intervention programming chiefly in the area of nutrition,[58] recognizes that even among the most disadvantaged families, some children tend to flourish. The application of the concept can go beyond nutrition. Time and again this study found examples of children from extremely impoverished households whose families somehow provided extraordinarily supportive environments – children whose curiosity, confidence and desire for interaction were routinely stimulated and encouraged in ways that were unusual for their communities. Just as in the case of positive nutritional deviance, it is possible to learn from these families, and there are implications for both research and programming.

Learning from the process

The goals of this study were not limited to gathering and analysing information about child rearing. An equally important focus was the development of a participatory process that could effectively be used in continuing work with parents, as the basis for practical planning on interventions to ensure improvements for children. Encouraging such a process involves creating a conducive space in peoples' lives for joint reflection and discussion – especially for those who are not accustomed to voicing their concerns and priorities. During the research this opportunity was provided in the dialogue sessions, a few months after the initial research, which were designed as far as possible to encourage the active involvement of all community members.

The communities welcomed the chance for discussion. By this time people were more familiar with the research teams and their objectives, and they were often more informative and open

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[58] See footnote 28, p.xx

during this phase of the research. Like the team members, they had had the chance to think about the initial phase of the research, and the dialogue created an opportunity for them to discuss their thoughts in greater detail, to correct and expand on the teams' impressions , and to arrive together at suggestions for change in their villages. Their suggestions are being (or will be) acted on by participating local NGOs, allowing community members to see the practical effects of their involvement, and to appreciate the on-going nature of this process.

The dialogue sessions were not only an important phase of the information and recommendation gathering process – they were also a unique opportunity to consider and discuss alternative viewpoints. Some norms within the villages were at odds with basic principles of child rights, whether because of cultural beliefs or economic pressures – beliefs regarding the lesser importance of education for girls, for example, or the access of lower caste children to religious observance. Drawing on their own experiences and on experiences of individual within the communities, researchers introduced the perspective of their child focused organizations into the debate on issues and solutions, and discussed these perspectives in the context of local knowledge and beliefs. Bringing together these alternative vantage points stimulated rich discussion about children's rights, as well as introducing new views on children's development.

These dialogues were successful and exciting in many ways, but it must be acknowledged that creating a truly participatory process was challenging. Genuine dialogue is central to real participation, but facilitating it can be complex in practice. There were many aspects of this process that could well be improved on in future. There will be a far more detailed account of these aspects in the toolkit (see below). The following is just a brief list of the lessons learned in the course of the process.

- Participatory learning and action (PLA) emphasises the central place of dialogue, and offers great potential for discussion and debate when it is well facilitated. This potential was stressed during training. But too often the production of PLA visuals became more important during the research than the discussion and the recording of discussion. Training needs to be still more focused on building interviewing, questioning and facilitation skills, and encouraging their routine use in stimulating discussion.
- Both group discussion and productive interviews require a genuine respect for and interest in other people. Much work needs to be done to develop appropriate training to overcome engrained hierarchical attitudes on the part of facilitators and a tendency to deliver knowledge to people in the villages, rather than engaging in real dialogue.
- Many dialogue sessions tended to represent the views of those community members who typically dominate societies – men, the wealthiest, those with political power and influence. Developing the skills to recognise the existence of power relations based on gender, caste and age takes time and reflection. It is critical to keep working on developing this kind of sensitivity, and to integrate this awareness into all phases of research and programming.
- The communities wanted more information from the teams, especially on how government resources can be accessed and improved. All team members need to be well informed about child rights and government policy and programmes in order to carry out effective dialogue and planning.

- Carrying out the project in both Nepali and English was a challenge. In order to involve frontline field researchers, it was essential that all workshops and field reports were in Nepali, although this then limited the input of English speaking senior researchers and advisors, particularly in the analysis phase. There is a need for a full time experienced researcher at a senior level to be fluent in both languages.
- The study was limited to the peak agricultural season, when it is a struggle for people to spare the time for anything but work. Although it was clear that this time of the year presents the greatest challenges to child care, it would have been useful to carry out the study during the slack season also, so that planning could have taken into account the changes across the year – but also so that community members could have had more time to devote to reflection and discussion.

All of these issues, and others, will be taken up in far greater detail in a separate toolkit which will document the whole process of the research – from the selection and training of the researchers through to the analysis and report writing phase. The toolkit will reflect especially on the experience of facilitating dialogue, and on the necessary skills – a respect for alternative view points, a commitment to developing processes that allow different voices to be heard, and an openness to creating new knowledge and new ideas with all involved learning along the way.

As detailed in the recommendations, it is expected that the methods detailed in the toolkit will become an integral part of parenting programmes, supporting processes that respond to the needs and existing knowledge of communities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Keeping children at the centre

These recommendations have been developed within a child rights framework which keeps children firmly at the centre – but of necessity they are concerned at the same time with all levels of society. They draw on the understanding which the study has given us of a whole array of influences on children's well-being as summarized in the different chapters – the larger policy and programming environment, the environmental, economic, social and political factors within each village that shape everyday life and children's experiences, and the beliefs and practices within families.
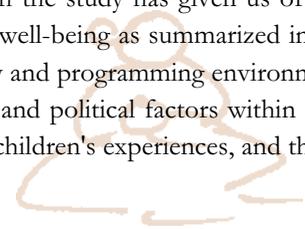
The individual village reports contain detailed recommendations pertinent to each of the villages. In this report we felt it important to reflect on the broader learning that has been gained from the study and in particular to make suggestions for the further development of effective participatory approaches which build on families' and communities' achievements and assist them in addressing their concerns. The recommendations are based on the strengths and constraints of these communities' in providing a supportive environment for their children's overall development. They are concerned with both "internal" aspects (knowledge, attitudes and practices) and "external" (resources, structures and systems.) Recommendations are made here not only for action within families and communities, but also for mechanisms and policies at district and national levels that can ensure implementation and follow up and will work towards systemic change.

Poverty and children's development

All over the world, poverty interferes with the realization of children's rights. Within families, communities and countries, a lack of resources undermines the capacity to provide adequately for children, and to afford them opportunities. In all four of the study villages, parents, not unexpectedly, made it clear that economic pressures are the fundamental obstacle they face in rearing their children. Health care, education, the chances for future success, and even their day-to-day interactions are constrained by the lack of resources. Given this fact, it might be concluded that programmes focused on poverty reduction would be the most effective means to implement children's rights.

Poor families can provide supportive environments for their children: A mother encourages her son to become familiar with a book

However, the findings in this study have also emphasized the necessity to avoid over-simplistic conclusions about the relationship between poverty and people's capacity to support children's development. Time and again we found common practices in these villages that draw creatively on minimal resources. We also saw inspiring examples of "positive deviance" – families from the poorest groups who manage to provide supportive environments for their children despite their economic constraints. Socio-economic factors are a key influence, but the picture is complex. Child rearing practices are defined by material resources, but also by parents' knowledge and beliefs. Parents may be prevented from acting in accordance with their beliefs, because of lack of resources. But equally, a lack of knowledge or information may prevent them from making the best use of their resources. Certain beliefs may also preclude the most effective or supportive use of resources.

The assumption that programmes which work towards broad change according to communities' priorities automatically enhance children's overall health and development has been called into question. Increased food production does not automatically translate into better fed children. Nor do increased economic opportunities necessarily mean greater opportunities for children. Recent research in Nepal indicated that the school attendance rate of children with mothers in micro-credit programmes tended to be lower than those of other children; this held particularly true for girl children.[59] Worldwide it has become clear that, while efforts for chil-

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59 USAID (1999) *Promoting Education for Girls in Nepal: a USAID Impact Evaluation Paper*, cited in a personal communication from William Thompson.

dren should be set firmly within the family and community context, programmes require a specific focus on the child. Otherwise children tend to get "lost" and the real beneficiaries are men already in the middle or upper echelons of the local hierarchy. Child-focused agencies have a responsibility to work with broad-based development organisations to ensure that poverty alleviation programmes take more account of the impact of these programmes on children.

Development programmes in South Asia in particular have been dominated by poverty alleviation through economic development to a quite unusual degree. But too narrow an economic view means that the social aspects of under-development are seen as merely a by-product of poverty rather than as part of the cause as well. For the family faced with the difficulties of putting enough food on the table it is hard to take a broader view. For programme planners and policy-makers it is essential. The study findings have indicated the need to avoid a purely economic view of poverty, and have emphasized the importance of addressing social and political disempowerment on the basis of gender, ethnicity, caste and age.

Children get lost if programmes don't specifically focus on them

Child development programmes as an entry point

A commitment to continue working for broad-based improvements in children's social and physical environments is central for those involved in children's rights. The judgements required are about the most effective ways to approach and achieve these improvements. The primary focus is the rights and requirements of young children. However, these interventions inevitably have effects for caregivers as well, and experience indicates that a successful programme for young children can also become an entry point for responding effectively to many of the factors underlying poverty.

One of the keys in successful development approaches appears to be the increased sense of control that they give people – whether through a greater capacity to earn, or through the the chance to become involved in local decision making. The opportunity to work together with others in a community to make tangible differences in children's lives can be an empowering experience for many caregivers, who may seldom have had a role outside of home, and who may never have had their efforts on behalf of their children recognized before. The sense of being able to make a real difference in the lives and opportunities of one's children can be a powerful entry point – with important implications for both the child's sense of self and the caregiver's. To give two concrete examples:

- In villages throughout Nepal where early childhood programmes are operating, parents who have been closely involved with these efforts demonstrate an increased sense of engagement with local institutions. When their children join grade 1 many of them are outraged that their children "aren't learning anything". Despite initial resistance to the active learning approach characteristic of the child development centres they acknowledge that "our children learned a lot there" and challenge the primary school when it fails to deliver.
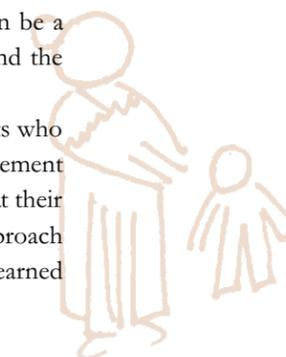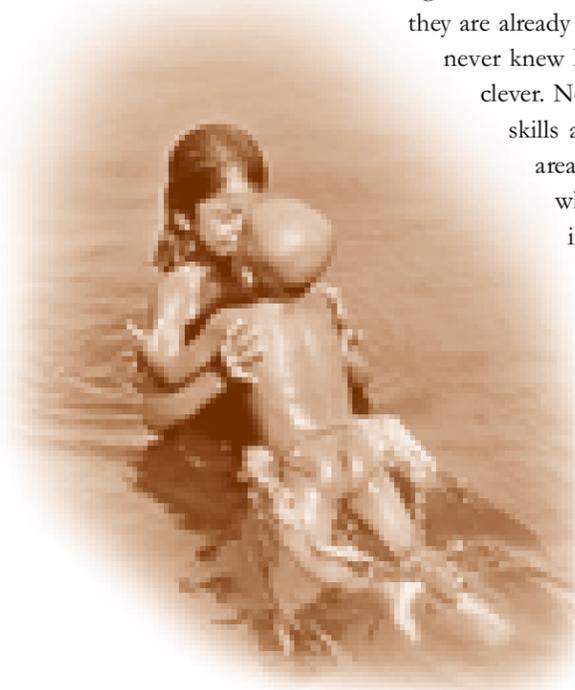
- Parents who participate in programmes run by facilitators skilled at recognizing and drawing out their knowledge are often surprised and gratified to discover how much they are already doing. A typical comment at the end of such a session was: "I never knew I was doing so much to help my daughter grow up strong and clever. Now I know I can really help her have chances I never had." The skills and confidence gained in this way often carry over into other areas of life. Examples abound of mothers, supported in this way, who have ended up for example, succeeding in keeping their girls in school and taking leadership roles in their communities.

These are small illustrations of the multitude of ways that a child development programme can serve as an effective entry point for mobilizing communities, with impacts well beyond those normally looked for in ECD programmes. The most effective ECD approaches are essentially tools for giving people control over their lives, and the study indicates that community members recognize this as a need above all else in order best to support their children's and their own development. This is a much broader view of ECD than is traditional. Unlike many of the things which it may be possible to bring people together around (a bridge or credit for example) young children are not so apt to become the focus of power struggles. It is possible to appeal to people's better natures and many of the hurdles to effective group formation are more likely to be avoided. It is after all the development of dynamic groups, able to articulate their own and their children's needs and act together to address these, that is an essential step in producing solutions which are both relevant and practical.

Programmes can serve whole communities in other ways too. The most commonly cited benefits of successful ECD programmes (particularly where there is active parental involvement) relate to children's improved health and their ability to participate successfully within the formal education system. These are clearly benefits not only to individual children, but also to communities and societies at large, in terms of the returns that are realized on investments on health and education.

It is ironic therefore that early childhood provision continues to be perceived as a luxury, and that, where resources are limited, young children are often the first to lose out. Ignoring the needs of young children is short-sighted and guaranteed to result in problems later on, just as, conversely, positive early experiences and opportunities provide lasting benefits.

A focus on approaches and method within a child rights framework

Our focus is on recommendations regarding approaches and methods. Increasingly funding will be coming available for programmes concerned with children's psycho-social development as well as their healthy physical development. The big questions are not around the "what" of such programmes but the "how." We have to look at new ways of working in partnerships which ensure genuine decision-making responsibilities are shared among all actors. Child development programming is not a product to be dispensed but a process in which families, communities, fieldworkers, professionals and planners must work together. Our purpose therefore, is to focus on approaches which will:
- empower families
- equip communities and local government
- energize agencies
- expand policy-makers' vision

As described in the introduction to this book, ECD programmes are increasingly conceptualized as an integrated set of actions for ensuring young children's rights. They seek to ensure the synergy of protection, good health and nutrition, supportive and affectionate interaction, stimulation and opportunities for exploring the environment. What this means specifically for a particular community is that ECD programming may consist of any of a number of components, depending on that community's needs and priorities – it may (or may not), for instance, include child care arrangements, parenting programmes, advocacy groups, support for healthcare, record keeping, supports for caregivers including older children, or work on local policy formulation, all of which are discussed in the following recommendations. The central concern is with enhancing the supportiveness of the overall environment for children's development.

In Nepal the ECD Indicators project, has been developing a framework which conceives of responses to young children in just this integrated way.[60] The framework connects closely with Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization of multiple levels of influences on the child (see page 18). It also summarizes this visually – with the child at the center surrounded by concentric circles representing the family, community, district and national levels, but it takes an explicit rights perspective.

It is recommended that this framework be further developed and widely used to ensure that overall policy and programme planning is concerned with the whole child (rather than having a sectoral focus) and takes account of all different levels (child, family, community, district, national). This is necessary because we won't see the desired achievements for children on a significant scale unless things are working at all these different levels.

There are many parenting programmes, for example, which aim to strengthen caregiving practices. However, strengthening practices is only part of the picture. Systems are often set up in ways that exclude or marginalize certain children; health services are inaccessible or unaffordable; education and employment opportunities may be hard for certain families or castes to access.

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[60] This collaborative effort has involved CERID, the Ministries of Education and Health, Seto Gurans, Save the Children Alliance and UNICEF. It is one of a number of a country case studies conducted under the auspices of the Early Childhood Care and Development Consultative Group. See Myers, R (1999) *In Search of Early Childhood Care and Development Indicators: A Contribution to the EFA Year 2000 Assessment*, Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development.
Arnold C. (2000) *Assessing the Supportiveness of the Environment for Young Children. Are adults meeting their obligations? A Child Rights Framework*, Paper for Education for All Bangkok Regional Meeting.
Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (2000) *Nepal Country Case Study*, Tribuvan University.

In such settings parenting programmes can also be designed to help change systems. It is important to take a systemic view and create programming that strengthens all the systems that must eventually support and sustain families.

The framework looks at how we assess progess in meeting obligations to children – whether by family members, parent educators, child development centre facilitators/teachers, district staff, NGOs or government policy makers. It is divided into three main segments and considers the implications of these at the different levels. The three segments are *political will* (areas such as policy, budget allocations and expenditure, programme coverage and inclusion of young children's issues in agendas), *socio-economic conditions (*overall context relating to well-being), and *interactions* (between children and the people and environment around them) The study was a constant affirmation of how powerful an influence the quality of interactions are on well-being. This applies across the board – whether we are talking about women voicing their opinions and taking decisions, or men caring for their children. The quality of children's interactions are vital to their well-being, whether we are looking at feeding practices, verbal interactions or physical and emotional comfort. Such a framework helps ensure we don't lose sight of the key questions that concern us (see Appendix III for chart.)

A summary of the recommendations

At the level of families and communities
- **Support parents and caregivers through dialogue-based programmes. Strengthen existing parenting programmes and expand coverage**
- **Help families to develop a flexible range of alternative childcare arrangements**
- **Promote the development of Action Groups for Children**
- **Co-ordinate with healthcare providers**
- **Support the establishment of village record-keeping and child indicators**
- **Identify examples of "positive deviance" in child rearing, and draw out lessons for use within communities**
- **Expand opportunities for older children**
- **Continue addressing constraints women face**
- **Help communities to assess new and changing livelihood possibilities for the impact they might have on children**

At the agency and district level
- **Develop a participatory dialogue course for child development, education and child rights personnel**
- **Provide capacity-building support for the development of effective delivery mechanisms and advocacy voices at District level**
- **Establish practical methodologies for mainstreaming children's issues into broader development initiatives**
- **Initiate research and documentation on issues affecting young children's lives**

At the national policy level
- **Support the coordination of relevant ministries and use of a child rights framework on issues relating to young children**

AT THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEVEL

❖ **Support parents and caregivers through dialogue-based programmes. Strengthen existing parenting programmes and expand coverage**

The enthusiasm of families in all the villages for information and discussion on child care topics was striking. Initially community members were reticent with the researchers, but after several weeks of informal interaction, they became eager for the chance to discuss their children. The researchers deliberately avoided imposing their ideas on child rearing and, perhaps partly because of this, families became keen for researchers not only to listen, but also to share their own knowledge and other perspectives. In all the villages community members recommended strongly that provision be made for them to discuss and learn more about children's health and development from outside organizations.

There is increasing awareness among programme developers that what happens within the home is by far the most significant influence for young children. Family members are the first teachers and home the major learning environment. Well-conceived caregiving programming can

- create an opportunity for parents (both men & women) to articulate, discuss and reflect on their beliefs and practices
- assist families and other caregivers to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in their abilities to support their children's development and ensure their rights;
- develop the capacity of parents (especially mothers) to articulate to local government and development organizations their needs for support for their children
- have an impact on the lives of children below three years old where influences are so critical, as well as for older children;
- enable families to help their children function effectively in rapidly changing societies while retaining a clear cultural identity and sense of values.

NGOs have extensive experience in the successful establishment of such programmes. Their experiences should be drawn on – especially the processes they have followed in introducing the idea to influential community members and leaders, and selecting and training facilitators. Comprehensive parenting/caregiving programmes have not yet been absorbed into government programming and are still dependent on the efforts of NGOs. Although they have expanded significantly since the mid-1980s, they still reach only a tiny fraction – probably less than 1% of Nepal's families

In addition to having limited coverage, parenting programmes tend to follow a fairly set curriculum in which each session has very specific objectives and follows a pre-determined format. The study, however, revealed considerable variation in people's understanding of their children's development and their caregiving practices, as well as in the particular concerns and constraints that families face. In addition we know that in an area as complex and emotionally charged as bringing up children, message driven approaches are unlikely to be effective. We will do well to draw on personal experience and to recall what helps us in raising our own children, as a way of thinking about the kinds of processes that need to be encouraged. There is clearly a need for approaches based on dialogue that can be flexibly adapted to the needs and interests of specific families and communities.

Guidelines for action

- Fieldworkers should spend at least three to four weeks in a village simply getting to understand the situation for young children and their families prior to any dialogue/ information sharing sessions. A programme can then be developed which reponds genuinely to the needs, interests and knowledge levels of the community. This is not really a matter of developing different strategies according to our ideas about different ethnic groups or geographical area. It is about listening to people and having real conversations about their concerns for their children and the ways in which they can best support their development. While we need to take a serious look at the details of our programmes, it is important to keep in mind that the bottom line is always our attitudes – both those of the people designing programmes and those of the front-line facilitators. Genuine respect and empathy is the key – and can't be packaged.

- Design programming *with* rather than *for* caregivers. Existing parenting materials can provide an invaluable source of background information and ideas for field workers, but should be used flexibly rather than as a fixed package, integrating some of the methods developed for this study to facilitate genuine discussion and dialogue with mothers, fathers and other caregivers. To be successful, the approach must:
  1) build parents' and caregivers' confidence in the huge role they already play in supporting their children's development, by recognizing and respecting what they know and do and drawing out this knowledge;
  2) address issues which parents identify as being of concern or interest (e.g health problems, helping their children grow up clever and confident, childcare); issues where there is a clear gap between awareness and practice (e.g. hygiene, support for children's homework, gender issues); issues where there is a lack of knowledge/awareness; and provide information on available support from VDCs, NGOs;
  3) draw on caregivers' own experiences and provide opportunities to share experiences (both positive and negative) and identify solutions to problems;
  4) expand parents' and caregivers' understanding of the role of everyday activities in promoting their children's development ;
  5) work towards enabling parents to organize collectively to influence government and NGO agencies in their plans for children

  Sessions will most often be regular community events, but may sometimes be individual discussions and counselling. This will ensure that support is made available to the most hardpressed families who are indeed the ones least likely to make it to regular sessions.

This type of approach will require more intensive training and support for the frontline workers in the early stages. However, it is clear that the long-term gains for children will greatly outweigh the costs, since with this approach there is a "fit" between the community and programmes which is far more likely to result in positive change. To validate people's skills is not a complicated process. Our most significant potential strength is to be familiar with the context and to recognize and enhance what people are already doing that is positive. After learning with parents/ caregivers about their issues, questions can be raised which may be outside of the knowledge or concerns of the caregivers. Clearly we have to recognize and be willing to address the fact that some practices are at odds with the rights of the child – whether this is due to certain cultural beliefs or to families being under pressure. These areas need to be discussed and debated with families. To do this in a way that is cognizant of the caregivers' own knowledge and concerns is not only the most morally acceptable strategy. It is also likely to be the most successful way of facilitating assimilation of additional information or new ideas to benefit children.

Examples of parent/ caregiver dialogue topics and approaches to discussion

Promoting verbal interaction

In many families, where verbal interaction with children is limited to brief exchanges and directives, discussions around the importance of language skills for success in school and in everyday life can be useful and stimulating. This may emerge directly from parental concerns. Many parents, for instance, are worried about the high drop out rate when children start school, and also about children's shyness with outsiders. Facilitators can respond by introducing the idea that limited language skills impede children's progress in school, and their confidence in dealing with other people. Parents may then be eager to discuss ways in which they can promote children's language development.

The relevance of everyday activities for children's development can be emphasized, the advantage being that families can simply make use of activities that are already part of their routine, such as eating, bathing, sweeping or washing clothes. Using these activities as support for development through language and play, it is possible to provide children with a variety of materials and encourage them to use them in different ways.

This mother is encouraging her son's language, eye-hand coordination and social skills through the simple task of helping her clean rice. Talking with children about what they're doing and taking an interest will develop language as well as the confidence so central to children's development. The key is always communication - both talking and listening and supporting children's efforts.

Respiratory infections

Other topics such as ARI , immunization for children, hygiene and gender disparities -- all found to be issues of concern in the study -- are included in many existing parenting materials. The challenge is reworking our approach so that there is real discussion of the issues, and how to address them. Poor indoor air quality and racking coughs, for instance, are problems in all the villages. Smokeless stove projects have been popular with development agencies at various points over the last twenty years. The trouble was they never caught on with many communities! Discussions in this area need to draw on the research literature to understand what has and has not worked. But we must avoid simple messages about doctors saying children should not sleep in smoky rooms unless we are really exploring the options with people who live in one-room houses, for whom the open fire in the centre of the room is the heart of family life. The question remains finding the best approaches with families to work towards improvements in respiratory infection rates. Real engagement with families is called for where they, rather than facilitators, identify problems with both existing practices and alternatives and seek possible solutions.

TT immunizations for pregnant women

How this is discussed may be critical in encouraging more pregnant women to be immunized. The study clearly indicated that women believe that immunization will result in a larger baby and more difficult childbirth. Women have many fears around childbirth, which the maternal mortality statistics show to be entirely justified. There is a need to reassure mothers that the immunization will make the mother (and baby) safer during birth.

Supporting girls' education

In all the villages there was a strong feeling amongst most parents that girls "ought" to have the chance to go to school. Discussions taking an explicit rights stance therefore may not be helpful. Instead, practical discussions regarding the importance of education for girls and ways the community may be able to address the issues which result in limited opportunities for girls, may be more helpful. It is essential to acknowledge the very real issues the community are likely to bring up and even anticipate these at times:

- the need for someone to make sure the young children (especially the one to four year-olds) are safe
- the many important things that girls learn from caring for their younger siblings which they will need to know as mothers
- the increased workloads faced by the adult members of the family
- the high cost of schooling and its lack of relevance at times

The aim is not to dismiss any of these valid points, but rather to explore with the community how, despite the difficulties they face, they might be able to give their daughters the chance to succeed in other spheres of life as well as nurturing children. The goal is to consider how girls may continue to play an important nurturing role without being deprived of opportunities to play, explore and learn in other settings, including school.

The researchers found it productive to explore with the community the changes that are taking place in their lives and the implications of these changes. Girls and boys alike need to develop a flexible range of skills to deal with a rapidly changing world, so that they can contribute to their families in a number of ways. It is too easy nowadays for people without good literacy and problem-solving skills to be cheated. When men are gone for several months of the year in search of work, it is all the more important for women to have an education and to be accustomed to making decisions about a wide range of matters. This type of discussion holds close to the community's perspectives rather than imposing other views about broader issues. Wider debate will emerge later. Pointing to role models is also useful - women who, as children, were unique in their communities because their parents were determined that they would have opportunities to develop their potential and who now combine parenting and economic roles in exactly the way the community has identified as desirable.

It will usually be necessary to explore the childcare patterns and different options with communities and individual families in the search for solutions. Discussions with the school and parents together are also important. Often girls drop out because homework loads are incompatible with their heavy household responsibilities. How could parents distribute tasks more equitably between boys and girls? How can the school be more supportive? It would be a huge step forward if children did not have to feel ashamed when they did not have time to complete homework.

Tom Kelly

❖ Support families to develop a flexible range of alternative childcare arrangements

The study pointed to a real and articulated need for childcare arrangements for at least some periods of the year, and people from all of the communities, during the dialogue phase, recommended attention to this important issue. The emphasis here must be on flexibility. The key is to assess continually what is most appropriate within any given context - given the rights of the children, the needs of the caregivers and the resources available. The more that is known about existing family and community arrangements, the more interventions can be designed to build on and strengthen these rather than responding with pre-conceived notions on what will work best.

Over the last twenty years NGOs in particular have gained a wealth of experience in Nepal regarding child development programmes, which can be productively drawn on. A whole range of home or community-based child care arrangements have been found effective in providing safe, healthy and stimulating environments for young children.

These programmes can:
● be critical where family and community support systems are stretched to breaking point, whether by poverty, rapid social change, women's increasing workloads or migration;
● provide an expanded range of experience for children and promote skills which will enable them to make good use of the learning opportunities offered in school and elsewhere. Far from being a "pre-school" luxury these programmes are perhaps even more important for children who never have the opportunity to enroll in school;
● free up girls from child care duties, so that they can attend school;
● free up mothers' time and help them develop new skills and confidence through active engagement in the management or operation of a programme;
● increase the confidence of parents to engage with their children's schools.

D Mckenzie

A child care centre: a stimulating environment for young children

During the 1980s most child development centres in rural Nepal were open all day, and played an important childcare role. In the 1990s there was a shift to shorter hours, more for four and five year olds. These programmes can be valuable, and indeed have been reported by grade 1 teachers to play an important role in building children's confidence, expanding their learning opportunities and skills, and developing a school-going habit and expectation, especially for girls. But the hours of these programmes do not take account of the stress faced by women in functioning as both nurturers and providers.

Another problem inherent in the provision offered by these centres is the fact that the children they serve are in many cases those whose help is counted on at home to provide care for younger children. While it is highly desirable for their own development that these four to six-year-old have periods of time where they are not looking after younger ones, the question still remains for some families – who will provide care for the younger children at home? Coverage of some kind is needed for a wider age range of children.

At the same time, centre based care is not ideal for children under three. Where adult supervision is available most of the day and where children can play with family and friends in a rich natural environment, it would be highly undesirable to see these younger children in a more formal setting. One solution developed in Nepal in the mid 80s was the provision of care for younger children on a rotational basis by a group of mothers. These groups have a natural life-span, as they only operate for as long as children are very young. Plenty of difficulties were encountered with this solution, mostly with establishing adequate levels of trust between the women. But there have also been notable successes in cohesive communities where good back-up support is made available. The benefits are as significant for the women (in terms of adopting more leadership roles in their communities) as for the children.

Guidelines for action
● Options need to be explored and plans made *with* communities, with efforts to include all parents and caregivers.
● Video could be used to initiate discussion about the different child care options that have been tried in different villages, talking about advantages and disadvantages and what would make sense in the local context.
● Especially for children under three, options other than centre-based care should be explored.
● Where there are existing programmes for four and five year olds, a number of options can be considered to ensure that younger children are not left without supervision:
  1) operate these programmes at a time of day when other caregivers can be at home to look after younger siblings, or outside of peak season;
  2) keep these centres open for longer hours and make them available for all one-and-a-half to six-year-olds in real need of care during the busiest periods (planting and harvest);
  3) establish home-based programmes for one-and-a-half to three-year-olds run by mothers themselves on a rotational basis.
● Community planning must draw on the lessons learned from both the successes and failures of NGO and government-supported programmes. This knowledge must be drawn out and shared with both communities and planners, with regard to community ownership, financial sustainability, training for facilitators, addressing quality issues, training for management committees, orientations for VDCs, monitoring systems, back-up support requirements and so on.
● In many communities the success of a programme has been viewed as being closely connected to the fact that the facilitator is from the village – thus strengthening community ownership. In contrast, community members in the research villages recommended that facilitators be from outside to avoid problems of discrimination. This emphasizes the importance of dealing with issues of inclusiveness in training both facilitators and management committee.
● A variety of approaches can be drawn on and combined to ensure the financial sustainability of programmes, including the following, most of which were recommended by community members:
  1) accessing locally available government (VDC) funds earmarked for women and children
  2) interest on loans controlled by the child development centres' management committee
  3) fees
  4) fund-raising (e.g. through traditional ways of collecting money by dancing and singing)

D Mckenzie

Children enjoying a game: the facilitator plays an important role in the success of the child care centre

This is particularly urgent, as the levels of support being offered by BPEP for the establishment of the 5,700 *Bal Bikas Kendra* are not likely to result in sustainable centres. Successes in this, as in all areas, need to be documented and disseminated.

❖ **Promote the development of Action Groups for Children**

There was a clear interest on the part of all four villages in being able to move their children's "agenda" forward. Examples of issues identified during dialogue sessions which would be ideal for an action group to address were: health services, childcare, girls' education, *Dalit* children's education, homework facilities and time-saving technologies. Community members stressed their need for support in addressing these issues.

Guidelines for action

- Communities said that they needed information on a whole range of children's issues, government provision, bureaucratic processes and funding possibilities (government and non-government). This highlights the need for local NGOs to be well-informed about child development, child rights, district provision and national policy, and the imperative for INGOS and others to build capacity in these areas.
- Community groups identified the need for confidence and capacity to communicate with formal structures (government or non-government), and develop strategies for advocacy. NGOs or volunteers acting essentially as catalysts need to provide guidance and assistance in forming strong groups and build leadership and communication skills. Issues for action need to be identified by the groups themselves with the NGOs playing a facilitator role.
- Action Groups for Children might vary according to the range of groups and clubs already in a village. In some villages a parents' group established following a parenting/ caregiving programme might serve as the starting point. In others it could be a women's group; in others a youth club, a child club or a group emerging out of an adult literacy class. There are many connections here with aspects of the UNICEF supported Decentralized Planning for the Child Programme, which at present has a nutrition emphasis.[61]
- An additional strand in supporting the effectiveness of such Action Groups for Children would be complementary work supporting women ward representatives to become active advocates for women and children.

D Mckenzie

❖ **Co-ordinate with healthcare providers**

The very poor status of children's health in the village with the worst access to healthcare was striking, and is reason to reassert the high priority of accessible healthcare for families everywhere – no village was without problems in this regard. Because traditional healers are highly respected by local communities and are their first point of call, it is critical that their involvement be an integral part of any health care solutions.

A health worker checking a mother and child's health

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[61] This community-based development programme of the Ministry of Local Development shares many of the goals of these recommendations. DPCP works with communities and local bodies (DDCs, VDCs) to build their capacity to improve the situation of women and children with a focus on children below three years. Attention to nutrition is integrated with other interventions and DPCP aims for the convergence of sectoral programmes at village level. Community mobilisers bring the situation of children into the centre of discussions of local community organisations and help the community to analyse the available resources, plan actions, and seek additional support from outside if necessary. The aim is to establish an ongoing cycle of assessment, analysis and action.

Guidelines for action

- Especially where health is poor, child development strategies must include attention to health care, nutrition and sanitation as key components. Parenting/caregiving programmes, which already have a strong orientation towards health and nutrition are critical.
- On-going training and support for local health volunteers, especially the Female Community Health Volunteers, as well as training opportunities for traditional healers and traditional birth attendants, can be integrated within a broad ECD response.
- Where child development centres operate, these should have links to and support from health facilities and local healers. In villages where there are no health facilities a child development centre could provide a base for regular outreach visits from the health centre and even provide some very basic health care itself. Child development centre facilitators receive First Aid and very basic health training; given the unlikeliness of the numbers of FCHVs (Female Community Health Volunteers) being expanded it may be worth providing continuing health training to child development centre facilitators.

❖ **Support the establishment of village-recordkeeping and child indicators**

The absence of easily available records in all four villages is cause for concern. Some sort of community tracking system is essential for monitoring the well-being of children, identifying trends and responding to them adequately. The establishment of child indicators and a system of record-keeping over which the community feels ownership is an ambitious goal where record-keeping is an unfamiliar concept. But the establishment of village based records would provide a real sense of achievement, especially as progress is made towards targets the com-

Participatory methods can help to identify indicators based on community concerns,

munity has decided on: for instance "all six year olds will enroll in school this year" or " twice as many pregnant mothers will have have been immunized against tetanus as last year".

Guidelines for action

- Any effort to establish local record keeping would require first looking into existing initiatives to see how these might be built upon or supplemented.
- Indicators should be based on communities' concerns, and the methods developed during this study can provide the approach for this effort.
- VDC expenditures on children should be recorded and monitored, so that the community can hold the VDC accountable, in line with the requirement that they include programmes yielding direct benefits to children and maintain records. The group monitoring progress should liaise with their ward representative to ensure progress is reported at the VDC level This should then feed into both VDC and DDC planning. NGOs will have a role in supporting the establishment of any such system.
- It is recommended that a community tracking system and locally developed child indicators be piloted initially in the four study villages.

❖ **Identify examples of "positive deviance" in child rearing, and draw out lessons for use within communities**

There are many common practices in all these communities that support children's development; these should be identified and should continue to be encouraged. In addition in all these communities, there are examples of families or individual caregivers who may stand out in various ways in their success in providing their children with the physical and emotional support they need, and with a high level of intellectual and social stimulation. We can learn a good deal from their strategies. The very fact that these strategies have been developed within the local context makes them especially valuable, not only in terms of their accessibility to others within the community, but in terms of their potential to strengthen the confidence of local people in their capacity to find their own solutions. This needs to be done in sensitive ways, in order to avoid stimulating or exacerbating community tensions or conflicts.

Guidelines for action
- Encourage teachers, health workers, ECD facilitators and parents to become aware of children who are doing unexpectedly well, whether in terms of nutritional status, general health, social maturity, intellectual curiosity or overall development, given their families' circumstances, and attempt to identify the relevant supportive factors.
- Make such examples of "positive deviance" a topic for discussion and an opportunity for learning in parenting education groups, and in the activities of health care workers, teachers, and others involved in children's well-being.

❖ **Expand opportunities for older children**

Researchers were struck in every village by the sense of a narrowing of children's lives and opportunities as they grew older. Activities related to family subsistence which provide opportunities for play and learning for young children become endlessly repetitive, physically more and more demanding and fill an increasingly large percentage of the day as each year passes. This was especially true for girls, who run the risk of becoming quite isolated as they approach adolescence. The study also found that many girls and most *Dalit* children had low levels of self confidence and self esteem. Although the focus of the study and recommendations is on younger children, it makes little sense to support their development without ensuring that the resulting gains can be sustained and built on throughout childhood and adolescence. Community mobilization for girls' education is of singular importance. It is vital in its own right. It is also, within the context of recommendations around child development, critical in reducing young child mortality in the next generation.

Using participatory methods to identify key issues of concern with children
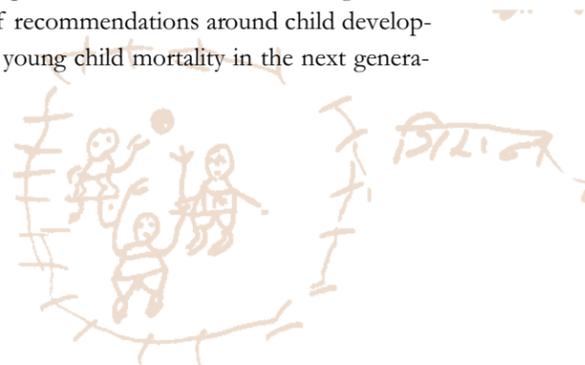
Guidelines for action
- Strategies for increasing school enrollment and attendance, especially for girls, should be introduced in all possible fora – for instance, parenting sessions, adult literacy classes, VDC agenda, school management committee meetings, child clubs, youth clubs, women's groups. Community members recommended, too, that teachers and other parents visit families of non-school-going children to persuade them of the importance of education.
- Children's capacity to complete homework is compromised by the lack of well lit space in the evenings. In all villages there is need for a space (an existing classroom or community room) that could be used for homework, even a few times a week.
- The introduction of Child-to-Child programmes, which recognize children as active change agents, could be an effective practical response to the limited opportunities for older children. Child-to-Child is a practical approach supporting children to address specific child rights issues (health, education, protection) in their communities. The approach focuses on the reality of children taking responsibility for other children, but also emphasizes new roles, better understanding and stresses that activities should be interesting and fun. Child-to-Child should focus particularly on building the self esteem of children of lower castes, minority ethnic groups and girls.

Providing opportunities for older girls to express their opinions

- In Nepal, as in most countries, the challenge (similar to that with parenting/caregiving programmes) is to continue moving away from a rather message driven approach and to ensure children's genuine participation and decision-making in identifying issues, finding out and understanding more about them, planning and taking action and seeing the results of that action.
- Nepal's child clubs provide another good alternative. The children in the clubs have received some training and support but have been encouraged to develop the clubs themselves without much direction in how they should be run or constraint on what should be their focus. Some clubs focus on sports and leisure activities, some on general community development activities, some have managed to prevent early marriages, and others have lobbied successfully to get out-of-school children in school. They have been remarkably successful at maintaining a reasonably even gender balance and an ethnic/caste mix in mixed villages. The recent child club study[62] made recommendations for strengthening the democratic functioning of clubs, and was decisive in its conclusions about the importance of the clubs' role in expanding children's opportunities.

❖ **Continue addressing the constraints women face**

The study confirmed the impact of women's low status on child rearing and child rights. Women's ability to nurture and stimulate their children is limited by social conditions that deprive them of access to resources, services, information and control over decisions around family expenditures. Women's status, and the lack of alternative role models, also affects girls' socialisation and their sense of self esteem. Nationally, high maternal mortality figures, the low

[62]   Rajbhandary, J, R Hart, C Khatiwada (1999) *'The Children's Clubs of Nepal: A Democratic Experiment',* Nepal: Save the Children Norway, Save the Children US

life expectancy of women, differential treatment of boys and girls, women's lack of control over decisions and their own bodies point to the need for a focus on women's rights in their own right, as well as to ensure their children's rights

Development programmes have too often focused somewhat exclusively either on enhancing women's economic and social status or on addressing young children's rights. Yet for most women the juggling act of providing for their families and nurturing their children is an urgent everyday reality. Mutually reinforcing programmes which effectively address both women and children's interfacing needs are vital for effective development.

Discussion groups give women an opportunity to come together

Guidelines for action

- Child care programmes can provide an opportunity for women to build leadership and management skills, with appropriate training and support from NGOs. Managing the funds of the programme and liaising with external officials, for instance, can build confidence and capacity. Child care programmes should not only work with women as this reinforces their reproductive roles. Men should also be involved.
- Child development programmes should actively seek to work with and learn from women's groups, such as mothers' groups (*aama samuha*), and credit and savings groups. These groups have been effective in many parts of Nepal in providing a forum for women to come together, and become active on issues such as family planning, prenatal care and anti alcohol campaigns.
- The compulsory provision that there be at least one woman representative for each ward and each VDC offers a great opportunity. These women representatives need to be supported, and their capacity built to act as effective representatives and advocates for women and children.
- It is essential to work with men as well as women, to engage in discussion about gender roles and responsibilities as well as the low status of women. Changes in women's role in household decision-making and control of resources as well as men's role in child care require the involvement of both men and women. Discussions should point to the role that men and boys already play in child care – to emphasise that they can and do take part in child care.

❖ Help communities to assess new livelihood or community development possibilities for the impact they might have on children

As discussed earlier, there is no guarantee that improved economic opportunities for a community will necessarily improve things for children. The danger is that, in spite of contributing to long term family gains, such possibilities may in some cases cause the situation for children to deteriorate over the short term. If women put all their time and resources into establishing a money-making venture, for instance, their capacity to care for children and provide food for them in the present may be compromised.

The immediate sacrifices necessary to ensure deferred benefits may be of marginal significance to adults, but for children, these sacrifices may be more critical. New evidence emerges all the time indicating that the younger the child, the more critical deprivation (or positive experiences) can be. Early childhood is a window of opportunity ....if we miss it many of the losses can never be made good. For example, the long-term consequences of missing a meal fairly regularly are far more serious for a child than they would be for an adult; and while an over-worked adult may benefit from time to lie down and do nothing, a child left alone in a hammock for hours on end may be missing out on important opportunities for mental and social growth. This does not mean that new possibilities should be avoided. Rather, it means that communities must be aware that measures entailing deprivation for children may result in significant loss over the long term. Steps must be taken to protect children from such repercussions. These may often be very simple - just things that need to get brought out in discussion. For example if families are participating in a homestead production enterprise the most immediate benefit for the children should be more nutritious meals – and there should be discussion of children's nutritional status, not just profit from selling vegetables in the market.

While it may be difficult for individual overstressed families to weigh these kinds of considerations, and forego sorely needed income, it is well within the scope of both Action Groups for Children and local leaders and decision-making groups to keep such considerations in mind.

Guidelines for action

- Encourage households and community decision-making groups to consider children in the planning stages of a project rather than after the fact.
- Support members of any Action Group for Children to draw out and discuss the implications of new projects for children, to serve as advocates on their behalf, and to present approaches that take children's needs into account.

AT THE DISTRICT AND AGENCY LEVEL

❖ Develop a Participatory Dialogue course for child development, education and child rights personnel

There were considerable challenges in preparing the research team for the dialogue phase with the villagers, which point to the need for thoughtfully designed training. Discussion and dialogue are not notable characteristics of Nepal's education system even at higher levels. This fact, combined with the realities of a highly stratified society, means that the concept of real dialogue with an uneducated villager does not come easily. The pattern of delivering knowledge is very deeply established in society. But this is not compatible with the goal of supporting people to take more control of their own lives. Training personnel to become comfortable and skilled with a more participatory approach could pay valuable dividends on both sides. Through the pooling of ideas and genuine dialogue we may achieve a better balance and create new understanding and solutions. Only in this way will it be possible to design interventions that are appropriate for different cultures and contexts.

Guidelines for action

- Develop a participatory dialogue course suitable for personnel working in a range of related child- focused areas. This course would both deepen understanding of child development and child rights issues and make participants more comfortable with debating and questioning the issues. The course should be very practical, involving extensive observation, analysis and discussion around a whole range of both real situations and simulations - all the types of issues that emerged during the child rearing study and which facilitators need to be able to help families reflect on. It would draw from and link closely with the Child Club course and be based on the experience of this child rearing research as set out in the toolkit. The course could be taken in two blocks of several weeks and could incorporate supervised field work entailing practice and assessment of a range of dialogue approaches between the first and second phases.

❖ Provide capacity-building support for the development of effective delivery mechanisms and advocacy voices at district level

In order to take forward the recommendations in this report, there is a need for effective mechanisms at all levels to act as catalysts to promote children's rights. To date there has been a heavy dependence on expertise from central levels. But district level capabilities must be also developed, and existing expertise at this level must be called on.

Government, child agencies and NGOs all have vital roles in promoting children's rights at the district level. The Children's Act has established the administrative framework (Central and District Child Welfare Boards see page 11). A major problem has been the lack of full time qualified staff to take forward the task of addressing children's rights and ensuring co-ordination of provision of child-specific services. If provided with appropriate support the DCWC should be able to function as an effective policy adviser on children's issues to the District Development Committee. Child agencies can support DCWC efforts, and both advocate for children's rights and build the capacity of other groups to do so.

The development of professional expertise, able to spearhead activity at district level for early childhood development, is also critical. The point persons for ECD appointed by the Ministry of Education at district level do not have an ECD background as yet, but there are promising non-government initiatives to build on. Seto Gurans National Child Development Services has been training teams of three individuals per district with the aim of establishing district level personnel to provide support to community organizations, local NGOs, INGOs and government departments. The establishment of such expertise at district level – able to support the development of ECD networks and ensure effective training and back-up support is indispensible.

Guidelines for action

- Agencies should work to *strengthen the capacity of the existing administrative structures* and should collaborate with DCWCs to build local political commitment to the whole array of child rights issues including mobilization for ECD
- Drawing on the success of Women Development Officers (see Box on page xx), the new post (gazetted officer) of Children Development Officer should be created to implement the intentions of the DCWCs. This individual would act as full time advocate for child rights and child development at the district level, and would have specific reponsibility for linking with the VDCs, line agencies and NGOs, identifying opportunities, and mobilizing different groups (including children).[63] It is strongly recommended that Children Development Officers follow the same path as Women Development Officers – that is, start off with a particular focus in one or two VDCs while remaining an active member of the District Development Committee and DCWC.
- Agency contributions could include on-the-ground support, support to posts on a phased basis and support to orientation and follow-up training, including:
  - situation analysis of children in the district which would focus on feeding analysis into planning and budgeting;
  - expertise in planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, and an understanding of policy issues to support a child focus in district and VDC and line agencies' planning and programming.
- Mechanisms must be developed to enable local government structures to draw on and support exisiting expertise (as envisioned in government policy) in developing locally viable solutions.

- Work with NGOs is important, as well as with government agencies and officials. Child agencies can increase the capacity of local NGOs in a number of ways
  - building their own advocacy skills and capacities,
  - providing advocacy training to local NGOs, so that they can influence the VDC, district and central level for children's rights and the provision of child-specific services, as well as support communities to advocate on their own behalf.
  - providing training for local NGOs in child-focused planning and monitoring at different levels.
- Assist the ECD NGOs newly formed by Seto Gurans graduates to establish themselves as a key recognized resource for ECD at district level - providing support to NGO projects, BPEPII etc.These NGOs established should be utilized to provide technical assistance for a range of NGO initiatives (parenting/caregiving programmes, child development centres, home-based programmes, VDC and district orientations and advocacy, research) and to the ECD component of BPEP within their districts. In addition to drawing on the services of these newly established ECD NGOs, agencies should also provide support for building their capacity – establishing their offices and a resource centre, building management skills, ensuring continuing development of their technical expertise and so on.

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63 This seems to have been very much part of the thinking in the Child Act - a district level post which would be a catalyst for child rights. The Assistant Chief District Officer's role was always stated as being temporary.
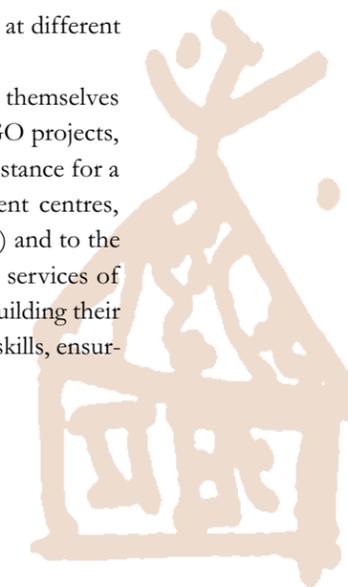
❖ Establish practical methods for mainstreaming children's issues in development

Broad community development and poverty reduction efforts, as already discussed, do not always consider the impact for children in their planning. The development of models which address broad development issues and include elements which specifically concern themselves with children is an important role for children's organizations. It will enable the inclusion of a child focus within mainstream development programmes - a very practical way of getting children on the development agenda.

Guidelines for action
- Provide staff in governmental and non-governmental institutional settings with efficient training in children's rights and development in order to make child-focused development decisions a more routine matter – for example, while homestead production projects might usually concern themselves just with production volumes and income generated, a child-focused perspective would also include a concern with the costs to beneficiaries, household consumption and the impacts for children's nutritional status.
- Children's organizations increasingly need to concern themselves with the development of child sensitive indicators, to enhance the capacity of government, donors and NGOs to integrate children's issues routinely into development planning and practice.

❖ Initiate research and documentation

Research and documentation,underpinned by ongoing programme learning, is an important responsibility for child-focused agencies.
The aim is to:
- improve programme quality and understand more about programme impact
- contribute to a broader understanding of development processes in Nepal from a child rights perspective
- advocate for changes in policy or practice based on an understanding of the realities in communities and programmes.

Guidelines for action
- *Policy mapping*: An important step in developing an advocacy strategy is to map the policy environment, provisions and insititutions relating to ECD and child rights at international, national, district and local levels. Mapping of all organisations working on child rights and ECD also needs to be done, with a view to developing strategic alliances. Government budget allocations to children and the mechanisms which need to be influenced to ensure that funds are allocated to children, also need to be researched.
- *Longitudinal study*: Now that we have drawn a picture of the child rearing patterns and expectations for children in four villages, and established strong relationships there, we have the ideal situation to establish a longitudinal study and track selected children from these villages over a multi-year period. SC/US has recently made a commitment to conduct such a longitudinal study in order to better document the impact of ECD programmes. The study should be a 2-level study:
  i) basic information collected and analysed for large numbers of children on a regular

(probably annual) basis (e.g. health status, nutrition status, ECD program enrollment, school enrollment, drop-out and repeat rates, participation in different programs)
  ii) small-scale qualitative, participatory research with selected groups and individuals tracked over time to probe impact in more depth – in terms of both children's overall development and adults commitment to providing supportive environments for children.
- *Documentation of successes and failures:* The documentation and dissemination of lessons learned from experiences to date with different ECD approaches – including both parenting/ caregiving and centre-based programmes – is vital as Nepal prepares to significantly increase its investment in programmes for young children (see community childcare arrangements section on page 163-164). This documentation should include video of different ECD approaches in Nepal and a discussion of their advantages and challenges from various perspectives including communities'.
- *Urban child rearing study:* The research looked at a few case studies of households that had moved to less rural areas because it was assumed that such a move would have important implications for child rearing. It is recommended that a comprehensive comparative study be done to explore the experience of child rearing in urban households and to gain a more indepth understanding of some of the factors which effect children's rights in an urban environment.

AT THE NATIONAL POLICY LEVEL

❖ Support the co-ordination of relevant ministries and use of a child rights framework on issues relating to young children

As a country seeks to identify ways to expand ECD programmes it is entering into a process of i) assessing what is already done to support families and young children; and ii) looking at ways to strengthen and supplement those resources. It is important to note that in the policy arena, ECD and child rights are currently viewed as being relatively separate areas of concern. Responsibility for promoting child rights, which are seen primarily as involving "child protection", rests with the Central Child Welfare Committee in the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare; responsibility for ECD is in the Ministry of Education. Unless these efforts are linked, ECD is likely to be limited to keeping under-age children out of the primary system, rather than focusing on the whole child and the full range of rights.

As discussed above (page 153-154) , a child rights framework offers an integrated way of conceptualising responses to children and recognising that action must be taken at different levels. Such a framework is an important tool to guide national policy on issues relating to young children.

Guidelines for action
- Encourage co-ordination between relevant ministries and committees to ensure integrated programming for children and to eliminate costly overlaps in provision. Such co-ordination can be supported through the creation of liaison persons or bodies.

- Find ways to involve also those ministries not so often associated with children. The membership of the Central Child Welfare Committee, for instance, should include officials from the different ministries, who would have responsibility for mainstreaming child rights and child development in their ministries.
- Establish a secretariat to the Central Child Welfare Committee with full time staff. Their role would be to act as a policy advisory and advocacy body at the central level, and to co-ordinate, advise and monitor the work of the DCWCs.
- Agencies should work to build the capacity of this secretariat – in co-ordination work; in policy analysis and formulation relating to child rights and child development; in influencing of ministries to mainstream child rights; in planning and monitoring.
- Further develop and use the child rights framework (see page 153-154 and Appendix III) for the development of ECD policy, planning and the establishment of monitoring frameworks. Ensure, as indicated in the framework, that responses are concerned not only with the whole child (rather than a single sector) but also with action at different levels (child, family, community, district, national).

These recommendations are by no means comprehensive, even within this child rights framework. Many avenues can be taken in supporting children's rights. The emphasis here has been on early childhood programming, very broadly defined, and on the processes and structures that affect it in Nepal. As we have stressed, this is an "entry point" – one potentially effective approach that has proven results for young children, that has the capacity to build on and develop the knowledge and skills within communities, and that draws on the desire of parents to do their utmost for their children.

D Mckenzie

Complementary ECCD Programming Strategies

PROGRAM APPROACH	BENEFICIARIES	OBJECTIVES	MODELS
1. Deliver a Service	The child 0-8	survival health/nutrition comprehensive development socialization rehabilitation child care school 'readiness'	Maternal/child health home day care center-based program 'add-on' centers preschools (formal; non-formal) comprehensive child development program religious schools
2. Educate Caregivers	parents/family members caregivers teachers/educators siblings elders	create awareness increase knowledge change attitudes improve/change practices enhance skills	home visiting parent education courses caregiver/teacher training Child-to-Child family life education
3. Promote Community Development	community members leaders/elders community health workers community organizers	create awareness mobilize for action change conditions take on ownership of progran	social marketing social mobilization technical mobilization literacy programs school curriculum media
4. Strengthen National Resources and Capability	program personnel supervisors management staff professionals paraprofessionals researchers	increase knowledge enhance skills change behaviors strengthen and sustain organizations enhance local capability increase local/national resources develop local materials	organizational development training pre-and in-service training experimental/ demo projects collaborative cross-national research projects action research
5. Strengthen Demand and Awareness	policy makers general public professionals media	create awareness build political will increase demand change attitudes create an enabling environement	social marketing multi-media dissemination of knowledge advocacy
6. Develop National Child and Family Policies	policy makers families with young children society--over tome	create awareness assess current policy for families young children identify gaps create supportive policy	relate national to international efforts (EFA, CRC) participatory policy development
7. Develop Supportive Legal & Regulatory Frameworks	policy makers legislators families with young children society--over time	increase awareness of rights and resources create supportive workplace assure quality child care implement protective environmental standards institute maternal/paternal leave	create alliances (woman's groups, community groups, etc) innovative public/private collaboration tax incentives for private support of ECCD programs
8. Strengthen International Collaboration	donor agencies bilateral agencies foundations international NGOs	share experience distill knowledge maximize resources increase awareness increase resources maximize impact and effectiveness	Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development International Vitamin A Consultative Group Development for Africa Education (DAE) Save the children Alliance

The Consultative
Group on ECCD

Population Figures of Selected Households From the Four Villages

Village	Selected HHs	Adult			Children					Total Population
		Male	Female	Total	U6		6-16 years		Total	
					Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls		
Biskundanada	32	115	105	220	28	23	45	29	125	345
Koldanda	75	252 (M+F)		252	43	41	101	92	277	529
Jahbahi	70	155	148	303	51	60	115	74	300	603
Dekhetbhully	25+(12)	90 (M+F)		90	29	17	55	55	156	246
Total	202+(12)	-	-	865	151	141	316	250	858	1723

Assessing the Supportiveness of the environment for young Children
How are adults meeting their obligations to children?
A child rights framework

National
Key Q.
Is the government demonstrating support for programs ensuring young children's rights through policy and budget decisions?

- policy
- level of support

District
Key Q
Is there adequate support (both government and NGO) at district level?.

Community
Key Q
Is the community and its local institutions supportive of children's overall development?.

% of gov. expenditure allocated to:
- MCH
- education
- ECD

Family
Key Q.
Are families providing a supportive home environment for their children's overall development?

Health Centers
- MCH programs
- immunization rates
- CDD/ARI out reach

- enrollments in :
- ECD programs for 3-5 year old
- parenting/ caregiving programs

INTERACTIONS

POLITICAL WILL

BUDGET ALLOCATIONS, EXPENDITURE

Child
Key Q.
Is the child developing well?
(healthy, well nourished, active, sense of self-worth, gets on well with others, expresses self, learns enthusiastically)

Child Status
- psycho-social
- health/nutrition

ECD Centers
Do centers foster children's overall (physical, social, emotional, cognitive) development?
e.g.
developmentally approp.child-centered

Do interactions support children's overall development? (vast range of poss. indicators)
e.g.
- exclusive breast-feeding for 1st 4 months

Are there adequate training and support systems? (government & NGO)
- regular training
- on-going back-up support to ECD personnel.

e.g.s of indicators
- weight for age
- incidence of illness
- developmental status
- language
- cognitive
- social
- motor
- school enrolment & retention

expenditure per young child as % of family income

- expenditure on ECD (including MCH, parenting & center-based programs)
- inclusion of children's issues in community/ local gov. meetings

- ECD posts
- bodies with specific child rights responsibilities
- holistic approaches

- opportunities for play, interactions with adults & children, exploration of a variety of materials

●Supportive, nurturing environment
- secure atmosphere in which children's efforts are appreciated & encouraged.
- no physical punishment, humiliation etc.
- health care

- no gender disparities in feeding children
- equal importance given to girls & boys health, play & education

Do family conditions support an enabling environment for children?
- food security
- water/sanitation
- family structure &decision-making
- land holding

- decisions indicating concern for children's "best interests".

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

●inclusive (gender, ethnicity, caste, religion,disability)

●relevant
- strong connections with school & homes
● teacher/child ratios

Schools
- transition programs/ special attention to children entering grade 1

ECCD centers
- adequate space to play
- light
- airy
- clean
- learning materials

Health Center
- adequate facilities equipment, medicines

- IMR/CMR
- nutrition
- adult literacy rate (disaggregated male/female)
- primary school enrolment (disaggregated male/female)
- GNP

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Acronyms

ARI	Acute Respiratory Infection
BPEP	Basic and Primary Education Project
BPEPII	Basic and Primary Education Project Second Phase
CBCDC	Community Based Child Development Centre
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CDO	Chief District Officer
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERID	Centre for Education, Research, Innovation and Development, Tribhuvan University
CRC	The Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCWC	District Child Welfare Committee
DDC	District Development Committee
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FCHV	Female Community Health Volunteer
GTZ	*Deutsche Gesellschast Fur Technische Zusammenardeit* [German Technical Cooperation]
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice
HDR	Human Development Rank
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LISP	Local Initiatives Support Programme
MOE	Ministry of Education
NER	Net Enrollment Rate
NFE	Non Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNSWA	Nepal National Social Welfare Association
NPC	National Planning Commission
PLA	Participatory Learning Approaches
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RSDC	Rural Self Reliance Development Centre
SC/US HFO	Save the Children United States Himalayan Field Office
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
TT	Tetanus Toxide
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee

Glossary

aama samuha: mothers' group

Anhatari: Tharu festival celebrated by women and girls

aran: blacksmith's workshop

asal manchhe: good people

badghar: a traditional leader who provides guardianship in the community

Bal Bikas Kendra: Child Development Centre

Bal Bikas Samaj Sudar Kendra: Child Development Society Improvement Centre(name of a Community Based Organisation)

Basanta Panchami: day of worship for Saraswoti, the goddess of learning

bari: sloping areas of agricultural land close house

Bhailo: a winter festival where people eat, drink and dance over a week to cope with the cold winter and welcome the new year

Bhanjyang Chautari: a radio programme (*chautari* is a place to rest or meet under the shade of a tree and *Bhyanjyang* is the meeting point between two peaks)

bhat: rice

Bishwokarma: blacksmith caste, designated a "lower or untouchable caste" in the Hindu caste hierarchy

Bisne: forgotten

boksi/ boksa: female/ male witch

Brahmin: Priestly caste - designated as the "highest caste" in the Hindu caste hierarchy

brinjal: aubergine or eggplant

chari: "Jacks" (a game)

Chettri: Administrator or warrior caste - designated as a "high caste" in the Hindu caste hierarchy

chewar: first haircutting ceremony for boys

chichinda: type of gourd

dahi: yogurt

dhal: lentils

Dashain: important Hindu festival celebrated in September or October to the goddess Durga

dhakia: basket

dhami: spiritual healer

dhigri: dumplings made of rice flour

disa: faeces

dum: untouchable (the name of a children's game, like "It" or "Tag")

Gaura: an agricultural festival where people make a god made out of rice plants, pray for a good harvest and enjoy a week's singing, dancing and drinking.

gatta: "Jacks" (a game)

ghee: clarified butter

ghongi: snail

ghughuria: three-wheeled wooden pushcart to help children learn to walk, made by Tharu people

guruwa: traditional healer

Holi: festival to celebrate the arrival of Spring in March, celebrated by throwing coloured powder and water

jaard: beer made from rice or other grain

jamun: an edible, sweet black berry from a tree

jatra: fair or festival

jhankri: spiritual healer

juano: a herb used in oil massage

kamaiya: originally referred to any male working for cash or kind, now more commonly means bonded or indentured labourer

kandru: a type of vegetable

kanika: broken rice

karma: a person's fate

khet: flat agricultural land

Krishna: Hindu god

kumuw: type of vegetable

lahure: originally a term used for those going to join the army, but now more generally for migrants going to work abroad

lama: Buddhist traditional healer

lati: derogatory term used for people who are deaf and dumb

Lukimari: "hide and seek" (a children's game)

maard: A kind of fermented soup made from mixed food grains,beans and vegetables made by Tharu

Magar: an ethnic group of Tibeto-Burman origin

maiti: mother's family home

mama ghar: mother's brother's house

marda: brave terms use to describe manhood

mela: market fair

moje: chronic diarrhoea that infants suffer from

namaste: greeting, which shows respect

Natuli: a monthly Magar ritual, where virgin boys go and offer milk to the god of the forest.

neem: a tree known for it's medicinal properties

padne: to read – used in the context of formal school learning

pahadi: person who is from the mountainous or hilly region

pewa: traditional gift of a goat or a hen to a child, especially girls, which becomes their private property

pisab: urine

prasad: offering to the gods

puja: worship, pay homage to the gods

Putra Badai: ceremony performed for first sons

raksi: locally-made alcohol,

rawra: traditional Magar community leader

Risuwi: angry

samajmaa milne: to get along with others in the community

sarbottam pitho or *lito:* a nutritious mixture of grains and beans, including rice, maize and soya beans, made into a paste for babies

Shivaratri: ceremony performed for the birth of sons

Sishu Kakshas: school-based child classes

sudeni: traditional birth attendant

sukumbasi: landless people

supo: a flat, circular bamboo tray used for winnowing

syaghu: local umbrella woven out of bamboo

Teej: festival of women, usually celebrated in September, where women fast and pray for their husbands

terai: plains land in the south of Nepal along the border with India

thar: a solidarity group of neighbours for the exchange of labour and the distribution of some resources.

thari: selected leader of the *thar*

Tharu: an ethnic group indigenous to the *terai*

thulo manche: important (big) people

Tihar: festival celebrated in October or November, which includes a festival of lights to the goddess Laxmi and worship of brothers by sisters