

Travel Report and HEAR Nepal Project Update

by Sten Linnander

Crisis Management and Success

These are the two concepts that best describe my trip to Bajhang at the end of October, 2021. Crisis Management because of the number of unexpected blockages, problems, and crises and success because, in the end, it all came out well:

– the Girls’ and Women’s Project has now finally started and is running smoothly. We’re receiving the first bi-weekly reports from Narayan Joshi, the HEAR Nepal District Coordinator and they are all very positive;

- 7 of the 10 “PAUL“ filter stations have now been installed and are up and running and the remaining three will be installed before the end of the year;

- and a new idea for a second water project is taking shape and the planning process has begun.

Getting there

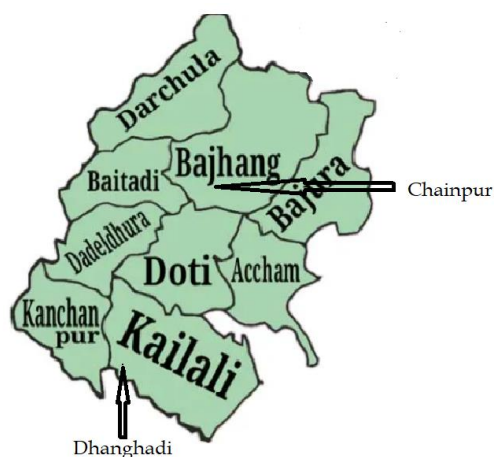
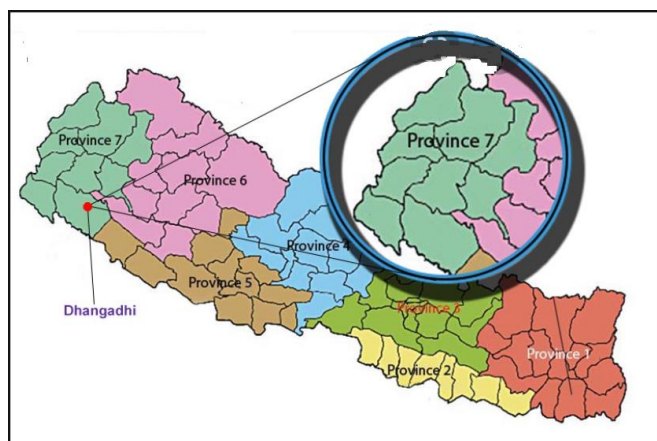
But let me back up. As soon as the Covid numbers in Nepal had decreased enough for the Nepal Government to declare that tourists could come back without having to do 2 weeks of quarantine, I ordered my ticket, arriving in Kathmandu on Oct. 20th.

After my arrival in Kathmandu, but before setting off as planned to Bajhang on Oct. 24th, we got the news that there had been great flooding and several large landslides in Far Western Nepal, resulting in the death of about 150 people, among them 35 in Bajhang.



A landslide in Bajhang that killed 23 people

The road from Dhanghadi in the South to Chainpur in Bajhang was cut off and it took about 3 weeks for it to reopen. Luckily, a small airport in Bajhang had opened a year and a half ago, saving us from having to drive for 10 hours in a Jeep, which this time would not even have been possible.



In any case, we were undeterred and flew to Dhangadhi: Madhav Joshi, the head of HEAR Nepal, Prof. Narbada Thapa, who was with us to train the nurses and male health staff, and I flew together. Krishna Chand, Senior Officer of the National Health Education Information and Communication Center (NHEICC), joined us in Dhangadhi to assist in the trainings.

In Dhangadhi, the headquarters or capital of Province 7 in which Bajhang is located, we met with the Minister and the State Minister for Social Development of Province 7 to gain their support for our Girls' and Women's Project.



Left to right: Madhav Joshi, head of HEAR Nepal, Krishna Chand, Mona Kumari Saud, State Minister for Social Development, I and Lal Bahadur Khadka, Minister for Social Development in Province 7.

They were all highly positive toward our Girls' and Women's project and asked us to come back around April/May; then we could tell them more about how the project is working. They liked the idea of building a factory for Baala pads in Nepal and they could imagine supporting such an effort financially.

On we flew the next day in a small Czech propeller machine with less than 20 seats, flying low between the mountains and around the clouds, landing on a small airstrip in Chainpur.



Coming in for landing



Confusing instructions

The Girls' and Women's project

Once in Chainpur, some self-inflicted bad news awaited us. We were intending to interview prospective employees and hire 2 nurses, 2 male health professionals and 2 organizers, based on vacancy advertisements that had attracted 29 positive answers. The problem was that the advertisement had been posted 6 months earlier, and now only 5 of the 29 remained interested. We quickly interviewed the 5 and found 1 or 2 additional possible candidates. However, at the end only 4 of the candidates were chosen to take part in the Training of Trainers (ToT).

We spent 2 days during which Narbada Thapa, supported by Krishna Chand, taught the health staff how best to teach the contents of the two brochures: *Kishoree* for the girls and *Kishor* for the boys. This focused on avoiding frontal lecture-type teaching in favor of involving the students actively through small group discussions, role play, and other more modern teaching methods. On the third day we went to one of the schools to let the prospective teachers do a dry run that we could monitor. The result was that one excellent nurse and one excellent male teacher remained, both of whom we hired for a 1-month test period before hiring them permanently.

During the days that followed, our staff taught their first classes in nearby schools, distributing the brochures and pads. They also brought together the mothers of the menstruating girls and gave them Baala pads and taught them basic facts about the menstrual cycle and how to use the pads.



Schoolgirls in Bajhang having received menstrual pads

There were some complications. We were especially happy with the one nurse whom we had trained and who did an excellent job teaching. But after some 4 days of teaching, the nurse suddenly disappeared. She did not answer her phone and we could not get any information from people in her home. It was said that she had fallen and was hurt and was on her way to Dhanghadi to get treated. However, this turned out not to be true. Instead, our staff suspected that she had left us for a job that would pay more. I later heard from Narbada Thapa that this is common practice in Kathmandu and represents a serious problem for hospitals and health centers. As a good Swede, I asked Madhav if we could not take her to court for not fulfilling her employment contract, which she had signed, but he told me that if we did, her whole village would become our enemy and that could not be overcome so easily.



The boys were also taught.

In the meantime, we have now found and hired an excellent and reliable nurse who is teaching the girls, and all in all the project is now off to a good start. We have educated the schoolgirls and -boys in many schools already, based on the brochures, and have been providing the girls and their mothers with pads. We were happy to note that a recent radio program in Bajhang greatly praised our project, quoting the mothers as being very happy to have received the washable pads and asking if we could extend our project to cover all women in Bajhang. We, however, do not have the financial resources to do this.



Mothers having received Baala pads

Water project 1: PAUL water filter stations

I have previously mentioned that we have transported 10 so-called PAUL water filter stations to Bajhang to be installed in villages and facilities along the main river in Bajhang, the Seti River that have no other source of drinking water than the contaminated river water. The installation of the filter stations was delayed because of Covid, but now 7 of the 10 have been installed and the rest will be installed in a few weeks. There were some initial problems and we realized that we had to monitor the “Water Committees” that we had established to take responsibility for the filter stations and their maintenance much more closely. This is now occurring at regular intervals.

Water Project 2 (at the planning stage): Clean drinking water in the villages

We realized that even in villages where there is good drinking water, for example from a spring, other problems are lurking. Often, springs are not enclosed, leading to cows and humans urinating or defecating near the springs, potentially contaminating them. Also, when the village inhabitants collect water, they often use dirty containers and at home they store the water in an unhygienic way, retrieving water from dirty cups.



Since we knew that 80% of all communicable diseases are spread through water, we decided to start a project to remedy these problems. We will first do a survey of all, approximately 400, villages in Bajhang District, testing the water they use, at the source, in the large reservoirs they usually have and in a random sample of homes. Once the results from this survey have been analyzed, in a second step, two water specialists will be going to each village where problems were found to inform them of the problems, suggest solutions and educate the inhabitants about how to ensure that their water remains uncontaminated. This is expected to be a 2 – 3-year project and we hope that the municipalities will find our project to be so good that they will take on the financing of it after that.

For this project, we found an assistant Professor at the Tribhuvan University, who holds a PhD in Environmental Science from the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany and who is also a water specialist, having run water tests in many parts of the country. His name is Prof. Deep Shaha, and he is currently writing a proposal for our project, which I will pass on to possible foundations for funding.



Prof. Deep Shaha and a student of his who wishes to take part in the water survey.

We visited a number of institutes and authorities to understand more about the water situation in rural Nepal, what to test for and how best to design our project. We also gained the support of several authorities. The head engineer of the District Water Commission in Bajhang confirmed that if a village needs materials, such as pipes, cement, etc. to enclose their water source, they can get it free of charge.

There is a small but strong presence of people from Bajhang who live in Kathmandu, some of them in influential positions, making our work easier. One of them, the Director General of the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management, even promised to make several, fairly expensive, water test kits available to our project for free.

So, all in all, we are off to a flying start with our Girls' and Women's project, the last PAUL filter stations are being installed, and the planning of our second Water Project is going ahead full speed.

Networking

In Germany we are beginning to cooperate with the German aid organization ChildAid, headquartered in Bad Homburg close to Frankfurt and we have been meeting regularly with their representatives. ChildAid is working to help disadvantaged children in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. It is possible that we'll bring our project to the district where they are active in Nepal, and together we are discussing how to start a Baala factory in Nepal.

We're also in close contact with NePals e.V. who is helping the local population to solve problems in the areas of education, health, menstruation, recycling and clean drinking water.

Financial considerations

During the past one and a half years, the Covid pandemic stopped us in our tracks. What did not stop, however, were the recurring costs for rent and utilities for our two offices and the salaries for 2 people, without which we would now have no NGO in Nepal to work with. This has set us back financially, so that we now need an additional € 30,000 by the end of 2022. I thus have my work cut out for me.

I am very grateful for the generous donations we have received, sometimes anonymously and quite unexpectedly. I especially appreciate the monthly donations which makes it possible for us to plan our work better.

Thank you, also to my wife Karin, without whom the Girls' and Women's project would never have happened!



Donation account:

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