

WHAT'S UP?

WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SPECIAL EDITION

AUGUST 2024



OXFAM



Rafting in Mahakali River. Oxfam is promoting rafting as a tool for peace and transboundary cooperation. Photo: Amit Machamasi

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Water Resource Management

Water is the most abundant and important natural resource in Nepal. Annually, 225 billion cubic metres of water is fed by springs and streams, while an estimated 13 billion cubic metres infiltrate the ground through recharge (2022 Climate Adaptation and Resilience (CARE) for South Asia / Asian Disaster Preparedness Center). Despite this immense water potential, Nepal faces a crisis in water allocation for daily use. Soil erosion, haphazard urbanisation, improper land-use, and overuse of water sources coupled by the impact of climate change have caused water resource to degrade. This has not only reduced water availability, but impacted morphology of river.

Oxfam's WASH and Water Governance program works towards strengthening water security for poor and socially excluded women and men to achieve systemic change for sustainable and equitable access to water and sanitation. The program has two major sub-themes – WASH Governance and Water Resource Management. Under WASH Governance, we focus on WASH infrastructure construction, access to finance for WASH facilities, demand creation, behavior change and functionality, and sustainability.

Likewise, Water Resource Management is focused on basin management and river resilience for effective resource protection, management, and

utilization of basin and river resources.

Oxfam has been working towards improving river resilience through management of riverine resources and strengthening the voices of riverine communities under Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA) project. TROSA project, now in its second phase is focused on improving cooperation, at transboundary level, in sharing of water resources and strengthening resilience to climate change of communities in Mahakali basin in far west Nepal.

Similarly, our Watershed Management project aims to improve governance in watershed management to tackle water insecurity and local water conflicts through evidence-based intervention. We continue to work on nature-based solutions considering people's landscape approach to promote sustainability of watersheds and empower communities in economic activities for fisheries, aquaculture, recreation, tourism, and navigation. This involves inter-sectoral coordination.

We have further collaborated with government, private sectors, like-minded I/NGOs, and media/journalists to address water security.



Oxfam aims to advance inclusive water governance and amplify community voices to claim their river rights with a strong focus on climate resilience.
Photo: Kishor Sharma/Oxfam

Fostering Women Leadership through WEC



Bhawana Khadka, President of Bahadure Women Empowerment Centre (WEC) during WEC meeting. Photo-Oxfam

Bhawana Khadka, President of Bahadure Women Empowerment Centre (WEC) in Parigau village, Parashuram Municipality-5, Dadeldhura district of Sudurpashchim Province is known for her leadership, and unwavering grit and determination. She along with WEC members have addressed the community's decades long water scarcity issue.

Bahadure WEC, established in 2018, is one among the 29

WECs established in various communities residing along the banks of Mahakali River in Sudurpashchim Province.

WEC was envisioned by Oxfam to sensitize women about their rights and enhance their leadership skills for active participation in water resources planning and decision making.

Bhawana recalls the difficult times she and Suman Bhatta, social mobilizer from Rural Women Development and Unity

Center (RUWDUC), Oxfam's partner NGO, faced when the WEC was initially formed.

"It was a new concept for the community and organizing meetings and ensuring attendance was a difficult task. We had a hard time convincing people to attend the meetings," shared Bhawana.

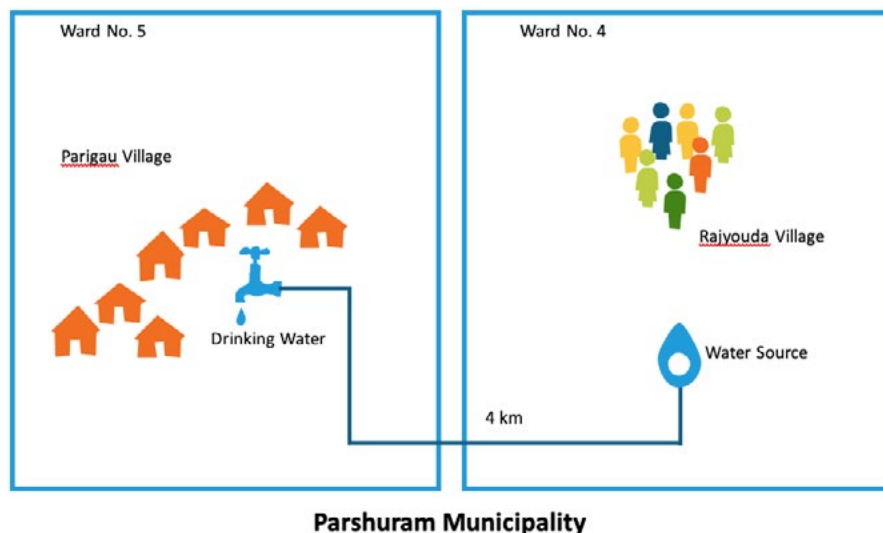
The WEC has come a long way since. WEC meetings are now organized twice a month.

“WEC now raises pertinent issues plaguing the community and compels the local government to address them. Among them was the issue of water scarcity in the community,” claimed Bhawana.

Rajyouda Drinking Water Supply scheme in Ward 4 of Parshuram Municipality has been supplying water to Parigau in Ward 5 of the municipality since 2002. As water demand from Parigau village increased with growing population and leakage due to the old water supply scheme, tensions escalated between communities from both wards.

People from Parigau village had to wait for hours to get a bucket of water and this affected their daily schedule and impacted their agriculture output. Community members had no option but to use water from Mahakali River. However, Bhawana questioned the quality of water and conducted a water quality test. The result showed the water was contaminated with *Escherichia coli*, linked to various gastrointestinal illness in humans, thereby unsuitable for human consumption.

“Three WEC members and I approached the local government and organized a lobby meeting with Ward Chairperson and Engineer of the municipality in 2022. After the meeting, we made a formal request for maintenance



Rajyouda Village in Ward 4 of Parshuram Municipality supplies drinking water to Parigau Village in Ward 5 of the municipality.

of Rajyouda Drinking Water Supply Scheme, but funds could not be allocated by municipality,” said Bhawana.

Later that year, she was able to include their demand in the Municipality’s annual plan but again government budget was not allocated.

In 2023, Bhawana and her team campaigned and invited the Ward Chair, and Technical Officer and Planning Officer from the municipality for a field visit. After the field visit, local government agreed to conduct a survey to identify the required budget for maintenance.

The survey however was obstructed by community members from Ward 4 as the water supply scheme is in Ward 4. Bhawana organised a meeting with community from Ward 4 to understand the reason behind obstruction. The community shared that people living nearby were worried their private land

would be taken away during maintenance and renovation of the scheme.

In the successive meeting, Bhawana facilitated the government’s technical team members to share their plan with the community, and helped clarify that private land would not be used. Finally, after four hours of discussion, everyone agreed to the field survey.

Oxfam provided financial support for the maintenance of water supply scheme, under Watershed Project, which was completed in March 2024.

“I am happy that my community can now access adequate water even in dry periods,” smiled Bhawana.

The community members have praised her leadership in resolving the issue. They are hopeful that Bahadure WEC will continue to address similar issues and contribute to community development under her leadership.

Early Warning System: Saving Lives Amid Natural Hazard

Every year, monsoon triggers landslides and flooding impacting thousands of people across the country.

Mahakali River in Sudurpashchim Province, that serves as a border between Nepal and India is known to wreak havoc for communities residing along its banks every monsoon. Therefore, to address this, Oxfam and NEEDS Nepal, Oxfam's partner NGO, have initiated Community-based Flood Early Warning System Communication Channel from Darchula in Nepal and Dharchula in India to Kutiyakabar in Nepal and Naujilaha in India.

Early Warning System is an essential tool for mitigating human and economic losses during disasters. It fosters resilience by improving preparedness, speeding up recovery and reducing vulnerability.

UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDRR defines Early Warning System as "an integrated system of hazard monitoring, forecasting and prediction, disaster risk assessment, communication and preparedness activities systems and processes that enables individuals, communities, governments,

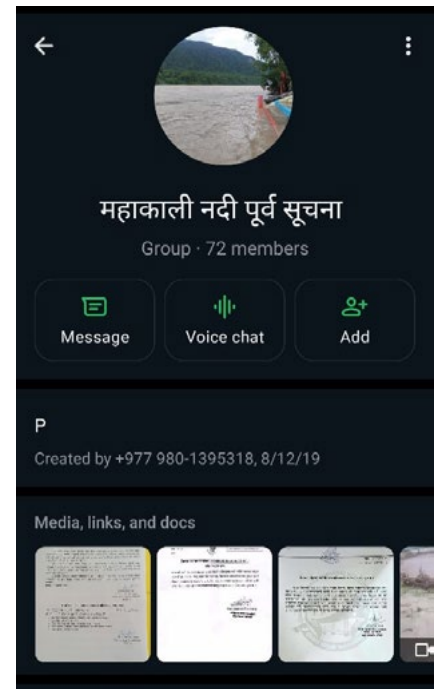
businesses and others to take timely action to reduce disaster risks in advance of hazardous events."

The Early Warning System in this case is typically a WhatsApp group with members including representatives from different WECs in Nepal and India and local government representatives. The group plays a vital role in improving transboundary cooperation by serving as a genuine information dissemination channel essential for alleviating the impact of natural disasters, especially flooding.

Dhananjay Joshi, Mahakali WEC member in Bheemdatta Municipality-11, Kanchanpur district promptly alerted Purnadevi Kasera, WEC member from Dhakanghat, Dodhara Chadani Municipality-9 in Kanchanpur district about the rising water levels on the night of July 6.

He also contacted a staff from NEEDS Nepal for wider circulation. This timely warning prevented loss of life despite the unexpected nighttime flood.

Reflecting on the incident, Joshi, whose own home lies between Mahakali and



Bhujela rivers, highlighted the community's swift response was enabled by the early warning message. "Despite the uncertainty about my own safety, I prioritized spreading the message with others," he shared.

"We were unable to save essential belongings like gas cylinders and clothes during the flooding of 2021," recalls Kutiyakabar WEC Coordinator Bashanti Sunar, adding, "But this time, thanks to the early warning system, we were able to secure our necessities."

The success of the Early Warning System in Kanchanpur district stresses on the importance of proactive disaster preparedness and community resilience.

Promoting Transboundary Cooperation



Kamal Bahadur Shah, Chief Minister, Sudurpashchim Province rafting from Nepal's side Mahakali River. Photo: Amit Machamasi

The first-ever adventurous rafting on Mahakali River (bordering Nepal and India) was organized during Parashuram Festival on 14th-22nd January 2019. Rafting started from Parshuram Dham, Dadeldhura district to Khalla, Kanchanpur district of Sudurpaschim and saw participation of hundreds of people from Nepal and India.

Rafting in the river was introduced by Oxfam, NEEDS Nepal, and Rural Women Development and Unity Center (RUWDUC), in coordination with local stakeholders to strengthen cooperation between communities on both sides and present an alternative livelihood opportunity. The advocacy by WEC members to promote rafting as a tool to enhance religious tourism and alternative for crossing the river was instrumental in realizing this. The community believed that rafting would increase religious tourism with pilgrims visiting religious sites like Purnagiri in India and

Parashuram Dham in Nepal.

RUWDUC, working in Dadeldhura district coordinated with local governments in Nepal and India to make this Indo-Nepal event happen. RUWDUC facilitated meetings with local representatives, stakeholders, and security officers, and organized a meeting with District Magistrate of Uttarakhand in India.

After the festival, private rafting companies in India continued rafting on Indian side of Mahakali River. However, for Nepal, lack of clarity in regulations and policies, limited trained human resources, and rafting already available in other rivers posed a challenge for continuity in Mahakali River.

Rafting was organized once again in Mahakali River on World Water Day in 2024. On 22 March 2024, Bharat Badyar Joshi, Mayor of Parashuram Municipality,

Dadeldhura district and Durga Kumari Khatri, Deputy Mayor of Mahakali Municipality, Darchula district inaugurated the event at Parashuram Dham. They also participated in rafting the 14 km downstream stretch to Khalla-Musetti of Bheemdatta Municipality, Kanchanpur district along with WEC members, representatives from Oxfam, partner NGOs, local government representatives. The group was received by Kamal Bahadur Shah, Chief Minister of Sudurpashchim Province on reaching Khalla-Musetti after almost two hours of rafting.

During the event, local governments expressed their solidarity in promoting rafting as a business in their locality. Bheemdatta Municipality had constructed road to rafting location of Khalla for the event. They have supported the training of river guides. Now they plan to invest in procuring rafting boats and accessories.

Similarly, Parashuram Municipality has committed to allocate NPR 400,000 for rafting this fiscal year.

Rafting is now done occasionally on Nepal side of Mahakali River with the commitment from local governments to continue it as a regular business. This will ensure tourism and uplift the livelihoods of locals.

People Landscape Approach For Resilient Watershed

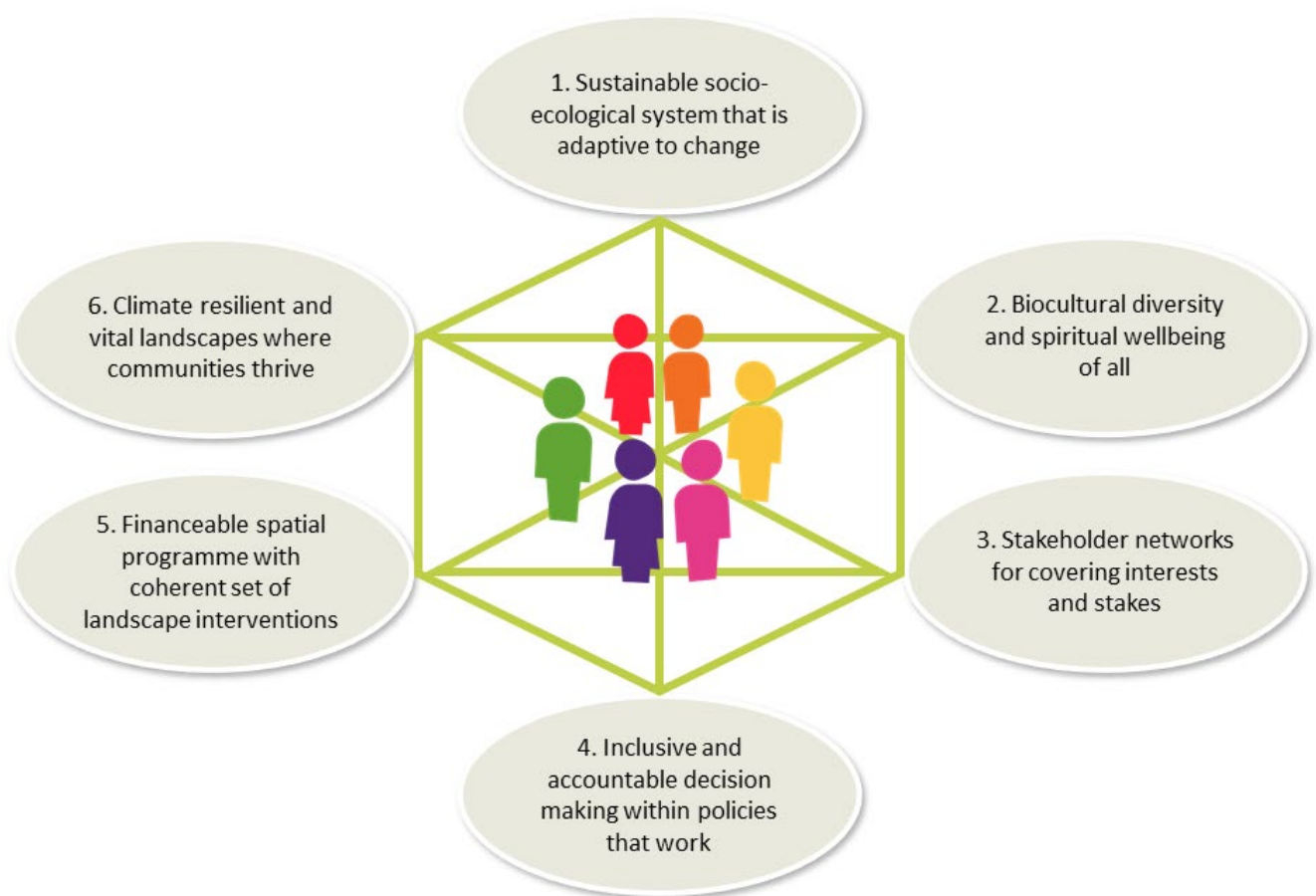
Oxfam realized a need for a people centered landscape approach applying a human rights and inequality lens in Watershed Management and for promoting youth and women's empowerment. A People's Landscape Framework was co-developed by reviewing approaches, tools and experiences from Oxfam and partners (ICIMOD,

CSRC, LI-BIRD and NEEDS Nepal) in collaboration with the Wageningen Center for Development and Innovation (WCDI).

The aim of the approach is to empower multi-stakeholders of a landscape by developing adaptive capacities and resilience of people and institutions and supporting

them to develop and implement People's Landscape Approach (PLA) Watershed Management.

The framework has identified six abilities to implement People's Landscape Approach (PLA) within a landscape ensuring multi-stakeholders' leadership. These abilities are outlined in the figure below.



Six abilities to implement People's Landscape Approach (PLA) Watershed Management.

In 2022, Oxfam and its partners (CSRC, LI-BIRD and NEEDS Nepal) piloted a project to understand the applicability of People's Landscape Framework.

Rangoon Watershed is fed by many tributaries that empty into the Rangoon River, which is the main drainage channel for the watershed. The watershed area is 483 square km (Oxfam, 2023). It includes eight wards of Parshuram Municipality, all wards of Alital Rural Municipality in Dadeldhura district, and two wards of Joraya Rural Municipality in Doti district of Sudurpashchim Province. To the west, the watershed borders Uttarakhand in India, and Kanchanpur district in Nepal to the south.

In the pilot phase, NEEDS Nepal, LI-BIRD and CSRC conducted detailed assessment of water, biodiversity, and land sector respectively using their organizational tools. Based on the use of these indicators, a PLA tool was developed for an integrated Rangoon Watershed assessment.

The key finding of the assessment were:

Finding 1:

The administrative boundaries in the watershed are drawn for governance purpose and divide the watershed. The assessment identified the need for more knowledge about mechanism for access and benefit-sharing, upstream-downstream linkage, and the relationship between different ecosystem component within watersheds.

Finding 2:

Sectoral issues do not satisfactorily address the multifaceted and interrelated issues concerning water governance. The assessment identified a need to work through an integrated approach, making water an entry point in scenarios of changing climate.

Finding 3:

The assessment identified the need to extend support towards the three tiers of the government to prepare evidence-based watershed management by helping them generate, manage, analyze, and decide based on climate data.

Oxfam in Nepal has signed an MoU (Memorandum of understanding) with Water Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS) to implement the findings of the PLA assessment.

WECS is Nepal government's lead agency established for providing expertise on water resource management related issues to government agencies and related stakeholders in Nepal. WECS has been developing a basin level plan for 10 major rivers of Nepal since the past five years.

In alignment with the government's basin plan, Oxfam is piloting the Rangoon River Watershed Management project. WECS has branded this project as a pilot project for the government to understand the possible watershed level intervention and replicate the learnings in other watersheds.

Oxfam is currently building water balance model in watershed; researching on conflict resolution model, and existing governance model for water management to recommend better model for water management at watershed level linking to basin plan developed by WECS.

If you have any concerns or queries regarding safeguarding, please contact the following number **16600150076** or send an email at speakup@oxfam.org.uk For feedback and complains related to programme, please contact the following numbers— NTC: **9851179358**; Ncell: **9801571204**



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