

Trianglen, Nepal Village Fund Review

"Time to move on?"

1. Overall impression and recommendations

- The program is clearly successful. Villages are happy with the support they get from Danish families and the training they get from Trianglen/CISU through ASK. The 5000 DKK Village Grants (= approx 80.000 NRP) have helped poor families into a process out of deep poverty and raised their living standards. The forming of Village Committees (VC) with the initial purpose of deciding on the use of VF and with extensive training in SLP, Social audit, Right to Information and project preparation has changed the mindset and outlook considerably. It has enabled villagers to take an active part in the decentralisation reform process, that Nepal has been through since 2015 which has led to more resources to the new municipalities, enabling them to support village development in many different ways.
- Several villages that have received VF support for many years have accumulated a substantial sum in the VF – some up to 500.000 NRP. Given the limited overall number of Trianglen villages (41) and the demand for support like this to other villages, Trianglen should consider outphasing the 5000 DKK annual contribution to such villages and start up in new villages in the same municipalities.
- However, even after outphasing the VF support, Trianglen and ASK should continue to monitor and develop the planning, RTI and similar democracy institutions in the "old" villages for some years.
- Introducing organic farming has also been promising with an increasing support from the so far (limited number of) farmers involved in Kavre, despite problems encountered when changing from trad. to organic. CISU has just agreed to a project extending the scheme to Syangja where there also is a noticeable interest to get involved. In Kavre, more and more farmers, although still a minority and mainly women, express interest in joining as are new villages in Kavre.
- The question of marketing and pricing of the organic vegetables need attention. Several initiatives in Kavre are under way and may prove promising.
- Adding two IT-labs in Syangja to the one in Kavre are welcomed by the youth using them, although not really in line with Trianglens key activities. Given Trianglens limited capacity, it is recommended that Trianglen should keep its focus on the core activities and find other sponsors for the IT-labs.
- Trianglen, ASK and local authorities should discuss how to expand the teaching on SLP, Social Audits and RTI to more villages. The local authorities can provide (or share the costs of) various forms of training, seeds, farming equipment etc.
- The enthusiasm of the ASK staff and the many Nepalese working voluntarily to promote the program is heartening as is the reception they get in the villages. Their quality and workload is impressive and should be maintained.

- Trianglen should consider its working relations with the Nepali partners, especially in Kavre, as this seems very based upon personal as much as professional relationships.
- Trianglen should ensure that the reporting from villages is balanced and reflects facts, rather than being overly positive.

2. Purpose and planning of review

The review was designed as a brief semi-independent view of the Trianglen supported activities with special emphasis on the use of the Village Funds (VF) provided by Danish families. The activities funded by CISU and provided by ASK upon being trained by i.a. Trianglen, have been favourably reviewed in April-May 2018 by a local independent consultant.

The review took place in Syangja from 11-13 and in Kavre from 15-17 November 2018. As the review team included the daily project manager Hari in Syangja and Badri in Kavre, who also acted as translators as well as other ASK project staff, the findings reflects what was translated to the reviewer. This will invariably be coloured by the relationship the villagers and Hari and Badri in particular. So the finding must necessarily be seen in the perspective of being not entirely independent.

The team visited the following villages:

In *Syangja* no 8 Pakhere, no 9 Okadi, nr. 15 Taruk, nr. 11 Chilaunekharka and nr 21.2 Chhappa Bimrabort.

In *Kavre*: no 51 Gairigaun; no 53 Chhappaun; no 59 Sathikuryia and no 57 Makaibari plus the IT-lab at the school in Village no 4 Dhapuk Jamunebanda. Brief reports from villages in Appendix.

3. Findings

3.1. Direct use of Villages Funds

The use of the VF has changed over time in all visited villages. Most villages initially spent the annual 5000 DKK on small support such as providing school uniforms or books to poor children; small infrastructure as protection of wells, repair of roof, sports equipment, smokeless stoves etc. However, according to themselves they soon realised that such needs exceeds this funding. As training in SLP, Social audit and priority setting went along in tandem with the VF and Village Committees, together with ASK they realised that money for fx infrastructure should be solicited by the local authorities, previously VDCs, now municipalities.

Hence, upon ASKs recommendations, the use of VF was changed into providing interest-free micro loans to needy villagers.

This has of course put a pressure on the families that take up loans, as there is a considerable community pressure to pay back the loan in full at the end of the one-year loan period.

According to all the villages visited, there have not been any noticeable default on the loans. However, in some villages an insurance scheme have been provided at a minimal cost.

Micro credits have been used to invest in small livestock, overwhelmingly goats (goats get two three kids. Every year, one half grown kid can be sold for the sum of the credit which can then be repaid and the borrower still have a goat or perhaps several), but also some pigs, poultry, as well as in vegetable farming and similar income generating activities.

Goats:



Almost all villages have invested microcredits in goat-raising. Goats seem to be so attractive because they are quite easy to keep and brings in a considerable price when grown - 12-15000 NRP or DKK 700-900, the equivalent of more than a month's salary for an unskilled labourer. As the goats are kept in stables, the risk of overgrazing or environmental destruction by the goats is not an issue. Instead the goats manure is an important element in fertilising fields and vegetable gardens.

Organic farming has been added to the original concept 2-3 years ago in 9 villages in Kavre, involving 225 farmers out of an estimated 1500. The initial results of this pilot activity seem promising, as the farmers involved in general want to expand their organic areas and (some) traditional farmers show an interest in joining. The success is due to reduced use and thereby costs for pesticides and fertiliser, expected improved soil quality after changing as well as in the health of consumers incl. The villagers themselves. Farmers were learning how to produce their own organic pesticides and manure/compost for fertilisation and expected that initial smaller yields (smaller size of vegetables) would change after a few years. The project had introduced an insurance scheme that has helped farmers attacked by insects, death of goats or other problems.



Marketing seems to be an issue, although the 20 hotels in Nagarkot present themselves as eco-friendly and want to buy organic products

- and to some extent are ready to pay an extra price for them. It was surprising to find out that cauliflower sells at 39 NRP/kg in supermarkets in Kathmandu, whereas at least some hoteliers are ready to pay 50 when buying directly from the producers.

The four villages visited in Kavre would like better options for marketing their vegetables, but only if the price they get remains the same! Walking 2-3 hours every day carrying up to 40-50 kg does not seem to be a major obstacle for the women.

At the time of our visit, a new initiative took off: A pickup began driving around to the villages in the very early morning to buy vegetables and bring them to the hotels. From what we learned, it is hoped that this initiative will be self-sustainable, which of course will relieve the women in the villages for a heavy workload. A possible alternative would be to establish a number of collection

centres on the roads to the villages to enable easy collection and reducing the time, the women must spend carrying their produce. Time that could be better spent on expanding their organic gardens.

3.2. Indirect results of VF and VC

Although the VF money have been and still are important in their own right, many villages found that opening their eyes and changing their mindsets have perhaps been the most important result of the project for their village. The VF and VC had created a forum where villagers have been taught about important policy and priority setting and developed useful skills when approaching VDCs and – since 2016 – the new municipalities.

Getting to understand the political processes has enabled villagers to promote projects and enhance development in their area. This was particularly clear in Syangja, whereas the visited villages in Kavre had not yet challenged the municipalities directly but mostly relied on ward or municipality taking action on their own, based upon the village priority setting.

3.3. Phasing out old villages

By changing the use of VF from grants to credits, the villages gradually accumulate a sizeable fund as the annual Danish contribution of DKK 5000 (=80.000 NRP) is added every year. Villages visited had between NRP 200.000 (newer villages) and 500.000 (older villages). As the average credit is between 7 and 15.000 NRP – average 10.000, this would lead to between 20 and 50 microcredits



per year. In small villages almost all families can in practice get a loan almost every year.

In these, the most "wealthy" villages there was a certain understanding for the argument that now we have got on a good start and it is perhaps time for Trianglen to initiate similar development in other villages. In other villages, especially newer ones, there was still felt a strong need for continued Danish VF support for some years to come.

On this basis, it is recommended that Trianglen develop a strategy for phasing out Danish direct funding to older villages in order to introduce new ones, but maintaining continued ASK support and monitoring of the "departed" villages for several years. It is also recommend that new villages should come from the same three municipalities as the present in order to keep links to the authorities simple and close. And optimise the likelihood of co-funding.

3.4. IT-lab

We visited only the computerlab that has been established in Kavre. Its overall purpose - to give the youth a better chance of understanding and practicing Computer training, as this is a compulsory part of the curriculum in secondary school. Hence, the IT-labs are primarily established to be used in classes and not by the general public.

The one we saw is used for training three classes only at the adjacent school, a total of 60 students. It is used nine (3*3) hours per week and has four, modern Apple computers (with Danish keyboard). We have not managed to find out exactly how many PC there should have been. Some

claim 12, 10 or eight. We were told that one perished during the earthquake, one has a broken screen (for some time), one is at the headmasters office. Badri promised to send an overview of the whereabouts of the remaining PCs.

Except for our general recommendation for Trianglen to focus on the core business and leave IT to other and hopefully stronger donors, , we will leave the more detailed recommendation re the IT-labs to the assessment by Gert Birnbacher.

4. UN Sustainable Development Goals

The programme has a direct, albeit small, impact on several of the UN global systemwide development goals, SDGs.

Goal 1 Reducing poverty (Nepal goal: from 21% in 2015 to 5% in 2030) by giving income opportunities to vulnerable and poor groups, mainly women.

Goal 2 Zero Hunger (Nepal goal to reduce stunting of kids from 36% to 15%), by increasing and diversifying food production through vegetable farming.

Goal 3 Good health (Nepal goal to reduce maternal mortality not directly relevant), however improved quality of food and less pesticides through organic farming should improve health in the villages as has the introduction of smokeless stoves in villages (which seems to have been taken over by the local authorities).

Goal 4 Quality Education (Nepal goal to increase number of youth with relevant skills by 75%) by training farmers in better agricultural practices as well as school children in IT.

Goal 5 on gender equality (Nepal goal to raise ratio of women in professional work from 24 to 40%) by mainly supporting women through microcredits and training in agricultural practices, notably organic farming.

Goal 12 Responsible production and consumption (No particular Nepal target) by promoting organic farming

Goal 13 Climate action (Nepal target to halve CO2 emission levels from 100 kg/capita to 50 kg).

The impact of the project on climate change is questionable. The amount of goats that are being raised through VF emits methane. However they also deliver nutrient to the organic farming. The goal should also be seen in the perspective that the per capita emission of CO2 in Denmark is equivalent of that of 50 Nepalese.

5. Other Concerns

5.1. Future funding of ASK etc.

Trianglen has managed to develop project proposals that have received substantial support from CISU and to implement them through ASK. At present, an extension of the project on organic farming in Kavre by one year until October 2019 and a new three year project on the same topic in Syangja makes the need less urgent. However, ASK should seek a more diverse funding on the longer run to avoid over dependency on Trianglen and CISU.

We learned that the involved municipalities are open to proposals for co-funding many of the activities such training in SLP, social audit as well as to provide good quality seed, agricultural and other vocational training. This could reduce the need for additional Danish funding and spread the good results obtained through the present Trianglen project to more parts of the country and perhaps also other international NGOs as potential partners for ASK.

5.2. Presentation of village reports to donors

Donors would like to be assured that their support has a positive impact and is appreciated. However Trianglen should be careful not to oversell the impact of the VF. Even in low-cost Nepal, DKK 5000 is not a huge amount and the credits of 10.000 NR, equivalent to DKK 600 kr can not even buy you a grown goat. Obviously, this will not change the life of a family overnight, as some village reports seems to suggest. So the village reports must present a sober picture of the situation before as well as after the credit and be less effusive in the individual successtories to convince present and potential donors, who may otherwise become sceptical.

5.3. Trianglen capacity

The capacity of Trianglen makes any major expansion of the program in its present form unrealistic. Rather than attempting to add more donor villages to the present 41, outphasing some and introducing new should be considered as discussed above. However, given the good results there ought to be room for attracting more VF donors and expand the program. This would however demand a different set-up of the whole organisation, probably including professional staff in Denmark. It is the impression that Trianglen is not interested in such a development at present.

5.4. Nepali partners and relations

The involvement of important and enthusiastic Nepali partners is a great asset for the program. However, Trianglen can not expect Nepali partners to work unpaid in the same way as Danish boardmembers, of which many are pensioners.

The activities in mainly Kavre seems to be based upon strong and long-lasting personal friendships, including perhaps some personal economic interdependencies between Danish and Nepali partners outside the scope of the cooperation. This has undoubtedly been an asset in the early years of the programme. However, it is recommended that the future work is based upon more strictly professional relations, which could also be a guarantee for the longer term sustainability of the programme. The codification of roles and responsibilities in the new CISU-funded programme is an important step in that direction

Mvh Henrik Brade
December 2018

APPENDIX / VILLAGE INFORMATION

Syangja

Village 8, Pakhere

41 households. Trianglen support since 2009. Initial support went to establish a plain volleyballground, net and balls, school fees and some road maintenance. From 2012 the village changed to Income Generating Activities (IGA). Mainly loans to poultry, vegetable farming (harvest of 400 kg tomatoes this year). Today almost 500.000 NRP in VF and village could understand if Trianglen would move on to others as long as the training and monitoring by ASK continued. The village has experienced that men, who previously went to work in Middle East now stays home to take part in the much additional work with the vegetables.

The village has received some road repair, but is requesting the Municipality for support to new roof on school, further road improvement. The village is interested in learning about organic farming but are concerned about insects as well as monkeys.

The village seems well organised, it has an impressive community building.

Village 9 Okadi



65 households. Trianglen support since 2009. The village has a very scenic position on the top of a hill with impressive views and good opportunities for paragliding. A major international event had just been held and filled up the guestrooms, that the industrious village chair, who is also representing the ward in the Bheerkot municipal council, has build. Goats are in abundance.

VF first used for

volleyballground, schoolfees and books, healthservices to pregnant women. From 2012 gradually changed to IGA i.e Microcredits, mainly for goats. Virtually all households have received loans and all have been paid back.

The village seeks municipal support for better road (indeed needed!), water supply and introducing individual water-meters to curb demand. The village also seek funding for a goat/cheese dairy including import of american high/yielding goats. The village is self confident, but aware of its need for better skills in the above discipline.

Village 15 Taruk,

53 households, mainly Dalits. Trianglen partner since 2009. 50 families have received loans and all paid back.

VF started supporting a village musical group, school fees and water filters. In 2012 changed gradually to microcredits, mainly used for goat, pig and poultry raising as well as vegetable farming.

The VF stands at 455.000 NRP and can provide credit to all households.

The village has received municipal support for road maintenance, waterpipes, community house and for vocational training in eg tailoring. It would like to have a sitting-place by the nearby lake.

Village 11 Chilaunekharka

49 households. Trianglen partner since 2009.

VF first used for small-scale community projects as improved stoves (which all households now have). In 2012 microcredits first for goats, but increasingly for vegetable farming, nursery. The village is interested in getting involved in the organic farming project, as it will give them better health, improve soil and reduce costs for fertiliser and pesticides. They expect to be able to sell produce in the valley through the use of the one returntrip daily public lorry to town.

The municipality has helped with a community place at the school, based on the village own SLP. They are eager for a better road.

Village 21.2 Chhappa Bimrabot.

29 households, Trianglen partner since 2015. L VF first year used to protect a well but was changed to IGA in 2016 and is now mainly used for goats and vegetable farming. The VF at present stands at 200.000 NRP.

The municipality has provided a partly improved road and protection of scarce water source.

The village wants a community house in order to improve women literacy, training in gardening and in beekeeping, handicraft and tailoring. As a small village, they are eager to have closer collaboration with other villages nearby.



Kavre

Village 51 Gairigaun

130 households of which 27 members of organic farming network (out of which 24 are women). Trianglen partner since 2013.

VF first used for minor infrastructure but from 2014 for microcredits / goats and vegetable farming. There is 300.000 NRP in the VF at present.

A few farmers have left the organic network since start, mainly due to long distance to their



gardens which makes constant surveillance difficult.

This is considered necessary because of many monkeys. Also the lower yields the first years were disappointing, albeit it has gradually improved since as has the interest in joining or rejoining the network.

A successful young organic farmer is making NRP 200.000 per year (ca 13.000 DKK) in addition to outcome of traditional subsistence crops.

Municipality takes a keen interest in organic farming and has provided plastic sheets for tomatoes, seedlings and co-funding a mini cultivator. Privately owned but rented out to other farmers in the village.

Village 53 Chhapgaun

80 households of which 24 are in organic network (of which 23 women).

Trianglen partner since 2013.

VF at 377.000 NRP and used for microcredits for vegetables and goats, mainly.

Experience with organic farming that the yields are lower the first two years, but this is compensated by lower costs to fertiliser and pesticides and also canvassed through an insurance scheme.

Only a very limited part of the culturable land has been transformed into vegetable growing, but farmers are experimenting with using manure and organic pesticides also for their traditional crops such as maize and millet.

Municipality is supporting or co-funding plastic sheets and seed for organic.

Village expect more land taken in for organic vegetables and more farmers joining the network.

Village 59 Sathikuryia

45 households. Trianglen partner since 2013. 25 organic farmers of which 13 women.

VF first used for a foot-trail, school fees but soon turned to microcredits for vegetable farming and goatraising.

The VF stands at 390.000 NRP. The VC was about to meet to discuss who should receive the next round of credits.

Organic farmers grow cauliflower, tomatoes, cabbages, ginger. Traditional farmers are increasingly showing an interest. However, the main problems are insects as well as monkeys. The village sells half its organic produce at the local market or own consumption, 25 pct at collection centre and 25 at the hotels directly. Main challenges in the village is insufficient watersupply with no piped water. Road to village was being upgraded as we visited.



Village 57 Makaibari

55 households. Trianglen partner since 2009.

VF was originally used to improve toilets, water-protection, irrigation drum as well as scholarships. Since 2014 microcredits have taken over for goats, vegetables, but along with a support to build a community house, so the VF stands at 372.000 NRP. All households have received loan, many in addition to loans of 13 pct interest from cooperative.

Many have received loans more than once, including Sarita who is featuring as the success-story on the 2017 village report (who was not quite as destitute to begin with as reported). Now she is leading organic farmer of the village.



The village benefits from the same road improvement mentioned above. It has reduced the walking distance to Nagarkots hotels to one hour only. Most vegetables are sold directly to the hotels. But the villagers would prefer if it could be collected by car at a nominal price.