

Breathing a Sigh of Relief amidst all the Troubles

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Mankumari is comforted that like in the other households, a toilet has been constructed in her own house. But, this 66 year old woman's problem remains as it is although she has seen as many winters as her age pass by. "By all means, a place to 'empty' myself has been built at this age, but I don't have the means to 'fill up' my stomach," she says. Grippled by old age, poverty and solitude, she also has the responsibility to bring up her grandchildren. So, how can one expect her worries to fade away just like that?



Manakumari at her house

Mankumari is a resident of Chimchok in Gumdi VDC, Ward No. 2, that takes 10 hours walking distance from the district headquarter of Dhading to reach. When her only son remarried and moved out of the house, her daughter in-law also chose to part away in the same way. Her husband had died much earlier. The earning from her land would barely feed the family for two months in a year. That's why even in her old age she has no option but to toil for daily wage and feed her seven and ten year old grandchildren. But, her bodily status disallows her from labouring all day long.

No matter how critical her condition, how could she step aside from the social obligations? A campaign to construct and use toilets in each and every household and to declare Chimchok a 'No Open Defecation' (NOD) area took off. Everyone

was aware about Manmamati's condition. So, she received a pan for free as part of the support facility provided to the ultra poor households. What could possibly someone so frail, having just her young grandchildren by her side do with this material? But, the community did not ignore this situation; they all joined hands and built a toilet in her house.

Chimchok a community comprising of 1,109 people and 187 households of which 12 households belong to *dalits* (so called lower caste) and 175 to Tamangs faced grave shortage of water. The sanitation conditions were even worse. Traces of change started unfolding after the water, health and sanitation project was implemented in the community with the active participation of *Apasi Bikash Sanstha* (local organisation) and the financial and technical support of NEWAH. In this process, works for the drinking water scheme began side by side with the education sessions on environmental and household sanitation for the community members. After sanitation awareness increased, toilet construction work started in each and every household to declare NOD in the community. In this community where 75% of the people belong to poor households, the community people contributed their labour to some ultra poor households to construct their toilets in order to ensure that everyone in the community constructed and used the facility.

Chaitra 2065 (March/April 2009) spread waves of joy in the community. From this point onwards people were liberated from their water woes, and on 29 March '09 NOD was declared in Chimchok. In this manner, like Mankumari the residents of this community have learnt to find a sense of relief amidst all their troubles.