

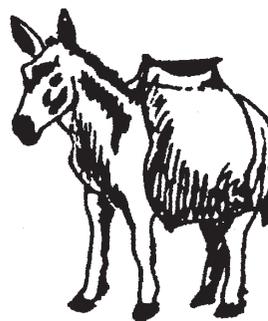
is not the good living she has now but the safe knowledge that the water buffalo will provide the much needed support in times of hardship.

When **Jomana P.**, a day labourer now aged 43, and her two daughters were deserted by her husband, she was suffering from a serious heart condition and was unable to work. Her parents took her in but the financial burden was very high. Five years ago, Jimana received a water buffalo and she now earns enough to support herself and her daughters and to pay for all health costs. They can now live in dignity again.

After my visit to Myagdi I travelled to the border to Upper Mustang to inspect the two prototypes for **greenhouses** there and to assess whether they have been built properly – before any more will be constructed in spring. In their enthusiasm, the two women had already started to grow various vegetables (from their own seeds) but the soil had not been dug up. They will do this after their first harvest. Then the greenhouses will gain more heat from the ground and more height (they were built too low). In addition, flowers, runner beans etc. will be grown on both sides of the entrance to attract pollinators into the greenhouse.

During August and September, Sahayog Himalaya-Nepal ran another midwifery training course, this time with 17 women from Mugu and Humla (very remote and economically disadvantaged regions, about the size of Maine). Some of the women left their families and their fields for six weeks to participate in the course (ten days on foot to the nearest airport, Simikot or Basura, by plane to Nepalgunj and by bus to Kathmandu). A man from the region was especially employed for one month to ensure that all of the women got to the airport on time. Surprisingly, half of the women brought their youngest children (aged six months to 2.5 years), who had to be looked after during the course. The midwifery instructor was delighted with this group, which had a higher level of education than previous ones (some had even completed grade 15) and the results from the final exam at the end of this course were considerably better than in previous courses. This time, the course included instructions on how to close a perineal laceration as well as emergency measures in case of the baby being stuck in the birth canal. The midwife bag has also been improved. While the theory lectures were delivered to all participants, during practical sessions in the labour ward, they were split into small groups around different birthing chairs. All participants and their children are now safely back home in their villages.

News: Sahayog Himalaya-Nepal is currently allocating naks in the northern part of Dolpas as well as preparing the construction of greenhouses. With your donations, by the end of 2013, Sahayog Himalaya-Nepal has been able to provide 2312 mothers with animals and train 77 women in midwifery. In 2015, Self-Help-by-Donkeys is celebrating its 20th anniversary and we would be delighted to see many local activities in support. The children's book "Kessang und Sarkini, Zwei Mädchen im Himalaya" is available from booksellers. Our mobile exhibition is available free of charge. The postcard sets and posters are also free but we ask for a donation in return. All donations are transferred completely (100%) to the project.



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Travel Report Nepal September – October 2014

by Stefanie Christmann

The chairperson of Self-Help-by-Donkeys, Stefanie Christmann, spent three weeks in Nepal to assess the projects in Myagdi and in the northern region of Lower Mustang. To mitigate the adverse climate effects from her flight, she made a donation to www.atmosfair.de. All travel expenses were paid by herself.

Myagdi is a large district in the foothills (up to an altitude of approx. 2500 m) characterised by rice terraces, bamboo and rhododendron forests. Several harvests are possible in one year. Since 2007, we have allocated about 250 water buffalos here. While these animals eat a lot and their maintenance is labour intensive, they provide a considerably higher income than a cow or a yak. But it is impossible to feed them in the higher and drier regions.

Almost all people in Myagdi are Hindu and their culture is markedly different from the Buddhist north. Many men (and some single mothers) spend many years working in India, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates. It is mostly the young who want to go there. However, many of them borrow money to finance their travel costs and several women (now widowed mothers) have lost their husbands due to accidents at work in the Emirates.

The men who return from India are often ill and die, despite spending a lot of money on health care, and their widows, such as **Gori S.**, must now pay back the debt. Gori had to repay a loan of more than 1000 US Dollar (1 US Dollar = 96 Nepal Rupee) and had to sell all her animals and most of her land. Together with her now 14-year old son, she survived on day labour. When she received a water buffalo three years ago, she was able to rebuild her life.

Due to the manpower shortage, the pay for single mothers working as day labourers has more than doubled since 2007, but it is very hard work, especially on the building sites, with detrimental effects on the bones. Most of the single mothers who received a water buffalo

now work only sporadically if at all as day labourers on fields (for 200, some times 300 Rupee/day) and no longer at building sites. Instead, they spend their time looking after the water buffalo, fetching fodder (a female water buffalo will give more milk when fed than when she has to graze on the hillside), making ghee, leasing fields, growing their own rice, corn, millet, vegetables and potatoes. Many of the women are now able to produce enough for the whole year on their leased fields, using the dung from their animals. **Puna K.M.**, a 44-year old woman from Pataleket even managed to buy more land. Nine years ago, she was divorced and left without means; her son is now 12 year old. Her parents gave her a small house but since she had no land, she had to work as a day labourer. Six years ago, she received a water buffalo. To date, she has been able to sell two male calves and saved some of her income in a savings club (15000 Rupee). Eighteen months ago, her parents gave her a small allowance and she could buy a field big enough to provide food for 5-6 months. This spring, she grew corn and used the stalks for runner beans. In summer, after harvesting the beans, she sowed millet and this way she can have three important harvests. She shares the milk with her parents who, in return, give her millet to produce rakshi to sell. Saving clubs have a bad name in Nepal, but in Myagdi, they are popular with the single mothers: about 20-30 women from one village together save a fixed amount per week or per month and each woman can take out a larger loan from time to time. For a loan of 20,000 Rupees from the savings club, the repayment is 400 Rupee per month (compared to 1000 Rupee/month on the commercial market). **Yamaga G.**, a 48-year old widow saved 20,000 Rupee from the income from her water buffalo and she uses the commercial market to lend out money. **Gori S.** (mentioned above) saves and lends out the same amount in the savings club. The fact that single mothers lend out their savings for interest is new to our project, as is Puna's purchase of land.

Unlike in the northern regions (where butter is used in salty tea), the women in Myagdi produce mostly ghee as a substitute for oil. That way they can save about 1400 Rupee monthly. Many women also sell ghee and save the money or buy clothes and soap etc. with it. One litre of ghee costs 1000 Rupee. **Kumari P.**, a 39-year old widow, earns about 5500 Rupee a month selling ghee and some milk.

In addition, sale of the water buffalo offspring provides a considerable income. Several of the women, who received a water buffalo in 2007, have by now earned 30,000 – 40,000 Rupee from the sale of male calves. The money is mostly used for clothing and education. **Kishna K.**, aged 35 years, has been most fortunate and shown certain skills. So far, she has sold three male calves for 30,000 Rupee in total and her water buffalo has just given birth to another male calf, while a female calf has produced another female calf. Kishna's husband left her 13 years ago when she was pregnant. Her son is now in grade 9. Almost all of the women keep the female calves unless there is an acute emergency (hepatitis or another serious illness) or they have to pay exceptionally high school fees. For example, **Shunmaja P.**, a 51-year old widow with three children, is financing her daughter's nursing degree in Pokhara, which will cost 95,000 Rupee per year and takes three years. From the sale of three

calves she already raised 32,000 Rupee. If she would wait and sell the calf when it is two years old, she could earn twice as much. But in most cases, the women need the money urgently. Several women, like **Puspa P.**, pay for their daughter education up to grade 15 (equivalent to A-levels/high school certificate), which will enable them to find good employment with businesses, banks, tourism etc. **Vishnu M.G.**, an 80-year old grandmother from Jhi, wants her granddaughter to complete grade 12 so that she can become a primary school teacher, whereas her grandson left school after grade 10 and works in their fields which yield enough harvest for the whole year. The water buffalo and the female calf are now looked after by the grandchildren but the grandmother still participates in the decision making. The father died seven years ago and the mother died giving birth to the daughter.

Two mothers have built a house, one of them is **Pudro K.** (see the postcard), who lives high above Dana. Her two children are now in grades 4 and 6. She no longer sells grass (her daily income was about 100 Rupee), but instead is leasing some additional land and continues to sell milk. She has saved more than 40,000 Rupee in the savings club and has taken out a loan. Her house is brick built with a corrugated sheet roof and there are only another seven monthly instalments on her loan left to repay.

Further up on the hill lives **Pulmaya P.**, a 40-year old mother of two highly intelligent boys (both have skipped a grade), who also received a water buffalo in 2007. She saved 60,000 Rupee with the savings club and with the help of relatives has built a much smaller house than Pudro with a straw roof, wooden beams, some rocks and clay. She did not want to take out a loan. Both women were given land by relatives after they had saved larger sums. They are now living much higher up the hill than before because further down in the village, nobody would offer them any land. **Muna J.** said in 2008 that she wanted to sell her male calf to build a bhatti (cookshop). For the last three years now, she has been running her own bhatti with a small adjacent shop, jointly owned by herself and her parents. Muna contributed 60,000 Rupee to the building costs (about 50,000 Rupee came from the sale of calves), her parents paid for most of it. But Muna contributes greatly to the successful business, her water buffalos produce milk and ghee for the restaurant and the family and with the dung used on her leased fields, she can grow potatoes and vegetables which keep costs down. Muna can harvest more than enough and is able to even sell vegetables and potatoes. Her small daughter, who loved the calf so much, wants to stay in school up to grade 15 and hopes to become a doctor.

But what touched me more than these fascinating success stories was how mothers like 41-year old **Zokmaja P.** have improved their life. Zokmaja and her two children (aged five and six at the time) were deserted by her husband six years ago without any means of support. She worked as a day labourer until a bad fall left her unable to walk for six months. She was devastated and did not know how to feed herself and her two children. Then she received a water buffalo, her neighbours and her children fetched the fodder and sold ghee and so the water buffalo carried the family through the time of her illness. Now Zokmaja is leasing some land, sells calves and the family has a good life. But what matters most to her