

PAHUNCH

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Trail Bridges and Tourism

Breathtaking mountains, diverse flora and fauna and varied ethnic diversity make Nepal the ultimate trekkers' destination in the world.

Every year, thousands of tourists come to the country to explore remote trails and to enjoy the natural beauty and rich cultural diversity that the local villages have to offer. Along these trails and tracks, one invariably has to cross trail bridges to pass over streams and rivers that crisscross the majority of trekking routes.

For many tourists, these trail bridges, add to the local flavor and sense of adventure that they have come to the region to explore. But for others, the bridges are a stark

reminder of the difficulties that locals face in their mobility needs. Many realize the significance that they have on the economic, social and cultural development of the region; including the dependence of the tourism sector.

In this fifth issue of PAHUNCH, the NTBF has therefore decided to bring focus upon the importance of trail bridges on tourism. It also seeks to highlight, the potential of trail bridges, through the connectivity that they provide, to contribute towards the growth and promotion

of tourism in remote areas of the country.

Among the many articles in this issue, one of particular interest - is on the privately constructed bridge across the Bhote-Kosi, which is used for Bungee Jumping. At 500 ft (160 m) drop, it is the longest free-fall jump in the world, attracting hundreds of thrill seekers ever since it first came into operation.

Similarly, the ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project) has numerous bridges which are invaluable for connecting routes and trails in the region.

Since its inception in 2005, the NTBF has been instrumental in bringing such relevant trail



bridge issues to the forefront of the general public. However, due to the lack of funds, the Forum is currently facing a serious threat to its survival. Securing funds is essential for its viability. But, unfortunately, except a few modest donations, nothing has been forthcoming.

If the NTBF is to continue representing the voices of the poor then all those concerned; members, stakeholders and donors; need to be aware of this reality and help contribute towards the viability of the Forum and its objectives.

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(Opinion expressed in the articles of this bulletin are the writers. NTBF will not be held responsible).



Bungee Jumping from a Suspended Bridge: The Ultimate Adrenaline Rush!

■ **By Rewati Sapkota**
In Bhotekoshi, Sindhupalchok

As not only do they attract thousands of tourists every year, but also are able to provide international standards of safety and accommodation with the benefits being shared with the local communities.

“The thrill of a life time”- is how Jessica, a tourist from the United States describes her feelings after bungee jumping off the 160m high suspended bridge in Sindupalchowk. A feeling echoed by Premraj from Madras, who adds “...though its scary at first, once you jump the feeling is totally indescribable...”

Like Jessica and Premraj, hundreds of other tourists in search of the ultimate adrenaline rush make their way up to the Last Resort, which operates the jump, to leap from the highest free-fall in the world.

Located over the Bhot Kosi river, 100 km North-East of Kathmandu and approximately 15 km West of the Tatopani Border between Nepal and China, the jumping site has been attracting over 2,000 jumpers every

year. Since it began operations in 1998, over 14,000 people have already jumped from the 166m long suspended bridge, which was specifically built for the bungee jumping purpose.

According to the organizers, while the majority of the jumpers (39%) come from Western European countries and Israel (31%); Nepalese youths also make up a significant 21% of the total jumpers. A figure, which has steadily increased over the past two years, especially after the start of the peace process.

Not everyone is however allowed to jump. Restrictions are imposed against pregnant women and those who have undergone recent operations. Similarly, everyone must be over 13 years of age and must weigh in between 40 – 120 kgs.



The sport itself is believed to have been developed from the indigenous practice of “Land diving” among the Pentecost Island tribes of Vanuatu. This is a small nation made up of island chains in the Pacific Ocean, where young men jump from wooden platforms with vines attached to their ankles as a test of their courage and entry into adulthood. The commercialization of the sport was started in the 1980s by A J Hackett, a New Zealander, who substituted the vine ropes with large elastic cords and opened the first commercial jumping site in New Zealand.

Eventually, this sport entered Nepal, when a jumping site was constructed in 1998. The suspended bridge was specifically designed for bungee jumping purposes by New Zealand Engineers and was constructed by the Radha Engineering Company at a budget of NRs 5.7 million rupees. With a 4X safety factor, the bridge has been made up to international safety standards with a loading capacity of 4.5 tones.

Presently, the jumping operations are run by two Nepalese bungee masters, Prakash Pradhan and Shailesh Chaudary, who themselves received their training from Australian bungee jumping masters. They received their certificates only after supervising more than 2000 safe jumps each.

According to Bishnu Neupane, owner and organizer of the Last Resort, the initial investment in the project has more than paid for itself. He mentions that while the initial site for the jump was being surveyed, they had decided upon the present location, in between the Panglang (Listi VDC) and Tyangthali (Marmin VDC) because of existing transport facility near Kathmandu and Tibet as well as the desire to improve the lives of the local communities.

As presently, local villagers make up the majority of the resort staff. In addition, safer and more convenient river crossings provided by the suspended bridge has more than helped the villagers improve their mobility

needs. With villagers from cross the Bhote Kosi river now easily able to access the highway to go to either Tatopani or Kathmandu. Shops and restaurants have also opened up near the jumping site to cater to the tourists as well as on lookers who watch the jumps from the nearby areas.

According to Mr Nuepane the success of the Last Resort should be taken as a good example of how tourism in Nepal can be developed. As not only do they attract thousands of tourists every year, but also are able to provide international standards of safety and accommodation with the benefits being shared with the local communities. He also points out that due to the natural topography of the country there are many other potential bungee jumping sites in Nepal that could be operated through suspended bridges. And with the changes that are taking place in Nepal right now, he is hopeful that as soon as there is political stability, he may be able to expand the sport in other areas of the country. ■



Trail bridges and Tourism in ACAP Region

■ **By Rewati Sapkota
In Birethanti, Kaski**

The region is also one of the most scenically beautiful parts of the country, where one can view excellent habitats for diverse flora and fauna along with the cultural diversity of the local communities.

Tourism in ACAP

It was 26 May 2008, when this scribe encountered a French couple, Pascal and Mary, who were climbing towards Ghorepani from Birethanti in Kaski District. The couple who were on their honeymoon had been trekking along the ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project) region for the past couple of days. An experience which they described as being “exciting and adventurous”.

The region is also one of the most scenically beautiful parts of the country, where one can view excellent habitats for diverse flora and fauna along with the cultural diversity of the local communities.

The conservation area is itself spread across 7,629 sq. km over 55 VDCs (Village Development Committees),

making it the largest protected area in Nepal. Established in 1986, the project includes seven areas– Ghandruk, Lwang, Sikles, Bhujung, Mang, Jomsom and Lomangthang. Each area has its own unique cultural heritage and attraction. For example, the people of the Loba community mostly resides in Lomangthang, which is known for its rich biodiversity. Similarly, in Ghandruk, there are mixed populations of Gurungs, Magars, Chhetrys and Brahmins who are known for their expertise in tourism management. Whereas in Sikes, which lies in Kaski district, the main profession of the locals is in integrated agricultural activities.

Every year, it is estimated that among the total tourist arrivals into the country, sixty percent travel to ACAP. Just

Tourist Arrivals in ACAP

The maintenance of trekking routes and the trail bridges which lie on these routes should therefore be of paramount importance to ACAP and the government.

Tourist	Number	Revenue	Time
British	2,424	4,848,000	Jan - March
Korean	2,359	4,718,000	Jan - March
Chinese	1,665	3,330,000	Jan - March
Australian	1,422	2,844,000	Jan - March
German	1,334	2,668,000	Jan - March
French	1,228	2,456,000	Jan - March
Japanese	1,186	2,372,000	Jan - March
American	1,125	2,250,000	Jan - March

Source: ACAP, 2008

within the period between January and March, there were over ten thousand tourists who visited the area. Most come for the 14 day trek across the region, with some adventurous individuals also tackling the 21 day trek across the lesser known tracks.

Not surprisingly, the arrival of tourists has had a tremendous impact on the economy of the region. Starting from the entry fee of NRs 2,000 per individual for Non-South Asian citizens (for South Asians' it is NRs 200), to the film shooting charges which range from NRs 5,000 to US\$ 1,000; large amounts of revenue have been collected, which directly goes to the government.

In addition, income is also earned through transportation charges, food supplies, lodging, etc. Just in the Ghandruk area alone, there are over 118 hotels, restaurants and tea shops

which are in operation. Local entrepreneurs have also taken advantage by selling handicraft, which has in turn provided income generation opportunities to many rural households.

Considering the large amounts revenue involved, it is natural to ask where and how the money is used. Entry fees and charges collected at check posts are directly sent to the government, but little is known about what happens afterwards.

Preservation and maintenance of trail bridges within ACAP

One of the underlying philosophies of the project is its focus on the improvement of the economic life of local inhabitants based upon sustainable resource use and conservation. This makes one ask, how is the project helping to conserve infrastructural resources such as trail

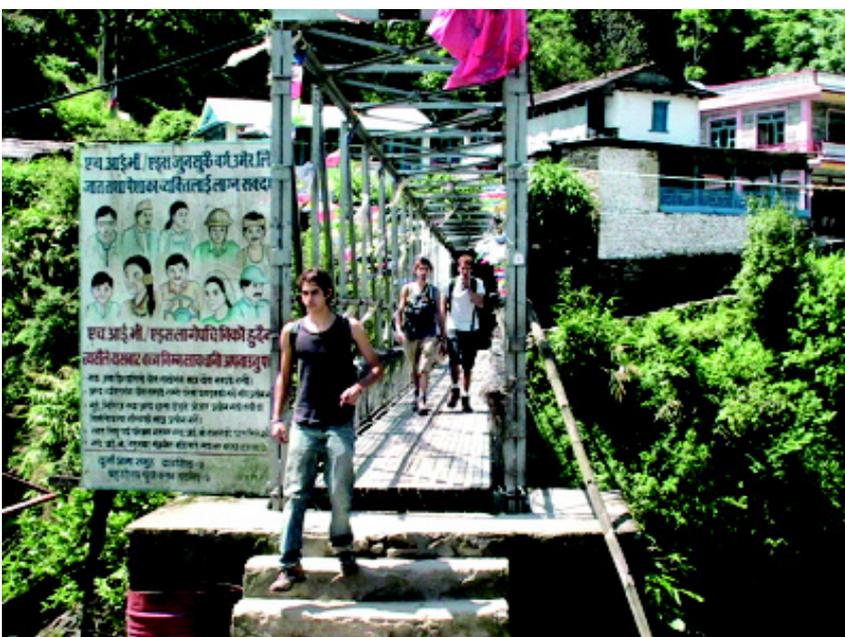
bridges in the region?

As presently, there are over 100 trail bridges located in the project area. These bridges directly facilitate in the mobility of local communities to access markets, schools, health facilities and communication centers. But, in addition, they are also equally important for the continuous tourist flow into the region.

The topography of the region, with countless rivers and streams, requires trekkers to cross bridges to continue their journeys. Without these bridges, many areas would be cut-off. Local communities would be isolated and entry into these areas would be severely restricted. This would have severe repercussions on the number of tourists coming into the area as well as in the generation of revenue.

The maintenance of trekking routes and the trail bridges which lie on these routes should therefore be of paramount importance to ACAP and the government. One way of helping would be by financially supporting the maintenance of bridges in its project area, through the revenue that it collects. Till now, the maintenance of the bridges have been entrusted to the local communities and the local governments, but as with other infrastructures, additional support would be very welcome.

With the arrival of tourists projected to increase due to the end of the decade long internal conflict the maintenance of the trails, tracks and bridges needs to be given more priority. Even Pascal, a passing traveler, is quick to point out that without the bridges his trek would be cut short and would come to an end quite quickly. ■





Dodhara-Chadani Bridge becomes a tourist destination, but lacks preservation

■ By JANAK RAJ PANDIT
IN KANCHANPUR

On the whole, the people of this far-western region are very proud of this bridge and realize its importance for their economic and social needs. It has brought smiles to their faces. But now, sadly they have also started worrying about its condition and the apathy shown by concerned authorities for its maintenance and preservation.

The uniquely built, Dodhara-Chadani bridge, is a multi-span suspension bridge which has been attracting national and international tourists alike.

Known throughout South Asia as a model suspension bridge, it has a total length of 1,452.96 m, which makes it the longest trail bridge built for walking purposes in the world. Altogether, the bridge consists of eight towers of 32.72 m height, four main spans of 225.40 m and eight side spans of 67.7 m. Furthermore, each span is fitted with wind-guys to prevent the shaking of the bridge during windstorms.

The bridge was built at a cost of NRs 94.28 million, after the Ministry of Local Development approved the plans. Construction was started in 2058 BS by the Suspension Bridge Division (SBD) of DoLIDAR. It was completed

in 2061 BS.

Located approximately 10 km south of the Sarada Barrage and 12 km southwest of Mahendranagar Municipality of Kanchanpur district, this bridge connects Piparaiya of Mahendranagar municipality-13 with Chadani VDC-6, which is located on the other side of the Mahakali river.

Due to its strategic location, this bridge has proved to be a blessing to over 35,000 people who reside at Dodhara and Chadani VDCs across the river, who have directly benefited as a result of the connection that it has provided to the rest of the country. As before its construction, the inhabitants were compelled to make a six-hour-long journey across Indian territory to reach their own district headquarters. Many were also at risk from Indian dacoits that would prey upon them.

The lack of an embankment has also increased the risk of damage to the bridge.

It was essential to connect these villages to the rest of the country, as most felt like Nepalese citizens in name only.



But now, after the construction of the bridge, this same journey takes half-an-hours walk. There is no longer the need to travel across India and now no longer are travelers subjected to the risk of robbers.

But more importantly, it is the sense of “connection” that the residents fell with the rest of the country that has been of the utmost importance. As before, the two VDCs were situated on an island, surrounded by Mahakali river at one side and Jogbudha river at the other side. According to Pravin Khadka, a local of Jhilmila Dodhara, it was essential to connect these villages to the rest of the country, as most felt like Nepalese citizens in name only. They were forced to visit Indian markets for basic necessities and even for primary health care.

Only after the construction of the bridge, have these residents been able to frequent Nepalese markets and reach the district headquarters for services. Conversely, the bridge has also allowed the products of Dohara and Chadani to be easily supplied to the markets of Mahendranagar. Trade has therefore increased tremendously, with the bridge becoming a boon for inhabitants on both side of the river. Students have also benefited, as they can now attend schools and colleges in Nepal. In the past, they were compelled to go to Indian colleges, mainly to Dehradun for their studies.

According to local Devsara Wali,

groups of students and teachers daily visit the bridge as a part of their educational tour. Some restaurants have also started businesses near the bridge, due to the large inflow of travelers, students and even national and international tourists.

Since the bridge is located just one km away from Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reservation (SWR), most tourists come to the bridge site to visit and observe. Many can be seen taking pictures of this unique bridge as well as the panoramic scenery that it affords. It has also attracted tourists due to the controversy which surrounds the issue of the Mahakali river and the usage of its water by India. A dispute, which has lead many activists to demonstrate at the bridge site, thereby attracting more tourists to the site.

On the whole, the people of this far-western region are very proud of this bridge and realize its importance for their economic and social needs. It has brought smiles to their faces. But now, sadly they have also started worrying about its condition and the apathy shown by concerned authorities for its maintenance and preservation. As one crosses the bridge, few can but notice that many of the bolts have been loosened or are missing. According to local Jay Bahadur Thagunna, maintenance of the bridge has been solely lacking. He points out that there is the risk of the bridge actually tilting

towards the Pipariya side due to the erosion of the Mahakali river. The lack of an embankment has also increased the risk of damage to the bridge.

Locals also point out that they have taken steps for its preservation. They informed Kanchapur District Development Committee (DDC) officials about its condition. But in reply they received no answers and so have become frustrated with their indifference. Some have even gone to the extent of submitting a memorandum to Subhas Nembang, Speaker of the Interim Parliament, to request for support for the preservation of this famous bridge.

Surya Khadka, UML leader from Dodhara, blames the DDC officials for not showing any interest in its maintenance. He claims that the concerned officials have not even visited the bridge site after its completion. However, it is a claim that is refuted by the DDC. According to Bhairav Bohara, Engineer at the DDC, already the DDC has allocated a budget for the maintenance of the bridge, and steps have already been started for its preservation.

It seems pointless pointing fingers a tone another as it will not achieve anything. Rather, considering the importance of the bridge, it is high time that everyone starts working on its preservation. The first step being the need of embankments to stop the erosion by the Mahakali river. ■

Social relations between villages have also been severely impacted. Especially for physically weak individuals like Jalapi, who are now compelled to endanger their lives while crossing rivers. "I am worried about whether I will ever be able to reach my maternal home once again in my life," says a visibly troubled Jalapi.



Reaching maternal home becomes a distant dream for Humlis

By Tirtha Raj Rokaya in Humla

It was seven years ago that Jalapi Rawat of Chhipra of Humla district last visited her maternal home in Simikot. Since then she has never returned.

It is not due to any restrictions from her husband or in-laws that has deprived her of the opportunity. But rather, Jalapi's contact with her maternal home was cut off when in 2059 BS, Maoist rebels destroyed three suspension bridges located in Nalla and Dojam of Humla district, and in Kharpu and Gyaru of Karnali, to foil possible entry of security forces to their base areas.

Jalapi is just one case in point. Others, mainly the elderly, children, physically feeble and disabled from the Southern part of the district, are also facing similar suffering due to the absence of a suspension bridge, which had provided the only means of transport in the rural region.

More than 30,000 people from 18 Village Development Committees from the southern Humla, had been benefiting from these bridges, which were constructed by the Suspension Bridge Division in 2034 BS.

According to Chaure Budha of Raya VDC, local people are now facing

severe problems to their livelihoods following the destruction of the bridges. "We have not been able to supply local vegetables, sheep and goats to the district headquarters," says Budha, adding, "It has also been difficult to carry foodstuffs, clothes and other essential commodities to our villages from district headquarters."

According to Maina Bahadur Hamal of Chhipra VDC, locals face a lot of difficulties in ferrying daily consumable goods to and from the district headquarters. He adds, "there is no alternative to the district headquarter to buy daily essential commodities like salt, cooking oil, rice and soap as well as for the purpose of buying and selling of land. But it has been very difficult to get to the headquarters now due to lack of bridges."

Explaining the problems of the locals he further adds that, "it is not so easy to get our work done at government offices and carry out development activities as movement of people has become very tough." Students and teachers of Chhipra, Kharpunath, Lali, and Raya VDCs have also been negatively affected. "We don't know whether we will return back home safely in the evening," says Kasya

Jethara who works at the Mansarobar Higher Secondary School. According to Mohan Rokaya of Bipin Construction Service, transporting construction material to the villages has become a very difficult task due to the lack of bridges.

Social relations between villages have also been severely impacted. Especially for physically weak individuals like Jalapi, who are now compelled to endanger their lives while crossing rivers. "I am worried about whether I will ever be able to reach my maternal home once again in my life," says a visibly troubled Jalapi.

She'll never forget the incident when an office assistant working at the Small Hydropower Project Humla lost his life while attempting to cross the river with the help of a tulin, which is the traditional way to cross the river. A woman also met the same fate not long ago, an incident which is still fresh in her mind.

"We don't know how many people will have to face a similar tragedy. It is unfortunate that no one has cared about this serious problem" laments Prem Budha, former president of Raya VDC."

According to Raj Bahadur Shahi of Kharpu Nath, leaders and cadres of

different political parties were seen crossing the rivers with the help of a tuin, thereby risking their lives during the election campaign. He points out that, "they experienced the same suffering of the people. So we are hopeful that they may make plans to reconstruct the devastated bridges".

According to Humla District Development Committee (DDC), the suspension bridges in Kharpu, Nalla and Dojam were constructed at the cost of NRs 1.1 million, NRs 3.3 million and NRs 700,000 respectively. The reconstruction works of Gyaru suspension bridge should have been completed by 2065 BS.

Tilak Paudel, Local Development Officer of Humla DDC, points out that efforts are underway. According to him, the necessary documents have been forwarded to the concerned authorities in a bid to initiate the reconstruction works of Kharpu and Nalla suspension bridges.

But for the local people, the delay has already caused too many problems. "No one has bothered to solve this pressing problem even though two years have already passed. The then rebels who were responsible for their destruction are now the ruling party yet nothing has been done," says Lok Bahadur Hamal of Chhipra VDC.

The signing of agreements, political discussions and meetings being held in the capital are not of much concern to Jalapi. All that she hopes is that one day she will be able to meet her kin in her maternal home once the damaged bridges are built again. Others, in the villages in Humal will also be able to breathe a sigh of relief once the destroyed bridges are of Nalla, Dojam, Kharpu and Gyaru are reconstructed again.

The reconstruction of these bridges would certainly send the right message. Especially as Nepal now embarks on a new phase of its history. If the issues of these people were to be put forth as an agenda during the Constituent Assembly (CA) and the cabinet meetings that take place, then one can hope that the dreams of Jalapi and countless like her will one day be fulfilled. ■



Locals in Kalikot are compelled to continue risky journeys

By Dilli Pandey

As shown in the picture, the walkway is made of twigs supported along two iron cables. This is not a dummy bridge to demonstrate to children. It is a real bridge that is being used for crossing a river by locals of the northern part of Kalikot.

Only bold and fearless locals dare to cross the gorge through it. Common people are too frightened. Nevertheless, people of the surrounding villages are compelled to risk their lives for their daily livelihoods.

Previously, people had been using a bridge to cross a local river at Ryagila in Kalikot district. This bridge used to connect 17 VDCs of Kalikot district, 9 VDCs of Bajura as well as Humla and Mugu districts. But, Maoists destroyed it for their

security reasons seven years ago. This has resulted in the inhabitants of the area facing severe difficulties in their mobility and in their daily lives.

This bridge at Ryagilaghat, was built 30 years ago by the Remote Area Development Committee. It was the longest and busiest bridge in the district. Locals were able to arrive at the district headquarters Manma within two to three hours. A journey, which now requires them to walk for three to four hours, due to the lack of a bridge.

"Building a bridge will make our life easier. They continually assure us that it will be rebuilt. But, it still has not occurred," says Mithu Jaishi of Raku VDC. She however does acknowledge that the construction materials have been brought to the village.

The government released NRs 6.43 million seven years ago with a plan to reconstruct the bridge within two years. The budget was sent to the district and

Around 70,000 villagers in these areas have been affected due to the dillydallying of concerned agencies with regards to the reconstruction of the bridges. Locals are compelled to use boats, makeshift rope-ways to cross the rivers at the risk of their lives. Already, seven persons, including three children have lost their lives.

a User Committee (UC) was formed for the bridge's construction. According to Dev Raj Bharati, the Chairman of the committee, the concerned authorities claimed that the project was a priority, but in reality the work never began. He adds, "it is said that the entire project budget has already been released. But, the construction work has not taken place. The district development committee (DDC) has informed us (the UC) that it is investigating the matter."

Construction materials worth NRs 1.4 million were brought to the village but the users committee was told that NRs 5.2 million was spent for its transportation. "The materials have been brought here, but, the goods are different from what was described in the estimated details. The materials are useless. It can not be used in the construction of a suspension bridge," says Bharati, adding, "NRs 5.2 million has already been spent in transportation alone. Who will bear transportation expenses in future?"

Furthermore, members of UC have been blaming DDC officials and others for embezzling over NRs 2.1 million. Presently, the DDC is trying to take action against the concerned company, which has been accused for not supplying the materials as per the demand.

The Nepalgunj-based regional office of the Remote Region Development Committee had taken the responsibility of supplying steel parts for reconstruction of the bridge. Members of the UC and DDC officials found that the goods delivered by the supplier were different than what had been demanded, but, they only came to know about it after the supplier had supplied the materials. "This is a mistake done by the company and we will take action against it," says Local Development Officer, Yam Lal Adhikari.

Presently, the hope of the locals who wish the bridge to be built has been shattered. As already, the budget is finished, the materials that were supplied are different from that was

needed. Bridge construction has yet to start, with the construction company claiming the need of additional funds for the transportation of other goods.

Besides the Ryagila bridge, there have been others which have also been ravaged during the decade-long insurgency period. Five suspension bridges built over the Tila and Karnali rivers were damaged in Kalikot district during the conflict. No progress has been achieved in their reconstruction at Raraghat, Serighat, Lalighat and Bhaktighat.

Around 70,000 villagers in these areas have been affected due to the dillydallying of concerned agencies with regards to the reconstruction of the bridges. Locals are compelled to use boats, makeshift rope-ways to cross the rivers at the risk of their lives. Already, seven persons, including three children have lost their lives. ■

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Piloting of a Long Span Trail Bridge through the “Community Approach”

By Kanti Singh

Trail Bridges are considered as the backbone for rural transport in Nepal. As many trail bridges are constructed over many rivers, there is still a vast unfulfilled demand. In order to meet the trail bridge need of the country, a National Policy known as the Trail Bridge Strategy (TBS/LIDP) has been developed providing procedural as well as technical explanations. One of the technical explanations is about the classification of trail bridges. Trail bridges have been classified into three categories

- i. Short Span Trail Bridges (SSTB) range from 32 to 120 metres which are constructed by using steel cables. SSTB bridges are executed through the well known “Community Approach”.
- ii. Long Span Trail Bridges (LSTB) range from 120 m till 280 m for the suspension type and 120 m till 350 m for the suspended type. Both types are constructed by using steel cables and are executed through a “Contracting Approach”.
- iii. Truss Steel Bridge are up to 32 meters in length constructed by using steel steel truss and are executed through the Community Approach.

Premise

Users Committees (UCs) play a key role in facilitating the successful implementation of Short Span Trail Bridges. In absence of the elected body

at the local level, UCs have even represented the people of the districts in formulating their demands for bridges. During times of conflict, the UCs have taken unprecedented responsibilities that enabled the completion of a large number of bridges. The success stories of the UCs in constructing SSTB bridges have been the basis for wanting to pilot Long Span Trail Bridge under a Community Approach. It should be noted that potentially there are considerable savings one can make applying this approach instead of the classical Contracting Approach.

Objective of Piloting

The objective of piloting LSTB bridges through the community approach is to test the UCs’ capability of managing the execution of bridge works and also, of handling funds. The experience gained from this project will form guidelines for future courses of action.

Planning and Implementation Modality

The Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) through the Trail Bridge Support Unit (TBSU/Helvetas) has endorsed supporting this LSTB pilot bridge. A Collaboration Agreement between the DDC Dang and TBSU had been concluded regarding the trail bridge support. The Community Agreement between the DDC Dang and the community had subsequently been signed in order to

commence work at site. The UC is responsible to execute the construction of the bridge with technical support from the DDC and TBSU. A Delegation Agreement between DDC-Dang and a local NGO has been established to provide social support to the UC.

Roles & Responsibilities of the Stakeholders

The roles & responsibilities of all the stakeholders are defined in detail in the above mentioned agreements. The main responsibilities are:

- i. TBS/DoLIDAR is to develop policies, norms and standards, coordinate among donors, allocate budget and develop technical know-how and approaches through pilot projects.
- ii. DDC is to plan and implement the project through the community with the support of the NGO.
- iii. TBSU is to provide technical support which includes monitoring of the project.
- iv. NGO is to provide social support (note: on SSTB bridges it also provides technical support) to the communities which include timely reporting on the progress of the project.
- v. UC is to execute the construction works and is responsible for handling the fund received from various sources for the project.

Piloting of Bhimbud Bridge as an LSTB under Community Approach

As Rapti is one of the major rivers, a

The objective of piloting LSTB bridges through the community approach is to test the UCs’ capability of managing the execution of bridge works and also, of handling funds. The experience gained from this project will form guidelines for future courses of action.

bridge is a priority for the community. For the first time in Nepal, a bridge Users Committee (UC) in Dang district is constructing an LSTB bridge. Construction work on Bhimbad Bridge began in FY 2007/08 over the Rapti River. This bridge will serve 1,222 households comprising 7,332 people. The community is made up of Janajatis (53%), Dalits (13%), Minorities (17%) and “others” (17%) which include Brahmins, Chhetris and Thakuris. The bridge will provide access mainly to markets, health centers, service centers, educational centers and for enabling to conduct household activities by the communities.

The communities on both banks of the river, in the vicinity of the bridge, have proven to be highly committed. The DDC and VDCs, including other stakeholders, have committed their respective support. As Forest Users Groups (FUGs) will benefit substantially, nine such groups have contributed to the bridge construction. The community members are very responsive and have been briefed on the phase-wise construction process as well as on the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. On the basis of this experience, the classical Contractors Approach will be reviewed and, possibly after more tests, amended to make more space for the Community Approach.

At present, the river at Bhimbad is crossed with the help of boats. After the completion of the bridge, the boatpersons will lose their jobs. Therefore, these boatpersons will receive priority with bridge training during which they will acquire skills that could help them become construction workers.

Technical

The span of this bridge will be 165m span and its walkway width 1.0 m. The bridge is of the suspended type. The bridge is designed following the well established LSTB technology. The foundations of the bridge will be based on soil in both banks. The Main Anchorage Foundations are designed as gravity foundations. On the right bank, the foundation block will be elevated to gain sufficient free board.

A windguy system is also included to withstand possible high winds and to provide additional stability to the bridge.

Social

A Public-Hearing, -Review and – Audit will be held at the start, midway and conclusion of the project. The main intention of organizing these events is to maintain transparency throughout the project cycle. It is important to form an inclusive Users Committee which comprises of the disadvantaged group. At the same time the project focus on improving their livelihood.

Contribution Pattern

The contribution pattern was finalized during a meeting at the DDC premise in presence of all the stakeholders. The committed contributions are as follows:

Institution	Amount	Percent
DDC	Rs 334,924	8 %
VDC	Rs 300,000	7 %
FUGs(9)	Rs 882,600	21 %
Community	Rs 43,622	1 %
RRN (NGO)	Rs 100,000	2 %
TBSU	Rs 2,597,566	61 %
Total	Rs 4,258,712	100 %

Learning

Although the bridge is in its initial stage of construction, preliminary learnings are given below. Reformation of the UC is suggested in order to better reflect the composition of the local population.

The bridge layout work has been completed and the first phase of work has commenced. Technical input from TBSU will be high as this is a piloting case and also due to the lack of NGO’s technical capacity.

The NGO will provide social support to the UC. The Social Mobilizer of the NGO needs to visit the site frequently during its initial stage as the UC will need support in managing fund, executing bridge construction and also in making the reporting system effective.

The expected participation of the UC members is higher than for average SSTB-bridges as the funds they will manage will be considerably higher and also to manage execution of the bridge.

An issue that has emerged at the bridge site is that some poor women were deprived of work because of their babies. It is a serious concern for all the stakeholders and we have an important role to play in finding the right solution. ■

Nepal Trail Bridge Forum

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NTBF has overcome many hurdles but can it overcome the current crisis?

By Prof. Deepak Bhattarai

Trying to be a good Ambassador for the rural poor who cannot fund the very organization that is representing them is not always easy. The NTBF which has so far exclusively operated through volunteers has cleared many hurdles out of the way. It however again has come to a life threatening hurdle, namely a lack of funds, which again seems insurmountable.

When the NTBF was created back in 2005 it faced two serious issues. The first issue was its registration thus determining its legitimacy. Due to the then reigning conflict, registration kept on being postponed, frustrating everybody but the initiators succeeded at last in 2007 to get the Government's formal endorsement. What a relief!

The second issue started by wanting to be a good Ambassador for the rural poor it represents. Many of these people complained that they couldn't get their produce to the market during the monsoon because of a lack of bridges connecting the rural roads. Hence the then still informal NTBF organized a seminar getting all the

bridge experts together to see how the problem could be tackled. Misfortune wanted that the king seized power the very day the NTBF had organized the seminar. Consequently, all donors boycotted the seminar thereby frustrating the initiators who were and still are volunteers with good intentions wanting to help their clientele.

After having overcome the big blow, the initiators organized a second seminar on the same issue, entitled "Connecting Rural Nepal" in 2007. The attendance of Government authorities and especially bridge professionals was encouraging. However the follow-up, possibly also because of a poor attendance by donors, still leaves a lot to be desired.

In its movement of being a good Ambassador to the poor, the NTBF intended to hold workshops in each District with a cross section of society in an attempt to identify any discontent with respect to pedestrian bridges. Funds proved to be a major obstacle but NTBF eventually persuaded TBSU of Helvetas to sponsor two workshops. Two districts with extreme characteristics were chosen, notably Baglung and Jumla. People of both Districts were very enthusiastic and the problems surfaced almost immediately.

The results of both meetings were published in the PAHUNCH of July – September 2007, Vol. 1 Issue 2.

Baglung, even though it is one of Nepal's smallest Districts possesses 400 bridges! Baglung has a long tradition in trail bridge construction and its people proved to contribute generously (as much as 40%) towards bridges. Currently, it has 100 bridges in disrepair of which 50 are life threatening! The people of Baglung wish to again contribute liberally to reduce this number markedly but are frustrated by the contribution constraints donors impose and thus repairs progress very slowly.

Jumla, is the other extreme. It is one of the largest Districts and is struck by extreme poverty. As a result it only has 10 bridges and its people identified 150 locations where bridges are desperately needed. People in Jumla feel that their needs have been ignored for decades by both the Government and donors.

Being a good Ambassador to the poor, the NTBF reacted swiftly after the tragic bridge accident of Subaghat bridge in Surkhet. Both the Chairperson, Professor Deepak Bhattarai and the Treasurer Er. Saroj Upadyaya went to the site, to declare their sympathy with the bereaved

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NTBF has given a proposal to DoLIDAR, requesting the latter to mandate it with the administration of distribution and sales while paying DoLIDAR a royalty. The NTBF is hopeful to soon receive DoLIDAR's mandate which would ease its financial plight.

Government officials which culminated in a report. The NTBF will continue to keep pressing the Government to release the overdue report and to compensate those that lost their beloved ones adequately. The PAHUNCH of January – March 2008, Vol. 1 Issue 4, was fully devoted to this tragic accident.

Hiring two professionals, renting modest facilities and continuing or rather expanding the work like in Baglung and Jumla is considered a prerequisite for NTBF's professionalism and survival. It therefore approached SDC in March 2008 for financial support. Although it appeared promising, so far no funds have been formally committed and despite the generous contributions by "Bridges to Prosperity" from America as well as "Hulas Steel" from Nepal, NTBF has almost run out of its resources. TBSU of Helvetas used to generously subsidize PAHUNCH and also this source is running out. A solution to this grave problem is very urgent!

Maps popular amongst developers of

infrastructures and tourists alike that were developed by the Government with the support of SDC/Helvetas, were, because of legal complications, withdrawn from the bookshops in 2002. NTBF has given a proposal to DoLIDAR, requesting the latter to mandate it with the administration of distribution and sales while paying DoLIDAR a royalty. The NTBF is hopeful to soon receive DoLIDAR's mandate which would ease its financial plight.

Lastly, NTBF considers itself as the most appropriate candidate for maintaining the Nepal Trail Bridge Record (NTBR). The NTBR is currently maintained by TBSU of Helvetas and will need, one day, to be handed over to its counterpart, DoLIDAR. As the NTBF is closer to bridge users than the Central Government it considers itself more apt to assume responsibility for said NTBR. However, until the sales of maps starts to bring in revenue, will NTBF need financial support from outside for this additional duty. ■

families and to investigate as to the cause of the accident. The Chairperson presented the NTBF's findings in a meeting with the Government, various donors and TBSU of Helvetas. Subsequently preventative measures were taken to prevent similar accidents and the Government appointed an enquiry comprising different

The unit price of trail bridge parts purchased by the Trail Bridge Support Unit (TBSU)

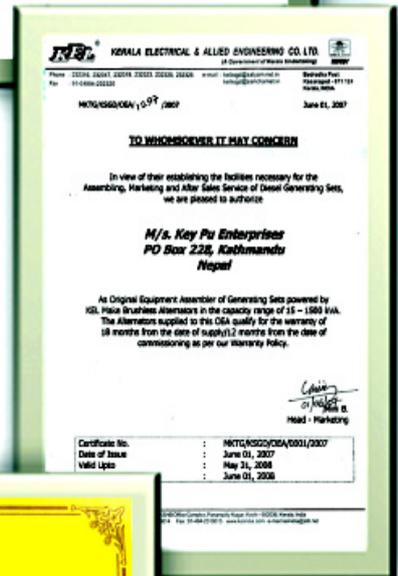
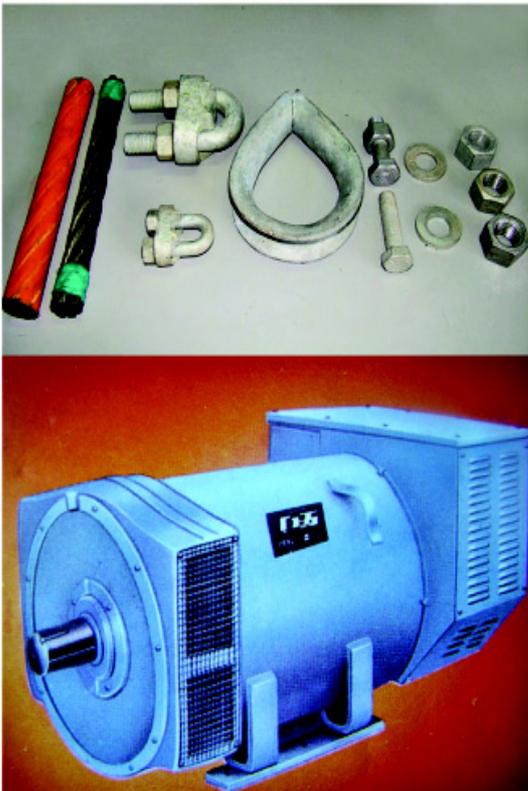
13mm steel cable	NRs 63.00 per meter (excluding duty)
26mm steel cable	NRs 236.00 per meter (excluding duty)
32mm steel cable	NRs 322.00 per meter (excluding duty)
Steel Parts	NRs. 90.00 per kg. (excuding VAT)
Galvanizing	NRs. 45.00 per kg. (excuding VAT)
Reinforcement	NRs. 90.00 per kg. (excuding VAT)
Nuts and Bold Hot dip galvanized	NRs. 220.00 per kg. (excuding VAT)
Cement	NRs. 700.00 per bag (excuding VAT) including delivery at store
13mm: Bulldog grips	NRs. 50 per piece (excuding VAT)
26mm: Bulldog grips	NRs. 200.00 per piece (excuding VAT)
32mm: Bulldog grips	NRs. 270.00 per piece (excuding VAT)

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Membership : Term Member (2 Years) Life Member
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Membership : Term Member (2 Years) Life Member
Signature : Date :

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