

Field visit to Khaniyapani September 25-27 2011 (by Julia Kilcer and Marcus Teets):

The bus stopped in Nepal Thok and we proceeded through the rice field to the river. Two strong men attempted to carry us across (Marcus was dropped in) and we proceeded along the path. I would recommend back-tracking along the road when the bus stops to a foot-bridge. They had not recommended going this way to begin with because there is construction going on uphill to the path on the far side of the foot bridge and risks of falling stones or land-slides. You may want to take this into consideration on the return trip.

The walk was along steep hills but the whole trip from Nepal Thok to Khaniyapani took about two hours.

Upon arrival, the head of the VDC, Vaughn (not sure on the spelling but this is how it sounded), recommended we re-order our visits to make it more efficient. Here is what he recommended: First, Hildevi (this is about 2h by car from the second foot bridge), then Bethan, Makadhun, then Bhirpani and Khaniyapani (a 6h walk from Bhirpani). These towns seem to be quite spread out and the terrain is mountainous.

We completed our first survey with a woman who was bringing a huge pile of firewood. Her aunt had been so badly burned in a cooking accident that she lost one hand completely, the other partially and burned her neck and face.

The nearest clinic is a health post about 3h away and provides only basic care.

We also met a teacher and rural health volunteer, Punyoti, who spread the word that we were there and would meet with villagers the following day. At this point the rain began to pour so we rented a room in Punyoti's family's house. It rained through the night and all of the following day. The paths turned into rivers and mud so we were limited in our mobility.

People living in the nearby houses came to where we were staying because they were excited about the chulo project. Our sample is therefore limited to a small area and we were unable to weigh firewood samples. People estimated the weights of their daily firewood consumption. Living in close proximity, the amount of time to collect firewood and water are the same in most of the surveys. Also, although people were excited about the stoves, they knew very little about them. Smoke reduction seemed to be the largest known advantage. Several people did not know if there would be any advantages or disadvantages because they had not used one before.

Water for the people with whom we spoke was the spring at the center of the community. Most people also have a "tap" which seems to refer to large jugs of water in the corner of the room or to the rain collection with tap. The water seemed to be of good quality (we drank it without ill-effect) but it gets blocked by landslides and it dries up when there is drought. When this happens they have to go to the source about a 3-4h walk up the mountain.

Firewood comes from the community forest. As far as we could gather, there are no private forests or public lands. Generally people were describing having to spend "all day" seeking out and collecting firewood. Three or five years ago this was much different. They would spend maybe two hours doing the same chore.

The question regarding uses of fire or fuel was always for cooking food for humans and animals and heating water. I am sure that the stoves do generate heat which is beneficial at night or in cooler weather but no one identified this as a purpose of the fire.

The main cause of deforestation was most often attributed to firewood collection. Other factors were: population growth leading to more firewood needs, drought - in dry years they have to go even farther for wood, an invasive species of ground covering plant that makes new tree growth difficult. People reported that logs for construction come from a different place and are not contributing to deforestation in the same place.

We awoke the following morning to grey skies but the rain had stopped. After witnessing landslides the evening before and hearing that the river we had crossed was impassable, we decided to leave before the rains began again. The road had been eroded in several places and we saw more evidence of landslides along our route. We took the longer path to the footbridge and made it to Nepal Thok. After lunch, the rain started and we caught the bus back to Kathmandu.

David B.C. acted as translator and was a wonderful member of our team. He helped us to navigate through to the small towns and was patient through the mud and rain. We were so grateful for his assistance and company.

Thank you to Anita, Katharina, Frank and ÖFEN FÜR NEPAL for letting us be a part of your project. We will remember the people we met and all of the experiences for a long time and we hope to be a part of your work again. After the glimpse we have had, we believe we have learned how to direct our efforts to be even more useful in the future.