

## Our Rights and Initiative Suggested by “Hamro Pahal” - A Case Study of Giving the Voiceless a Platform in Rural Nepal-

ラジオ放送「Hamro Pahal」が教えてくれた私たちの権利  
: ネパールの農村地域におけるマイノリティの社会参加をめぐる事例研究

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### <Abstract>

As the research project, the radio program “Hamro Pahal” consisted of 12 episodes, produced as a platform for raising the voice of the Indigenous community of Khoincha, Bungamati in Lalitpur, Nepal. Through this program, people who are called the Boshi in Khoincha, the community have been able to strongly express their problems and concerns and look for solutions with the relevant stakeholders. The radio program was produced as an effort by the local media sector to solve the problems faced by the Indigenous community, broadcast through Ujyaalo Radio Network 90 MHz. Each episode is about half an hour long and includes interviews with the locals, from the Ministry of Health, district health office, local governance, health workers, and specialists. This study describes the situation of those living serious situations deprived of any basic government services from the perspective from health rights. The research team explored and found these efforts will have a positive impact on the rural community, and will enhance access to information. Therefore, this case study suggests transformation of learning styles in adult education and enhancement of access to information as the human rights.

### <要旨>

本稿は、ネパールのラリプール郡ブンガマティ村コインチャ地区の先住民らが自身の生活環境をめぐる権利獲得を目指すプロセスについて、ラジオ放送番組「ハムロ・パハル」を制作、実施した事例研究の分析である。先住民コミュニティが直面している問題を解決するために、ローカルメディア局である Ujyaalo Radio Network 90 MHz の協力の下で放送した。各放送は約 30 分に編集し、保健省、地区保健局、地方自治体、医療従事者、専門家などの地区の人々へのインタビューを含んでいる。政府から基本的な支援を提供されてこなかった人々の極めて深刻な状況について、とりわけ、コロナ禍における彼らの健康権の観点から現状について述べるものである。調査チームによる実践は村落社会にプラスの影響を与え、さらには、情報へのアクセスを強化することを見出したといえる。本研究は成人教育における学習スタイルの変革と情報へのアクセスの強化について、基本的人権の観点からも示唆を与えるものである。

## <Key Words>

Access to Information, Community Radio, Social Participation

Adult Education, Health rights, COVID-19

## I. Introduction

Media play a vital role in achieving the various aspects of marginalized people's right to basic free health services. Strengthening the voices of people living in poor health improves understanding and actions aimed at addressing and promoting the right to health and can inform and influence public agendas locally, nationally, and internationally along with influencing government action plans. Appropriate access to knowledge and information helps (economically and socially excluded) communities work for a better future.

In Nepal, there are many poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized groups. In particular, there is a lack of a proper health delivery system especially for socially marginalized people in rural areas. According to WHO data, Nepal ranked 139th in life expectancy with the average Nepalese living to 70 (WHO Nepal, 2021). Health care facilities, sanitation, and hygiene is of very poor quality. One of the reasons for this is inadequate government funding in the health sector. Approximately 70% of health expenditures come from out-of-pocket contributions. Health and education have been prioritized to increase the Human Development Index (HDI), which currently stands at 0.602, to 0.65 (Government of Nepal, 2021).

The Gorkha earthquake on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015 destroyed several houses in Bungamati, marking the most serious damaged site in Lalitpur. Although villagers received grants from the government through the National Reconstruction Authority, some destroyed houses have yet to be rebuilt. Furthermore, Nepal was also impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2020, the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in a youth who came from China. During the pandemic, the government of Nepal implemented lockdown across the country. People were afraid to go out for months and faced mental and physical problems. The pandemic led to many deaths, many lost their jobs, and many lost their livelihoods. COVID-19 has changed not only the health sector but also education, employment, finances, and lifestyle.

Along with lack of empowerment, lack of access to knowledge, skills, and information can also be seen as the major cause of inadequate access to quality free health services and maternity care. Women and marginalized people are the main groups who are excluded from the health services in several aspects. This study produced and implemented a radio program aimed at

improving or enhancing people’s access and rights to knowledge and information about health services under the COVID-19 pandemic based on a pilot survey was conducted in Khoincha, Bungamati village, Lalitpur from the latter part of June to the end of August 2021 (Nagaoka,2021). In this paper explores and examines and the non-formal learning opportunity using radio focus on indigenous community as a case study.

## **II . Research Background**

It is necessary to discuss the background to implementing the research project in Bungamati. Initially, our research network<sup>1)</sup> broadcast educational radio program called “Baahrakhari” (=read and write) for alternative non-formal education for adult women in Khoincha. The program was launched in 2009-2010 with the support of the Toyota Foundation of Japan, that was primarily a literacy program for women implemented as a pilot project via community radio (Nagaoka & Karki, 2014). Community radio is based on a particular area, broadcasting local news or issues in the local language and is very effective and important for enhancing access to information, especially for rural people economically, culturally, and socially. “Baahrakhari” was a very interactive education program, but it was difficult to continue to manage the project and to provide learning opportunity for villagers due to a lack of resources or capacity related to economic issues.

Currently, most people living in rural areas can access radio information via transistor radio, mobile, or can listen to radio programs at tea shops and so on. Based on previous research and the effectiveness of the program, the decision was made to design another project “Bungamati Awaaj” in 2020 and carried out again in cooperation with Radio Sagarmatha after the Gorkha Earthquake. “Bungamati Awaaj” means the “voice of the people” in Bungamati. The research team focused on the Boshi in the Khoincha community in Bungamati who are marginalized in several aspects, and identified as the driving force behind the culture of the Kathmandu Valley (Maharjhan, Shakya, and Nagaoka, 2020).

## **III. Issues of the Khoincha Community in Bungamati**

### **1. Marginalized community**

The Indigenous community of Khoincha has been facing many problems for a long time. It is close to the capital city Kathmandu, however, Khoincha is far from the various services provided by the government. Khoincha is only about 10 kilometers from the central city of Lalitpur. Although this village can be accessed by road, most of people have to walk an hour to reach the health post,

a clinic, and a school to the main bus park in Bungamati. The locals are forced to walk on dusty, muddy roads.

After repeatedly raising the concerns of the residents in the “Bungamati Awaaj(= Voice of people in Bungamati )” (2020) program, they have received permission to rebuild the houses destroyed by the Gorkha Earthquake. They have since started rebuilding their homes. However, 12 out of 50 families have not been able to build houses yet and they are still in temporary shelters. Furthermore, older people are facing deteriorating health. Cold, dusty environment, and smoke from the brick kiln industry surrounding the community have caused asthma problems in senior citizens.

This community could not rebuild their homes because they had no land registered as their own. Our research team repeatedly took initiatives for them through our previous project “Bungamati Awaaj.” Most have now rebuilt their houses after initiatives with stakeholders including Guthi Sansthan<sup>2)</sup>, National Reconstruction Authority, and MPs through our program. However, they are not able to obtain a land registration certificate in their own name. They have not received compensation for the land taken by the government’s Fast Track Project and have been raising their families on farmland.

They have not received a single rupee in compensation for the land lost due to the aforementioned Fast Track Project. This is Khoincha residents’ main concern. Additionally, a total of nine government projects including 32 KV transmission lines, Bagmati corridor, and smart city are enforced in Bungamati. For these projects, the government has occupied their farmland. Hence, the locals fear that the government may have established national projects in their area to destroy their ancient settlements and cultural heritage.

## 2. Situation under the pandemic

There were no noticeable effects of COVID-19 in this village during the first and second waves because the village’s connection with other places was lost at that time. A local man lost his mother after she became infected with COVID-19 at the hospital. This was an isolated case; other people from the village did not need to be hospitalized until the third wave. However, the nearest health facility, a health post and a clinic, is an hour walk from the village. Due to such conditions, most chronically sick patients stayed at home rather than going for treatment. They must go to Bungamati Bazaar for minor check-ups such like blood pressure, blood sugar test and so on. Local people tolerated greater challenges to reach health services during the first and second lockdowns as all public transport was closed down. Most of the youths in the village lost their jobs during the COVID-19 period. After losing their jobs, they were forced to return to agriculture. They have indicated that they lost their livelihoods during the pandemic.

### 3. The Boshi

It is necessary to describe about people called the Boshi in Khoincha, Bungamati. The Boshi have been managing wood for Rato Machhendranath’s chariot from generation to generation, they are Newar and belong to Putwar which is subordinate to the Maharajan caste that resides in this community. Their ancestor settled there from the time of the Licchhavi period (approximately, from the 4th to 9th century), but their community has long been deprived of various government services. There is no land in the name of the residents in this community; the government previously gave them the Guthi land.

The Boshi community has been working to collect wood for the Rato Machendranath Jatra<sup>3)</sup> of Lalitpur since the Licchhavi Period. The people from this community stay in the forests for 45 days every year to collect wood. This tradition has stopped them from adopting any other profession other than farming. A total of 144 ropanis (=approximately 7.2ha) of land was given to these families as an income for their efforts in collecting the wood for the Jatra. However, they do not have land ownership certificates for this land, which is registered under the Guthi system. This has been a major obstacle for them to reconstruct their homes destroyed by the earthquake in 2015 and to receive grants provided by the government. Furthermore, part of this land has instead been taken by the government for the Fast Track Project leaving the people with a little land and economically vulnerable as they can no longer carry out farming.

The aforementioned project was implemented by the government of Nepal after the Gorkha Earthquake. The village has not received compensation yet. The reconstruction of houses in this village started six years after the earthquake. However, 12 families have still not been able to build a two-room house due to financial constraints. Additionally, homes have not been completed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, they are struggling to pay off their mortgage loans. Most have lost their jobs and the Boshi community has been forced to return to subsistence farming.

## IV. Project Objectives

### 1. Objectives of the radio program

Objectives of this radio program as followings. Main objectives are to focus on Khoincha, Bungamati, and the surrounding Kathmandu Valley, and prepare a radio program to address the impact of COVID-19 on the local community.

- To provide information about masks, roads, family reunions, and access to health for rural women.

- To act as a bridge between the community and stakeholders to provide access to information and learning opportunities during COVID-19.
- To take initiative to solve the problems of women, children, and senior citizens through this project.
- To explore the potential knowledge and capabilities of rural women and empower them.
- To highlight the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and the problems faced by the Indigenous community of Khoincha in Bungamati.
- To produce and broadcast a radio program to provide knowledge and information regarding COVID-19 related problems, and that will spread and raise awareness about health rights, maternity health care, and other health related issues.
- To engage specialists to solve the problems by specialist.
- To encourage people through success stories that motivate safe or speedy recovery from COVID-19.
- To explore struggles they face in terms of their rights after COVID-19.

## V. Outputs and Activities

### 1. To give the voiceless a platform: “Hamro Pahal”

This research broadcast the “Hamro Pahal (Our Rights)” radio program to determine the impact of COVID-19 on human life. The program was launched to give the voiceless a platform, to teach them to live with COVID-19, and enhance or aware them. “Hamro Pahal” consisted of 12 episodes<sup>4)</sup> (see Table1).

**Table 1: Program Details**

#### **Episode 1**

**Subject:** An Initiation to solve the mental problems created by Covid-19.

**Broadcast Date:** 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2021

**Interviews with Local & Stakeholders:** Former Health Secretary, Psychiatrist

#### **Episode 2**

**Subject :** COVID-19's impact on the agricultural sector, wise and stakeholder suggestions for solutions

**Broadcast Date:** 31<sup>th</sup> December, 2021

**Interviews with Local & Stakeholders:** Chief of Agriculture Knowledge Center, Kathmandu Valley, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Chief of griculture and Livestock Business Management Division, and Agriculturalist.

**Episode 3****Subject :** COVID-19's impact on working women and initiatives to address it**Broadcast Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2022**Interviews with Local & Stakeholders:** Member of the National Human Rights Commission and current Chairperson, Chairperson of the Inclusive Commission, Head of the National Women's Upliftment Program**Episode 4****Subject :** Access to COVID-19 Vaccine and Stakeholder Role in Bungamati Khoincha Community**Broadcast Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2022.**Interviews with Locals & Stakeholders:** Senior Public Health Administrator, District Public Health Office, Lalitpur and Former Head, Vaccination Branch, Health Services Department.**Episode 5****Subject:** COVID-19's Impact on Children's Education and Stakeholder Suggestions**Broadcast Date:** 21<sup>th</sup> January, 2022**Interviews with Locals:** Children of Khoicha mahankal school, Mahankal Primary School Principal  
**Stakeholders:** Public Health Expert and Lalitpur Senior Public Health Administrator**Episode 6****Subject:** COVID-19's Impact on Senior Citizens of Bungamati Khoincha, Access to Health and Stakeholder Suggestions**Broadcast Date:** 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2022**Interviews with Local & Stakeholders:** Bungamati Ward Chairman, Director of Aging Nepal**Episode 7****Subject:** Access to COVID-19 vaccine and testing of vaccine in brick kiln workers of Bungamati**Broadcast Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2022**Interviews with:** Workers who were stunned after receiving the vaccine at the brick kiln in Bungamati, Head of Public Health Branch of Lalitpur Metropolitan city, Senior Public Health Administrator of Lalitpur Health Office and Ward Chairman**Episode 8****Subject:** Vaccine test against COVID-19, which is being conducted for the first time in Nepal, on workers of a brick kiln in Bungamati**Broadcast Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2022**Interviews with:** Brick kiln workers of Bungamati Manages the brick kiln and Member Secretary of Nepal Health Research Council**Episode 9****Subject:** Access and awareness on reproductive and maternity services for women in Bungamati**Broadcast Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2022**Interviews with Locals & Stakeholders:** Anami Chameli Singer of Dukuchhap Health Post, Senior Public Health Administrator of Lalitpur Health Office and Public Health Specialist.

### Episode 10

**Subject:** Initiatives to solve the problem of lack of easy access to health for the locals of Bungamati

**Broadcast Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2022

**Interviews with Locals & Stakeholders:** Ward Chairman of Bungamati 22 and Public Health officer of the Social Welfare Division of the Metropolitan city

### Episode 11

**Subject:** In the context of the 112th International Women's Day Initiatives for self-reliance and rehabilitation of local women in Bungamati after the COVID-19 epidemic

**Broadcast Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2022.

**Interviews with:** Locals Senior Citizen, Mahankal Primary School Principal and Teacher Social filmmaker and Lalitpur Metropolitan city and Women's Development Division Chief

### Episode 12

**Subject:** Boshi community was affected by various government projects along with the impact of COVID-19 on the cultural sector.

**Broadcast Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2022.

**Interviews with:** Locals Guthi Sansthan Law Officer and Spokesperson and Guthi Sampada Advocate

Source: Created by the author based on research report Hamro Pahal : Joint Project (2022)

The program is an attempt to raise awareness of the issues faced by the people of Bungamati and to draw the attention of stakeholders from the local to the central government. The promises made by the concerned stakeholders regarding solving their problems have been included in this half an hour radio program (broadcast Friday at 7:30 am on Ujyaalo Radio Network, Kathmandu on 90 MHz). The program was posted on Ujyaalo Radio's Facebook page and uploaded on the YouTube channel of "Hamro Pahal" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



<https://www.facebook.com/watch/134242996606448/507125654032916>

During the pandemic, many people faced mental problems when they lost contact with their relatives. This community, which does not have access to health and education, has been deprived

of its livelihood. Obligation to stay in the severe cold environment, the financial burden of losing employment, and the COVID-19 vaccine trial on the brick kiln workers are some of the issues raised in “Hamro Pahal.”

The radio program “Hamro Pahal” is designed to convey the message of living with COVID-19. During the first and second waves, the community was seriously hit. Many lost their families and many lost their jobs. People have been deprived of basic services like health and education. The pandemic has affected cultural, social, mental, and economic aspects. The effects of the pandemic have been felt all over the world by all classes. The voiceless people and marginalized class spoke out, stating that their opinions and concerns had previously gone unheard. One of those groups is the “Khoicha community in Bungamati.”

## 2. Outputs and activities

This research project outputs and activities are as follows.

- Produced, broadcast, and presented 12-episode radio program “Hamro Pahal.”
- Highlighted the problems faced by the local Boshi community due to COVID-19. Interaction with locals and stakeholders to find a solution to these problems.
- The Ward Office provided free health care and medicine to the senior citizens of Khoicha.
- The Ward Office allocated budget to arrange hymns and prayers for senior citizens.
- Local community displayed awareness of children’s education and women’s reproductive and maternity services.
- Initiated economic recovery for those who have lost their jobs.
- Availability of vaccines to brick industry workers.
- The secret vaccine trial of brick kiln workers exposed.
- Commitment from Public Health, Municipalities, and Women’s Development Branch to provide necessary assistance to the needy.
- Stakeholder arranged COVID-19 vaccine for Khoicha locality and held an awareness program for empowerment and training of women during our project.

## VI. Conclusion

### 1. Lessons learned from this research

The main occupation of Khoicha residents is farming. However, their farmlands were seized under the Fast Track Project, which has impacted their daily livelihood. On the other hand, the brick

industry has increased the pollution in this area, causing health problems for locals. The community and the brick kiln workers were not considered targets for the COVID-19 vaccine provided by the government. As residents, they were deprived of their right. Although the locals are deprived of several government services, Bungamati has become an experimental or important place of study as the location of world heritage sites.

Khoitcha residents were not able to obtain the COVID-19 vaccine even after six months of the government vaccination program. However, the research team learned that a US vaccine trial was underway among brick kiln workers, in the process of interviewing. The local government and stakeholders were unaware of this. Hence, the research team informed the Public Health Office Lalitpur, Metropolitan City, and Ward Office about the reality. This radio program explored the hidden interest and the reality of the trial project. Through this program, the research team aimed to take initiative to solve the problems faced by the people of Khoitcha, Bungamati.

“Hamro Pahal” has played an important role in drawing the attention of the concerned bodies, the Public Health Office, Lalitpur, and the Kathmandu Metropolitan Corporation, about workers in the brick industry being deprived of the COVID-19 vaccine. Specifically, the following points were clarified.

- Based on this, it can be assumed that if they opened vaccination centers that workers received vaccines in five brick kilns.
- The radio program “Hamro Pahal” explored the reality of the secret trial vaccination program on kiln workers. Through this program, the concerned stakeholders were informed about this. Our research team attempted to establish the truth via investigative research.
- The Ward Chairperson of Lalitpur Metropolis 22 distributed free health care and medicine to senior citizens. He also provided one lakh rupees to purchase musical instruments to learn and to play hymns and for entertainment<sup>5)</sup>.
- After notifying the community that the health service is available about an hour’s journey away, the social welfare department of the metropolis expressed its commitment to provide mobile services.
- Local women complained that they had not received any vocational training. The research team informed the Metropolis Women’s Department about this and within days, they invited the women for vocational training on flower production.
- The women’s branch has no information about Khoitcha, so they requested we schedule a meeting environment for the women there.
- Some suggested making a documentary on Khoitcha and its brick industry workers.

## 2. Advocacy through radio program as the afterword

After this project, the following issues remain.

- Impact of brick kiln pollution on the community.
- Exploitation of kiln workers.
- Kiln workers’ access to health and education.
- Initiation to pressurize the government to compensate those who lost their land due to the Fast Track and other projects.
- Advocacy for the rights of the landless/marginalized community.

Listeners could respond on the radio’s Facebook page, through which people requested continuation of the program. People also responded by calling the radio’s landline directly. One issue had approximately 9K views. Some have requested a program on the workers of the brick industry and the problems of the voiceless. This research, which was conducted as a pilot study, should be continued as a case study of community-based adult learning.

After the radio program, the local Ward Office provided free health care and medicine to the senior citizens of Khoincha. The Ward Office allocated budget to arrange sung prayers for senior citizens. Local community displayed increased awareness of children’s education and women’s reproductive and maternity services. They even initiated economic recovery for those who have lost their jobs. The district health office and Lalitpur Metropolitan city made vaccines available to brick industry workers. We exposed the secret vaccine trial on brick kiln workers and made the responsible stakeholders explain the reality. Public Health, Municipalities, and Women’s Development Branch have committed to provide necessary assistance to the needy. Stakeholders arranged COVID-19 vaccines for Khoincha locality and held an outreach awareness program for women empowerment and training during our project.

The research team explored and found these efforts will have a positive impact on the rural community, and will enhance access to information. Radio program “Hamro Pahal” brought essential information to the Kathmandu Valley and it could empower socially marginalized people. Therefore, this case study suggests transformation of learning styles in adult education and enhancement of access to information as the human rights.

### <Notes>

- 1) The members of the research network were the author, Nepal Foster Mate under the Sefu and Radio Sagarmatha. They were great cooperation for our team.

- 2) Guthi originally referred to the corporate body charged with the oversight of the various functions of each particular trust. The Newari community indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley still refer to the social organizations as Guthi (Scott, 2019). Guthi Sansthan is a socio-economic organization in the Newar community.
- 3) Rato Machhendranath Jatra is one of the most interesting festivals in Patan, Nepal. It is festival is believed to have started in 11th century. Rato means Red, it is also one of the chariot festivals of Nepal. It is belief people that Rato Machhendranath is a god of rain. Both Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal worship the deity, Rato Machhendranath.
- 4) A project agreement took place on 21th December 2021 between the author and Ujyaalo Radio Network 90 MHz and Nepal Foster Mate for a radio project targeting for rural women, senior citizens, and youths over the KTM Valley. As soon as the agreement, the proposed activities started from December 2021 to March 2022 (second week of December to last week of February), according to this agreement of project. The concept of this project was from the author, and radio producer Miss.Samjhana Maharjan, and Nepal Foster Mate, Mr. Kaji Ratna Shakya were coordinated. In the field, Mahankal Primary School principal Mr.Rajesh Maharjan and local chairperson Mr.Mangal Krishna Maharjan assisted us.
- 5) The construction of the conference room and assistance in the purchase of musical instruments for women's groups were very effective. In rural society, improvised singing and gathering on themes of worship to God and daily life issues are not just entertainment for women, but also an opportunity to learn from each other about the suffering and enjoyment of daily life.

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