

DRSP – Preventing Migration and Turning Despair into Hope _____

Tila Maya B.K. is a permanent resident of Katunje VDC, Ward no. 6 (upper tole). She is 27 years old and is married to Sana Kumar B.K. with two children. She earns her living from daily construction work on the Barbot-Mahendra road which is supported by the District Development Committee's district road help programme.



In 2000, when she was 15, Tila married 21 year old Sana Kumar B.K. They lived

a tough life with a food sufficiency that lasted hardly for 3 months. They received Rs. 30 per day from daily labour work, which was not sufficient even for everyday home and kitchen expenses. As a result, 5 years ago, they migrated to Kathmandu to escape the hardship of the village life, and hoping to earn good money and live a better life.

In Kathmandu, they found work on daily wage basis as house painters. Tila earned Rs. 50 to 100 while her husband received Rs. 200. But this only went as far as covering food and room rent and there was no money left for saving.

In 2009, while returning back to Kathmandu after meeting his parents, the bus in which Sana Bahadur was travelling met with an accident in between Ghurmi and Katari. His right hand and leg were fractured and he was bed-ridden for 10 months. This limited Tila's husband from doing the regular labour based work. He could only walk in and around the house, and look after the chickens.

Still in Kathmandu, Tila found it very difficult to pay the Rs. 1 lakh debt that she had borrowed for her husband's treatment. She sold the jewelry that she received on her wedding day, to pay the room rent and to feed her two children and sick husband in the city. Her parents also helped the couple by selling out some of their property – but even this was not sufficient for the further treatment that Sana needed. In 2010, Tila returned back to village in a very gloomy mood.

She was depressed her husband's condition was not improving. She was worried about how to look after the family, educate the children and how to pay back the loans. Could she even get a job in the village just to feed her family? Tila was weighed down with these thoughts and worries. They survived for a few months living on meager rations, although hopes were fading.

But there was a brighter light on the horizon.

In December 2009, SDC's District Road Support Programme (DRSP) started the road construction in Katunje. Tila joined the workforce in 2010, and she was paid Rs. 300 per day. She received 15 days of training from DRSP's social development programme on stone shaping and wall making. This helped her to work effectively on the road construction, as well as greatly benefiting her own family's road to recovery.

Now, just 18 months later, she has earned more than Rs. 100,000 through her work on the roads programme and she has only Rs. 30,000 of her debt to repay. Her 11 year old son is studying in Class 2, her other seven year old son is in Class 1, and she has purchased a small cow and two goats.



In addition, she has had the opportunity to participate in several trainings. She says, "The trainings helped me a lot" and she has clearly benefited a great deal from her participation in the road construction also in terms of self confidence and hope.

The road, being constructed, passes through her family's two plots of land. Previously, their annual income from the land was hardly Rs. 2,000, but now her monthly income alone is Rs. 8,000 to 12,000. Though the construction of the road has reduced the land holdings of some of the poor people in the area, the income from working on the road has solved several problems, especially in freeing themselves from the burden of debt, and helping to secure food

security through the earning of wages.

Tila says, "To gain something means to lose something". Even though she lost some land due to the road construction, she now easily manages her husband's continuing treatment and the daily household expenses. She is confident that if she gets the chance to work for another 3 years, she will soon be able to buy some more land.

Sure, life is still a struggle. Tila's family still do not have enough land to feed themselves, and the availability of grass from her land is too small to properly care for the cow and goats – but for now, they can survive on their income from her roads job. She points out that other programmes came to area, made big promises but did nothing for them. She once thought that DRSP was the same, but she says that the programme has a different way of working – it gives first priority to the poor, Dalits and women. It provides equal payment to all its workers, and it gives the wages directly to the workers themselves. She adds that all these factors has made this programme trustworthy and effective for poor people like herself: "If it wasn't for the roads programme and the way it works for the poor, I would have to sell my land, shift somewhere else and borrow more money to help properly care for my husband and family – DRSP stopped me from shifting".