

# Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation (NYOF)

## Indentured Daughters Program

Kathmandu, January 2010

### Report on programs funded by the New Day Foundation

In the fall of 2009, the New Day Foundation provided NYOF with a grant of US\$10,652 to support NYOF's Indentured Daughters' Program (IDP) in the district of Dang. The grant was made to support three components of the IDP; (a) income generation, (b) awareness raising, and (c) legal aid and advocacy.

NYOF has completed the programs relating to income generation and awareness, raising but the legal aid and advocacy program continues. A brief update of activities and outcomes of these program components is given below.

- (a) Income generation:** The income generation program was divided into two components; bamboo making and henna production. Both programs are showing very encouraging results.



*girl making bamboo handicraft*

- 1) **Henna production:** Over 50 girls have been trained in henna production. They were provided with henna plants to be planted in their back yards. Some of the girls who were already involved in henna production were given henna processing training. The henna leaves they grew and collected were dried and processed at a processing unit purchased by the girls themselves. They have also purchased a solar dryer and a grinder. The henna powder produced by

these girls is of very high quality and there is already a huge demand in the local market. For example, the girls involved in this program produced some 100 packets of 1/2kg henna as a test product and they went to sell it at a market place organized by an organization of local businessmen. All 100 packets sold out in less than half an hour and most interestingly, the cost of each pack was Rs. 70 (US\$1), which is not cheap for the local market. As a result of the market, local buyers came to their processing unit and placed orders for henna. This experience has opened up good prospects for former bonded laborers to go into the business of growing and processing henna. Experts say the Dang area has the best climate for growing henna plants in Nepal.

II) **Bamboo handicraft making:** We contacted a bamboo furniture making company in Kathmandu and asked if they would agree to send one of their skilled workers to Dang to train our formerly bonded girls in bamboo furniture making. The trainer came to Dang, and we selected 14 girls from our program who were interested to take the training and established a small training center in Lamahi town in the Dang District. The trainer suggested that it would be better to train the girls to make small handicraft items first before training them to make bamboo furniture. After two months of training, the girls started to make beautiful handicrafts such as serving trays, bracelet holders, pen holders, mirror holders, bedside lamp shades, etc. All of these items are



*A girl at her workshop*

made of bamboo. The quality of these items is so good that the owner of Furniture Company in Kathmandu is willing to place orders for handicrafts with the newly-trained girls.

The girls took their products to sell at three different local market places, and the sales were very successful. The first time, they reaped 4000 rupees from the sale, the second time 6,500 rupees, and the third time 3,500 rupees. All the items were produced in about two weeks after they completed two months of training. The girls shared the profit and they were very proud of their

income. Their confidence and morale are very high. According to the trainer, the girls can earn at least 250 rupees a day if they want to make bamboo furniture, and it can be sold to a furniture dealer in Kathmandu. Even with the skills they now have, they can earn at least 6,500 rupees a month which is



*Selling handicrafts at market place*



almost 20 times more than what they earned as bonded laborers last year. This is a considerable sum in the context of wages in rural areas.

The girls like the work and the trainer thinks that they (along with other girls) can be trained to make high end bamboo and cane furniture. Ultimately, they

can set up a small production unit and run it by forming a cooperative among themselves. There is a ready market for such furniture in Nepal.

**(b) Awareness Raising:** A large part of the success for the Indentured Daughters Program is due to NYOF's awareness raising activities. New Day's grant contributed to the cost of anti-bonding rallies and street plays and sponsorship of local radio programs in which the returned girls spoke of their suffering as bonded laborers. As in the past, NYOF organized a massive awareness program during the Maghi festival, which occurred in mid-January. This is the festival at which the parents of Tharu girls enter into contracts with employers to sell their daughters or renew the contract if the girl was already in bondage. So, this is the right time to prevent prospective child laborers from being sold or to stop the parents from entering into another contract with the employer. To put pressure on both parents and the employers not to engage in this practice, NYOF organized various awareness activities during this time.

During this year's Maghi festival, NYOF arranged a march for thousands of freed girls, who demonstrated together with various NGO workers, human rights defenders, government officers and police officers. The demonstration was held on the streets of the Dang District Headquarters displaying placards with messages like – "daughters deserve an education, not servitude" and "abolish the Kamlari system, send

daughters to school” etc. NYOF transported these girls from villages to the city on dozens of buses and trucks. Likewise, NYOF organized several street theater groups in which most of the actors were former bonded girls. These dramas were brought to various villages, towns and bus stations along the highways



*Girls marching demanding their rights*

to inform the community about the suffering of the girls who are bonded.

NYOF also organized a press conference in Dang and mobilized the local media to spread the word against the bonding practice. Wall posters and hand pamphlets full of anti-bonding slogans and messages, were developed and distributed widely across the villages and towns. As a result of all the aggressive awareness campaigns and NYOF's rescue efforts, as of this Maghi festival, only 97 girls were left to be rescued in Dang District. We freed more than 5,000 girls in this District alone in the last ten years.

- (c) Legal Aid and advocacy:** NYOF organized a three day advocacy training for community workers in December. The participants were media persons, community workers and village chiefs. The purpose of this training was to make them aware of the rights of children and how the bonding practice violates a girl's rights to be safe, to get an education, to receive parental love and protection, to be able to practice their culture and speak their own languages, not to be uprooted from family at such a young age, etc. The symposium also discussed how to identify the girls who have disappeared from the employer's houses and how to bring to justice those who are responsible for the girls' disappearance. Since this effort is complicated and takes a long time to produce results, unlike the other two components discussed above, this part of the program is ongoing.

**Funding status:** We have used up the New Day fund designated for income generation and awareness raising but we are still not finished with the fund designated for the purpose of legal aid and advocacy. We plan to use up this fund in the next couple of months.

**Future prospects:** Our test program on income generation has been very successful as to both henna production and bamboo work. Many former bonded girls are eager to get involved in these trades and the product has demand in the local market as well in cities like Kathmandu. We wish, therefore, to scale up these programs. We would like to again apply for an additional grant. For each \$10,000 expenditure, we can train 50 additional girls and set up a small work shop for them.