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"A library is an arsenal of liberty" anon.

Ranapal School Library: A Reality



Children's section in Ranapal Library.

The Ranapal School Library presents an excellent example of collaboration between a local community, a regional NRN affiliate and the NLF.

At the initiative of FNCCI Finland, Binasa Timsina, an ex-student of Ranapal school, decided to support the establishment of a community and school library in the Secondary School in Dangighat, VDC, Ward No. 3, Morang District.

The total budget of the project was set at NRs. 4,42,320.00 of which Shree Ranapal Lower Secondary School and the local community contributed NRs 1,85,000.00 and NRN Finland contributed

NRs. 2,57,320.00 through the NLF.

The NLF local office in Kathmandu developed the project proposal, trained librarians, facilitated computer training and helped organize the library. The library, with books, three computers and a printer was inaugurated in mid 2011 with much community participation.

The library will be monitored jointly by the Nepal Library Foundation and NCC Finland.

The NLF is ready to provide project support expertise and overview of library development projects and to work in collaboration with organizations wishing to support the NRN mandate of library development..

President's Message

The last eighteen months have been a busy time for the NLF.

We have helped start three libraries from Simikot in Humla to Simara in Sharlahi, funded the training for librarians in three libraries, salvaged 50 computers lying in boxes in the CDO Office in Janakpur, continued our support of content development and carried on with our assessment visits to previously established libraries. Through these visits we are able to assess their utilization and impact and are gaining new insights into the problems and prospects in library development.

The problems start with the lack of clarity between donors and communities requesting support on the function of the library and the services they are expected to provide. In addition there are no ingrained reading habits in Nepal such as those that exist in western societies brought about perhaps by greater access to reading material. We have no tradition of parents reading with children before they go to bed or people in general reading for pleasure, to expand their knowledge base or to develop critical thinking. As a result the books in the libraries are not borrowed or read as much as one would expect. There is a demand for provision of computers from all libraries, but little know-how within the current library establishment to manage computers and ensure their sustainability and functionality. Also there appears to be very little, if any, recognition of the fact that computers without content in the Nepali language are of only limited use. It is clear that in the Nepali situation, library implementation must include the full package of providing books and computers, training of library managers, content development and helping the community to develop reading habits. Despite the above problems, we note that there is an enormous quest for learning amongst the young people, particularly children, across the country.

Our Kathmandu office in partnership with Open Learning Exchange, Nepal (OLE) has been very effective in addressing some of the above issues. In the year 2010/2011 we provided library management training to two libraries and plan to do so in two more libraries in 2011. To make sure that the community gets the type of books they want to read, we are encouraging the libraries we support to carry out a books demand survey within the catchment area of the library. We hope this will help the community enhance its reading habit. We are also encouraging libraries we have supported to start "Book Clubs" and children's story telling sessions every week and also essay writing competitions. We are in the third phase of content development. At the end of this phase, the e-library provided by OLE will have over 3000 holdings in Nepali and the English language.

Raising funds to support our programme is becoming increasingly hard. I take this opportunity to acknowledge support from the Student Council of Sutherland school whose students went on fast to raise funds for NLF (see photo). I would also like to thank our new sponsors Everest Restaurant of Toronto and Golder Associates Ltd of Canada. I appeal for increased NRN support. I would ask the NRN associations around the world to pay heed to the following words from a parent in Humla who had no opportunity to learn in her own lifetime.

"My daughter has ... improved her habits in looking over the books and started writing the names of our family after getting selected for [a] scholarship ... I have no words enough to thank the supporters who are the real gods for the poor people like me. I am quite optimistic that my daughter has a bright future with this kind of ... support." -Mrs. Suzkali Sunar (mother of 8 year old Laxmi)

The Importance of a Library

By: Christopher M. Considine, Q.C.

**CONSIDINE
& COMPANY**

One can only imagine the joy on the face of a young boy or girl when a library is opened in a small town or village. Instant access to knowledge and creative thought opens new worlds and vistas for everyone who has the opportunity of being in a library.

Wonderful stories and fables which open up the imagination from great children's books of fantasy and imagination to wonderful literature from civilizations around the world to reports on scientific research and discoveries are tremendously important to the education of all people young and old.

We live in a global village. Within our village, people throughout the world should have the opportunity to read not only their own literature but the literature of other cultures and civilizations. I have long recognized the importance of libraries being repositories of knowledge since the time of the libraries at Nineveh and Alexandria.

The growth of knowledge throughout North America in the 20th Century is due in large part to the vision of Carnegie who established libraries in virtually every city and town in Canada and the United States. If libraries in print and electronic form are available to the people of Nepal, it would help to create an opportunity to build a better society and help young men and woman further their education and their careers.

It is for these reasons that I have committed to financially helping the Nepal Library Foundation.

Children's Library in Humla Receives Assistance from NLF



Students who will use the NFL supported library.

By: Sharad Shrestha, Director, NLF Nepal Office

With support from the Vancouver based Trans Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS) and the Nepal Library Foundation, READI has established a children's library in Simikot. Appropriate reference books were selected by the Rato Bangala School for the children of kindergarten and primary levels. Also, the READI representative in Kathmandu participated in a one day orientation about library operation in RBS and later re-visited the librarian in Simikot to assist in the operation of the children's library.

NLF Meets Nepal Government Officials

By: Shiva Gautam, Ph.D.

March 2011 was a major mile stone- or so it seemed at the time - in this writer's nearly three years of effort on behalf of NLF to convince the government of Nepal (GON) to develop a nationwide policy and programme of quality education through application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and to develop e-libraries as a part of this programme. The GoN had finally allocated in early 2011 nearly 5 crore rupees for ICT education/e- library development and the Department of Education (DoE) had developed an ICT education concept paper. The NLF envisaged utilization of local resources and government funds, and local ownership to develop and sustain the project. Another dimension of the NLF's proposal was involvement of NRNs as one of the partners in the ICT based education/e-library.

Once the budget allocation was confirmed, the NLF team was encouraged by the then secretary in the Prime Minister's office, Mr. Leela Mani Pokharel, to come to Nepal for a meeting with DoE and Department of Finance (DoF) officials to discuss the implementation of the ICT education/e-library programme. Naresh Koirala and Shiva Gautam attended the meeting chaired by Mr. Poudel. Mr. Janardan Nepal (Joint Secretary, MoE); Mr. Keshav Acharya (Advisor of Finance Minister), Dr. Tirtha Khaniya (Educationist, and former member of Planning Commission of Nepal), Mr. Rabi Karamacharya (CEO, Open Learning Exchange); Dr. Bhola Thapa (Dean, computer science and engineering, Kathmandu university) and several other government officials from the Ministry of Education, the Planning Commission and faculties from Kathmandu University attended the meeting. Mr. Narayan Krishna Shrestha presented the DoE concept paper on ICT based education.

After nearly two and a half hours deliberation, Mr. Shrestha offered to revise the paper and re-circulate it to the attendees. The NLF has provided its comments on the paper, but at the time of this writing,

we have no information on the latest status of the paper and the project.

The merits of switching to a Linux operating system in all government computers were also briefly discussed. One immediate outcome of the meeting was that the prime minister's office was made familiar with the Linux operating system which we believe is the appropriate system for Nepal.

After the meeting Shiva Gautam also met Ministry of Finance officials including Mr Rameshwar Khanal (then secretary) and Mr. Bodh Raj Niraula to facilitate resolution of some issues regarding the release of allocated budget from MoF to MoE if a detailed project implementation plan is submitted from MoE. MoE officers also assured the NLF that some budget will be allocated next year for the project.

We understand the GoN has allocated over 10 crore rupees in this year's ICT budget. At this time, we are not clear how this budget will be spent. The GoN has not shared their Project implementation plan with us, but we have been assured that it will be done. We have learned that working with GoN officials often looks like one step forward and two step backwards, but the NLF believes that our mission is for the good of our country and will continue to engage the government in this worthwhile task.

Naresh Koirala also presented recent NLF work to a meeting of Nepali Parliamentarians organized and chaired by Ms. Binda Pandey (member, constitutional assembly). He also visited the NLF Nepal office and held several meetings with Sharad Bhabu Shrestha (NLF representative, Nepal) and discussed progress on several ongoing projects. He also visited Prakash Library in Shrikhandapur to monitor its progress and Subudi Mahananda Academic Library in Simara, Sharlahi to complete its sustainability assessment.

Donated Computers in Janakpur Rescued

By: Naresh Koirala

It recently came to light that seventyfive One Laptop Per Child XO2 computers (OLPC) donated by Aditya Jha of the POA Foundation, Canada, had been lying in boxes in the CDO's office in Janakpur since the NRN Day celebration in Janakpur in October 2008. This was a matter of extreme embarrassment to the NRNA, since there was no ownership of these computers and no effort to put them to the use for which they were intended, namely, ICT teaching in Saraswati school. The NLF was able to salvage these computers which are presently being used for teaching students in the school. The process of deploying these computers included making an inventory and checking their functionality training teachers in using ICT teaching methods and subsequent monitoring. It was found that 25 of the 75 computers were missing from the CDO's office. The whereabouts of these computers is still unknown. The above tasks were completed in collaboration with OLE, Nepal at a cost of NRs 338, 234. NLF is looking for help to pay these costs.



Computers in Nepal: A Solution Looking for a Problem?

By: Paul Bird, Secretary , NLF

Although we still believe that books are the most significant means by which literacy can be promoted and ideas disseminated, there is a growing demand for access to digital information resources. This demand is shown by the last ten applications from libraries all of which are seeking funding to support hardware acquisition or internet access.

Our first investment in computers five years ago was for the purchase of workstations in an established library. These workstations sat for a period of time unused because of lack of a definite application. They were a solution looking for a problem. Computers and the internet are seen as a 'must have' resource. Yet on a 2007 tour of rural libraries in the Terai we saw computers sitting unused either because of malfunction or simply because there was nothing to do with them. In the early days of personal computing a similar situation arose where the PC only became an indispensable tool when a spreadsheet program (VisiCalc) provided the first directly applicable PC utility to everyday business practice.

We identified the most significant issue in the libraries we visited as one of content. We were fortunate to establish a partnership with the Open Learning Exchange Nepal (www.olenepal.org) in which the dearth of content could be addressed in the form of a digital library in the Nepali language, the e-Pustakalaya. This application, the most significant online Nepali children's literature resource, has seen us direct most of our funds into the development of the e-Pustakalaya over the last three years. We are very keen to see this resource deployed in libraries which have suitable network resources and will provide partial funding to have these installed along with training on how to use and promote the use of the resource.

As well we identified the need to develop the use of a cost effective native language operating system and software. Most computers in

Nepal run pirated copies of commercial products such as Windows. The remedy of this unacceptable situation can only be in the form of the development of a cost effective, supported open source

operating system such one based on the popular Linux core. Critical, though, is the understanding that any software needs constant upgrading and attention which will come at a cost. This cost is likely to be miniscule in comparison to the purchase of commercial products. To that end we and others have been pursuing the revival of a software localisation program which was funded through the International Development and Research Council, a Canadian based agency. This funding provided the foundation of a Nepali language character set and an operating system Nepalinux 3.0. We are now looking to see how we can further develop this potentially useful tool into a fully operational and widely used resource. Key to this is an acceptance by government that there are significant economies to be gained by adopting an open source standard for schools and at least some of its computer based functions. Some progress has been made in this direction. We fully support the notion of a sustainable development model and a business plan that will accomplish this.

As with software there have been significant developments in the provision of low maintenance, cost and energy consuming hardware and network systems. Such products which go under the generic name of shared computing allow for one regular PC to be hooked up via the PC's USB ports to a series of 'stations' consisting of keyboard, mouse and monitor. If we are to achieve cost effective computer deployment to achieve recognized ends in educational and general literacy fields we need to promote these cost effective solutions. We need, also, to continue to develop functional and relevant digital responses to the educational and literacy problems that abound in Nepal.

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Sutherland School Students Fast for NLF



Photo: Students of Sutherland School enjoying snacks after finishing their 24-hour fundraising fast in support of NLF.

Students participating in the Student Leadership Council at North Vancouver School District's Sutherland High School have regularly supported NLF projects through such activities as the sponsored 24 hour fast coordinated by teacher Ms Cynthia Bunbury.

The Leadership Council has raised money for the NLF and Vancouver based Trans Himalayan Aid Society for the last 5 years. Through a variety of fund raising activities the students have donated over \$2500 to libraries in Nepal. For the last two years the school has partnered with Prakash Community Library and funds raised have been specifically earmarked for Prakash.

Another source of funds was from the raffle of an Apple iPad donated by a local businessman whose children attend Sutherland High School. The NLF salutes the commitment of the students and parent community at Sutherland to the cause of literacy in Nepal.

Prakash Community Library: A New Look

Prakash community library has expanded considerably in the last year. With financial assistance from local authorities, the library has added a new room which is already functional and another room which is under construction. The library intends to continue the expansion with the construction of a community hall which will be rented for community functions. The rent will be used for community support. The library now has a completely different look following the contribution of adult and children's books and librarian training. All the books in the library have been catalogued to international standard. Besides children's literature, the children's section of the library includes children's educational toys. NLF is encouraging the library BOD to start a Reading Club and also children's story reading sessions.



Prakash Community Library: Meeting with Board of Directors

Books to Besishahar, Lamjung



Students carrying books to the library.

Sophie Neil, a young lawyer from England, approached the NLF because she wanted to provide books to a school in which she had volunteered in Nepal.

She wrote: "I am from England and I have for many years worked very closely with a boarding school in Besishahar, Lamjung in Nepal. I was a volunteer in the Bhupu Sainik Boarding School for 5 months, six years ago (I was 18 years old). I recently returned to the school and saw that they have room for a library but no books. I am returning to Besishahar to visit my friends in December 2010."

In response to Sophie's request, NLF facilitated purchase of the books and arranged their delivery. NLF believes Sophie's generosity will inspire NRNs to support libraries in their own schools.

About NLF

The Nepal Library Foundation is a registered Canadian charity: HST# 884108705 RR0001



Registered Office:
1426 Chamberlain Drive, North Vancouver, BC V7K 1P6

Nepal Office:
Sarita Nibas, Siris Marga, Dilli Bazar Height, Kathmandu

NLF Country Director: Sharad Babu Shrestha
sharad@nepallibrary.org
Program assistant: Dhan Kumar Shrestha
dhan@nepallibrary.org

Board Officers:

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Nepal Needs to Bridge the Digital Divide

By: Paul Bird, Secretary , NLF

We have been in existence as an organization for six years. During that time our focus has undergone a significant change. From a supplier of books to existing libraries we now spend much of our budget on ICT hardware and the development of digitized resources as a result of addressing the stated needs of communities and organizations in Nepal. From this we have come to some key understandings on the successful deployment of information and computer technology (ICT) resources. These are outlined in the article published on this site (Provide link to page where my article is displayed),

“The most significant of these problems are shortage of power, little or no access to the Internet, lack of training, inadequate local know-how on maintenance of hardware and software, and above all limited funding.”

The problems facing any community in Nepal wanting to gain access to the Internet or localized resources such as a digital library or learning aids stored on a computer's hard drive are significant. The most significant of these problems are shortage of power, little or no access to the Internet, lack of training, inadequate local know-how on maintenance of hardware and software, and above all limited funding. As well, the uses to which any ICT resources are to be put are in many cases unclear.

The situation, then, would seem to preclude any attempt to address the problems and there are those who would wait until the conditions for wide spread deployment improve.

The NLF strongly argues against such a stance. Every community we visit to discuss library issues has access to the internet and provision of computers at the top of their list of objectives. Most of the project proposals sent to us are for support of ICT based information resources. We believe that it is vital to address the difficulties by seeking solutions head on rather than waiting for better times.

Some key steps can be taken. One is to establish a national policy with regard to the adoption of low cost computer hardware and operating systems. Brazil has recently deployed over 300 000 Linux based workstations at a cost of about \$300 per computer using open source software and shared computing hardware (<http://www.rbgsys.com/news/brazil-schools-go-linux-26-thousand-computer-labs>). 96% of the French public sector ICT resources run on open source (<http://www.osor.eu/news/fr-almost-entire-public-sector-is-using-open-source>) however the cash strapped Nepali government and other public institutions largely use proprietary systems. Is it that the Nepali government can more afford to pay for such systems than the French government (as illustrated by the French National Police incurring savings of millions of Euros by switching to a Linux variant (<http://arstechnica.com/open-source/news/2009/03/french-police-saves-millions-of-euros-by-adopting-ubuntu.ars>)?)

ICT resources are a vital tool for development, provision of which, at an affordable cost must become one of the top national priorities in Nepal.