

CLIMATE JUSTICE: CONSERVING COMMON RESOURCES

The Story Series



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TIED TO THE LAND, BOUND BY STRUGGLE: FOUR STORIES OF RESILIENCE FROM DOTI

Barsha Sedhain - Doti

In the remote hills of Doti, far from the bustling cities and national news, lie four villages—Koireli, Kalena, Godre Khola, and Dilpeswor—each marked by the scars of hardship, yet each pulsing with the quiet determination of its people. These are not stories of victims, but of survivors—people who fight not just against the challenges that nature throws their way, but also against the indifference of a world that often forgets them.

Koireli: Life Beneath the Crumbling Hills

Perched high in the hills of Koireli, the once lush forests have faded into barren slopes. What was once a village of green has turned into a land of dust and debris. The trees that once held the soil in place are gone, and now every monsoon brings landslides that feel more like a guarantee than an exception.

A massive landslide swallowed homes—mud, rocks, and water cascading down with terrifying force, taking everything in its path. It wasn't the first time, but it was the worst. The community's response has been slow, hindered by a lack of resources and support. The few retaining walls that were built are half-finished, and efforts to replant the trees have been sporadic at best.

The rains still come, the hills still crumble, but the people of Koireli try, year after year, to rebuild with whatever they can.



Homes devastated from the flooding at Dilpeswor

Channri Bista, the oldest person in the village, recalls, “Back then, there were just five or six houses. Now there are 61. There were no floods or landslides then. Life was good. Now, everything’s changed. When the monsoon starts, we are afraid the flood might come.”

Kunti Bista, a long-time resident of Koireli, reflects on how the very landscape that once nurtured the village has turned hostile. “Before, there were two small streams that flowed gently through the area. They were essential to our daily lives—used for drinking, irrigation. But now, those same streams have become a threat,” she explains. “During the monsoon, they swell uncontrollably and flood our homes. The water rises so quickly that it enters our rooms before we can react. We have no choice but to leave everything behind and take shelter in the local school. It’s the only place we can go.”

Her voice, though steady, carries the weight of uncertainty that many in the village share. Without proper flood control measures or safe housing infrastructure, even a familiar rainstorm can feel like a looming disaster.

Kalena: Dry Dams and Distant Dreams

Not far from Koireli, in the village of Kalena, the land tells a different story. Over 60% of the working-age population has left for India—not by choice, but out of sheer necessity. Once a village of self-sufficiency, Kalena is now a place where hands are missing, and dreams of a better future feel as distant as the people who’ve left.

The village’s drinking water source, a dam built decades ago, is now nearly empty. Once filled to the brim, today 90% of the dam is dry, leaving the women of Kalena to walk for miles just to gather water. It has become more of a chore than a gift, and yet, it’s a daily task they cannot avoid.

“The water used to be enough for drinking, for farming, for the household,” says Maheshwori BC. “Now there’s nothing. Crops don’t grow anymore.”

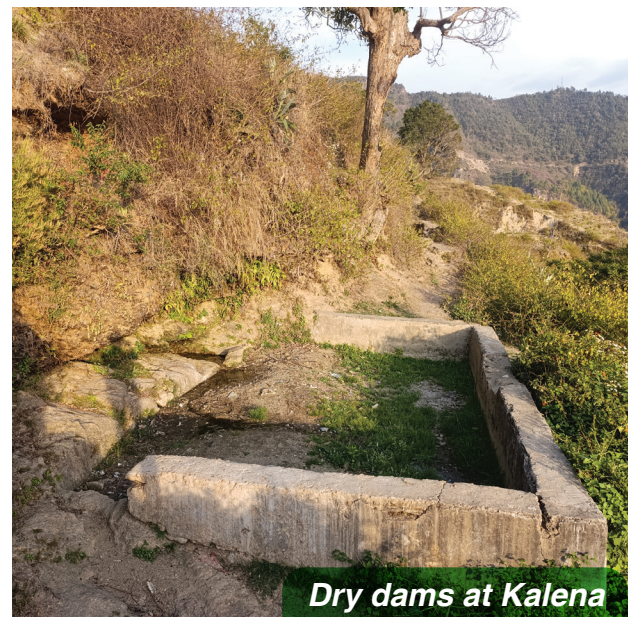
The crops suffer too. The summer heat scorches the fields, and the erratic rains offer little relief. Agriculture is crippled, and the village is sustained only by remittances sent home by migrant workers. But this comes at a heavy cost—children grow up without their fathers, elderly couples are left alone to work the fields, and festivals pass by quietly, without the usual laughter.

Radha Nepali adds, “Yes, now India is the only option. Life there is hard. I want to stay here in Nepal, but there’s no help. Nothing to hold on to.”

Despite the emptiness of their homes, the people of Kalena hold on. The school still opens every day—welcoming children who dream not of leaving, but of staying and changing their fate.

Godre Khola: Living on the Edge of the River

Nestled beside the flowing waters of the Godre Khola, a community lives in a unique blend of beauty and challenge. The river gives the place a special kind of life—its sound always in the background, soothing and powerful. But along with its charm comes a harsh reality, especially when the skies open and the rain begins.



Dry dams at Kalena

In dry seasons, the road beside the river is a lifeline—it connects the village to the market, schools, neighbors, and visitors. But during heavy rains, that very road becomes a river of its own. Water overflows from Godre Khola and floods the entire roadside. There's no place to walk, no way to cross, and for many, no way to leave home without wading through murky, fast-moving water.

"In monsoon, rain is everywhere," says Maya Khadka. "This road gets completely covered. Even our home gets soaked. Sometimes the water rises so fast, we feel trapped, watching the current swirl just a few feet away from our doorsteps."

The worst part is that this happens almost every year. Still, there are no proper drains, no barriers, and no raised sidewalks to protect the residents. Every rainfall is a reminder of how vulnerable life is—living not just on the edge of the river, but on the edge of danger.

Dilpeswor: No Easy Living

Along the riverbanks of Godre Khola, life is a constant battle between survival and nature's whims. The Seti River, once a lifeline, has turned into a monster. Every monsoon, the river roars. Floods tear through the village, sweeping away homes, livestock, and everything in their path. It wasn't the first flood—but it was the worst.

The village is built on the edge of the river, and each year, the Seti takes a little more. There's no embankment, no flood barrier, no escape. The people live with the constant fear that the river will

claim their homes again. Despite this, they don't leave. They rebuild, raise their homes on stilts, and hold rituals to honor the river, hoping that respect will somehow tame its fury.

"In monsoon, the river can flood all the way to the school area," says Sita BK. "The houses are in danger. A lot of us have to move somewhere else just to stay safe. But there's nothing we can do."

Laxmi Das says bluntly, "It's time the local government did something. We've waited long enough." She has worked with Dalit Mahila Samaj and is currently involved with Mahila Adhikar Karmi.

The local school, which flooded last year, now doubles as a shelter and storage space for emergency supplies. It's a reminder that in Dilpeswor, the people are always living on the edge—but it's their resilience that keeps the village intact, even if only just.

One Thread, Many Voices

From Koirali's crumbling hills to Kalena's silent homes, from Godre Khola's raging waters to Dilpeswor's floods, there is a single thread that binds these villages together: resilience.

These are not stories of helplessness. They are stories of people who continue to fight—against the weather, the land, and the systems that forget them. With empty hands and full hearts, they press on.

In Doti, the rivers may rise, the hills may fall, the rains may fail—but the people remain. Holding on. Building forward. Dreaming still.

THE CASE OF PATAWA POND: A POND TIED TO THE COMMUNITY

Rahul Dewan - Kapilvastu

Patawa Pond, a water body spread over just 1.5 bighas of land (about 40,000 sq. ft.), lies nestled beside the ward office of Ward Number 4, Shivraj Municipality, Kapilvastu. It plays a vital role in sustaining the lives of over 265 households in the area. As rainfall patterns have become increasingly unpredictable in recent years, the pond has emerged as a critical source of irrigation and livelihood support for the community.

A History Rooted in Soil

The pond holds deep historical significance. The first settlers of the village used the earth from this site to build their homes. Over time, water naturally accumulated in the dug-up land, eventually forming the pond. This transformation occurred during the Panchayat era. With the advent of federalism, the Department of Land Survey (Napi) officially declared Pattarwa Pokhari a communal resource.

More Than Just a Pond of Water

*“It’s not just water,” says a farmer,¹
“It’s part of who we are. Each year, I
bring a bundle of hay to strengthen
the dam—it’s the least I can do.”*

Patawa Pond is more than a historical landmark—it’s a lifeline. Beyond irrigation, it supports multiple aspects

of livelihood: fishing, drinking water for livestock, and everyday chores such as washing clothes. The pond is accessible to all, and community members use it with mutual respect. They collectively maintain it every year, contributing time and local resources like hay to strengthen the dam and prevent erosion.

A community member shared, “We directly depend on the pond for our daily needs, irrigation, and livestock. Our livelihood is interdependent on it, with boring being our only alternative.”

The Threat of Industrial Boring

The surrounding area has seen the rise of industrial-level boring wells. As a result, during certain months, local boring wells dry up, intensifying the community’s dependence on the pond. This has become especially critical as erratic rainfall continues to affect agricultural productivity.



Patawa Pond

One resident from the Dalit community noted, “The pond is our only option when there’s little to no rain. Without it, smallholder farmers would suffer the most. Bigger farmers often have alternatives, but the rest of us don’t.”

The quality of water from boring wells is also an issue. It’s often poor and significantly impacts crop yields—sometimes reducing total production by 20–30%. However, using pond water requires a pump and pipes, which many cannot afford, forcing them to pay to irrigate even when using the communal resource.

Climate Change and Its Toll

The community has been witnessing the growing impacts of climate change firsthand. In 2079 B.S. (2022), three consecutive days of heavy rainfall severely damaged crops, reducing income and leaving many without cattle feed like hay or husks. This led to hardship, especially for smallholder farmers, some of whom were compelled to take up informal labor to survive.

Hotter summers have also caused fish to die and animals from nearby villages to flock to the pond, further straining resources. Women have been affected, as the drying pond makes daily chores like washing clothes more burdensome.

“This year, I lost almost thirty percent of my produce, since the water from the boring is salty” said Urmila Koti,¹ a Dalit woman who is also a small holder farmer. “Along with I can’t afford a pump to draw water from the pond, so I end up having to pay others just to irrigate my own land for both the water and the pump. This severely affects my livelihood as I am barely able to sustain my family”

A mother and activist from the Dalit community shared how 18 households in her neighborhood rely on a single boring well. Whenever the nearby industrial boring system is activated, their local wells dry up completely, forcing them to depend entirely on the pond.

A Community Committed to Conservation

Recognizing the urgent need to preserve this vital resource, the community has taken proactive steps in recent years to conserve it. They observed that concrete construction in the area had significantly reduced groundwater recharge. However, as community members remark with realization, “Patawa Pond continues to act as a natural recharge zone.”

To protect it, the community has built a protective wall using bioengineering techniques—combining natural, local materials like hay and husk to prevent soil erosion and maintain the pond’s banks. This sustainable approach is both eco-friendly and cost-effective.

Additionally, the local municipality has supported their efforts by providing materials such as stones and wire to strengthen the pond’s structure.

A Symbol of Resilience and Collective Action

As climate change continues to disrupt lives and livelihoods, the community’s reliance on Pattarwa Pokhari has only deepened. It stands as a symbol of shared heritage, resilience, and adaptation. The story of this pond illustrates the critical role that common resources play in ensuring survival—especially for marginalized groups.

In Patawa, it seems the people aren’t giving up. Their story is one of unity, innovation, and determination. As climate change deepens, the value of Pattarwa Pokhari has only grown. And through this pond, a community finds not just water—but strength.

NATURAL SPRINGS (KUWA) AND WETLANDS ON THE VERGE OF EXTINCTION: A COMMUNITY'S GROWING FEAR

Kabita Basnet - Makwanpur

Musidhap is a settlement that once thrived with 353 households, but today only 130 households remain. Located in Manahari Rural Municipality, the community primarily comprises Chepang, Praja, and Bankariya people. The families here are survivors of the 2015 earthquake and subsequent landslides in 2017, which displaced them and left them struggling to rebuild their homes and lives in a vulnerable area. Living on unregistered (ailani) land, with no legal claim to their property, most of these families own only small plots 7 to 10 dhur of land at best. Their homes are made of bamboo and tin, and they struggle to survive through daily wage labor, as farming is nearly impossible due to the lack of land and resources. "We don't even have enough land to grow food, and now, even water has become a distant hope," shared Fulmaya Chepang, a woman in her 50s, echoing the struggles of many in the community.

Water Now They Have to Pay: A Community's Struggle for Access

Water is at the center of the community's struggles. While a water pipe system brings water from a river located a bit further away, the water is far from clean. Many families continue to drink from a natural spring located within the community, which provides cleaner, fresher water. However, the community's



*Kanchi Maya on the way to fetching
drinking water from the natural spring.*

primary source of water soon will revolve around two water tanks, which are being built with investments from the ward and municipality 9 to 10 lakh rupees and an additional 30 lakh rupees from the provincial and federal governments. This system will collect water from a stream located about 3 kilometers away, but the catch is that the water is not free. Community members are required to pay for it, despite the fact that water sources are nearby.

"We have river water coming through pipes, but it's not clean. The natural spring near us is pure, but the tank is where we are forced to buy water. It's a daily battle to afford it," said Kanchi Maya Praja, an elder from the community. For those who cannot afford the water from the tank, the only option left is to continue

fetching water from the natural spring, which remains an unregulated but clean source of drinking water. "Water flows near us, but it feels farther away than ever. We are paying the price for neglect in coins, in hardship, and in hope," added Fulmaya Praja, another resident.

The Neglect of Wetlands and the Looming Threat of Loss

Another issue haunting the community is the rapid disappearance of wetlands that once thrived in the area. In the past, these wetlands were a crucial resource for water, food, and even livelihood. They were fed by natural springs and served as sources of water for daily needs, agriculture, and fishing. The community also benefited from the presence



Figure 1. Settlement of musidhap, New Basti, Ward 4

of a water mill, which powered the grinding of grain. However, this wetland is now rapidly disappearing as people encroach upon it, building houses and making developments on the very land that sustains them.

"We have two ponds nearby, and the wetland is still there, but it's being taken away bit by bit. No one thinks about saving them now. Today, we don't see the need, but in five or ten years, we will realize what we have lost," said Ram Kumar Praja (Community leader), his voice heavy with concern.

The community's primary concern now is that, without intervention, they will lose not just the wetland but their remaining natural water sources as well. The struggle to access clean, affordable water is intensifying, as many are forced to choose between paying for the tank water or using water from the river, which is not safe. The question remains: Can the community protect what is left? The urgency is clear they need to safeguard their natural spring, their wetlands, and their access to clean water before they disappear completely.

"We cannot afford to wait until it's too late. Once the wetland is gone, the land will turn into desert, and the water will turn into dust," said Sita Chepang, a young woman from the community, her face set with determination.

Despite the growing challenges, there is still hope. The community has started organizing and raising awareness about the importance of preserving their water sources. They have called on local authorities to protect the wetland and natural spring before it is too late.



Kanchi Maya collecting drinking water directly from the open source

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THE SACRED WATER -THE STRUGGLE OF DHIKURBARI COMMUNITY FOR BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Kabita Basnet - Chitwan

The community is Dhikurbari, located in Ward 7 of Madi Municipality, is home to approximately 198 Dalit households. Situated near the Someshwar Community Forest, with an 800-square-meter expanse of dense jungle beyond it, the community is surrounded by fertile land and several rivers. However, despite this, Dhikurbari struggles daily for basic human needs, most critically, drinking water.

Generations ago, in 2026 B.S., the community was settled slightly uphill on fertile land. However, constant threats from wild animals, including wild pigs, bears, monkeys and tigers, forced the people to move closer to the forest edge. This decision was one of survival, not a choice, as they surrendered fertile land for safety. The land they occupy is aailani land, unregistered land traditionally used by communities but officially owned by the government. This precarious legal status leaves them without formal rights, meaning they cannot claim compensation in the event of natural disasters, wild animal attacks, or land loss. Although Nepal's 2015 Constitution recognizes land, housing, and food rights, enforcement remains elusive for marginalized communities like Dhikurbari. The Dalit families in Dhikurbari rely primarily on subsistence farming, daily labor, and foreign employment, especially in Gulf countries. Each household holds about 5 kattha (approximately 0.17 hectares) of unregistered land. However, the land's agricultural potential is severely limited due to dry soil, wildlife damage, and water

scarcity. Despite this, there is untapped potential for three crop cycles annually if irrigation were available, yet it remains unrealized. The crops they manage to grow are frequently destroyed by wild animals, compounding their struggles.

The community is heavily dependent on natural resources such as land, water, and forest for survival. Most households rely on firewood for cooking, which is collected under strict regulations from the community forest. Families are allowed to gather dry wood up to nine times a year, paying a nominal fee each time. Open grazing land is also essential for livestock rearing. Despite the ongoing challenges, the people of Dhikurbari persist with resilience and a strong sense of community, fighting for their rights to secure land, water, and a better future. The community's struggle is not just one of poverty, but one for survival in an environment where basic needs remain out of reach.

The Daily Battle for Water

The most critical and persistent struggle for the community, however, is access to water. Despite being surrounded by five rivers Ratani, Dhuldhule, Chisa Pani, Dhanus, and Khahare the community still lacks safe and reliable drinking water. The responsibility for water-fetching largely falls on the women, who must walk nearly 30 minutes through dense jungle to reach the Chisa Pani River. Once there, they must balance heavy buckets on their

heads to bring back water. The absence of men during the day, who are engaged in labor work, means that women and children are left to manage household chores, including securing water.

Previously, the community installed plastic pipes and a small well as well as small tank with the support of the local ward to collect water from Chisapani river, but the poorly constructed infrastructure has failed multiple times due to wildfires in the jungle. These pipes, which had already been installed under budget constraints, melted in the heat, forcing the community to rely on makeshift solutions. As water sources become scarce, especially during the dry season, the community frequently finds itself in conflict over access to the limited water available. Women are seen literally running with buckets to claim water, an image that has become all too common. In some desperate cases, families go deeper into the jungle to find sources of water coming from such as rivers or ponds. During particularly harsh seasons, they must even travel to neighboring villages to obtain water.

The situation took a turn for the worse when a sick cow, left to die upstream, contaminated the Chisa Pani River. Unaware, the community drank the contaminated water, leading to widespread illness. Most families have rudimentary filtering practices simply straining the water through cloth since the community lacks access to proper water purification systems. Despite the ward's designation of the area as an "Open Defecation Free" zone, women have observed open defecation near water sources, further compounding the community's sanitation and health challenges.

The Sacred Ponds: A Community Effort to Protect Water Sources

The community relies heavily on two ponds for their water needs. First, the Chisa Pani Pond (which naturally sub-merged from ground), has been drying up steadily over the years. This once-abundant natural reservoir can no longer provide enough water during the dry months due to lack of maintenance. Each year, the people of Dhikurbari dig deeper and wider into the pond by hand, hoping to preserve this vital water source for as long as possible. This

pond, which holds significant cultural importance for the community, has become a "sacred" source of survival. However, despite the community's collective efforts, the pond is no longer able to meet the needs of all households, particularly during the hot summer months.

The second pond, the Dhanuspurbi Pond, also naturally submerged from the ground, is another vital resource. Yet, like the Chisa Pani Pond, it faces the risk of drying up without proper infrastructure and management. In the face of these challenges, the community has worked together to clean, widen, and maintain the ponds, even though resources are scarce. Their efforts have focused on widening ponds, preventing contamination by cleaning on weekly basis, and ensuring that water is used as efficiently as possible. However, the lack of external support limits the sustainability of these efforts.

Despite the growing urgency, the government's focus remains on a deep borewell initiative, which has yet to show significant results. Community leaders have expressed frustration with the lack of progress and have called for a shift in government priorities. They urge the authorities to focus on preserving the existing ponds, which are the most reliable and immediate sources of water, rather than pursuing unproven projects.

The 25,000-Liter Tank: A Promise Unfulfilled

In addition to the ponds, the community was promised a 25,000-liter water tank designed to collect water for irrigation all the time. This tank was built two years ago but remains non-operational due to delays in



installing the necessary pipes and borehole systems. As a result, the tank, despite its large capacity, serves no purpose, leaving the community to continue relying on the unreliable ponds and rivers. The people of Dhikurbari remain in a state of anticipation, waiting for the authorities to fulfill their promises and make the tank operational.

The Dying Pond: A Lost Resource

Before the Chisa Pani and Dhanuspurba Ponds, the community had another pond located closer to the Chisa Pani River. This pond has since dried up (in 2030 B.S.) and is now used as grazing land. The loss of this resource has only worsened the water scarcity problem, leaving the community with fewer reliable sources of water during the dry season.

The Call for Immediate Action: Protect the Ponds

With the government's focus on the deep borehole project, the community's plea is urgent and clear: protect the two remaining ponds that have sustained them for generations. The community wants the government to fulfill its promises, including completing the irrigation tank system, and refocus efforts on preserving the sacred ponds that have been a lifeline for years.

"We are not asking for anything more than what is rightfully ours — the ability to access water to feed our families, care for our animals, and survive the dry season," said one community member. "These ponds are sacred to us, and we need the government to support our efforts to protect them."-Says Gita B.K. from the community and member of Sadabahar Women's Group.

"We must protect our sacred water sources before they are lost forever," urged a local leader. "The government's focus on unproven solutions is leaving us without what we need most water to survive."-Says Saram Seti B.K., community member and president of community development committee.

"These ponds are sacred to us, and we need the government to support our efforts to protect them. Without water, there is no life"-Says Krishna Bahadur

B.K, an elder man of the community and former President of Forest User's Group

The people of Dhikurbari continue to fight for their basic human rights to safe, reliable water. Their resilience and resourcefulness are commendable, yet the lack of adequate support from authorities leaves their struggle as an uphill battle. The message is urgent: Support the preservation of Dhikurbari's water sources and fulfill the promises made to the people who depend on them.

Ram Bandhu Pokharel, President of Red Cross Unit and former ward chair for ward 5

"There are significant complications due to outdated laws, particularly those governing the water and irrigation management system, National Park and Madhyewarti areas, which have created a restrictive environment for our community. Madi Municipality, despite being rich in natural resources, faces serious challenges because of these legal constraints. As a result, our community members are unable to fully benefit from these resources to uplift their livelihoods. I speak from experience as a former ward president of Ward 7 it's nearly impossible for local representatives to allocate budget for essential projects like pipeline installations, pond conservation, or the development of irrigation infrastructure. Instead, the municipality tends to focus on expensive

“**We must protect our sacred water sources before they are lost forever,” urged a local leader. “The government’s focus on unproven solutions is leaving us without what we need most water to survive.”- Says Saram Seti B.K.**”

and unsustainable solutions like deep borewells. For example, installing a 50 lakh borewell or a 40 bigha land project is considered easier than working on smaller, more sustainable water projects that could truly benefit our people. Even for a relatively small-scale 20 lakh irrigation project, we struggle to secure even 2 lakhs from the central government, due to the low revenue in our area and the bureaucratic complexities that exist in both the local and central government mechanisms.

Despite having multiple rivers in the municipality, some seasonal and some permanent, we're unable to access these resources for irrigation. This is because of the lack of proper infrastructure, along with legal barriers imposed by the federal government, which restrict us from utilizing nearby water sources effectively. We even have water just 10 meters away from some agricultural land, but without the proper resources or permission, we can't use it for irrigation.

Take the example of the Gayeu River Irrigation Project, which covers land of Ward 4, 5, and 2. It was supposed to be completed within three years, with a budget of 18 crores, but after eight years, the project remains incomplete. As a result, the community was left with no choice but to install 20 additional borewells, which were not part of the original plan and should not have been necessarily had the irrigation project been finished. This situation has left the project in a fragile condition, and the lack of completion continues to disrupt agricultural productivity in our community.

In addition to this, there are other borewell projects underway in different parts of the municipality. These projects are being heavily invested in, but unfortunately, they are not providing the comprehensive solutions needed to address the broader water crisis. For instance, some borewells are being installed in Ward 6 and my own ward, amounting to investments of up to 6 crores and 1.5 crores, respectively. As a result, around 30 to 40% of the land is growing Chaitra paddy in Madi, even in the dry season, thanks to the use of borewells. This is a clear indication of what can be achieved with proper irrigation, but this is only a small portion of what could be accomplished if we had broader access to

water and better infrastructure. These investments may provide some relief, but they are not enough to address the root causes of the water scarcity that our communities face. We need more sustainable and inclusive solutions, not just temporary fixes. The reality is that without sustainable water solutions, this success will remain isolated, and many families will continue to struggle.

The complications don't stop there. Due to the Madhyawarti laws, we're failing to connect local communities to the community forests, which could provide much-needed resources for fuel and agricultural development. The government's focus is often misdirected toward large-scale projects that have not delivered tangible results, rather than addressing the urgent needs of our community. With legal barriers, unfulfilled promises, and the government's reluctance to address local concerns, we are left struggling to secure the resources we need to survive. In this climate of uncertainty, we are forced to rely on community efforts to protect our resources, but these efforts are not enough to overcome the systemic and bureaucratic obstacles we face. We are not asking for anything extraordinary just the ability to access water and use the resources around us in a way that benefits the community. Our community is resilient, but without adequate support, we are unable to move forward, and the legal and political barriers continue to hold us back from building a sustainable future."



Participating community members mapping their lifelines (Resources)

THE PRICE OF UNFERTILE LAND: SURVIVING ON LOANS AND WEAK HARVESTS

Shivani Singh- Mahottari

“The land isn’t fertile anymore. I do what I can, but diseases come. Pests come. The harvest is weak. It goes straight to repay the loan”- Phulo Devi Thakur

Phulo Devi Thakur starts her day in the quiet fields of Gothbanauli, Ramgopalpur Municipality, Ward-8 Mahottari, standing barefoot and wondering what she can do to yield more on her land. At 40, she’s a mother and grandmother, bearing the weight of farming and family with strength.

Phulo has learnt life through the soil. She has spent her entire life playing and ploughing on the field. But now, as a person who has seen several lifetimes of struggle, she says, “I’ve been farming for as long as I can remember, but this soil I used to know is no longer the same; something has changed”.

This Change that she speaks of is no longer just a story to be shared but a reality shaped by climate change. It is a reality that is gradually affecting our public commons, of which most are unaware.

Times have transformed, but the burden on the shoulders hasn’t eased for Phulo. For farming, she borrows money from a local lender in the village and invests in the fields. But since the production is low, whatever grows goes back to paying him.

“The land doesn’t give as much as it used to, and the harvest is barely enough. When I sell the little I grow, I have to make hard decisions on where to spend that money: Should I pay the interest on my debt? Should I feed my children? Or should I save for my grandchildren’s school fees? Why is there no yield, I wonder? I work as hard as I can, yet there’s no progress,” laments Phulo.

Phulo farms the same land her father once tilled. But unlike before, now, every sowing season begins with



uncertainty. Already struggling with low harvest, she now also has to battle the threat of crop diseases and insect attacks. “I put in a lot of effort, but still, many kinds of diseases attack the crops. When the crops get diseases, there are pesticides and medicines, but we farmers can’t afford them. Even without money, I still plant my fields, but insects keep attacking the crops. In the same field, my father used to produce a lot in the past. But even though I plough the same field and work hard, the yield is not good.”

Climate change here has intensified the difficulties with agriculture in the region, taking a heavy hit. The unpredictable and unprecedented rain has made the situation worse. Farming has always been accustomed to a certain weather pattern, but now, due to climate change, the lands are paying the price.

“I don’t even know why that is. I don’t know how to reduce problems related to farming, crops, irrigation, pests, loans, and debts,” she says, looking at the land nearby. The commons that once flourished with harvests of different colours, the

commons that farmers like Phulo once depended on, are now producing only a fraction of what they used to. Though Phulo’s hard work has produced limited results, she has joined a farmers’ group to understand the reason behind it and has started to learn how to tackle the challenges.

Phulo’s story shows us how the public commons are slowly breaking under climate stress and how People like her, without even understanding the reason, have been forced to be the cost bearer.



Phulo Devi in the community

THE FRAGILE COMMONS

COMMON RESOURCES: A RURAL WOMAN'S LIFE ON BORROWED LAND AND WATER

Shivani Singh- Mahottari

"Most people in our community are poor, so we don't have hand pumps at home. The pond is everything: we bathe, wash clothes, feed cattle, bathe buffaloes, and even perform Chhath Puja there. Without it, we wouldn't survive."- Shail Devi

Shail Devi, a resident of Bansbitti, Ward 8 in rural Mahottari, rises before the sun, fetches water from the nearby pond, feeds the cattle and begins her daily routine. She lives in a three-generation household of 10. Two of her sons are abroad, but she receives no financial support from them. "My sons are abroad, but they don't send money. For our living, my husband and I raise goats and farm on someone else's land to survive." The land they cultivate is borrowed from a lender in the village.

For most villagers, such as Shail, life is deeply tied to public commons, the borrowed land she tills, the communal pond she draws water from, and the shared spaces the community relies on. But with increasing poverty and climate change, even these communal lifelines are depleting.

Shail Devi works tirelessly in her field, she does everything that keeps her family running. But the harvest is no longer in her hands, everything now depends on the uncertainty of the changing climate.

"If there is good rain during the farming season, there will be a good harvest. If there is no rain, there will be a drought, and there will be no harvest. If there is no harvest, then I have to take a loan from the lender to cover my household expenses," she says, her voice calm but heavy with exhaustion.

Last year, the rain came late, in patches. The crop was worse than usual. To sustain the household, Shail Devi again took a loan from the lender, five lakhs now, a burden on her shoulders.



Shail Devi

Farmers like Shail have long relied on predictable weather cycles to plan their crop calendars. But as the weather continues to become increasingly unpredictable from one year to the next, the patterns do not apply, and they find themselves wondering what they did wrong and why nature turned its back this time.

Water, something we tend to take for granted, is another constant struggle for Shail. “Since the people of the community are poor, not everyone has a hand pump at home, so we borrow water from the neighbour’s to drink,” she says. The pond has become their refuge, a shared space where the community uses it for bathing, washing clothes and utensils, feeding cattle, and bathing buffaloes.

Public commons like the pond hold great significance in their lives. It’s not just a water source, it holds cultural importance too. Every year during Chhath Puja, the community gathers there to offer their prayers to the sun; It’s a sacred time, holding deep meanings in their life. But with more people, less water, and hotter days, these shared spaces are growing increasingly fragile. Still, the community continues to depend on them for both survival and faith.

Climate change hasn’t just affected crops, it’s left women like Shail Devi behind to negotiate survival with whatever means are remaining. The lack of water access and income support deepens her poverty. With longer dry periods, scorching heat, and unpredictable rain, both land and ponds are suffering. And when public commons are impacted, it’s the poorest in the village who feel it first.

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A dried up community pond in mahottari

BETWEEN THE RIVER AND THE FOREST: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE FRAGILE LIVES OF BHADALI

Anish Raj Shrestha – Bardiya

Every time families in Bhadali flee to elevated shelters to save their lives, they leave everything behind hoping it will all turn out well. But with each recurring flood, they witness one painful truth: their beloved jungle, which they once relied on the most, is slowly being taken away—thanks to climate change and the recurring flooding of the Karnali.

Chuliya and Bishrani Tharu showing the flood cut land in Bhadali, Rajapur.



Nepal has been witnessing the impacts of climate change. One of the most visible and devastating effects is the increasing frequency of extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall and flooding. While Nepal is gradually asserting its democratic identity, the climate crisis adds an additional layer of challenges. Bardiya is no exception. The communities around Rajapur face the danger of floods every year—threatening lives, livestock, property, and livelihoods dependent on the nearby jungle.

The settlement in Bhadali, Ward 1 of Rajapur, Bardiya, is a relatively new one, formed by former bonded laborers, commonly known in the local language as Kamaiyas. This settlement is part of a historic movement, following their emancipation and the subsequent reclamation of land from which they

“It was a lot easier for us to collect firewood and fodder for our livestock. The forest used to be massive, well-managed, and fairly distributed among community members. But now, the situation has worsened as its size keeps decreasing every year due to recurring floods,” says Chuliya Tharuni (61), a resident of Bhadali.

were once excluded. The story of this community reflects a broader national narrative—where male family members, as primary breadwinners, are often compelled to migrate to urban areas across Nepal and into India in search of work that can sustain their families. Bhadali itself offers very limited economic opportunities, leaving mostly women, elderly people, and children at home.

Surrounded by jungle and situated along the banks of the Karnali River, these former bonded labor communities have traditionally relied on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods. The community forest was both protected and sustainably used by locals to meet daily needs.

However, the proximity of both the settlement and the forest to the Karnali River has made them increasingly vulnerable. The Karnali has a long history of recurring floods, dating back to at least 1983. Rajapur, in particular, has suffered severe damage from such events. The forest in Bhadali once spanned around 3 bighas (approximately 0.6 acres), providing essential resources like firewood and fodder for livestock. Today, due to repeated flooding, only about 1 bigha (0.2 acres) remains. As a result, community access to the forest has been restricted, and it now serves primarily to supply firewood for funeral rites.

This loss of resources has severely reduced livelihood options, forcing more family members to migrate, while also increasing household costs—such as purchasing firewood. In a tragic irony, many residents risk their lives collecting floating wood from the river during floods to meet basic needs. This practice not only endangers them but also coincides with the threat of the floodwaters damaging their homes. They are caught between protecting their lives and salvaging what little the river gives, all because their once-dependable forest can no longer support them.

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A similar concern is shared by Bishrani Tharu (46), also a resident:

“During the monsoon, our homes get flooded, and the whole community scrambles to find higher ground just to stay safe. We must move quickly when we hear the early warning system, and at the same time, we risk our lives salvaging floating wood from the river.”

The effects of climate change are clear here, disproportionately impacting marginalized and vulnerable communities. Women, children, and the elderly face heightened risks, underscoring the urgent need for equitable climate adaptation and support.



Chuliya and Bishrani at the bridge with community forest behind them