

Rebuilding Antarastraya Yuba Barsa Secondary School

About the project:

I first met headteacher kamal Bikram in April 2015. Kamal trained as a teacher in Kathmandu and moved back to his home village where he is a dedicated headteacher and community leader. The need at that time was for additional classrooms and resources to enable children to undertake their +2s (the Nepal equivalent of A levels).

Later that month a 7.8 magnitude earthquake devastated Nepal. Over eight thousand people lost their lives. The need became even more pressing - the existing classrooms were seriously damaged so the school had been moved into makeshift tents. Even the water supply was gone.



The Challenges:

The school supports children from five villages in the Ramechhap District of Nepal serving a population of 3200. Many of the families are subsistence farmers. The cost of stationery can be a barrier to school attendance, the lack of +2 provision prohibits access to the professions. Low aspirations can also be a challenge.

School improvement in this context isn't just about the basics: books, water, toilets.

I've had to think deeply about how to best support Kamal with his school leadership and his engagement with the District Education Office to secure their support for the school.

What we did:

A priority was to focus on being deeply attentive to the needs, interests, and concerns of the community. Careful listening, asking questions to gain clarity and insight for a full understanding. I was challenged to be open to new mindsets. I've learned to work in a culture where custom and hospitality is treasured and a visitor is invited to eat and take time to drink tea before we work. To hurry would be ungracious.

We've looked at their school plans, challenged safety issues, and prioritised longevity. The pro-bono advice of an architect in England has added value and enabled tough challenges about the quality of initial building proposals.

Awareness of the Nepal project has been raised through fundraising events, social media and school resources in the UK. We've covered some basics including pipes for a new water supply, books and stationery have helped improve attendance and enabled the villagers to get involved.

Regular contact with Kamal is via text messages, electricity in the village is intermittent and there is no internet connection.

The knowledge that we have them in mind is very important to Kamal. Knowing that, he tells me, brings them great hope.

Outcome so far:

Kamal is working with the District Education Office (DEO) negotiating for funds on building plans which are earthquake resistant and include a library and computer room.

We've raised just under £20,000. The children at the school have access to drinking water. We've funded 600m of pipes and a second year of stationery. A new projector and screen have enabled group lessons using the one laptop owned by the school. We've seen the camera donated to the school in good use; a record of progress and achievements being kept. Funds are in place for compost toilets which have been agreed by the DEO. We've linked with The Tara Project and sanitary kits have been distributed to the girls which improves attendance.

Our next planned visit is April 2018 when we hope to see compost toilets built and good quality building plans for the school agreed.