



Together Renewing Endangered Ecosystems through Human Ecology



Issue 28:

Projects in Progress

2023 Annual Report

Volunteers serendipitously appeared in 2023, providing their own flights, and donating hundreds of dollars worth of in-kind value to the generosity of donor partners, old and new.

Both took initiative to lead us over obstacles and delay, to a year of modest but successful accomplishment with promising opportunities ahead.



Even before leaving for the US, Gaurav Tiwari began working with our team to improve our internal communications. To help evaluate our program potential for the coming season in Chitwan, Gaurav met with Chitwan Manager Baburam BK and our very first field supervisor, Satya Narayan Chaudhary. Satya, a Tharu agronomist and former teacher with trilingual skills, proved unsurpassed in community engagement. He and his wife Lakshmi agreed to host Forester Ethan Olson's first field visit as a SeedTree volunteer, exploring local interest.

Forester Ethan was motivated by his former Prof. at U. Maine, Dr. Brian Roth, to similarly support and learn from our program as well as from Nepal's extraordinary progress in reforestation. Securing a grant from his employer SAPPI, Ethan bought his own ticket and coordinated with Seed-



Ethan (left) with Beeju (in green) and AFU participants in the nursery program. Kalyan Raj Khadka (far right) accompanied Ethan on to Chitwan & Nawalparasi districts to assist.

Tree to make his visit as productive as possible. Each donation helps release Kate Kinley Gregg's match. Ethan directly delivered a laptop to her KKG Work-Study Scholar Kushum Khadka and funds to Program Manager Beeju Poudyal at the Agriculture and Forestry University AFU nursery in Hetauda, Makwanpur.

After the extreme deforestation before Community Forestry was implemented, Nepal now resists harvesting. Yet, with fuel wood still being imported, there is need for all aspects of sustainable forest management. Ethan addressed this with Beeju's students.



He and Kalyan then set out for Chitwan for more formal PRA participatory assessment for groups identified by Satya and Baburam with a preliminary interest. In the Bachhauli area just north of the Chitwan National Park, population growth since 1995 had divided the land into ever smaller plots. Jhuwani

Original '95 members of Jankauli Women's Group. Pres. Savitri (left), passed in '23, leaving one large original and many 2nd generation rosewood trees she planted.

Womens' group could proceed only by leasing a nursery plot. We advised our early women's groups to first plant on their own lands, then plant the remainder in community sites such as roadsides or community forests where available. Jankauli Community Forest (JCF) seems to have been a recipient of many of the 258,000 seedlings



Jankauli CF, cattle-cropped grass in 1993, now appears like old growth forest.



Satya leads the Jankauli CF Nursery-making, Spring 2023. (see growth by November, p.4)

team visited two CFs working with Baburam for PRA. We decided to continue with Shivashakti Community Forest User Group which CFUG has availed of every opportunity we offered since 2007 to add to their forest. It has become a model of reforestation scientifically studied by the Chitwan District Forest Office.

Former CFUG Treasurer and Eco-Educator Menuka Phatak: “SeedTree has brought a lot of positive changes in our group. I used to be afraid ... but SeedTree training has made me able to put my voice in the committee and even to write something. I have ... taught sisters in my community to sign who didn’t even know how to hold the pen. I want to thank all ... respected people involved with SeedTree.”



Menuka & Ethan

In neighboring Nawalparasi district, our team visited a group from the historically impoverished Musahar community, resolved to improve their condition. They are managing the “Vulture Restaurant” feeding pesticide-free cattle carcasses to rare or threatened vulture

recorded 1996 & 1997 by our 14 early groups in the Bachhauri VDC served by JCF. In 2014, Dr. Rob Lilieholm’s graduate researcher/our intern Jared Stapp, using Landsat data, demonstrated a 162.9% increase in forest cover 2005-2013. JCF is gaining renown as a haven of biodiversity which they aim to increase with 3 of their 97 hectares available for planting. They were ready and eager to proceed.

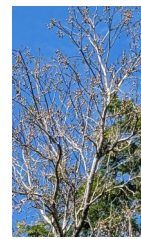
In NE Chitwan, our field



species. They sought our help to grow fruit trees as they plan to sell fruit to the visitors who come to see the vultures for income generation.

Peru:

Meanwhile, at an opposite end of the earth, our local ngo, **NiBero** (Seed/eye of the jungle) collaboration has grown significantly in 2023 from seed to healthy sapling. Just so, the seed from the highland *cedro* (*Cedrela odorata*) that Adam Stone had planted was gathered and planted. Support came first from hand-crafted chocolate maker Prophecy Chocolate, who used to purchase cacao from Adam and later from generous guests at the Stone’s Tierra Vida ecotourism hostel on Yarina Cocha Lake. This allowed their deep well to be completed and



Adam’s cedro



Bella & fellow UNIA student from Wampi tribe, planting.



Bella Luz & “audante” Nicolas with cedro, moringa & Jergon Sacha, a shade-grown, medicinal with edible tubor.



Poly bottles cut in two, make pots for distributing cedro.

support for Bella Luz attending the Agroforestry and Fisheries Engineering program at the Universidad



the nursery on their donated land, which had languished during drought, to flourish. Adam reports: “We give away trees to the villages through the Shipibo and bilingual schools, along with some environmental education classes. They get planted on the school property integrating it into their classroom curriculum as an educational project.” Inspired by the transformative impact of our scholarships in Nepal, I proposed to the Debley foundation to include

Nacional Intercultural of Amazonia UNIA in Pucallpa. I joined in encouraging her to start a NiBero/UNIA collaboration. She invited UNIA reps to visit the Ni Bero nursery and begin a seed and seedling exchange. In addition to the aforementioned species, we were able to secure an abundance of shihuahuaco (*Dipteryx micrantha*) seed. Prized for its dense hardwood, this tree is severely overharvested. Though not yet protected by ICUN listing, in Peru shihuahuaco is deemed to be critically endangered. Shihuahuaco trees are the majestic giants of the Amazon, towering above the canopy. We are proud to be planting a tree that may take a millennium to mature. It is an act of faith and hope for the future.



UNIA nursery & Bella Luz collecting data in UNIA's Research Forest.



Local gatherer brings Shihuahuaco seed to NiBero.

Coop NAFSCOL nursery from its extreme slopes and narrow terraces to more favorable Suryakot, near his family home. There and in nearby Dhusini, he engaged wide community participation in our two SeedTree agroforestry projects.



Suryakot community agroforestry nursery



New NAFSCOL nursery

We were delighted to have Leah and Fulmati's example as accomplished professional women and their female perspective to complement Ram's supervision. In Suryakot, it revealed a strong interest in our improved traditional wood cooking stoves program. As many areas of Nepal prospered, gas stoves gained favor. But higher costs and better understanding of fossil fuel's impacts have rekindled interest in these efficient, smoke-free cooking stoves. We hope to support their interest in 2024.



Fulmati and Ram lead discussion

Ram, wishing to expand his seed collection network, suggested he and Dev take them on up to Nuwakot. There, after an ordeal of travel, they found Maya (by Leah) and her women's savings group, successfully engaged in *lokta* paper making. The enterprising women showed interest to **Nepal Peace Corps**, after its long Covid-19 hiatus, reopened its Food Security Program in 2023. SeedTree was invited back to resume our collaboration. Brian Roth and Beeju



Maya's group welcome, garlanding with scarfs.



Fulmati & Leah



Dev and Ram

Planning a **return to Nepal** in September after 13 years to visit her former ngo OUEST team and project sites, our old friend and ally, Leah Schulte, asked if there was anything she could do for SeedTree. As OUEST's area had been along the ridge dividing Nuwakot and Sindhupalchowk, a visit to Ram Gautam's work in Sindhupalchowk seemed feasible. Fulmati Thapa, a social worker formerly with OUEST, coordinated with Ram and his nephew Dev to visit two new SeedTree sites, rough-riding on the back of their motorcycles over rutted roads and mountain paths. They brought back surprising news that Ram had moved his professional Nepal Agroforestry Seed



Poudyal attended the In-Service Training in Kathmandu and presented the keys for a successful agroforestry nursery project Brian had gleaned from visiting to all our Peace Corps Volunteers PCV's sites in 2020. We recommended all the PCVs interested in participating return to their communities, explore and confirm whether they had the necessary local resources, interest and support to succeed. Beeju gathered their evaluations of preliminary criteria. We selected three of the strongest candidates, serving in western districts. These PCVs are now proceeding with our participatory dialogue in their communities that will determine the species and amounts of seed to be delivered.

Forestry UHF. We were all surprised to greet AFU's Balram Bhatta, also visiting UHF as he arrived by car. John mused about engaging the ex-pat community in some volunteer activity with SeedTree as a way to make their stay more meaningful and for SeedTree to engage a potentially valuable new contingent. Satya, living by the popular tourist access the Chitwan National Park where there is ample accommodation, especially liked the idea, He is exploring its feasibility for 2024. Our well stocked nurseries offer good opportunities for service.

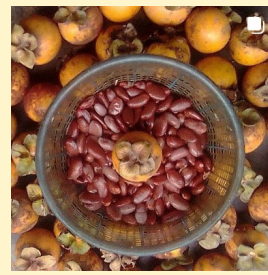
Ethan will return to Nepal March 1st, eager to continue the interrupted progress at AFU, visit Satya's family homestay and projects,



PCV John with 2019 allies planting macadamia.



By 2023, their Avacado and Star fruit are producing.



First fruits in Nawalparadi: Mangosteen

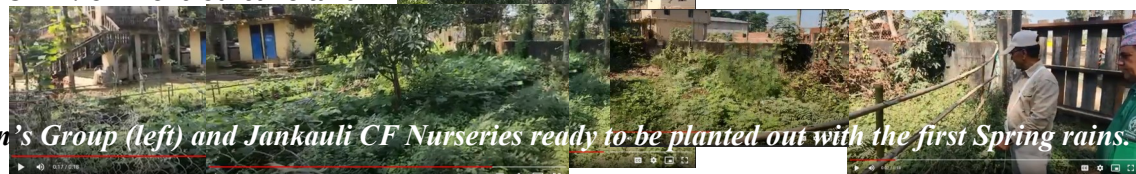


Bauhinia blossom in JCF

After Former Food Security PCV John Buscarino visited the site of his pre-covid service and viewed the fruits of his labors, he met Brian in Pokhara. The two had traveled together in 12/21-1/22 on a supervisory tour and Brian conveyed to me John might be available. We are fortunate that John, who is fluent in Nepali and so well accomplished in the program, has agreed to provide on-site supervision and assistance to these new volunteers.

Our last Board meetings were interesting, dynamic and well attended. Attendees were from ME: Peter Arnold, Ethan and me, VA: Tom Hammett, MO: Leah Schulte, TX: Rob Lilieholm, Nepal: John and even India where Brian was visiting the Univ. of Horticulture and

and accompany John in field supervision. With 4 of 6 groups reporting, we find each of these agroforestry nurseries received 5 kg. of 13 species of tree or bamboo seed, producing an estimated total of 22,981 seedlings. Additionally, we provided 10 species of vegetable seed. Since the 2015 earthquakes and Peace Corps partnering there has been a greater emphasis on food producing trees. The tanki *Bauhinia purpuria* flower above is on a tree commonly used for animal fodder. But Nepali women pluck the buds for a delicious relish to brighten their meals of rice, dhal, and vegetables, just one example of how Nepali cuisine has developed unique uses for the diversity of their indigenous species.



Satya's Jhuwani Women's Group (left) and Jankauli CF Nurseries ready to be planted out with the first Spring rains.

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