

“Building Peace through Water Supply”

Sindhuli, Nepal

2025

Lewis & Clark College

Shubhika Baral

Context

Bhaluwai is a small village in the Sindhuli district of Nepal. Locals there face serious social and health challenges that are rooted in caste discrimination between the Brahmins and the Dalits (formerly known as “*untouchables*”). Despite the Interim Constitution of 2063 BS (Bikram Sambat calendar) abolishing untouchability, discriminatory practices persist. Such practices deny Dalits access to communal resources like water taps and wells. Due to the lack of proper filtration systems for the *Kamala* river water that they fetch, the health and hygiene standards in Dalit communities are very poor. This not only affects their health and hygiene but also perpetuates social tensions and conflicts.

The recent 2024 Nepal floods have worsened their condition, making it even more difficult for Dalits to obtain water and forcing them to travel to distant villages in search of a water source. There have been many cases of Dalits who have been physically assaulted for using a communal tap. This is because the Brahmins considered the water from a tap used by Dalits to be “*impure*” and cut off access to it. This shows the urgent need for peace-building initiatives between the Brahmin and the Dalit community.

To provide universal access to and sustainable management of water and sanitation, it is necessary that these problems be addressed under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6): Clean Water and Sanitation. Thus, I believe that it's important to build a reliable water system to build peace within this village and ensure that all individuals, regardless of their caste, can access this fundamental human right.

About Udaan Foundation

Udaan translates to ‘*to fly*’ in Nepali. The *Udaan* Foundation is a nonprofit I started in 2016 with my younger sister. Through this foundation, we have collaborated with many organizations and individuals to carry out awareness campaigns regarding menstruation, health, and sanitation in rural areas all over Nepal. With awareness, we also supply sustainable menstrual products and train women to improve local employment for a more sustainable future. Our focus for the year 2025 is on health and water sanitation. Thus, I will work with *Udaan* to make this project a reality.

Project Description, Aim and Impact

This project aims to promote peace in Bhaluwai village by addressing the critical water and sanitation challenges faced by the Dalit community. With the help of a plumbing team, we plan to extend the water supply line to the outskirts of Bhaluwai, where the Dalits reside.

In the summer of 2024, I spent time in these Nepali villages to understand the impact of untouchability practices on health and sanitation. Although the Dalit communities are willing to pay their monthly water bill, they first need a source to provide them with the water supply. I went through a few nearby villages and came across Raage. The majority of the population in Raage consists of Chhetris—the second highest caste after Brahmins. Despite their strong reluctance to allow Dalits access to their communal taps — they were the only nearby village that agreed to support this project. This proposal was accepted not solely as an act of charity towards the Dalits, but also as a means to divert them from using their communal taps. The payment will be made by the Dalits to Raage village’s *Upabhokta Samiti*, the committee equivalent to a water company. This is a stepping stone to alleviate tensions and promote peace, for now, to slowly build on dialogues.

The contracted plumbing team will set up pipelines for the Dalit community by connecting to Raage’s existing water system. By building taps for the Dalit community, we aim to build peace by eliminating the need for Dalits to sneak into Brahmin neighborhoods to collect water.

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The project will directly benefit approximately 58 Dalit families, with an average family size of seven, and impact around 400 individuals. We anticipate that building these communal taps will reduce waterborne diseases, and improve overall community health by ensuring direct and reliable access to clean water for the Dalits. More importantly, this initiative promotes dignity for the Dalit community and thus challenges the enduring stigma of untouchability.

The project is set to be completed within one month. On July 4th, *Udaan* will organize a Welcome Event to kick off the project and honor all partners involved, including Brahmins, Dalits, Chettris, Ward 1 Chiefs (local authorities), and the plumbing team. The 6 communal taps will be constructed from July 5th to August 5th. On August 6th, *Udaan* will host a Success Event to celebrate the project’s completion.

Throughout the month, I will continue the conversation about peace and equity with individuals from all three communities (Brahmin, Chettri, Dalit). Alongside this, I will make sure that the construction process goes smoothly, that all equipment and food items are delivered on time, and track finances. On 12th July, I plan to organize a one-day workshop on the importance of water security for local students (aged 10-20) with *Udaans’* help. Specifics of the workshop will be decided during the first week of construction. As a part of the Success event, students will then paint murals on their community water taps symbolizing the importance of equality. I believe that such activities with the younger generation will help build long-term unity and social change.

Partners

For this project, I will collaborate with several partners to ensure its success and sustainability:

1. *Udaan*: *Udaan* will organize the welcome and success events, facilitating dialogue between the Brahmin, Chettri, and Dalit communities as needed, with the support of the Ward 1 Chiefs. These events will primarily emphasize community building and bridging social divides, while also focusing on improving health and water sanitation conditions. *Udaan* has committed to contribute half the funds needed to purchase event tents, speakers, and microphones. More importantly, *Udaan* has agreed to pay an additional amount if expenses exceed the total budget. *Udaan* will also rent a camera from their budget to document this project. While construction takes place, *Udaan* will help me organize a workshop on social equity for local youth and the final mural art for the Success Event. Additionally, *Udaan* will engage with local government officials to advocate for ongoing support and sustainability of the water supply initiative. *Udaan* will be given \$1200 from the Lewis & Clark grant for future maintenance and repair. They will inspect the taps once every 4 months for sustainability.
2. Plumbing team: As there aren’t any plumbing teams in these nearby villages, they need to be contracted from a small town called Bardibas, which is two hours away from Bhaluwai. A few plumbing teams in Bardibas agreed to help when contacted a month in advance.
3. Ward 1 (local authority), Dudhauri Municipality: Ward 1 of Dudhauri Municipality, Sindhuli District has agreed to allow this project if it gets selected. Chiefs will be joining the welcome and success event which will be held on government land. The Chiefs will be invited to say a few words about peace-building in these communities. Together, these partnerships will facilitate improving social harmony within Sindhuli.

Assessment and Evaluation

During the Welcome Event, *Udaan* will conduct an initial assessment of waterborne diseases and sanitation conditions within the Dalit community. A survey will be carried out to gather baseline data from one representative per household across the 58 Dalit families. Questions will address the frequency and types of waterborne illnesses and current water-fetching practices. More importantly, *Udaan* will also assess the number of water-based caste conflicts before the installation of the new taps.

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Udaan will conduct follow-ups every four months to assess the functionality of the water system and monitor ongoing health and social dynamics in the village. The initial survey will be taken again after 6 months to evaluate the potential decrease in caste-based conflicts, waterborne illness, and water fetching practices.

The attendance and active participation of all three communities (Dalit, Brahmin, and Chhetri) at the Welcome and Success events will be documented. Feedback from these events will help evaluate the project's effectiveness in fostering dialogue and building peace.

Project Sustainability

The sustainability of this project will be supported by ongoing collaboration between *Udaan* and the local government officials to evaluate the integrity of the infrastructure and ensure that both communities live in peace and harmony. Notably, the Dalit families have agreed to pay the monthly water bill if communal taps are installed, ensuring a continuous water supply. A small amount of the project budget (sourced from Lewis & Clark) may be left with the Udaan Foundation for early project maintenance.

Udaan Foundation will conduct fundraising programs to secure necessary funding for maintenance and renovations as needed in the future. With adequate funding, we hope to expand similar water sanitation projects to other underserved areas in Nepal, building harmony between communities and promoting peace.