

“Building Peace through Water Supply”

Sindhuli, Nepal

2025

Lewis & Clark College

Shubhika Baral

A. Project Summary

This initiative sought to advance peace and equity in Bhaluwai village, Sindhuli, Nepal by addressing caste-based water discrimination that denied Dalits access to clean water. The project involved building six communal taps in the Dalit settlement, connected through pipelines from Raage village. By ensuring reliable water access, the project reduced tensions between castes, eliminated the need for Dalits to use restricted taps, and promoted dignity and health. The work was carried out in partnership with the Udaan Foundation, with approval from the Ward 1 government authorities, and in collaboration with a contracted plumbing team from Bardibas.

B. Project Description

Issue Selection and Approach

The central issue identified was water insecurity rooted in caste discrimination. Dalits were denied access to communal taps, leading to conflict and health risks. The approach chosen was to extend pipelines from Raage village to install six communal taps in Dalit neighborhoods, serving approximately 400 individuals. This strategy provided both immediate relief and a pathway toward peace by separating water sources.

Site Selection and Local Support

Sindhuli was chosen as the project site because of firsthand observations made in the summer of 2024. Conversations with Dalit families, high-caste households, and local authorities highlighted the urgent need for intervention. The Raage village community agreed to share their water system, and the Ward 1 Chiefs gave their approval, legitimizing the project and strengthening its sustainability.

Adjustments to the Original Plan

While the Welcome Event was designed to bring together Brahmins, Chhetris, and Dalits, many high-caste individuals did not attend. To address this, Udaan Foundation pivoted, sending representatives directly into high-caste neighborhoods to foster dialogue and gain support.

Additionally, the project timeline was delayed due to administrative challenges. Online fund transfers through banks, took longer than anticipated, and the project began on 15 July instead of the planned 4 July. Despite these hurdles, construction was completed successfully within the revised timeline.

Sustainability and Continuity

Dalit families committed to paying their monthly water bills, ensuring ongoing operation. Udaan Foundation will conduct quarterly inspections, and remaining funds will support maintenance. The project also laid a foundation for future peacebuilding efforts, including workshops and mural activities with youth to promote long-term unity.

C. Reflection

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Defining Peace

For this project, peace was not defined as immediate integration of castes at the same water source. Instead, peace meant reducing conflict and violence by ensuring that Dalits had their own secure water supply. Thus, peace is a process rather than a single moment. This practical approach created dignity and safety for Dalits, while opening the door for future dialogue toward deeper social integration.

Contributions to Peace: Short- and Long-term

In the short term, peace was achieved by eliminating the need for Dalits to risk assault by fetching water from high-caste neighborhood taps. In the long term, workshops and student-led murals foster conversations about equity and community, creating conditions for gradual social change where shared water sources hopefully one day be possible.

Personal Learning

The project revealed how reality often diverges from written proposals. Unexpected conflicts, absenteeism, and administrative delays forced quick adaptation. For example, when I could not fly back home, I had to lead and direct online. With time difference and bureaucratic delays, I had to learn to be patient and consistent with my efforts. Later, I redirected funds meant for my travel to construct a bathroom and a seating structure near the taps, allowing people to rest and enjoy fresh water together. These improvisations reminded me the importance of resilience and flexibility.

D. Personal Statement

“This project taught me that peace is not always about immediate unity. It is about building stepping stones that reduce conflict and allow dignity to flourish with time.” – Shubhika