

Nepal



VSO Nepal Strategy

2012-15

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Welcome to the *VSO Nepal Strategy 2012-15*. Based on the development priorities outlined in Nepal's Poverty Reduction Strategy and the plans of our Ministry partners (including the School Sector Reform Plan and the Health Sector Programme Implementation Plan II), our new strategy is the result of extensive participation and consultation with VSO Nepal staff, volunteers, partners, donors, community members and other key stakeholders. This document is an introductory summary of our detailed country strategy, providing an overview of our objectives, our programmatic focus, the way we work and our anticipated impact.



Foreword

VSO is the world's leading independent, international development organisation that works through international volunteer professionals. We believe that change happens because people make it happen. Providing food, infrastructure and machinery is important, but we believe people are the key to overcoming poverty.

That's why we work through volunteers. Drawn from many countries and all walks of life, they give their expertise, their time and their passion. Volunteers share their skills within carefully selected partner organisations, ranging from grassroots groups to government ministries. It is a powerful, cost-effective way to create lasting results.

Together we work to improve poor people's access to quality essential services, information, technology and ideas that link them to local development and to the wider world. VSO's approach builds on the strength of local communities to help poor and marginalised people to understand their rights and to fulfil their potential as active, equal and fully-valued members of their society.

What we do

VSO Nepal works to improve the lives of impoverished people in some of the country's poorest districts, particularly focusing on vulnerable women and girls, and marginalised caste and ethnic groups. We work with our partners to identify the skills that would most affect strategic change. Our international

recruitment bases then match highly-skilled technical experts to the specific needs of each placement. Today our work in Nepal is supported by the expertise and time of volunteers from Australia, Canada, China, India, Kenya, the Netherlands, Philippines, Uganda, the UK and the US – as well as a rapidly growing team of national volunteers, who have been central to developing this strategy.

How we do it

Although poverty and marginalisation in Nepal are driven by many different issues, the people we work with tell us that poor access to education, insufficient and insecure livelihoods, and an inability to meet basic health needs impede their efforts to change their circumstances. VSO Nepal supports communities to consider their strengths, assets, needs and options to address these factors in a sustainable and locally-owned way, mainstreaming issues of gender and climate change across all that we do.

We work with partners from civil society, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), supporting them in designing effective solutions to local development challenges. By sharing the skills and knowledge of our international volunteers, we build the capacity of poor and marginalised people – particularly youth – to lead the development of their communities. Using this grassroots experience, we then lobby and support district-level bodies and national ministries to develop pro-poor policies, services and practices.



VSO Nepal

Home to the most extreme geographic and climatic range in the world, Nepal is also the poorest and most unequal country in south Asia. Since 2006 the country has successfully maintained peace after 10 years of insurgency, yet is still beset by many of the factors which made it a fertile ground for conflict and the recruitment of combatants. Almost half of the working-age population are unemployed or underemployed, while the average adult literacy rate is below 30% in the poorest districts. Although 92% of primary-aged children are enrolled in school, keeping them

in the education system remains a significant challenge compounded by poor education management, quality, relevance and access. Many rural communities lack access to safe drinking water or primary health services and 39% of children are malnourished. Poor infrastructure isolates communities from markets while their livelihoods are increasingly affected by the impacts of climate change. All of this comes in a context of frequent natural disasters, including floods, landslides, major earthquakes, drought and famine.

VSO has worked in Nepal since 1964, initially addressing the need to deliver key services in remote districts. Today, we are building on the success of this earlier work to increase local organisational, managerial and civil society capacities to address poverty. One of our key strengths is our ability to work directly at both community level, where the needs are greatest, and at central level for scaling up impact. We share skills strategically with people and organisations to effectively contribute to and sustain development in Nepal.



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Who we work for

Our strategy focuses on impoverished and marginalised people in rural communities, especially vulnerable women and girls, and excluded ethnic and caste groups. The plan reaches at least 51,738 direct beneficiaries, including:

- 432 teachers
- 96 head teachers and school supervisors
- 31,500 children from the most disadvantaged communities
- 800 community health workers
- 450 female community health volunteers
- 120 agriculturalists
- 7,500 people with extremely insecure livelihoods.

Indirectly, our strategy will further reach an estimated 450,000 marginalised and impoverished people, as well as all those benefiting from the results of our advocacy work.

Where we work

In 20 of the most impoverished and disadvantaged districts in Nepal we have selected 100 Village Development Committees (VDCs) as the focus of this strategy. These include eight hill and mountain districts in the far and mid West, and four districts with extreme poverty density in the Terai area. For advocacy networks and strategic reach, the main urban areas of Kathmandu and Kaski have been included, with government and NGO partnerships supporting the replication and sustaining of effective grassroots initiatives.

Our focus

Our holistic approach integrates the focus areas of education, secure livelihoods and health throughout all our planning. We also develop alliances with organisations where we can complement and add value to one another's work, for a more comprehensive approach to tackling poverty in Nepal.

Education

VSO Nepal has worked in education for more than 40 years, focusing on increasing school enrolment, retention and participation of children who are marginalised from the education system – especially vulnerable girls, children with disabilities and Dalit children.

Our current work supports the Ministry of Education's School Sector Reform Plan, and seeks to improve teaching quality, increase the effectiveness of education management and improve early childhood development. Alongside teachers, communities, district education offices and national education divisions, our volunteers work to increase the institutional capacity of the education system to deliver quality, inclusive and child-centred learning. We also support the development and revision of local curricula, and mentor school management committees to develop and implement effective school improvement plans.

Working in six districts, we seek to ensure that the value of education is recognised and invested in from family level to national level, in a transparent and accountable manner. We also aim to make education policies relevant, participatory, and needs-based and to break cycles of gender and caste discrimination by establishing safe, child-friendly school environments where children can learn and grow together.

Health and social wellbeing

Although Nepal has made promising progress in its overall health status and living standards, critical primary health problems persist. These include: extensive childhood malnutrition; one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world; and widespread preventable diseases through a lack of access to or information about sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and sexual health. Compounding this, there is only one doctor for every 5,000 people.

Building on our former HIV and AIDS health programme and aligning with the Ministry of Health's Sector Programme Implementation Plan II, VSO Nepal aims to improve community-based primary healthcare systems. Our strategy focuses on rural communities in 12 districts where access to quality health services is compromised by factors such as cultural and economic barriers to good health and weak healthcare systems.

Through the expertise of our healthcare volunteers, we aim to increase the capacity of community health workers and administrators to deliver and manage health services. We will support marginalised groups (especially vulnerable women and women of reproductive age) and promote their own and their families' wellbeing through increased access to quality preventative and curative healthcare. We will also support rural communities in holding service providers accountable and in participating in healthcare decision making and delivery.



Secure livelihoods

The majority of people in Nepal work in the informal agricultural sector with low wages, exploitation, poor working conditions and exclusion from markets. With severely underdeveloped electricity infrastructure, 87% of domestic energy is produced by firewood. As forests are cleared, depleting the nutrients in the land, crop yields fall and women spend increasing hours searching for fuel.

Although 8.5 million Nepalis are chronically hungry today, by 2050 the population will have increased by 75% – current levels of food and labour availability must double to meet demand. This in a context of extreme vulnerability to climate change, low technical skill in agriculture and animal husbandry, minimal access to new technology, and marginalised farmers poorly connected to market chains.

VSO Nepal's response will focus on sustainable agriculture, forestry and enterprise development, supported by technical expertise from long-term, highly-skilled volunteers. Our livelihoods programme seeks to increase environmentally-compatible and climate resilient livelihood options along with food and income security for poor households in at least 10 districts. We also aim to build the capacity and accountability of government and NGO service providers, to advocate for pro-poor policies that challenge the drivers of insecure livelihoods, and secure greater inclusion of marginalised people in decision making on livelihood issues.

Cross-cutting theme: gender

Severe gender inequality exists in Nepal. We have the highest maternal mortality rate in south Asia with women facing a one in 80 likelihood of maternal death. The average literacy

rate among women is 34.9%, contributing to women's significant disadvantage in the formal economy and in access to information to help defend their rights and health. Especially in rural communities, women's advancement is limited by entrenched social and cultural attitudes and by traditional customs that devalue, disempower and in some cases endanger them.

Addressing gender inequity is therefore a foundational element of our work, and cuts across all of our programming. During the five years covered by this plan we also are deepening our expertise in this area so that we can strengthen and expand our gender advocacy work and that of our partners.

Cross-cutting theme: climate change

Nepal is one of the 20 most disaster-prone countries in the world and highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Disadvantaged people are the least resilient to weather-related disasters and other climate impacts, which increase their food insecurity and contribute to disease in people, crops and livestock. Moreover, the impacts of climate change on Himalayan glaciers and precipitation extend to river basins downstream, affecting the whole south Asian region and hence nearly 25% of the world's people.

We are integrating climate change considerations into all our operations and programmes, particularly focusing on community-based adaptation work and advocacy. VSO Nepal is also conducting research into the impact of climate change on the lives of the people we work with. We can then identify the best ways to proactively improve people's ability to respond, adapt and develop resilience.



Impact

Our vision is to bring about significant improvement in the lives of impoverished and marginalised people in our 20 targeted districts.

We want to bring about a large increase in the number of marginalised children (especially girls) enrolling in school and actually completing a quality and inclusive basic education. This improves overall literacy and numeracy rates, which better prepares children to build a future without poverty.

We envisage community members who are better informed about proactive measures to stay healthy. Community health

workers will have a greater ability to support local people and address basic health issues. Health service providers will have improved capacity and skills to deliver better quality services.

We will also work towards thriving and more resilient communities in our target areas with increased productivity and diversity in agriculture – vulnerable workers, especially women, will have greater capacity to establish sustainable, resilient and market-orientated livelihood solutions and fairer working conditions.

By bringing people together, we can fight poverty in Nepal.

Partnership: the way we work

We recognise that we are one small part of a process involving many diverse players. We therefore focus on the thematic and geographic areas where our methodology can most add value. We also build strong partnerships with government, other INGOs and NGOs, civil society and the private sector to contribute to wider development.

Implementation

At the heart of our approach is a people-to-people method of development. Our development toolbox includes:

- **Long-term overseas volunteers (professional placements of up to two years)**
Our volunteers come from developed and developing nations, to share expertise, knowledge and experience not normally available locally. We are also implementing an international youth scheme to mentor our national youth volunteers.
- **Short-term specialist assignments (six months and under)**
Highly experienced professionals providing support at senior levels. They come from both developed and developing nations, and include British MPs as parliamentarian volunteers and volunteers from the Nepali diaspora.
- **National volunteers**
VSO Nepal and our NGO partners harness local expertise and potential to lead and sustain their own development. They mobilise and support local people in using their skills and cultural understanding to impact their own communities
- **Knowledge brokering**
Through workshops, conferences and national and international exchanges we connect individuals and organisations so that they can share knowledge, perspectives, ideas and practices.
- **Advocacy**
We provide knowledge to those responsible for deciding on and implementing policy, and create opportunities for communities to influence those who set the policies that affect their lives.



ISBN 978-1-903697-22-1



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