



## **Partnering for Change: Link Research to Societal Challenges**

### Video Transcript

#### **Making migration safer: how the project developed**

[Prof. Dr. Susan Thieme] The project addressing the situation of Nepalese migrant workers in Delhi ran for two years. The first phase was dedicated to economic literacy. Migrants would learn how to transfer their money safely between India and Nepal.

In addition, the South Asia Study Center introduced secure possibilities for remittances. Its members negotiated with banks to provide access for Nepali migrants. They initiated banking facilities for safe money transfer, and they encouraged Nepali to use them.

In a Skype call, Raju Bhattarai, the former head of the South Asia Study Centre, explains how this was done. The NGO informed the migrants how a bank worked. They also communicated with posters that read: 'Money in the bank, safety, benefits, stress-free'. One man in the poster is Nepali. Thus, the migrants understood that banks offered services they could use.

The second phase of the project focused on empowering migrants to form their own organisation. The South Asia Study Center now felt much more confident about what they wanted to achieve. They took the lead in defining the project and the activities.

As Raju Bhattarai relates, the first phase had resulted in a loose alliance of the migrants. However, it became clear that this was not enough, since Indian people did not really recognise the work the Nepali did for them.

The best way to achieve visibility was to establish an organisation. Bhattarai says that the implementation was very demanding. The members of the Center did a lot of groundwork, sharing closely the experiences of the watchmen they tried to organise.

Thus, in the second year of the collaborative project, an association for watchmen was formed. Together with the South Asia Study Center, the watchmen established platforms to discuss their problems and demands.

Different activities enhanced the visibility of the association. Many migrants participated, for instance, in the silent march in Delhi. They walked without shouts and words, blowing whistles and shaking rattles.



The watchmen and the South Asia Study Center wanted to register the migrant association as trade union. The initial talks with other trade unions were promising, even if some just wanted to incorporate the watchmen.

As Raj Bhattarai explains, the watchmen wanted their own trade union so that people would recognise their trade. The formal application for registration, however, was constantly denied.

The issue became very political. Insisting on forming a trade union instead of an association, the South Asia Study Center became a target for police inquiries. The police searched Bhattarai's home, sealed his bank account, and blamed him to assist in Maoist conflicts. With this, they referred to the civil war Nepal lived at that time. Any political activities were closely shadowed by both the Indian and the Nepal governments.

In our Skype call, Raju raises the important issue of responsibility. Activists who champion the rights of marginalised people are exposed to risk. He emphasises that there are thousands of activists like him in India, that his was a small case, and he was not famous. So he could suffer dire consequences without anybody really caring about his fate. He did not have the networks and the money to get supported when in trouble or put in jail. Thus, he went to Europe.

We invite you to look again at the excerpts of the Skype call with Raju Bhattarai. What are your reactions to the development? We look forward to reading your comments.