

Life returned to its utmost simplicity when a Magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Nepal on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015. Sky the roof, crop-fields the bed; Electricity, Telephone, Internet, deprived of everything. Even some of the fortunate ones among us, who migrated to Kathmandu in an attempt to escape the impoverished conditions of rural Nepal, got back to the conditions at our roots.



14 October 2014: Albeit much further than proposed and in a miniature scale our GEE 2013 project, "*Homestay on Annapurna Circuit*" had got its life. We were preparing to welcome more guests that autumn, but all our efforts went in vain when a snowstorm struck. The snowstorm, *Hud-Hud* and series of avalanches occurred on the Annapurna region, the destination for our GEE 2013 Project, claiming more than 40 lives.

The disaster had two crucial implications for our business. One, most of the deaths was due to unavailability of proper shelters for the trekkers, highlighting the potential for modified version of homestay services in the Annapurna region. Two, the circuit was closed down for tourists after the tragedy and the projection for number of tourists in the following year was low. We continued preparations with modest ambition. Friends and families became the customers. The rural women at least had some income in hand, able to buy a *saree* they coveted for long and purchase stationaries for their kids' education.

25 April 2015: A couple of months remained until my graduation after which I would be able to devote much of my time to the homestay at proposed location. Then, another calamity headed our way. A 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck mid-Nepal. As with other districts, Lamjung suffered a huge devastation. Though there have been minimal loss of lives here, it has had major physical loss. Most of the houses have suffered serious damage, while some have totally collapsed. At the moment, we are providing relief materials and voluntary labor for construction of immediate shelter here.

It has been a half step forward and two step back kind of journey for us. But we are not going to stop. The natural calamities may have caused infrastructural damage but it cannot damage the natural and cultural beauty of the region. After the houses in the local communities are rebuilt, we're planning a change in our plan. A focus on domestic tourists would be the ideal way to go, before the foreign tourist flow regains its momentum in Nepal. Homestay service will provide income-generating opportunities to women; it will change their lives. Despite constraints we're determined to achieve our ambition.



The joyful experience of last two years meant that I was eagerly anticipating the start of GEE this year. We had even more diversity, from Asia-Pacific all the way to Africa and Central America. Having seen the misery of rural Nepal, most of my ideas revolve around Rural Enterprise Development. With the first hand experience of problems in the education sector of rural Nepal, I put

forward my idea of a Community school, which could improve the rural education system. The venture would benefit the whole community as a part of its knowledge co-creation mechanism. It turned out to be the business plan our team worked on.

The best part about GEE has always been the exchange of social, political, cultural and economic information between group members from many different regions of the world. GEE is an ideal platform for youths from different regions to share their experience and learning in these matters, helping in the global knowledge co-creation process. Our world would simultaneously prosper if only we openly shared our knowledge and lessons with each other. It was delightful communicating with the team members. Though, active participation from all the members would have helped us analyze the events from a broader perspective.

Most of the team members were from developed regions. Marginalized groups in those regions seemed to have very different problems compared to such groups in LDCs. The problems here are more concerned with survival and other basic needs while the developed regions have gotten away with this and focus on making lives easier.

We really enjoyed the video team discussion. One of our friends from Mexico was returning home for dinner while in Nepal I was having my early morning breakfast of technically the next day; the fun part about time difference, which we hardly ever give much attention to in everyday lives. The leader was extremely friendly and was available for project discussion any time. Despite extremely limited information available in the Internet, she was eager to know more about the conditions of the impoverished places in Nepal. It was pleasure knowing such wonderful people; I hope to all of us will remain in touch.

With power and communication sources not functioning well, it was not easy at all to attend the team discussions. Even if you did gather courage to get into house for the project works, the regular earthquake aftershocks would rush you back to the field. I used my time in the field for planning the business we were working on. It would give me a break from the mental trauma of earthquake as well. Engaging in relief works, travels to and fro earthquake-affected villages, these three weeks have made be realize my efficiency. I am glad that I managed to complete all the tasks that I undertook, quite well.

As a student of Business and Economics, I have always championed the role of enterprise development in assisting the lives of marginalized communities. I encourage my fellow GEE family members to work in putting their respective business plans in actions. It does not merely boast money making potential but an opportunity to change the lives of many. We might face several hurdles in our way, but the satisfaction we'll gain when even one life prospers through our effort is simply unrivalled.

A quote from Napoleon Hill always inspires me,

"Whatever the mind of a person can conceive and believe, it can achieve."