

In their own words...

Nepal: The lives of young stone crushers



1 Samjhana Rajbansi, a 14-year-old student, has been crushing stone for the last five years.



Her family migrated to town in search of work and a better life after her father was forced to sell all of their land to treat her grandmother's terminal lung cancer.

Every day, for one to two hours in the morning and again in the evening, Samjhana, and all of her vacation time, she works with her family on the riverbank collecting sand and gravel. She sometime finds it very hard to manage school along

with chores in the household, herding, and working as a stone crusher. Their family of six is striving to earn enough to cover the everyday basic needs as well as managing to keep the four children clinging to school. The parents are quite sceptical that they will be able afford it in the days to come.

2 Tulku Tamang, 9-year-old, can always be observed at the stone crushing site at Phlaku VDC-7, Kathmandu along the Pharping-Hetauda road along with his relatives. Out of seven family members, only the older brother knows how to read and write; the rest remain illiterate due to "lack of luck", they say.



When he was at the age of "knowing something about himself", Tulku began to contribute to the household by doing chores assisting his parents by collecting stone for them to crush.

According to Tulku's mother, Buddhamaya Tamang, about five years back they owned about 10 *ropani* of land which belonged to her family. It was the major source of food for their family but it was seized by their relatives through a loop hole in the laws leaving them *Sukumbasi* (landless) stone crushers. Their *Khar paral* house is decrepit and urgently needs refurbishment to remain standing in the days to come.

Mr. Rimi Kancha Tamang says, “All four of my children have seen the school building but never been on the bench for study”. Their day starts with *doko* in their head and hammer in their hand. From dawn until 10 am they work, then take their meal, and again start to work until late evening.

3 Gokul B. K., 13-year-old (*Biswakarma*). In the dense heat of the midday sun at Sopyang, a boy was intently hammering stones as if his sole aim in life was to crush them into pieces at any cost. When questioned, he did not respond in any way. Apparently Gokul is dumb by birth, according to his grandmother.



She, a 58 year old lady, is the sole caretaker of Gokul and barely manages to earn their living through crushing stones, earning less than Rs. 1300 per week. Gokul has been with his grandmother for the last 5 years when he lost his parents in a landslide accident.

Gokul’s face is expressionless, having all his anguish and sorrow hidden under his voice and so rapt in work that he sometimes even misses his meal according to his grandmother. His work

and skill gives no indication that he is just 13 years of age.

4 Sunita Khadka, 16-year-old, a daughter of Mr. Ramchandra Khadka, has lately passed the School Leaving Certificate and been admitted to a nearby college. In her free time and vacation she manages to assist a bit in easing her parents’ burden for earning.

She has been working as a stone crusher for the past three years part time. Her understanding related to child labour is outstanding but when we asked why she was working if she knows all this the answer was outstanding too. “A person is wise if he works for necessities rather than working for impractical things”.



Mr. Khadka, who works in a hotel as a paid labourer, has family of 5 and is striving to provide them with basic education. Their own land is farmable and provides food for them for most of the year. For the family, crushing stone is amateur work to cover additional expenses. They have their own house with the basic amenities and recreation.

Sunita said, “This is a really easy job for making easy money”. Even though she works during her vacation, she feels it really contributes a lot to her family and expenses for her study.

5 Krishna Yadav, 14-year-old, also enjoys crushing stone and transporting sand from the river at Lakhndevi Khola near Nawalpul. Working with his family is like play for him. He enjoys school and learning as well and he is determined to complete school and to attend college. The nearby school is just 30 minutes' walk and is where he studies in grade seven.



The farmable land, which used to produce plenty of rice for them, was washed out by the river, leaving them almost landless. Still, the remaining land manages to support them for six to seven months of the year. Krishna works alongside school for 4-5 hours a day to support his family.