

**ADVOCACYNET 372**  
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## **Village Volunteers Beat Back a COVID Surge in Midwest Nepal**



In a rousing example of successful community action, a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP) in Nepal has helped to bring down the rate of COVID-19 infections and in the process brought health care to isolated families and villages.

The initiative was launched in late June in sixty villages by Backward Society Education (BASE), a community-based movement that works in the Midwest with the Tharu people. The campaign is focused on Dang District, with a population of around 550,000.

The virus was surging in Nepal at the time and after receiving an urgent request from BASE AP launched an immediate appeal that raised \$6,145.

This allowed BASE to mount an intensive information campaign and send a medical team into all 60 villages.

By the end of September infections in Dang had fallen to 134 a month from 588. Vaccinations rose to 194,375 - around 35% of the district population and a sharp rise on the 27,739 doses given out in June. Three deaths from COVID-19 were reported in September.

Pinky Dangi, who coordinated the campaign at BASE in Nepal, described the outcome as a “great success” in a recent Zoom call. Ms Dangi is seen on the left in the photo below.



The outcome represents a dramatic turnaround from June, when over 30% of the villagers in the district were thought to be infected. Oxygen had run out, the supply of vaccines from India had abruptly stopped, hospitals were full and patients were being treated on the sidewalk (bottom photo). Two BASE Board members had recently died from COVID-19.

BASE is not claiming credit for the overall improvement in Dang but the organization worked closely with the district health authorities throughout and team members feel their approach may have provided a blue-print for the entire district.

“Some of the villages are very isolated and did not even know about COVID,” said Ms Dangi. “They were surprised to see us!”

The campaign began by training a volunteer in each of the 60 villages to counsel villagers about personal hygiene and social distancing. The volunteers also worked with village elders to identify the sick and refer serious cases to a government health post or isolation center.

BASE also contracted with eleven women tailors to make 6,000 face-masks, including 3,000 that were specifically for children, and produced radio jingles that were broadcast every hour by local radio stations with an audience of over a million.

The campaign then dispatched a 3-person medical team led by Doctor Rajiv Jha to visit each village and offer Antigen tests and health care to the sick and elderly (photos below).

Dr Jha's team administered 747 tests in the 60 villages by September 30. Only fourteen tests proved positive, which BASE officials feel may be due to the weeks of blanket coverage and hard work by the volunteers.



Ms Dangi identified other welcome outcomes from the campaign. Antigen tests can be diagnosed in minutes, and this allowed Dr Jha and his team to reassure those who feared they might have been infected. The team also gave out medicine, which was something of a novelty in the isolated villages.

Equally important, the campaign helped BASE to build a strong partnership with the local authorities by purchasing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and oximeters for three government health centers that serve the 60 villages. BASE volunteers also helped villagers to visit government vaccination centers, as vaccines became available.

AP is currently supporting two other community initiatives to combat COVID-19. In Nairobi, the Kangemi Advocacy Self-Help Group has [helped over 500 inhabitants in the settlement of Kangemi to get vaccinated](#). In northeast Uganda the Gulu Disabled Persons Union has set a goal of vaccinating all people with a disability in Gulu Town.

AP is deeply grateful to the donors who supported the BASE appeal. They include the online giving marketplace [Givology](#), Michele de Nevers and Megan Keeling, who [served as an AP Peace Fellow in Nepal in 2016](#).





*(Above) Dang District, June 2021; (Below) the BASE medical team at work*



Masks



Outreach



Testing



Treating the Elderly



Testing



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