

# Media Kit

Author Bio

Book Bio

Who should read *No Mountain Too High*

Book Benefits

Testimonials

Book Excerpt

Press Release

Interview Questions

Downloadable Author & Book Photos

Connect with Rod

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## Rod's Bio

Since his teen years Rod dreamt of trekking in Nepal. He was born in Canada and having attained a Bachelor of Business Administration qualified as a Chartered Accountant while working as an auditor for Price Waterhouse. He met Brisbane-born Deborah in Montreal and in 1978 they emigrated to Australia.

In 1999 he fulfilled his dream and an eight-day trek in Nepal made a lasting impression on Rod and Deb. The warmth, friendliness and openness of the Nepalese touched their hearts. But they were also struck by the poverty, especially in the villages. Returning to Australia, they joined the Nepal Australia Friendship Association (NAFA), a volunteer-run aid organisation that was raising funds for small health and rural infrastructure projects in Nepal.

After more treks and following a peace settlement in a ten-year Maoist insurgency, Rod and Deb visited Tawal in 2006 and within a few years saw the potential of a community-development approach to making transformational change in that area. Rod became President of NAFA in 2007, and Deborah took on the role of Research and Evaluation Officer. They have travelled to Nepal nearly 30 times, at their own expense, to work with Nepalese partners on NAFA-funded projects ([www.nafa.org.au](http://www.nafa.org.au)). In the 2013 Queen's Birthday Honours list Rod and Deborah were both awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in recognition of their service to the Nepalese people.

The development process in the Tawal area was interrupted by the devastating earthquakes in 2015. The volunteer aid work became an even more intense and emotional story for Rod and Deb as local villages worked together in partnership with NAFA and other small, like-minded overseas donors to survive the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and then to rebuild their community infrastructure and livelihoods.

Rod wrote *No Mountain Too High* to tell two inspiring stories: that of local 'can-do' Tamang villagers determined to work together and partner with outside donors to improve education, health and economic opportunities in their community; and that of Rod and Deb's personal experiences and reflections of applying community and market-system development approaches in a partnership with villagers that has improved their lives and created the building blocks for sustainable pathways out of poverty.

Rod and Deb's other joy is sharing time with family and friends, and they are grateful that their two daughters (Kim and Angela), granddaughter (Heidi) and son-in-law (Scott) also live in Brisbane.

### Book Bio

Set over a 20-year period, *No Mountain Too High* provides a voice to villagers in and around the village of Tawal in the hilly region of Nepal, north-west of Kathmandu. These villagers from the Tamang ethnic group had migrated south from Tibet at least 300 years ago. This is a story of risk-takers and visionaries who, within a discriminatory social and political context, have always strived for a better life and future for their community. "Aphno gau aphno banaune" ('Let us build our village ourselves') was a strong conviction for these Tamang villagers.

They built their first school classroom in 1960, and then a grass-roofed, two-room school without any government assistance. Finally, in 1974, a newer school offering classes up to Grade 5 level was built with government funds and local volunteer labour on the site where the school is now located.

In the late 1990s, Tawal native Chandra Tamang, who was working for a trekking agency in Kathmandu, persuaded Lloyd Magalinski, then Vice-President of a small, volunteer-run charity in Brisbane, the Nepal Australia Friendship Association (NAFA) to visit his village. The visit began the evolution of a development partnership between NAFA and the Tawal area.

Although a Maoist insurgency then made local travel too dangerous, a peace declaration in 2006 allowed NAFA members Rod and Deborah Setterlund to visit Tawal and revive the partnership. Over the next nine years, much progress was made. Then, at midday on Saturday 25 April 2015, the world was changed forever for villagers here and in many other parts of Nepal. The area was hit by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake, its epicentre only 25 km west of Tawal, at Barpak in the Gorkha district. In a matter of minutes, 78 lives in the area were lost and all local infrastructure was destroyed, including approximately 1,225 homes, 10 schools, two health posts, a micro-hydro system, and water and agricultural infrastructure. *No Mountain Too High* relives the experience, in the villagers' own words, of that terrible day and its immediate aftermath.

While overseas aid played a part, competent, compassionate Nepalese professionals were critical in helping villagers get back on their feet. The story is one of courage, resilience, trust, competency, generosity and persistence. Recovery from the earthquake involved more than rebuilding community infrastructure. This book tells the yet-to-be completed story of how local farmers partnered with NAFA and a compassionate philanthropist to re-establish and expand the local Agricultural Cooperative, with an aim to provide local villagers a sustainable pathway out of poverty.

At its heart, *No Mountain Too High* is a story about an Australian couple's experience of being members of a small, entirely volunteer-run international-aid organisation. This book tells their personal story, the highs and the lows, as well as their reflections on the success factors and challenges in partnering with local villagers to bring about positive change through community and market-based approaches to development.

### **Who should read *No Mountain Too High***

- Curious travellers
- Readers with an interest in:
  - Nepal e.g. trekkers and other tourists
  - remote village life
  - the experience of villagers surviving and recovering from conflict or natural disasters
- Community/international development students and practitioners who are either paid staff or volunteers, including management committee members of Australian-based or international non-government or government organisations.
- Members of the Nepalese diaspora living outside Nepal

## Book Benefits

- Entertainment:
  - easy to read stories about village life in Nepal and one couple's experience of visiting and working alongside villagers in a development partnership spanning over 20 years.
- Information and education: details of two development aid practice frameworks:
  - community development
  - market-based development
- Inspiration:
  - how villagers from a subsistence farming, ethnic group (Tamang) in Nepal have worked together and in partnership with outside donors to overcome a long history of social discrimination, political neglect, a 10-year civil war and a devastating earthquake to develop a sustainable pathway out of poverty.
  - one couple's experience in applying community and market development approaches in a small group of remote villages in Nepal, including an honest account of the highs and lows and their reflections of the success factors and challenges that remain.

## Testimonials (longer versions can also be viewed on the website)

"This beautifully reflective, well-crafted and detailed account takes us into the mountainous terrain of the Tawal area and interweaves stories and voices of hope, hardship, determination and transformation through the processes of community development. We 'hold our agenda lightly' and as we trek with Rod and Deb along narrow mountain tracks, we see such a soft tread. We see cultural humility, deep connection and commitment to this process in the way Rod gently reminds himself in these pages of who is at the centre of this process and what this journey is."

*Dr Debby Lynch, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, University of Queensland, Australia*

"*No Mountain Too High* is a fascinating and easy to read account of the realities of communities looking to improve their livelihoods, and the commitment of people and organisations helping them to do so."

*Terry Parker, Regional Technical Adviser, Commonwealth Local Government Forum*

"Education, healthcare, hydroelectricity, buffalo, pigs, chickens, the fall of monarchs, a Maoist insurgency, earthquakes, landslides, and a love affair on a national scale. A fiction writer's dream, yet this is all too true. For those interested in grass roots community development, either at home or internationally, this a page turner to getting it right. Rod shows how a community can understand its own needs for development, and when the community is placed at the centre of the development process, amazing things can happen."

*Dr Paul Halman, Honorary Research Fellow at The University of Queensland, Australia, specialising in international development and humanitarian disasters*

"No Mountain Too High is an absorbing story of the outstanding positive difference a small Australian aid organisation is making to the long-term welfare of a Tamang community hidden in a remote area of the Nepal Himalaya... This book is an inspiration for all. Rod and Deb, with their NAFA members, supporters and donors have proved you can make a difference."

*Jim Drapes, Director, Back Track Adventures*

"*No Mountain Too High* is a mini handbook on successful community development. It is a compelling story of the strength of the human spirit and the story is told with compassion and humour...*No Mountain Too High* deserves to be read, not only by those interested in community development, but by anyone interested in the inequalities in our world and how a small organisation can work in partnership with a community to reduce and overcome these inequalities."

*Steve Maguire, Director, Partners in International Collaborative Community Aid*

"Besides being a heart-warming story of sheer hard work, persistence, and charitable endeavours, *No Mountain Too High* is a valuable blueprint for any organisation wanting to improve and enrich the lives of people in rural communities."

*Ray Baker, Trek Leader*

**Book Excerpt (free download of Foreword and Introduction also available on the website)**

(Chapter 9 – The earthquake strikes, with its epicentre only 25 kms from Tawal)

"Then, at 11.56am, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck, changing the world forever for villagers in this area and so many others in Nepal. The epicentre was approximately 25 km to the west at Barpak, in the Gorkha district. Kanchha and his wife, Lala, were cutting bamboo on their land above the village. Their three-year-old daughter, Rinchhen, was with Kanchha's parents in a temporary shelter, also above the village. He will never forget the moment the earthquake struck and the chaos that followed.

'The sound was deafening – first a loud rumbling like a bomb, then the horrible sound of collapsing slate and stone from the roof and walls of our houses. Large rocks rolled down from nearby hills. We were beside a big rock and jumped behind it as rocks tumbled down the slope in landslides triggered by the earthquake.'

**Press Release**

*No Mountain Too High* is a new book that tells the story of a Brisbane couple's 15-year+ commitment to help poor villagers in Nepal.

Rod and Deborah Setterlund, who are executive officers in the Nepal Australia Friendship Association (NAFA), have travelled to a group of remote mountainous villages every year for the past 16 years (except in 2021 due to Covid restrictions).

They've got to know the villagers, and their subsistence farming methods, and worked with them on how to effect positive change. And they've raised the money to do it.

In this frank and uncompromising account, Rod details the highs and lows, the triumphs and the challenges of working in a remote area alongside villagers who have faced a long history of political neglect, social discrimination, a ten-year civil war and a devastating earthquake.

The book describes how Rod and Deborah, with the support of volunteer-run NAFA, have partnered with the Tamang villagers to bring about positive change via community and market-system approaches to development.

Together with the community, they have built schools, then rebuilt them and other community infrastructure after the 2015 earthquake, installed a micro-hydroelectricity system and introduced higher value crops in the villager's search for pathways out of poverty.

"It has been rewarding working with village leaders who have always wanted to develop their community, and who have all invested and been involved in the changes," Rod said.

But there have also been some tough times, especially after the earthquake. "The challenges of raising the funds to help villagers rebuild their livelihoods, school and other community infrastructure, navigating the bureaucracy, securing the services of engineers and government accredited trainers in earthquake resistant building techniques and transporting building materials to remote villages inaccessible by road. Hats off to the community and their leaders, who have really been the ones to make it happen."

Rod and Deborah both have community development backgrounds and are much loved in the village. They were each awarded an OAM in 2013 for services to the people of Nepal.

Ends:

*No Mountain Too High – Village Development in Nepal*

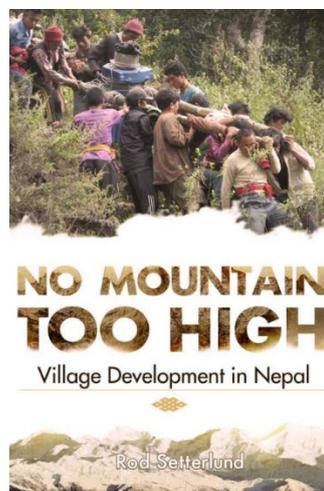
By Rod Setterlund

### **Interview Questions**

1. Why did you go to Nepal in the first place and how did you get involved with the Nepal Australia Friendship Association?
2. What was the political context in Nepal in your early visits to Nepal?
3. What were your impressions of the remote village of Tawal on your first visit there in 2006?
4. You decided to adopt a community development approach in your partnership with local villagers at Tawal. What is meant by "community development"?
5. What improvements have been made to the area with the help of NAFA and other like-minded donors?
6. Why doesn't the Nepal government help with community infrastructure, teacher and health worker salaries that we take for granted here in Australia?
7. How close was Tawal to the epicentre of the 2015 earthquake and give us an idea of what locals say happened on the day?
8. How much damage was done by the earthquake and was anyone killed in that area?
9. What did villagers need immediately following the earthquake and how did NAFA and other donors help them to survive with the monsoon season fast approaching?
10. How did the Nepal government and international disaster response agencies respond to that area of Nepal?
11. How did you get what was needed up to those remote villages as I imagine the roads would have been damaged by the earthquake?
12. Were there any other challenges to overcome before helping the local community rebuild their community infrastructure?
13. Apart from community infrastructure, what else is important for a community recovering from a natural disaster?
14. You say in your book that in addition to community development you also adopted a "market-system" approach to supporting the agricultural cooperative. What do you mean by the term "market system"?
15. How are the villages doing seven years after the earthquake?
16. Has Covid-19 affected the villages in that area?
17. What prompted you to write *No Mountain Too High*?
18. What is meant by "community development"?
19. Is there any special meaning with the title of your book "No Mountain Too High"?
20. Who is the target audience?

21. How will readers benefit from reading "No Mountain Too High"?
22. What are some of the key success factors in good community development practice and what are some of the challenges that remain?
23. How can people get in touch with you and where or how can the book be purchased?

### Downloadable Photos



## **Connect with Rod**

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