

16 Stories of Change

Showing the contributions of the
***Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response
Phase II Project***
to the lives of primary actors
(Married Couples, Adolescent Girls and Boys, Teachers
and Community Volunteers)
from Koshi and Sudurpaschim Province.

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About project

Although several policies, legislation, and programmes for GBV prevention and the provision of response services have been put in place in Nepal, and there are encouraging signs of progress, much more needs to be done to end this scourge.

In 2016, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with the Government of Nepal and supported by the Norwegian Embassy and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, launched the first phase of projects in Koshi Province, Bagmati Province and Sudurpashchim Province that aimed to reduce GBV by empowering women and girls and strengthening response services.

The second phase of the Gender Based Violence Prevention and Response (GBVPR) Project (2020-2024) will continue efforts to sustain the emerging results and expand a comprehensive model of prevention and response through an 'all of community approach' that allows more sustainable shifts in attitudes and behaviors of individuals and the community, as well as in governance, while enhancing the quality of response services. The second phase of the project is currently supported by UNFPA, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC and the Norwegian Embassy. The second phase of the project is in Koshi and Sudurpashchim Province.

VSO, with its local partner organizations, CoCoN for Koshi Province and Peacewin for Sudurpashchim Province, has been implementing the program by taking leadership for the prevention of gender-based violence under this project under which women and men as well as adolescents will directly contribute to the reporting of incidents and initiatives for the prevention of increasing gender violence in the society. Activities conducted for the prevention of gender violence are discussions between married couples on the value of gender transformation in the community, family dialogue programs, transformative sessions with adolescents in schools, discussions with community-based organizations and community leaders and religious and ethnic leaders, conducting advocacy programs on the occasion of national and international days against women's rights and gender violence to advocate for prevention of gender-based violence in the community.

Primary actors of the second phase of the project: Gender-based violence survivors (women and girls), adolescent girls and boys, families including newly married couples and local communities.

Service Providers: Police, health workers, women's health volunteers, teachers, judicial committees, reconciliation committees, hospital-based one-stop crisis management centers and community psychosocial workers.

Expected achievements of the project

1. Women and men, including girls and boys increasingly prevent, report and address gender-based violence.
2. Local governments, legal authorities and health facilities provide effective multi-sectoral and survivor-centered responses to gender-based violence.
3. Local, provincial, and federal governments adopt and implement policies and budgets for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls

The project intervenes to prevent and respond to gender-based violence through the following activities:

Prevention activities

Dialogues with newly married couples, families, women, and men to challenge discriminatory social norms and practices. “Transformative” sessions to adolescents about gender equality and human rights. Discussions with religious leaders, intellectuals, and other influential leaders to facilitate critical thinking and campaigning for gender equality.

Response activities

Support for the provision of quality services and quality health services to safe houses and shelters for survivors of violence based on gender discrimination. Provision of quality health services for survivors of gender-based violence through hospital-based one-stop crisis management centers and health institutions. Training and mobilization of community based psychosocial workers to provide psychological support and referral services. Strengthening and assisting community mediation centers and judicial committees to conduct survivor-friendly mediation in cases of gender-based violence.

Working municipalities in Koshi and Sudurpashchim Province

Achham: Kamalbazar Municipality, Mangalsen Municipality, Sanfebagar Municipality

Baitadi: Dashrathchand Municipality, Patan Municipality

Bajura: Badimalika Municipality, Budhiganga Municipality

Bajhang: Bitthadchir Rural Municipality, Jayaprithivi Municipality

Kailali: Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City

Morang: Biratnagar Metropolitan City

Okhlahunga: Chisankhugadi Rural Municipality, Manebhanjyang Rural Municipality, Molung Rural Municipality, Siddhicharan Municipality

Udayapur: Belaka Municipality, Chaudandigadhi Municipality, Katari Municipality, Triyuga Municipality



DETERMINED TO CHANGE HER LIFE

Kamala BK

Mangalsen Municipality, Achham

Kamala BK, a farmer and a metal workstation (aran) operator, lives in the hills of Mangalsen Municipality in Achham district with her husband, who works as a daily wage worker. Surviving on their minimum income and their small piece of land was not sufficient to feed the family throughout the year. Despite her best efforts, Kamala is tired and disappointed with how her life has unfolded. Her husband, instead of supporting her, often comes home late, intoxicated, and regularly subjects her to physical abuse.

Fed up with the constant domestic conflict, her family kept them apart. Even the neighbors tried to counsel him on how his habits have affected his family, but it wasn't helpful. Her children struggled to go to school as she couldn't afford to buy the educational materials for them. She used to feel helpless and alone, which brought up thoughts of self-harm. Kamala recalls the time she was hospitalized and none of her family was there to take care of her even after her surgery.

She says, "I started to see only darkness in my life."

Around that time, Kamala got a chance to participate in the Couple Discussion Program which helped her develop a new hope in her life.

Couple discussion is a program implemented in her society with the aim of promoting healthy relationships, providing knowledge about good communication practices, and educating couples on what gender-based violence is; their types, and how they can get help in case of the violence. It also introduces them to the concepts of consent, safer sex, contraception, and family planning methods. Kamala and her husband completed all 10 of the sessions together.



After the completion of the session,

Kamala understood the roles of a husband and a wife in a relationship, family planning services, and how to seek legal support in cases of violence. However, her husband did not learn from the same things as Kamala. He started drinking alcohol again and repeated his previous behaviors of abuse.

This program played a role in supporting Kamala to bring a change into her relationship.

She says, "At first, I didn't even know that I was facing domestic violence. Learning about the forms of violence opened my eyes and gave me the confidence to raise my voice against it."

Kamala decided to go through the legal process to get justice. She went to the ward office and

complained about the issues. But her husband threatened everyone by saying that he knows every one of the ward offices so no one can do anything to him. So, Kamala went to the police to file a case against her husband. The police initially counseled her husband and encouraged them to live together.

But unfortunately, nothing changed. His alcoholic habits were the same and he was abusing Kamala the same as before. But Kamala didn't give up and sought legal help. She had a strong determination to raise her voice against violence in any way possible. She filed complaints and was determined to stand against violence. During this time, her whole family was attending the Family dialogue program. This program brings together the couple





with their families to discuss their role in contributing to questioning harmful social norms and contributing to the prevention of GBV. This is when her husband had a revelation. Seeing his wife, children and parents in one space discussing violence made him realize the harm he was inflicting on his family. He started controlling his drinking habits. He put an effort into being more supportive at home, and made household decisions together with his wife. This was a small step but he saw how happy it made his family. He started working to maintain healthy family relationships and even, together with his wife, started to save some money. The better economic standard made it easier for the family and the children could attend school as well. He finally realized how much impact his behaviors had on his family and now got more determined to have a happy life. Their relationship as a couple gradually got better than ever before.



Now Kamala is happier. Despite having a long road ahead to recover and heal in their relationship, the change in her husband's behaviors made her efforts all worth it. Now that his alcoholic habits have subsided, this has provided huge relief for Kamala and she is more hopeful about her future and the future of her children.

"The couple's discussion programme has brought a change in my life that I used to think was not possible. The program has been very helpful in transforming the lives of survivors of violence like me in my community".





COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER: CHANGE AGENT

Bidur Rawal
Sanfebagar Municipality, Achham

The family consistently faced difficulties, given the ongoing demands of sustaining a kitchen used by 13 people. Such was the financial condition of Bidur Rawal, a young married man from Achham district living in an extended family. The financial strain not only heightened tensions but also gave rise to disputes within the family, often over trivial matters, exacerbating the overall atmosphere of stress and discord. However, no one in his family put any effort into solving their issues and living harmoniously. He just went by life with neither hope nor enthusiasm for the future. Even when he went to college, it was more for hanging out with his friends as he couldn't concentrate on his studies. Studying in college served as his refuge, providing an escape from the daily family disputes and quarrels.

Just two to three months into his marriage, Bidur applied for a position as a community volunteer under the GBVPR II project and he was successful in his application. Before leading project activities, he received training through which he learned how to work in the community, and how he could contribute to creating change in the community for a violence free environment. However, he was still not confident that he could apply whatever he learned at

the ground level.

Out of the various things he learned in the training, he found that the issues related to the importance of family bonding, the need for a good relationship between husband and wife, and respecting each other's feelings was something that he could relate to in his own life. He reflects on the times when he neglected to call his wife when returning home late. When questioned by his wife about the lack of communication, he perceived it as controlling behavior, something he disliked.

However, recognizing the importance of open communication in a marriage, he eventually took the initiative to talk to his wife. To his surprise, he discovered that his wife's concern stemmed from worry, as, in the early days of their marriage, she saw him as the closest person in the family and someone she could confide in.

He shares, *"Leaving her family and entering into marriage with a new and unfamiliar family is never easy. I, as a husband, should be the first person she can turn to for comfort. I frequently empathize with my wife, placing myself in her shoes and contemplating how I would feel joining a new family, considering my expectations and hopes in such a situation."*



Bidur also applied his gained knowledge to his own family first. Once a passive observer in family discussions, he has now become an active participant in family meetings and decision-making. He firmly believes that irrespective of age, everyone should contribute to the decision-making process, as valuable insights can be gained from members of all generations. Now they support each other while doing household chores while it was solely the responsibility of the women in the family before. He now believes that *“good decisions can be made by mutual discussion and consultation in the family.”*

With the savings and allowance earned from his role as a community volunteer, Bidur successfully initiated a livestock farm, co-managing it with his wife.

The primary motivation for starting the farm stemmed more from his wife than himself. Bidur aspired to empower his wife with financial independence, entrusting her with the responsibility of managing earnings and savings from the venture. When Bidur is away for work, his wife takes the lead in caring for the farm, receiving additional support from family members who also assist with childcare when needed.

Bidur emphasizes that the newfound financial independence has not only boosted his wife's confidence but has also led to increased engagement in decision making beyond the scope of livestock sales. The decision to start the farm has led to an enhancement in family income and a decrease in disputes among family members, which were

frequently triggered by financial stress. These days, his wife has become more independent, no longer feeling compelled to seek his input on trivial matters as she did in the past. This shift marks a noticeable change from when she felt obligated to involve him in every decision, even the minutest ones related to herself.

As a member of the community, he is keenly aware of the prevalence of violence and discrimination, understanding how they are unfolded through harmful social norms. In his role as a community volunteer, Bidur was assigned to facilitate a couple discussion program for young married couples in his community. Within the project's working ward, he identified a couple dealing with domestic violence and ongoing family disputes. Taking the initiative, Bidur approached and explained the potential benefits of participating in the discussion program, emphasizing how it could help address their challenges. Throughout the program, Bidur paid extra attention to this specific couple. During group discussions, the couple revealed that issues such as financial stress, communication gaps, lack of appreciation, and inadequate planning often fueled disputes in their family. Guided by Bidur, the sessions focused on the importance of shared household chores, collaborative decision-making, and effective communication. As the couple discussion program progressed, couples



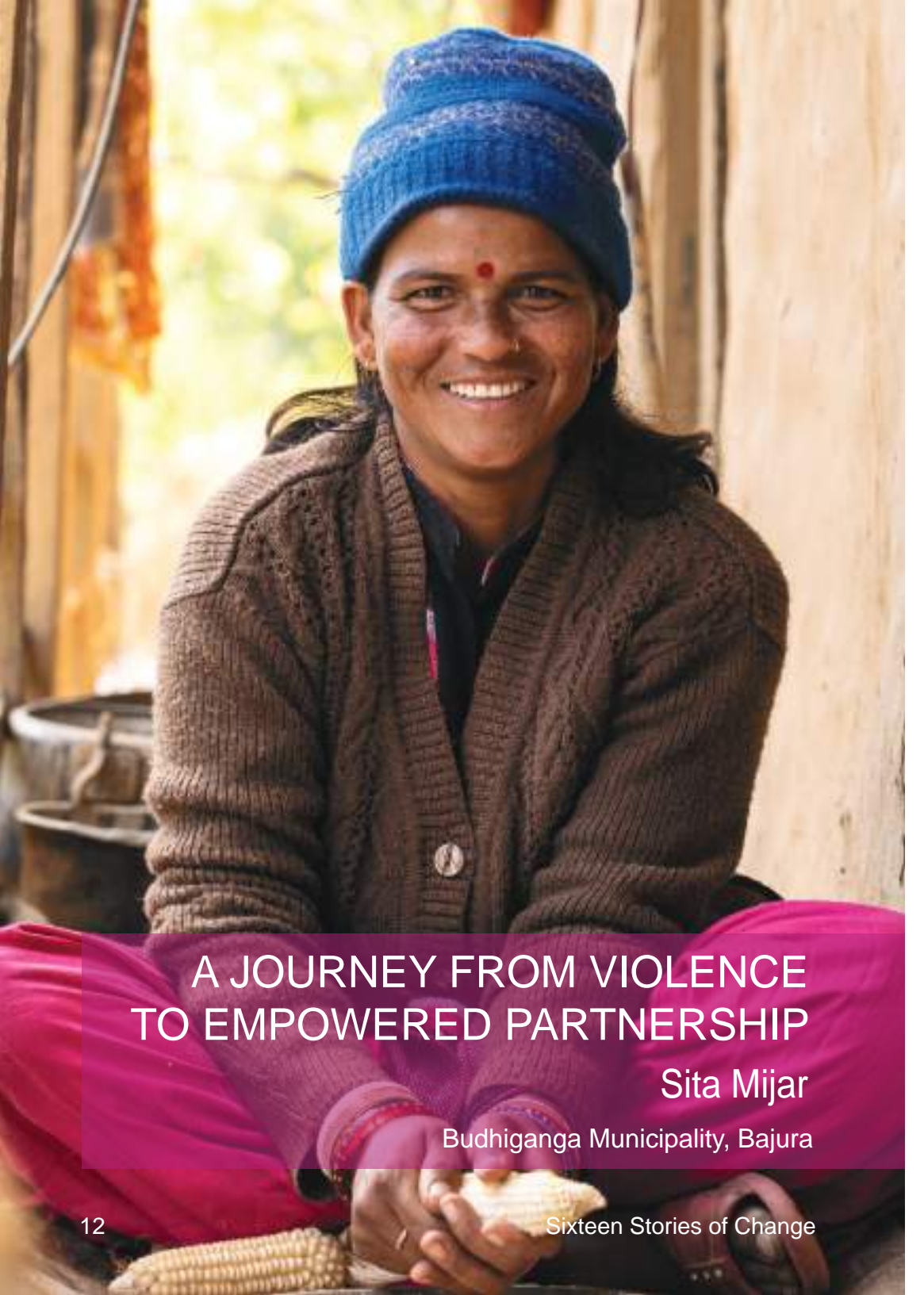
gained insights that led to positive changes in their relationships. By the end of the program, the identified couple had notably improved their relationship, and incidents of disputes and quarrels within the family had decreased. Witnessing this positive transformation served as a motivating factor for other participating couples, inspiring them to work towards enhancing their own relationships. This instance of change has also strengthened his previously uncertain belief that violence can be prevented.

He shares that he is continuously working towards spreading positive messages by not just being a community volunteer working for a project but a normal but responsible member of the



community. He accepts that there is no shortcut to prevention of violence, but he is determined that change is possible, and violence can indeed be prevented. As a community volunteer and member of the community, he actively takes the initiative to resolve minor disputes and differences. For issues beyond his expertise, Bidur directs the individuals involved in the necessary legal processes they may require. Currently, Bidur plays a crucial role in supporting survivors by guiding them towards the appropriate services to seek justice. Bidur holds the belief that, to effect change, he has accumulated valuable knowledge, yet acknowledges there is still much more to learn. While he observes that the community has undergone only slight transformations, he remains optimistic. Bidur derives hope from the incremental progress he has observed during his journey as a community volunteer, committed to fostering positive change within his own community.

He reflects *“this program has played an important role in bringing a ray of hope to the lives of people who are disappointed in their lives due to family disputes”*.



A JOURNEY FROM VIOLENCE TO EMPOWERED PARTNERSHIP

Sita Mijar

Budhiganga Municipality, Bajura

Moving to an unknown house as a 15 year old bride, Sita Mijar came a long way to stand up for herself. She gave birth to a daughter soon after getting married. Her husband and in-laws started acting differently towards her. They behaved with her poorly and made her believe that she wasn't good enough to be a daughter in law. As a married woman, she believed her husband's family to be her own and always thought she had to do everything in her capacity to please them. She felt compelled to have a son to live up to her family's expectations and gain their approval. So, she became pregnant continuously for years. She gave birth to 3 more daughters. During this process, she was being violated by her husband and family. They started finding fault in everything that she did. As a young bride she wasn't very skilled at doing household chores. They used this inability to do household chores properly as a façade to abuse her when they were actually finding fault in her for birthing daughters instead of sons. Her family members even started threatening her that they would remarry her husband to another woman for a baby boy. She had to endure physical, mental and social violence. But Sita endured all the violence done towards her believing that it truly was her fault for not giving birth to a son. Even if she did think

it to be violence towards her, she already felt so alone that she suffered in silence and believed that there was no one that could help her.

As there was no sign of decline in violence, the couple decided to separate from her parents-in-law. She believed that living with her husband would mean that she would not have to endure all the torture and she would be loved and cherished. But she was wrong. Her husband showed no affection towards her. Even when she was pregnant and facing health complications, he failed to provide any assistance or support. The multiple pregnancies had made her weak, but she still had the responsibility of managing all the household chores on her own. She didn't think that her husband, a man, could help her to do household chores.

The only time her husband was happy with her was when she became pregnant for the fifth and the sixth time and finally gave birth to two sons. But by this time, there were eight members in her family. They had to manage the expenses of the household with only the husband working and they were barely making through each day.

Amidst the turmoil, Sita had the opportunity to participate in the



couple dialogue sessions taking place in her community. As the community volunteers explained what the program entailed, the couple took part in the 10-session long program. They learned ways of strengthening family relations in the session. The sessions helped them realize the issues of domestic violence, legal provisions in case of violence, and process of access to justice, which helped in changing their mindset. In between, Sita and her husband had a chance to interact with couples who participated in couple sessions. They learned about behavioral changes that occurred in these couples which contributed to strengthening the relationship between husbands and wives. Especially for Sita, she realized that all the pain and discrimination she was enduring was all wrong.

She realized that she deserves to be treated with respect and that it is not her fault that she did not have sons. Her husband was also brought face to face with the reality of how he was treating his wife and daughters, how violent he was towards her and how it affected her physical and mental health. After the session, her husband started to realize his mistake and regretted his rude behavior towards his wife. His behavior towards wife and his daughter has changed. He has started to love and care for them.

Sita says, *"After participating in this program, I came to know that there are five types of violence, physical, mental, economic, social, and sexual violences and I was a subject to most of these."*

Now Sita has understood that violence should not be tolerated. Her husband also understands that violence should not be perpetuated. This has helped in the improvement of their family relations. They have now been able to concentrate in the multiple layers of making a relationship work. Since the financial pressure was very high, now Surendra has realized that working together with his wife will mean that they can earn more and the pressure does not have to be limited to Surendra as the man of the family. *While exploring ways to be more financially secure, the couple challenged the harmful gendered social norms.* Now they run a grocery store together and have balanced out the work at home and the shop and evenly

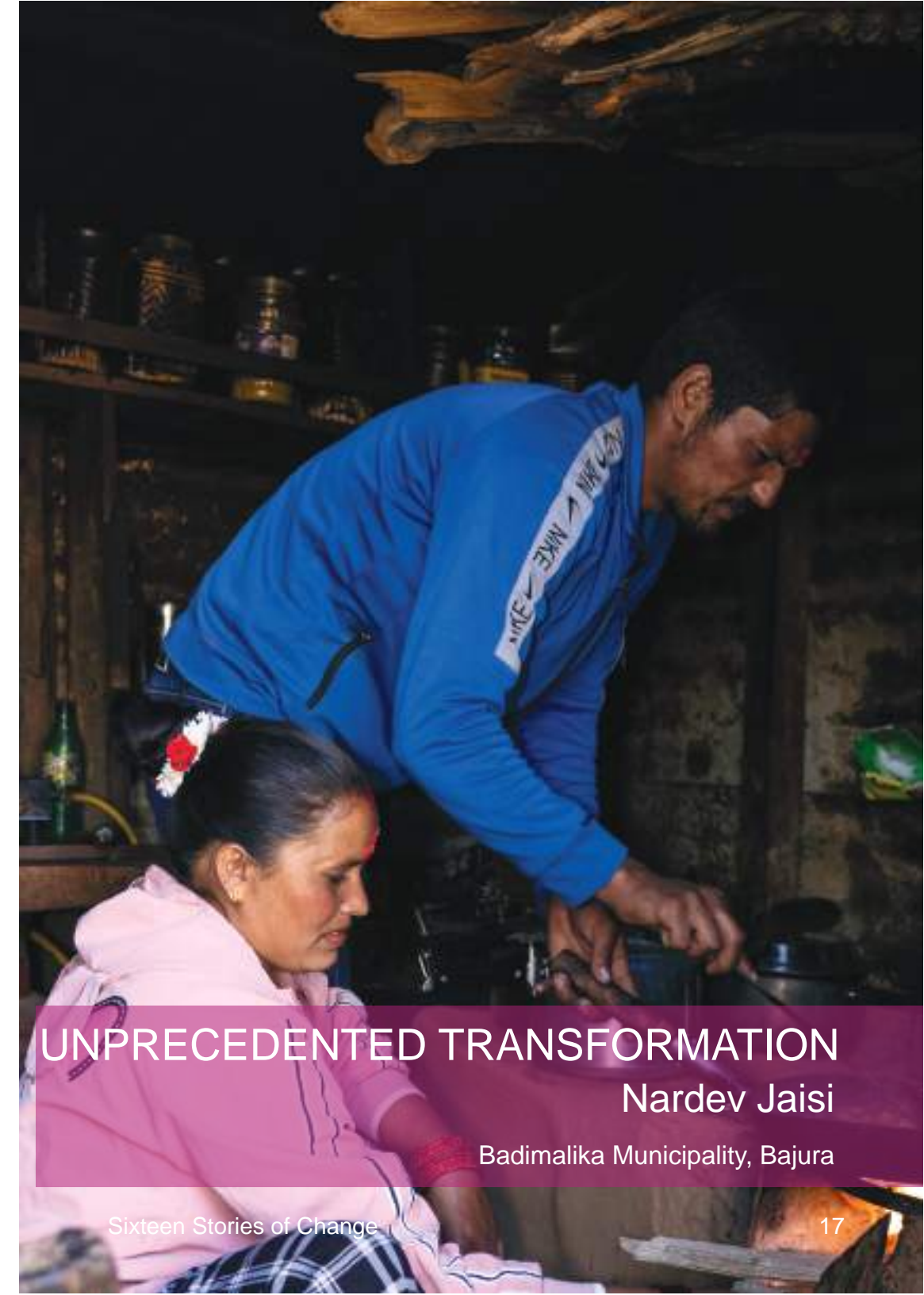
distributed the work among themselves. Working together has even helped them increase their sales helping them save some money for their children's education as well. Their children have started going to school. They are now able to provide necessary educational materials, nutrition, and proper care for their children. Sita is very happy to fulfill the needs of her children. Surendra now discusses with his wife on how they can have a healthy family relationship and how they can solve the financial problems. They have become more determined on creating a beautiful future for them and their children and they are working on it together as a couple. There are no more conflicts and misunderstandings like the ones they used to have before.



Surendra even advocates against violence so that the people in the community don't repeat the same mistakes as he did.

Sita has also become more confident and has started believing in herself. She is determined to stand against violence which she first did for herself and now shares it with her friends and relatives about the knowledge she learned during couple dialogue. She feels that no one should suffer violence like she tolerated. The couple understand that husband and wife are complementary to each other. Positive change in Sita and her family is an inspiring example to other people in the community as well.





UNPRECEDENTED TRANSFORMATION

Nardev Jaisi

Badimalika Municipality, Bajura

"I never behaved properly with my wife; my instructions were orders," says Nardev Jaisi, a man with stern beliefs in his perceptions of gender, their roles, and the hierarchy. His belief that men are superior to women and each has predefined roles reflected in his behavior. According to him, women were confined to household chores and family care.

His wife, Samjhana, found herself overwhelmed with responsibilities. From feeding the children and sending them to school to managing household chores and caring for the cattle, she bore the brunt of the workload. Meanwhile, Nardev spent his free time idly wandering the village and gossiping with friends, neglecting his responsibilities at home. His restrictive practices extended to making his wife sleep outside the house during her menstruation period.

The situation worsened as Nardev curtailed Samjhana's freedom, dictating even her daily choices like clothing without consulting her preferences. He fulfilled only the basic necessities of being a husband, showing minimal interest in her wellbeing. Any attempt by Samjhana to inquire about his activities would trigger his anger and aggression.

The Couple Discussion Program introduced in his community became a turning point. Nardev and his wife were recommended for these sessions by the ward office. Through these sessions, Nardev gained insights into the importance of fostering a healthy relationship with his wife. Reflecting on his transformation, he says, *"I came to know that it is not the female's fault to give birth to a son or a daughter. From these sessions, I learned that the role of men is most important in this matter."*

Realizing the rigidity of his beliefs and the harm caused by following gendered social norms, Nardev underwent a profound change. He regrets neglecting his family and now actively participates in their lives. He acknowledges the illogical practice of making his wife sleep outside during menstruation, recognizing it as a form of gender-based violence.

Nardev has evolved into a more considerate husband. He engages with his family, understanding their wishes and desires. No longer imposing his choices, he involves his wife in decisions, even simple ones like choosing clothes. He communicates his whereabouts, realizing that honesty is crucial for a healthy relationship. He actively participates in household chores, washing his wife's clothes and



providing care during health issues. His conservative mindset has shifted, as Nardev and Samjhana now jointly run a grocery shop. They make decisions collaboratively, discussing business matters and managing finances for the family's wellbeing. Nardev's friends, who once ridiculed him, have started following his positive behavior.

The positive changes extend beyond their immediate family. Nardev's improved relationship with his wife has transformed the dynamics with his mother-in-law, replacing rudeness with affection. He has also become an advocate against gender-based violence, promising not to commit or tolerate any such acts in his community.

Nardev is aware of the avenues

for seeking justice in cases of gender violence, actively supporting his wife in raising awareness and taking action. Together, they have constructed a new, beautiful house, mirroring the improved condition of their family. Samjhana expresses her joy, *“There have been a lot of changes in my family now. The financial situation was not so good. I used to see my future as uncertain and dark, but now everything is going better after participating in the couple program.”*

Nardev's family, once wrecked by conflicts, has become an exemplar in the community. With dreams of providing quality education for their children, they have created a nurturing environment for their family to flourish.



A photograph of a woman and a man smiling and holding a piece of wood together. The woman is wearing a red cardigan and a patterned headscarf. The man is wearing a white turban and a grey shirt. They are standing in front of a stone wall. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

FROM ALCOHOLISM TO EMPOWERED LEADERSHIP

Gorakh Bahadur Okhada

Jayaprithvi Municipality, Bajhang

Gorakh Bahadur Okhada, residing in rolling hills of Jay Prithivi Municipality, Bajhang, earned his livelihood as a mason. Yet, the shadows of alcoholism cast a dark cloud over his life, triggering conflicts within his family and staining his social standing.

Gorakh's routine unfolded in a disheartening cycle. Earning a daily wage, he would recklessly spend it on alcohol, returning home late to engage in heated disputes with his family, especially his wife and children. The scenes of verbal and physical abuse, coupled with financial neglect, pushed his family to the brink. Tara Devi Okhada, his wife, endured abuse, while drowning in the weight of loans taken for their children's education, which Gorakh heartlessly diverted to feed his addiction.

Tara Devi vividly recounts the torment of awaiting her husband's return, often battered from fights at local pubs. Beating his children, wife and even his old mother, and using obscene abuse were habitual to him. Their financial situation was also critical, and his children dropped out of school. His family was falling apart.

His wife, Tara Devi Okhada, used to blame her fate for being married to him.

She says, *"I even thought of ending my life twice because of the constant abuse I had to face daily. It was almost as if everyday I waited for him to come home so he could hit me and scream unimaginable things at me. But I had to stay strong and endure it for my children."* Everyone in the community was fed up with such behavior of Gorakh Bahadur. He was never respected or invited to any social event after that.

"The sessions were a blessing in disguise," reflects Tara, as Gorakh and she were selected for a Couple Dialogue Program based on community reports. Initially resistant, Gorakh attended sessions while occasionally intoxicated. However, through careful counseling, he began to realize the gravity of his actions and the legal consequences of discrimination within the family. Financially, he realized his habit of expending all his earnings on alcohol would lead his future towards trouble. He thought of his income for the future. After the completion of the session, Gorakh Bahadur returned home with a determination to stay together in the family, providing proper love, care, and support.

As time passed by, a gradual change in Gorakh Bahadur's thinking and behavior was observed while participating in the session.

He got to reflect on questions like, what is violence? What are the types of violence? What should the role of the husband be in a family? Why is it important to send children to school? These things that he pondered about, motivated him to change his behavior. He soon realized his mistakes and started to regret his past. He understood the intensity of crime he was committing towards his wife, his children and even his parents and learned how all these were punishable by law.

As the sessions progressed, Gorakh underwent a transformation in his thinking. *"I would sometimes get intoxicated to the sessions,"* he admits.

Reflecting on the nature of violence, the husband's role in a family, and the importance of education, he started to regret his past behavior.

"I never thought about my perception towards female and social taboos. Now I am working for the betterment of society against social stigma, discrimination, and violence against women," he says.

Determined to change, he returned home committed to providing love, care, and support to his family.



Over time, a remarkable change was observed in Gorakh's behavior.

"Now community people show respect towards me. They do not exclude me from any social activities in society," he shares. He renounced alcohol, actively participated in household chores, and supported his wife in various capacities. Together, they started saving money in a cooperative, and their children returned to school.



Beyond personal transformation, Gorakh embraced a spiritual journey, becoming a Dhama (faith healer) in the community. *"Now I am a Dhama, and people show respect towards me,"* he beams. Respected in the community, he actively participates in social gatherings, sharing his insights on social issues. His newfound influence has been instrumental in spreading awareness against sexual violence in the community.

In awe of his own transformation, Gorakh now dedicates himself to eradicating harmful social norms. *"Traditional beliefs should be changed. I work as a faith leader, but I don't follow the untouchability ritual when my wife menstruates. I encouraged her to stay inside home during her periods,"* he affirms.

His journey from an abusive alcoholic to a respected faith leader exemplifies the power of change and redemption. Today, Gorakh stands as a beacon of hope, offering support to those experiencing the struggles his family once endured.

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a black jacket and a purple scarf, stands in a rural village setting. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a dirt path, a building with laundry hanging on a line, and trees. A semi-transparent purple box is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing text.

ASHA MADE HER HUSBAND A SOCIAL WORKER

Asha Dhami

Jayaprithvi Municipality, Bajhang

As a Community Psychosocial Worker (CPSW), She spends her time interacting with survivors of gender-based violence to help them transition to a new phase in their lives. She is also proactive in helping violence-affected people by going to their homes. She supports bringing such incidents to a One Stop Crisis Management Center (OCMC) where the survivors get justice against violence. In addition, she takes care of her husband, children, and in-laws at home, fulfilling her role as a woman. Although she is active in various campaigns against violence, her own life before was not easier.

As a CPSW, Asha often has to travel to rural areas where women are facing violence. She mentioned that her work sometimes requires her to work late hours, which is often frowned upon in rural communities. Despite enjoying her job, her husband and the community did not support her work. Particularly, her husband would doubt her every time she traveled to remote areas for work. She mentioned how her husband, though educated, followed harmful practices and adhered strictly to traditional gender roles instead of supporting her. It was not easy for her to work by reaching the community, thus, she ultimately faced pressure to leave her job when neighbors started

gossiping about her. She says, "My husband also did not prefer me to go outside for a job. He used to pressure me to leave the job saying that all other females are staying inside, so why do you need to go outside for a job?"

But Asha continued her work. Sometimes, she used to get phone calls regarding cases of violence even when she was at her home. However, her husband did not like her wife's work activities, such as receiving calls, talking with unknown people, and going outside for her work. Her job required to be present at the place of violence to respond to the cases immediately. Before she used to reach such a place without the permission of her family at her own risk.

She worked in close coordination with community volunteers in her community and also facilitated sessions on a couple discussion program about referral mechanisms to support survivors of violence. After attending couple discussion programs she expressed her interest to participate in a couple discussion program along with her husband. She decided to enroll in the program along with her husband, which was not an easy task. However, she got the courage to put optimum efforts into convincing her husband to agree to join the session. After explaining everything about the couple program, he agreed to participate in



the program. The couple discussion program seems to be effective in addressing the various important topics such as social and gender norms, effective communication skills and also dynamics of happy and unhappy relationships. The take home exercise provided in the couple discussion program supported them to have open discussion, they got an opportunity to spend time with each other where they shared their feelings and views and their disagreement openly.

He gradually realized that his past behaviors were violent and would be punishable. He became more attentive towards her. He realized that working on their relationship could make them happier and improve their lives. He now puts effort into understanding what it is like to be a woman and the role they play in the family and society. Asha says *“I was working to improve the lives of others by supporting them for justice, but my own life was not that much easy. After attending the session, my life took a new turn”*.

Now, the situation has changed. Her husband provides support for her if she has to go long distance from home during her duty. Having her husband along with, has motivated her in the work. Asha is encouraged by such positive

behavior of her husband. This is a step forward to building trust in their relationship.

Additionally, the couple discussion program has helped to raise their awareness against harmful social norms as well. Like during menstruation, there was a tradition of staying outside the house, not going to the kitchen, and not having nutritious diets. But after participating in couple dialogue, her husband is also aware of such issues and has not forced Asha to follow these restrictions these days. Her mother-in-law, who had negative thoughts about her work is gradually being positive towards her work as a CPSW. It has made Asha's life happier.

Not only that, Asha's husband has bought lands in her name, which felt like a huge support for her from husband.

Asha says *“Working as a CPSW, I learned many things about gender-based violence. Similarly, after participating in the couple dialogue, I have learned additional aspects like equal responsibilities to handle household work, income generation, children's right to education, and access to decision-making. Now we make household decisions through mutual interaction”*. The couple discussion program has helped to change Asha's life for the better.



**BINDU FOR
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**
Bindu Mahara

Patan Municipality, Baitadi

A high school student of 11th grade, Bindu Mahara, lives in a household with five family members. The family's financial stability heavily relies on her elder brother, who works in India to support the household. Bindu grew up in the community where girls and women are expected only to perform household chores, should not speak and raise their voice, and follow all social restrictions. In Bindu's community the economic and social conditions remain sensitive, marked by gender discrimination, caste-based discrimination, and taboos like untouchability during menstruation. The community also has prevalence of issues such as child marriage, gender-specific roles, and limitations on women's interactions with outside men. Bindu loves to study and wanted to continue her study, however her family wanted her to get married. Despite pursuing education, Bindu also faces internal struggles with low confidence and self-esteem, exacerbated by societal constraints within her family dynamics.

Bindu started feeling that those rituals were against women's rights when she was in her higher studies, however she could not speak out against them. The chance to attend the Rupantaran class within her community felt like a beacon of hope.

She grabbed the chance to learn so many things about gender based violence and gender equality.

"I came to know that there is an equal role and responsibility of every community to solve the societal problem and we have to start the transformation from ourselves first" Bindu recalls.

Those classes have supported her in taking a new turn in her life which focused on the issues; rights and duties, issues of gender inclusion, hopes and expectations etc. After participating in the Rupantaran class, she learned that she could act against violence by filing a complaint to the ward office, municipality and police stations as well for legal remedies.

Bindu along with her friends has started an awareness campaign against domestic violence. They have provided support to survivors to reach out to the concerned agencies for legal justice. *"We should not tolerate violence. And if someone knows that there is violence in society, we should help those survivors"*. Bindu emphasizes sharing her learnings far and wide. Bindu shares learnings from the Rupantaran classes with her sisters, mother, friends, and other people around her society with the motive of making them aware of domestic violence empowered by her amplified voice.

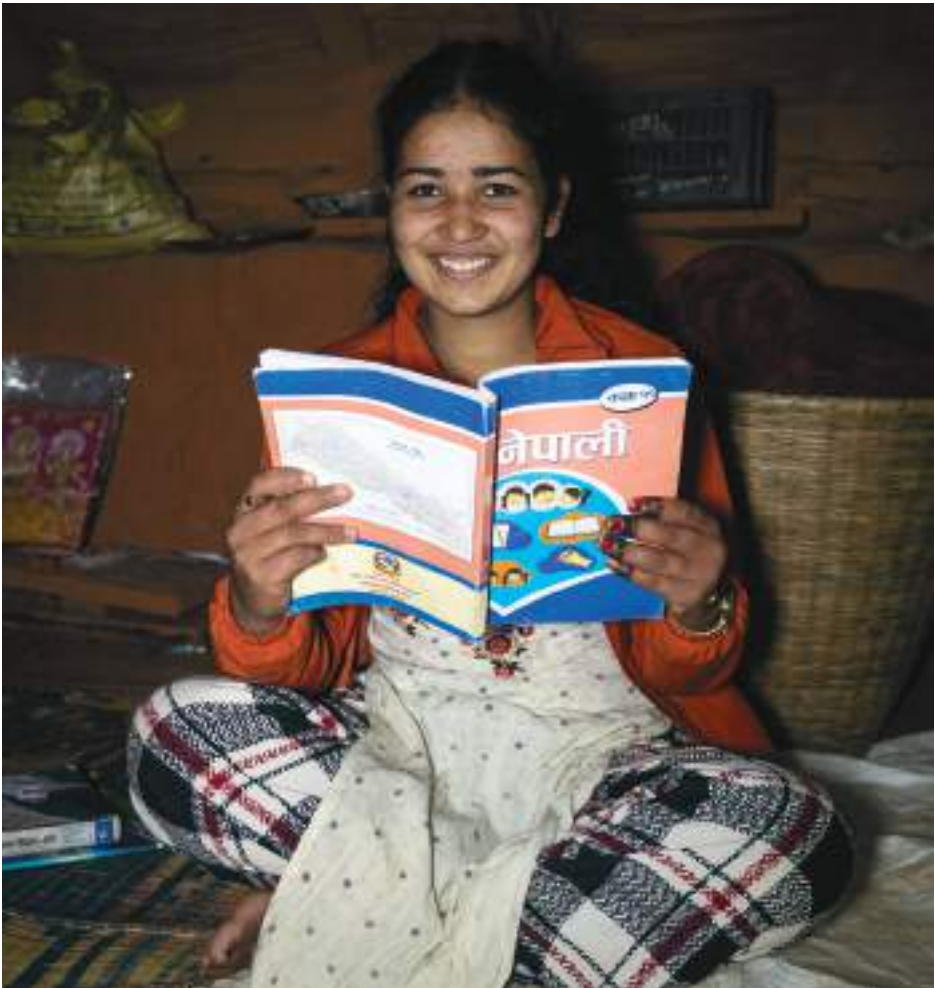
Bindu's confidence has increased since she was not able to talk clearly before. Now she always raises her voice against violence in every gathering, forum and program. She always stands in the forefront against discrimination and violence against women. Bindu is happy to see these changes and courage within herself. Also, she has made her family aware of violence and conservative rituals like untouchability during menstruation, and discrimination among sons and daughters. Within her family, no one was aware of regular savings for the future. But now they have started regular savings from their income.

Bindu's parents are also happy to see the change and courage in their daughter. Her mother Anfa Devi Mahara says *“Earlier my daughter was afraid to talk with anyone. But now she is confident and can aware everyone”*. *She praises her daughter's confidence that she is committed to her studies and has plans to be involved in social service as well as taking care of her parents. She says “Earlier we used to live outside of the house during menstruation. But now we have started living inside. Bindu has provided us with this knowledge that we should stay at home and have nutritious supplements during menstruation.”*



Bindu disseminates awareness about gender-based violence and discrimination among peers and the broader community, passionately urging all to stand against such injustices. Thus, Bindu, who was limited within herself, after participating in the Rupantaran class, is now moving ahead with a dream of being a social worker.

She says that *“40 people including me were taking part in the Rupantaran class. If these 40 participants can alert their families, the entire village could be alerted.”* Bindu is an example of how if a person becomes aware, his/her family and entire society can be transformed.



A portrait of a woman with a bindi on her forehead, wearing a pink cardigan, smiling. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and foliage.

INTERGENERATIONAL CHANGES

Meera Panta

Patan Municipality, Baitadi

Balancing the roles of a dedicated Community Volunteer, a responsible mother to both her daughter and son, and managing all household tasks, Meera Panta from Patan Municipality faced formidable challenges on a daily basis. Living in a bustling family of five, she often reminisces about the limited support she received, including from her husband, as she navigated the demands of her multifaceted life. She vividly articulates the limitations faced by women in her community, where they find themselves confined to household responsibilities. Their freedom of movement outside the home is frequently discouraged and subjected to family control, further compounded by societal disapproval. Being one of those women, she has been emotionally and mentally affected by the obstacles in the past. She distinctly recalls the hardships of domestic responsibilities before attending her duties as a community volunteer. *"How did I complete my work at home and office at the same time? It was scary. If I needed to go to the office early in the morning, I used to complete all the housework without sleeping at night. I used to think that my husband would allow me to go on time and he could support me with the domestic work. But he never supported me in that way".*

As a Community Volunteer, she holds a crucial role in addressing social issues such as dowry, domestic violence, and untouchability. However, despite her impactful contributions, her personal life is marked by numerous challenges. Contrary to her family's conservative beliefs, which held that women shouldn't work outside the home, she boldly challenged this notion by actively participating in community work without seeking her family's approval. This decision subjected her to comments, insults, and criticism from her family, neighbors, and the community at large. Even arriving slightly late from work led to reprimands at home, contributing to her mental distress, eventually requiring medication for depression due to the overwhelming pressures she faced. Throughout all the challenges, Meera received minimal support from her husband, whether it was understanding her priorities or sharing household chores. She pondered, *"Oh God! I teach other couples about equality and behavioral change. I considered myself an agent of change. But how can I bring about changes in my own family?"*

After careful consideration, Meera took her husband to a few of the couple discussion programs she facilitated. She specially brought him to the sessions related to

assertive communication skills. Her husband observed the sessions where couples (participants of the program) practiced assertive communication skills with each other in the session. Likewise, she also took him in another couple program where they had to walk for 3 hours to reach her work site. It was the fourth session of the couple program. In the session, Meera cited her husband as an example, stating, *"My husband actively participates in household chores. If I'm cutting vegetables, he simultaneously prepares the dough for roti."* However, upon hearing this, her husband felt uneasy and went outside of the program venue, realizing that he hadn't been as supportive as portrayed during the session. On the way home, he remained silent and did not express anything to Meera until when he finally shared, *"You shared our positive example with participants of the session which was not true but it has made me realize how limited my support has been for you considering the multitude of responsibilities you already carry"*. The day marked the commencement of a transformative phase in him.

After attending the sessions, her husband was more curious about the program. They both discussed

at home about the work of Meera as a community volunteer, her contribution towards the community. Witnessing her work and realizing the importance of gender roles enforced in society, he was filled with love and kindness. For the first time in their 16-year marriage, one fine day, he asked her if she was tired and needed help of any sort. Meera says, *"This seemingly small change is something I never expected from my husband. His care, attentiveness, and consideration for my well-being are the greatest changes in my life."*

Her husband realized his mistakes and started helping in household work. *"After that incident, my husband started to understand my efforts,"* Meera says with a hint of relief, highlighting the impact of those sessions on their relationship dynamics. Gradually, her husband also started appreciating the work Meera does. Furthermore, he even shows willingness and offers to drop Meera at her office whenever there is a need. Her husband's behavior gradually changed after attending a few more sessions of the couple discussion program.

Furthermore, Meera's mother-in-law, a faith leader with beliefs in untouchability during menstruation and other myths (not drinking milk or dairy products during menstruation), underwent a

transformation. Meera took the initiative to involve her mother-in-law in a religious leader's orientation program organized by the project, where it was emphasized that menstruation is a normal natural phenomenon and should not be subjected to restrictions. The program highlighted the importance of taking rest and nutrition during this time. Subsequently, Meera's mother-in-law underwent a first shift in understanding and concepts but she was not convinced yet.



As Meera's daughter entered adolescence and began her menstrual cycle, Meera ensured her daughter's participation in the adolescent-centered Rupantaran programme. The daughter who is dearest to her mother-in-law, in turn, explained to her grandmother and other family members that restricting activities during menstruation is a wrong practice. She further challenged her grandmother by questioning, *"Have you seen anything bad happening to the cattle if someone consumes dairy products during menstruation? Have you seen anyone having an adverse impact if touched by a girl or woman on menstruation."* Without any evidence and examples, her grandmother realized a shift in her beliefs around existing myths and norms, leading to a positive change where they now do not practice any menstrual restrictions. For example, in contrast to the past, nowadays, during menstruation, Meera's mother-in-law joins them for

meals, fostering a sense of togetherness as she shares dining moments with Meera and her daughter. Additionally, she ensures the provision of dairy products to them, acknowledging and supporting their needs during menstruation.

Daughter Bidhya regularly attends Rupantaran class. She says, *“I feel happy to attend Rupantaran class, where I have learned various things related to gender-based violence”*. was succeeding in raising her child. Initially, Bidhya used to study in a private school. But later, knowing the benefits of the Rupantaran programme, Meera enrolled her daughter in a government school because the students from private schools were not targeted for Rupantaran classes. Through the class, she acquired information about the impacts of child marriage, strategies to prevent violence, and safe spaces for children. Daughter Bidhya, along with her friends, has now identified the primary issues in their society and is actively planning initiatives to address and solve these problems. This was a very rewarding moment to Meera as a mother, she felt as if she was raising her daughter well.

The intergenerational changes brought about by Meera's efforts have significantly improved her quality of life. She expresses her gratitude to be working as a community volunteer bringing about small changes in the lives of her community members. Presently, while her husband is in India for work-related reasons, she exudes a sense of empowerment and confidence as she assumes the role of the household leader with support from her husband, mother-in-law and children. She actively encourages other women in the community, often citing her own experiences, to take charge not only in household responsibilities but also in financial matters and other decisive matters of the family.



**THE STORY OF STRUGGLE
AND SUCCESS**
Junga Bahadur Chaudhary
Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City, Kailali

“Couple program has a big role in our transformation. The program has rekindled the romance from the early days of our love marriage.” shared Junga Bahadur Chaudhary and Gulabi Chaudhary participants of Couple discussion program. Gulabi Chaudhary and Junga Bahadur Chaudhary had got married without their family’s consent. Junga Bahadur is a person with a physical disability. Despite his disability, Junga Bahadur had hopes for personal progress. However, within his family, his abilities were constantly doubted, leaving him feeling discouraged. No one supported each other in his family because of the misunderstanding among family members. Suspicion clouded Junga Bahadur’s relationship with his wife, causing conflicts over simple matters. His routine of spending his leisure time at the local shop, playing carrom board, and spending his earnings created further conflicts. There used to be quarrels due to his feelings of masculinity. The community’s perception of his disability worsened his mental health. People around the community used to insult his wife about his disability. She was also made fun of by the villagers for marrying such a disabled person which often used to make her sad. His wife wanted to share all those things with her

husband, but Junga Bahadur was not interested in listening to her. Junga Bahadur went to India for work but heard rumors of his wife’s remarriage, prompting his return to Nepal.

“Our marriage was a love marriage. Despite others making issues and poking fun at him, I was in love with him. I married him without my family’s consent, and we promised to support each other throughout our lives,” shared Gulabi Chaudhary, however these all things affected her marital relationship and used to have disagreements, misunderstanding every day.

Amidst these challenges, a couple discussion program became a turning point in their relationship. He and his wife enrolled into a couple discussion program and through active participation in the session, they gained insights into family reunions and the significance of the husband and wife relationship. Moreover, they seized the opportunity to acquire valuable knowledge on strengthening the bond between each other. Junga Bahadur says *“Every decision and work of the house should be done only after consultation between the family members. I came to know that our family relation was not smooth with lack of consultation practice before taking any decision”*.



They sensed a personal connection to the topics discussed during the session, feeling as though the issues discussed reflected the challenges they were currently going through within their own lives. Following the conclusion of the program, he made a conscious decision to undergo positive transformation. He believes that if he can change himself, he can improve others. Now, his confidence has increased. He mentions *"I have taken it upon myself to improve the poor condition of our family"*. Together, they took on household responsibilities, adopting a more harmonious family environment. Since they began sharing responsibilities, their family's situation has significantly improved.

The societal discriminatory behavior towards them has also undergone a positive transformation. Despite being disabled, villagers have started to take their changed relationships and behavior as an inspirational example for the community.

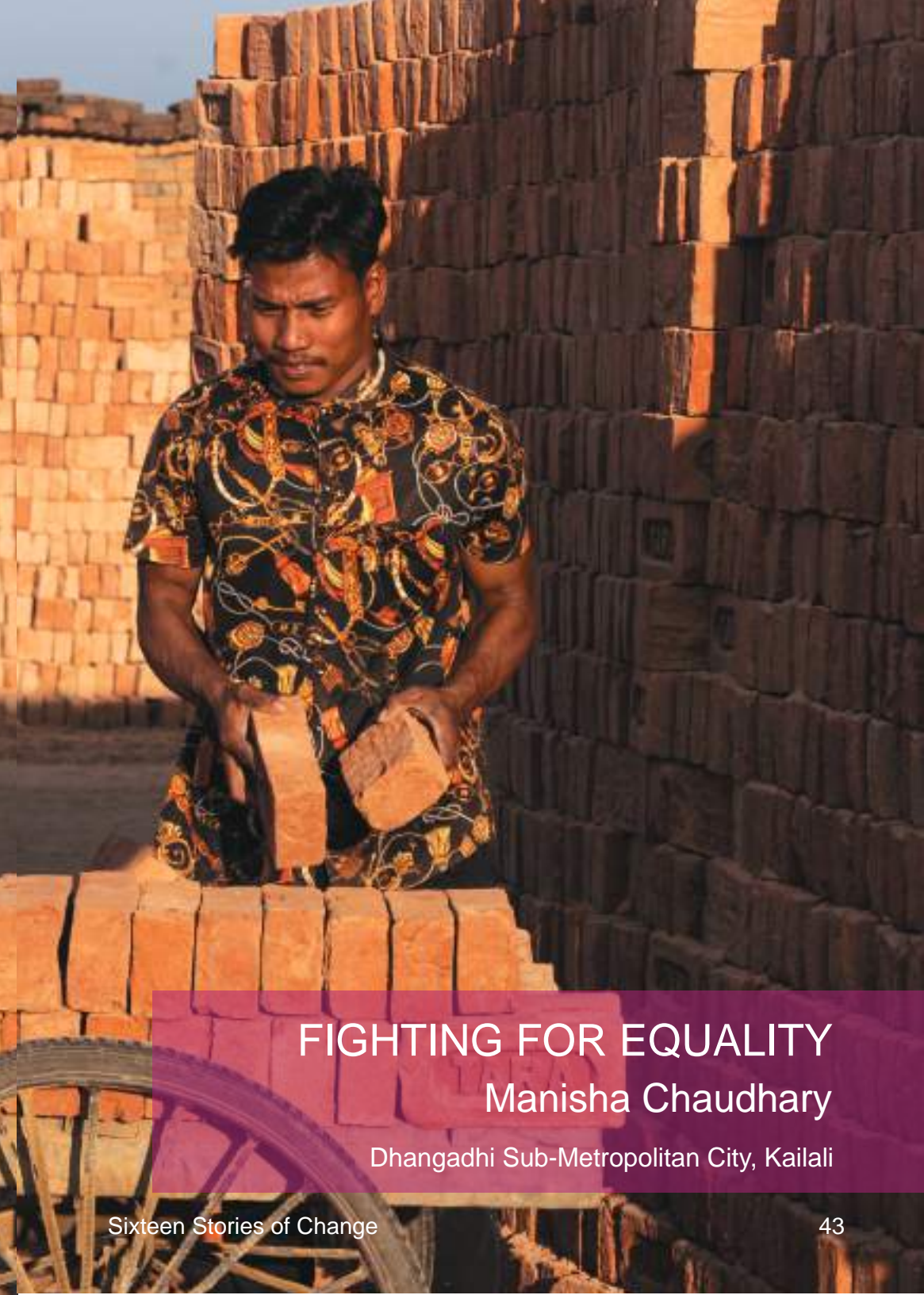
"The Couple discussion program has positioned us as a role model couple," Junga Bahadur proudly shares. They now receive invitations to community events where they share their transformative experiences.

Junga Bahadur's transformative journey has not only brought

positive changes to his own life but has also extended to his family. They started goat and pig rearing for economic self sustainability. This not only covers their household expenses but has also empowered Gulabi leading to her active involvement in community affairs. She has been elected as the chairperson of the School Management Committee. Junga Bahadur also transferred land ownership to Gulabi which reflects a commitment to gender equality. He always encourages Gulabi to attend community meetings, do social work and encourage her to support other women from the community who are survivors of violence.

They both inspire and guide others couples in their community, sharing their knowledge and experiences to encourage similar positive transformations among other couples.





FIGHTING FOR EQUALITY

Manisha Chaudhary

Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City, Kailali

To be with the person she loves, 23-year-old Manisha Chaudhary from Dhangadhi sub-metropolitan city in Kailali district had no option but to choose elopement. Poor financial situation of her family was one other reason why she entered into marriage at an early age. There was no alternative source of income to maintain the daily needs of the family with 6 members except the daily wage income of her husband. Manisha thus wanted to contribute to improving the financial condition of the family and support the family from her end. But she was not allowed to go out of the house to earn money as her family including her husband did not support her and opposed the idea of her working outside. Her family strictly believed that a daughter-in-law's role lies in household works rather than getting engaged in employment outside. She had to perform all household work alone throughout the day. No matter how well she did the work, her mother-in-law never appreciated it. Such behavior from her family, especially in-laws was painful to Manisha. To add to her problems, there was very little support from her husband. Her husband used to arrive home late from work. Manisha always wanted to share her thoughts and express feelings with her husband. But her husband never had time for conversation

and he showed little interest in listening to what she had to say. On the contrary, whenever she approached, he used to talk rudely which used to be disheartening and discouraging her from initiating any sort of conversation even if she wanted to. *"I felt alone, unheard by my husband,"* Manisha expressed.

While Manisha was having a hard time in her life, she was, one day, presented with an opportunity to participate in the couple discussion program which played a vital role in shifting the current course of her life. As this was a couple focused programme, she jointly participated in the with her husband. Through these sessions, Manisha and her husband learned about many aspects of couple and family relationships. Manisha expressed *"Through the program, we learned that men and women must have equal status and rights in every work both inside and outside the home. We also learned that earning or doing business should not be based on gender."* The couple programme was followed by the family centered programme called "family dialogue" which was attended by Manisha's mother-in-law on her recommendation. Participation in family dialogue sessions made her mother-in-law learn and reflect on different aspects of gender norms, violence, social

norms and beliefs were discussed. During the session, her mother-in-law reflected on how she experienced the effects of harmful social norms on her life in the past. Manisha's mother-in-law was thus able to link her experience with what her daughter-in-law has been going through currently. Gradually, her mother-in-law's rigid beliefs and thoughts started changing positively and thinking differently. By recalling the recent past, her mother-in-law felt remorse for the incident of harassment and mischief committed to her daughter-in-law. And she began actively assisting Manisha with household chores. As a result, she allowed Manisha to go outside and work alongside her son which increased their household income. Manisha never had an opportunity to go out with her husband after her marriage. But now, with encouragement from her in-laws, she has started going out for refreshments and quality time with her husband occasionally. Not only has her marital relationship revamped but it has made it easier for her to know more about the outside world and widen the scope of her knowledge.





These days, Manisha and her husband work in a brick manufacturing company. She felt bad when she learned that there was separate wages for men and women at the factory. Men received more wages than women though the nature of the work more or less remained the same. Manisha did not agree to this wage system and she felt compelled to challenge this inequality based on gender. She showed tenacity to challenge this inequality by performing physically demanding tasks normally done by men and demanding equal pay for equal work. Her strength showed the way for a fairer work environment. Manisha feels happy and empowered now. She quotes, *“Everyone in my family is happy now. My mother-in-law, who used to scold me for small things, has now started appreciating my work inside and outside home. I feel happy and empowered to lead a dignified life.”*



A COURAGEOUS STAND AGAINST VIOLENCE

Chadani Thakur

Biratnagar Metropolitan City, Morang

Chandani Thakur, a 10th-grade student residing in Biratnagar Metropolitan city, shares a home with her family of nine. Persistent financial challenges frequently trigger disputes within the family. Her father passed away during her early childhood, leaving her mother with the responsibility of managing the household. As the eldest among her siblings, Chandani was under immense family pressure for an early marriage, an expectation she was reluctant to fulfill. Guided by the belief that higher education for her daughter might hinder marriage prospects, Chandani's mother struggled with the dilemma.

The domestic issues and conflicts in her family were imposing mental strain on her, thereby hindering her ability to focus on her studies. She felt that her dream of working and living a successful life was moving towards darkness. Chandani has four sisters, and there is no male child in the family. Her mother was blamed by family members for not being able to give birth to a son. It was natural for her to be stressed by the abusive situation at home. Her mother used to feel that, if she had a son, she would not have to face such a problem. Her mother further shared, *“if she had a son, he would have helped her in the future, he would have taken care of her”*. *“Knowing my mother’s stress because of gender, I*

sometimes had thoughts of committing suicide,” Chadani recalled. Her mother was not willing to spend on education for her children as they were all daughters, and they would eventually go to their husband’s homes after marriage. Every day was sensitive for Chandani. Even if she went out of the house, her grandparents suspected that their granddaughter had gone to meet her boyfriend.

At that time, Rupantaran classes were being conducted at the school Chandani was studying at. She could not participate during the first phase of the session. *“One day I was observing Rupantaran class from the window. I found discussion topics and the presentation very interesting. I was highly interested to join the session and finally I started attending sessions without the consent of my family. I found the discussion on child marriage and its impact during the session very effective. I also felt that topics discussed in the session matched my condition. I know that child marriage leads to early pregnancy that affects both the mother and the child”* she reflected. She learned various dimensions of equality and realized that all the problems she was used to at home were examples of gender-based violence. The session also alarmed her that violence should not be tolerated.

She realized that her mother was facing emotional violence by being continuously blamed for not being able to give birth to a son. At first, she thought that her family's prestige in society might be ruined if such issues inside her family came out. But now she is aware that such incidents should not be kept hidden. She, thus explained to all family members what consequences can be there if her mother is to face emotional violence or getting blamed for not giving birth to a son. After she expressed that she could seek legal support and would be punishable as per the legal provision for violence, slowly her family members started taking interest in her opinion.

She also tried to explain to her family how the issue of conflict and child marriage was affecting her family. This helped to transform the beliefs and thoughts of her family. *"Now my family encourages and supports my education,"* Chandani shared. There is a mutual understanding and a harmonious environment among family members. Due to the division of work, the burden of family work has also been reduced.

On the other hand, Chandani helped her grandparents to participate in the family dialogue program conducted in the community.



After listening to the same things in session as explained by Chandani, they started to change their mindset. Chandani also was creating awareness among her neighbors. She says, *“After I counseled them by presenting examples of successful women who are working at the highest level in the nation, their mindset also started to change”*.

Following the introduction of Rupantaran classes, the school environment has witnessed significant changes. Not only has there been commendable progress in class regularity, effective teaching-learning methodologies, and consistent communication with parents, but students have also become increasingly conscious of incidents related to gender-based violence that may occur within the school premises.

Chandani's mother Punya Kumari is also happy that her family's situation has improved now. She says *“My husband died due to excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs. My mother-in-law started abusing me after my husband expired. I had only my daughters and it seemed that society looked at me with a feeling of victimhood. Being a single woman, even when I went to the market or went to work, my family and neighbors would point fingers at my character. I had to tolerate it in silence”*.

Chandani's mother is happy to see her family's situation change because of her daughter. She expressed her gratitude to the program saying that her daughter Chandani is the initiator of all the changes and Rupantaran class was the main reason for the transformation.





BIMALA'S STORY OF RESILIENCE AND TRIUMPH

Bimala BK

Triyuga Municipality, Udayapur

Bimala BK entered into marriage based on her family decision. She was so excited to start a new life with her husband, but after marriage, she came to know that her husband had an affair with another woman before they were married. Because of this, her marital relationship was not harmonious. She faced a lot of insults, discriminations from her husband. She shares, *“My husband repeatedly used to tell me that he didn’t like me. Knowing the feeling of my husband, I used to feel all the dreams of my life were shattered. I used to cry alone as I couldn’t bear it. My husband used to say not to show my tears in front of him and was not devoted to me.”*

Their home is located separately in the village because no other home is near to them. She used to cry throughout the day and night. There was no proper communication, love, support and care within their relationship. Even during her pregnancy, her husband didn’t care about her health.

“Surfacely, we were husband and wife to others but, we were not living as husband and wife at home,” shared Bimala. She was completely neglected in terms of finance and emotions. However, Bimala had kept a hope that one day her husband would eventually start loving her. She had to face repeated sexual violence several times by her husband. She

proposed to her husband to give birth to a child with the hope that he might be changed after getting a child. She gave birth to a child but even after that, her husband's behavior remained unchanged. Her husband preferred to stay outside rather than at home. Her husband had no interest in her needs and did not treat her as a wife.

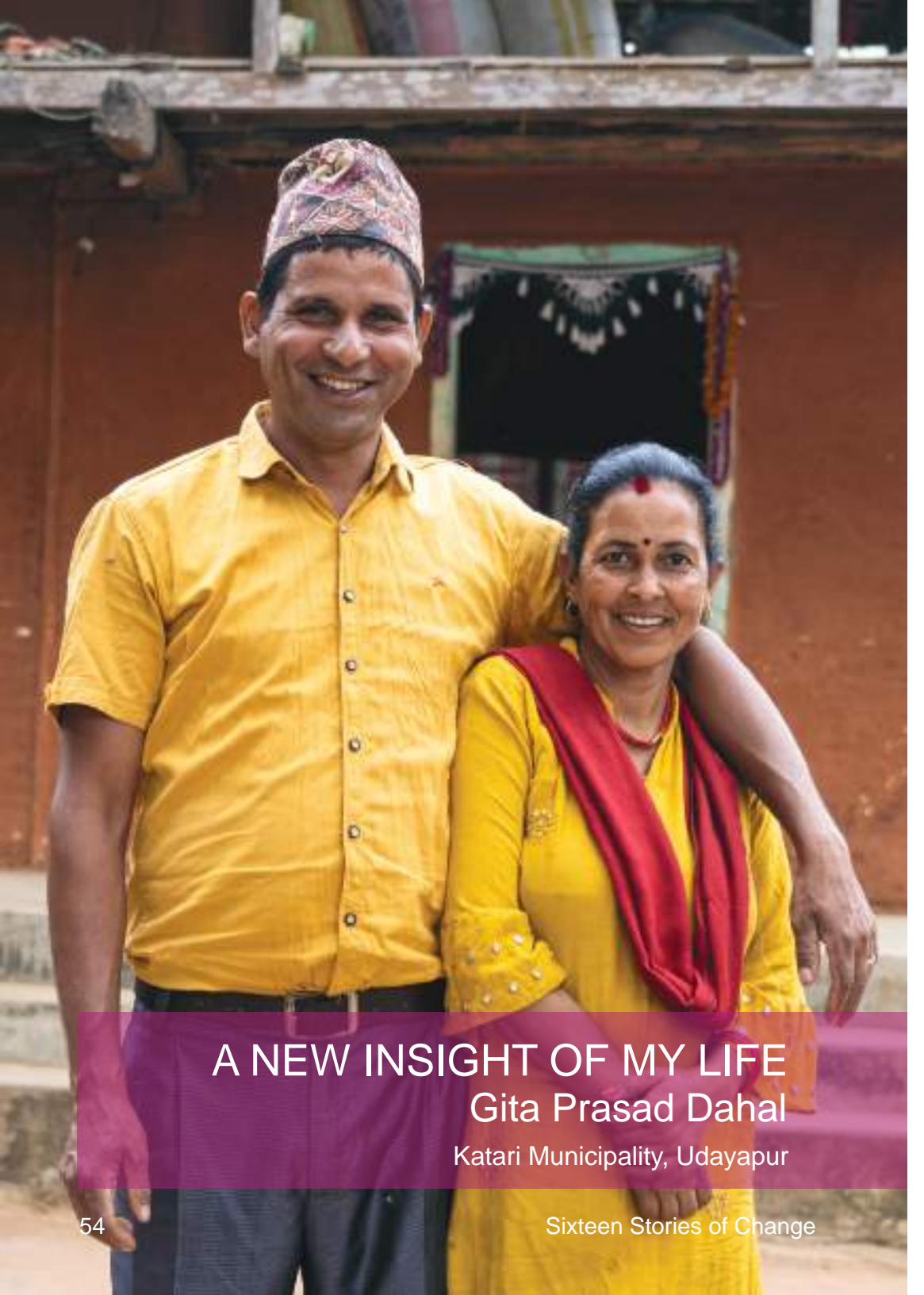
She continues to live her life in the hope that one day her husband will change and she will receive love and support from him. One of the participants from her community, who had previously attended all 10 sessions of the couple discussion program, persuaded her to join the program. She also tried to convince Bimala’s husband to take part in the program but Bimala’s husband did not participate in the sessions. Both Bimala and her husband attended the sessions. In the first session she attended the session alone. She recognized the need to involve her husband to change his perspective. Subsequently, she persuaded him to participate from the next day.

The discussions covered crucial aspects for couples, including the significance of trust and confidentiality, communication skills, family privacy, legal consequences of violence, the importance of savings, and, importantly, recognizing that coercing sexual intercourse when the wife is unwell or unwilling constitutes sexual violence.

The sessions provided insight to her about various forms of violence. After the session, she came to know that the financial negligence of her husband towards her was an example of violence. They started communicating with each other and started discussing the different issues related at their home as well. Gradually, her husband Balram, realized his mistake towards his wife in the past. After that, Balram began sharing household responsibilities and proper communication with his wife. *" I realized my behavior was a form of violence, now I love my wife without any violence,"* he pledges, acknowledging the couple discussion program's impact. They also participated in the follow up meetings where they shared their learning and experiences and also learned from other couples sharing. They started supporting each other and communicating with each other. Assertive communication helped them to understand each other and improve their relationship.

Bimala finds happiness in her transformed relationship now. *"After years of seeking his love and support, happiness has entered my life,"* she shares. The story shows how the right support can turn a difficult situation into a happier one.





A NEW INSIGHT OF MY LIFE
Gita Prasad Dahal

Katari Municipality, Udayapur

He was unmoved by the belief that a man who earns and brings income to the family and leaves household chores for his wife is an ideal man. Reflecting on his past days, Gita Prasad Dahal, a farmer residing in Katari Municipality of Udayapur District, found nothing unusual in divided roles based on gender. He as well as his wife used to manage finances but whenever there were expenses in his absence, he would expect and demand details of expenditure from his wife, no matter how small the expenditure was. For example, his wife had to share details of income whenever she sold livestock (goat and chicken) in his absence. On the other hand, his wife would never probe if he makes expenditures by himself and if she did, he would scold her off.

Furthermore, his household was characterized by dominance, conflict, and his tendency to consume alcohol. This often led to disputes within the family. Gita Prasad displayed irresponsibility in various family matters, including decision-making, children's education, and overall family well being. Many times, his wife kept on persuading him to quit alcohol and requested him to instead spend that amount on children's education, but all her efforts went in vain as he never

“My wife repeatedly used to remind me that all the money was spent on alcohol, I could not take care of children, but I did not care much about those things. I used to ignore her words.”

heeded and cared. His frequent quarrels with his wife were also typically fueled by alcohol consumption. Despite knowing that his wife has been busy doing household chores and child care throughout the day, he would scold her for not preparing meals on time. He did not consider it necessary to consult with his wife before making any decision. He used to make decisions alone and if his wife made any decisions, he could not bear it. Amidst all of these, a couple centered program was launched in the village. He did not have a clear clue about what the program was about but he felt an urge to participate, so he along with his wife did. Participating in the couple discussion program marked a pivotal moment in Gita Prasad's life. He gained insights into family reconciliation, the significance of equality and mutual respect in relationships. Both he and his wife received information on various forms of violence, their underlying causes, and effective measures for resolution.

Moreover, he came to the realization that his violent actions could lead to legal consequences. He acknowledges the importance of joint decision-making and mutual understanding. Now, the behavior and attitude of Gita Prasad especially towards his wife has changed. He enters into the past and recollects how he had mistreated his wife.

He vividly recalls how he yelled at his wife in front of people, asking her to go away when he was talking with a group. He wished he would have treated his wife differently then, so he could have nicely talked to his wife and maybe

explain why his wife's presence was not needed. He helps his wife to accomplish all the housework as much as he can.

He did not change him alone, instead he tried to change the behavior of his friends towards their family as well. These days, he consistently advocates for reporting of cases of domestic violence in society, offering support to survivors within his community.

After joining the couple discussion program, his wife Apsara Dahal also became aware about the violence she was facing.





“I came to know that I was suffering from the physical, mental, and social violence from my husband. If I had filed a complaint to the concerned authority, I would have obtained justice, and my husband would have been punished. But I no longer have to endure those behaviors. We earn and save collectively, and I sense that our family is on the path to success.”

She goes back to her past and recalls her ordeal when she used to leave her husband’s house along with her children as she could not take his abusive behavior anymore. She also recalls her past and expresses relief at the positive changes in her husband's behavior.

“My husband's behavior of having alcohol and aggression has changed. Now we work together, make decisions jointly and I feel respected with each other”, she shares.

Ward chairperson Mohan Tamang also appreciates the changes in Gita Prasad. He said *“I have witnessed the changed behavior of Gita Prasad Dahal. His positive transformation is commendable and exemplary to all”*, Mohan remarks acknowledging the Couple program’s contribution in their reconciliation. He expects other men in the community to take encouragement and learn from Gita Prasad and join a united effort to prevent GBV.



OVERCOMING OPPRESSION,
FOSTERING CHANGE

Gajala Khatun

Biratnagar Metropolitan City, Morang

"I was not allowed to leave my house."

Living as a woman in a conservative community, Gajala Khatun was confined to household duties. Married at a very young age, Gajala did not know the nuances of marriage or what is expected of her in her family. She was unable to conceive for the first seven years of her marriage. She lost confidence in herself. Over the course of seven years, Gajala faced blame from family and society for not being able to conceive. The constant criticism and societal expectations took a toll on her well-being. After seven years, she gave birth to a daughter, yet the pressure persisted as society and family continued to express disappointment for not bearing a son.

Despite her diligent efforts, appreciation from her family remained elusive. She recalls the times when her mother in law would pettily complain about her household works and her cooking skills to the neighbors. The more this went on the more she felt like she didn't belong there. Adding on to this, her family suggested that they want her out of the house. Even her husband was contemplating a second marriage.

All the physical and verbal abuse led her to accept those behaviors as normal. She started believing that not having a son was her fault and she wishes that she could have a son. Her husband was in favor of the family saying that *"A wife can be replaced but my mother cannot."*

Life was getting difficult for Gajala but she persevered. In the meantime, she got to know about the Couple Discussion program. Although she was eager to participate, she hesitated to share this with her family. She convinced her husband to go along with her but they couldn't tell her mother in law about it. So they lied to her very suspicious mother in law that they were going to pay installments at the cooperative.

Gajala loved going to the sessions. With each session, she learnt more about being in a marriage, issues of violence and most importantly about how the sex of the baby is determined. Her perceptions on having a son or a daughter changed drastically. *"When there was a discussion on women not being able to give birth to a child in session. It used to bring back memories of my past,"* she said with tears in her eyes. She came to know that she was not alone in facing such kind of violence in the community.

Many other women are forced to face the violence like her.

Her husband's behavior has gradually started to change since attending the session, her husband realized that household chores are not only his wife's responsibility. He started sharing household chores. His perception also shifted, acknowledging their past misconceptions.

“Our culture didn't allow daughters freedom”, he says. Presently, Gajala finds joy in her husband's support during health issues, and together, they make family decisions with mutual understanding. This has led to an increase in Gajala's confidence. She articulates her thoughts clearly in gatherings and programs and both are actively engaged in their family and community as well.

Once a woman in my neighborhood gave birth to a daughter. Her family had started abusing her by saying that she did not give birth to a son. I told them that sons and daughters are equal for parents.

She explained that discrimination between sons and daughters is gender-based violence and is punishable by law.

Presently, Gajala and her husband make family decisions collaboratively, and she finds joy in his support during health issues. Actively engaged in their family and community, Gajala articulates her thoughts clearly in gatherings and programs. Witnessing a neighbor facing discrimination for having a daughter, Gajala boldly asserted that sons and daughters are equal for parents, emphasizing that gender-based discrimination is punishable by law.



Remarkably, even Gajala's mother-in-law underwent a positive transformation, admitting her past misconceptions about gender issues. She admitted, *“I was wrong in my beliefs on gender issues.”*

Expressing a desire to rejoin family dialogue sessions for further learning, she acknowledged being wrong in her beliefs. Gajala's husband, too, embraced change, fostering love and support for her. The couple's transformation is a testament to the guidance received in the couple and family dialogue sessions.

Gajala's commitment to being a strong citizen with courage is evident in her journey from confinement and societal pressure to a woman who challenges gender-based discrimination and fosters positive change within her family and community.





BEYOND THE BLACKBOARD

Jyotsana Joshi

Biratnagar Metropolitan City, Morang

With the rising sun, the son sets off for school, while the daughter remains at home, involved in household chores or looking after the youngest siblings.

An experience from the past as shared by Jyotsana Joshi, a teacher at Shiksha Sadan Secondary School of Biratnagar Metropolitan city who has had many other interesting experiences during her 30 years long teaching career. The community surrounding her school struggles with challenges stemming from discriminatory traditions and customs. These issues are evident within the school environment as well.

“Children are influenced by the environment of their home. Even in school, they used to fight with their friends and did not support each other”, she explained.

The parents were not interested to consult about the school environment and education status of their children. The dropout rate of girls from school was high. Most of the families were dependent on daily wages for survival where savings for the future and investment in children’s education was almost ignored. Mostly men (father of school children) go to work on a daily wage basis across the border (with India) and on most of the occasions, they spend

their earnings on the way home leaving a reduced amount to be brought home and thus compromising children's education. *“Many students used to tell me that their father earns and brings them to eat, but some nights they had to sleep without a meal”,* a reality that she shares. She further shares, “Child marriage is one of the sensitive issues in the community, led to numerous girls dropping out of school after marriage at an early age”. In response to these challenges, the Rupantaran programme was implemented in her school. The classes assisted in raising awareness about violence and legal support, empowering children to speak up and get help when they face incidents of violence. Students began advocating against family quarrels and started speaking against violence.

Jyotsana says *“We teachers also ask them frequently what they will do if they face violence. Most of them say that they would tell their mother first and they will go to the ward office and other agencies for the legal process.”* Their increased awareness level makes her happy. She says, *“Earlier, students could not express their thoughts openly. But now their confidence level has increased. In society, women were blamed for giving birth to a daughter only,*

but we explained that it is not a woman's fault for giving birth to a son or daughter. They now share the same understanding.”

Children are also being positive towards their families and started helping parents with household chores. Students now help each other and are found to be more active in school activities. After being part of the Rupantaran programme, there has been a lot of change in the understanding of Jyotsana as well. She has further improved her behavior towards children as a teacher. Jyotsana teaches children with more love and care, due to which children also share their problems with her. This has helped Jyotsana to earn trust and confidence from her students.

That was why students would even feel non-hesitant to share incidents of domestic violence. Due to this, the relationship with the children has become more harmonious. She says, *“This program has played an effective role in educating parents through children. It seems to help in transforming society. After this program, the learning ability of the children has also increased. Children themselves have started to be active in reporting incidents of anti-child rights and violence in society. It has helped in building a beautiful future for children”.*





BREAKING BARRIERS, EMPOWERING CHANGE

Sangita Sapkota

Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City, Kailali

For any and all matters, her mother is the person she confides in, and her mother holds a special place as her favorite. Sangita Sapkota, a 10th Grade student from Chandrodaya Higher Secondary School of Dhangadhi sub-metropolitan, Kailali district lives in the community where most girls go to school after completing all household chores and she is no different. There were lots of instances of gender-based discrimination in her community in the name of customs and traditions which Sangita used to consider as normal. There were different roles for women and men at household and work. She also noticed many discriminatory behaviors between sons and daughters from a family and society. There was a custom of menstrual untouchability and prevalence of child marriage and Sangita again found all these normal. All these norms and harmful practices were known to her but she never questioned them as it was followed by most in the community. She was not sure if such practices were a violation of human rights. And she did not have courage to raise her voice against them fearing it would upset the community she lives in. Shy by nature, Sangita could not talk openly with a stranger. It was almost impossible for her to present her opinion in front of

people and gatherings. Meanwhile, she learned about the adolescent targeted Rupantaran programme being conducted in her school, but she was initially not interested in taking part in the session. Her teachers thoroughly explained about the Rupantaran classes, objectives of the programme and how participating in these sessions will enhance the life skills of adolescents and capacitate them to raise voice against harmful practices like GBV and child marriage. Hearing all the benefits of participating, she felt motivated to join the session and she did. During the Rupantaran session, she had an opportunity to learn about gender discrimination and social injustices that are widely practiced in society. There were also discussions about one's needs and desires, income, expenditure, and savings.

In the past, she was a stubborn girl who always demanded us to buy clothes she liked without taking into account our financial situation". These days, she thinks before buying anything she likes. She has opted against buying clothes she liked. She has been showing maturity in terms of savings and clearly distinguishing what is needed and what is not.



Unlike in the past, she actively started participating in such discussions which meant she was already finding confidence to talk to groups. The discussion on child marriage and its impacts completely changed her perception. Understanding what (consequences) child marriage brings along, what she used to think as normal was not normal anymore. She began to understand the phenomenon of discrimination between sons and daughters which was happening in her own family and society. She understood that all those were anti-human rights practices. She also had the opportunity to learn about the changes that arise with adolescence, bad company, and the risk of falling into drug abuse.

She did not confine the learning to herself and started sharing them with her parents. Considering her age, they didn't really listen to her at first. They had the perception that she could not know things well. But she kept perseverance and reminded her parents continuously about her rights, duties and other key learnings on harmful practices. Gradually, her parents started taking interest in her opinion and discussion that she wanted to have with them.

Along with her, 20 teenage girls from the community participated in the Rupantaran class. But after knowing her ability and eagerness, she was appointed as the Peer Facilitator to implement the weekly sessions.

Now, Sangita is working as a Peer Facilitator in the same Rupantaran class and her responsibilities have increased. She is happy to explore knowledge about social development as a facilitator. She continuously explains what violence is, how to avoid it and what to be done in case of its occurrence. The participants of the class have also started planning what roles children can play in transforming harmful social norms and reducing harmful practices in society. In her free time, Sangita often goes up to her friend circles and discusses with them about adolescence, social norms, harmful practices and GBV and available services. She has no friends who have not heard from her about gender equality, shared roles and responsibilities and the need for everyone in the community to be aware starting from family. In her family, she is now seen as someone whom one can go to and seek suggestions and advice. Her parents now see her as equally as other adult members and even include her in the decision-making process. Sangita's family is also to see her daughter's

resoluteness and her leadership ability for social transformation. Her father Gautam Sapkota proudly says *“I did not think that my daughter could lead a social reform campaign like this. I am very proud of her work as the Peer Facilitator. People from the community now know me as Sangita's father”*. Sangita's mother says “Earlier her daughter was stubborn. She used to get angry at minor things. But now my daughter is sensible. She has changed herself and is now engaging in the work of changing society. I love the work she is doing”.

And so forth, a young girl who used to live in a limited circle and carried old traditional values has become the center of hope for social reform. Sangita shares *“I have gained hope and energy from Rupantaran class. I would continue sharing my knowledge and experiences with my peers, juniors, family and whoever I get in touch with. Because everyone needs to know what I have learned from the Rupantaran programme. A united effort is required to realize the change”*.

