

AMPLIFYING CHANGE

Unleashing the power to dismantle gender stereotypes and harmful social norms



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Introduction

Justice and Rights Institute Nepal (JuRI-Nepal) and Feminist Dalit Organizations (FEDO) has jointly implemented project titled – “Pathways from Trauma to Empowerment-Fostering Social Norms Change Through Storytelling and Collective Mobilization (Hamro Sahakarya)” from March 2022 to April 2026 in ten Local Government Units (LGUs)¹ of Sudurpachhim and Karnali Province. The project was supported by UN Women and Government of Finland. The overall goal of the project was to enhance collective leadership and socio-economic opportunities of women and marginalized groups to address Gender Based Violence (GBV), harmful social norms and structural gender inequalities.

To create the social momentum at the ground, project has formed and mobilized twenty Women’s Self-Help Groups (SHGs) through reflect classes. These reflect classes were facilitated by trained local community volunteers focusing on tools and techniques on gender transformative approach. Three years gender transformative manuals that cover twelve modules in each year were developed and facilitated in each SHG. The first year manual focus on enhancing critical awareness on gender, gender roles, human rights principles, discrimination and harmful social norms. The second year manual aim on strengthening leadership skills and in third year it focus on enhancing skills on community engagement, stakeholder’s mobilization and advocacy.

Along with this the project also facilitated key activities like; comprehensive in-kind support distribution, referral support, livelihood and entrepreneurship development and community dialogues with men and boys, adolescents, intergeneration groups etc. Through out the project cycle, project has engaged and closely worked with local governments, like-minded duty bearers and stakeholders.

These all project interventions has significantly contributed to bring change and positive impact in the lives of project participants; enhancing their self-confident and leadership skills, changing their perceptions and behaviors, access to local resources and services, participation in decision making positions, leading and facilitating collective advocacy to address discriminatory and harmful social norms, enhancing economic independence and livelihood opportunities. Along with this, project has also enhanced gender responsiveness, accountability and ownership of local governments in the project locations.

This story book includes eight different real stories that demonstrate the change and positive outcomes achieved through the implementation of this project. It has captured the voices and personal experiences of individuals and communities, who were directly engaged in the project. Each story presented here is unique, yet they all share a common thread of resilience, determination, and growth.

These stories are taken conducting interviews, focused group discussions with the participants during field visit in the last year of the project.

Lastly, we acknowledged and thanked all individuals, SHGs, local governments, like-minded stakeholders, community volunteers, JuRI and FEDO team and funding agencies UN Women and Government of Finland for their overwhelming support, engagement and contribution for the successful completion of this project.

We invite readers to explore these stories with an open mind and heart. May they inspires you, just as they have inspired us, to continue our journey towards social movement for the change.

Project Team
Hamro Sahakarya Project
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¹ Dhangadi Sub-Metropolitan City, Kailari RM, Bhajani Municipality of Kailali district and Shikhar Municipality, Badikedar RM and Dipayalsilgadi Municipality of Doti district in Sudurpachhim Province. Birendranagar Municipality, Bheriganga Municipality, Gurbhakot Municipality and Lekhbesi Municipality of Surkhet district in Karnali Province.

REFLECT Sessions driving for collective change in the Badi community in Surkhet

The daily life of Badi Community in Jhupra has been changed within few years, I was overwhelmed with their conversations on understanding gender, gender roles, harmful norms and collective power as a Self Help Group. They easily reflected their stories of change and upcoming plan to advocate on community issues. I found them strongly committed, result oriented and unified in my last visit said Tika Ghale, Birendranagar Municipality, GESI Unit Head.

She added that the curiosity to know how was this possible took her to REFLECT session in the SHG. She observed the session very closely, it was very simple but engaging. Everyone was attentive and participating in each activity, sharing their thoughts in the floor very openly. The facilitator was well prepared and was giving space to everyone voice and building the conversation. The REFLECT class facilitation tools were so powerful that ignite individual to reflect on their own life experiences and motivated to adapt and advocate for change.



She expressed personally she have a very good experience in last monitoring visit and emphasized on scaling up such programming model in similar deprived and marginalized communities across Surkhet.

In Surkhet Birendranagar-11, near bank of the Bheri River a settlement of Badi Community is found who are collectively now engaged in challenging discriminatory and harmful social norms, claiming their rights on local resources and government services. The 25 women's from the community represents from Fulbari SHG which was formed by Hamro Sahakarya Project in May 2022.

The REFLECT classes in SHGs have enhanced their confident to introduce themselves, understand the different attributes and roles as a women, badi community they are performing, the power relations and deeper understanding of discrimination and

its consequences. These reflection, understanding helped them to unite together, build mutual respect and trust, create a safe space to share their experiences, emotions and problems. Along with the REFLECT classes the project has facilitated key activities like; leadership training, re-skilling and



livelihood support, comprehensive in-kind support package, referral support, mobilizing men's and boy's, adolescents and inter-generational groups. These cumulative efforts have resulted for some significant change in the Badi community in recent year.

The community which was only depended in the sand mining and fishing for their livelihood are now found doing other income generating activities like; kitchen gardening, rearing goats and pig, poultry farming and grocery shop. They save monthly NPR. 100 (by each member) in the SHG fund which is helping SHGs members to get small loan in their emergencies. Currently, the total saving amount is approximately Rs.28,000/- which is used as a revolving fund.

Amrita Badi from the SHG mentioned that, "I have now eight goats, a well-managed vegetable garden in the backyard of my house which is results after I join the SHG. I realized my inner strength and got more confidence from the REFLECT classes to start alternative source of income generations. Earlier I spend my time collecting sand and criticizing others, listening rumors. But now my daily routine has been changed I work in my vegetable garden and graze



my goats, in free time I also collect sand. I clean my house and surroundings daily”.

Dhanasara Badi, Community Facilitators of SHG added earlier the community hygiene and sanitation was very poor, the backyard of the house was empty, and children were not going school daily. After I engaged in this project, I realized how and why we remain same vulnerable and marginalized over the years. I started facilitating REFLECT sessions and sensitizing my community on our community



problems, practices, and habits. We discuss in the group and make decisions/rules together to follow and implement, which is helping our community towards change. The power of collectivism is now learnt and owned by SHG members along with their roles and responsibilities.

The hygiene and sanitation of the village are also well maintained, children are sent to schools, the discrimination between girl and boy is decreased within the family. Similarly, the domestic violence is also reduced compared to past years. We have registered our SHG in LGU for its sustainability and visibility of the work. Now we have identified and prioritized community issues, we have made

community action plan to address it. We have also reached out to different local stakeholders seeking their support to facilitate CAPs. We are working together to sensitize the community on child marriage, GBV, caste based discrimination under CAP. At the same time, we are also raising higher-level advocacy issues like the settlement of the Badi Community by providing attention letter to Chief of District Administrative office, at district level in support of FEDO.

Mangali Badi from SHG also reflected that she is also learning and practicing communication and public speaking skills from recent REFLECT classes. Now, she along with other SHG members can address share her views in formal programs also. They practice this so many times in the group and also in their home. They learnt few tools and technique for it and it was very effective and joyful learning.

Dhanasara Badi further add that she represented her community in high level national event launch by UN Women & Shrijanalaya at Kathmandu as a panelist showcasing their change as a form of storytelling. The story of badi community has been recently feature by artist of Shrijanalaya in the national art workshop.

Parbati Badi, President of Fulbari SHG, Birendranagar Jhupra, happily shared that her elder daughter Sita Badi has proved that Badi women can lead by being a Minister. I always prioritized the education of my children than getting them married early, which has been a bold decision for the future of my children. Appointment of Honorable Sita Badi in the Minister of the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC) is consider the historic milestone of the representation of marginalized Badi and Dalit community in the recent cabinet of Nepal Government.



From nobody to somebody: The rise of women rights activists

“After eating at a hotel, I would wash the plate and glass myself and leave them upside down to dry, as was the practice for Dalits. I no longer follow this practice,” said Nirmala Sewa, a confident-looking volunteer with Aawaj Pairawi Samuha in DipayalSilgadi Municipality in Doti.



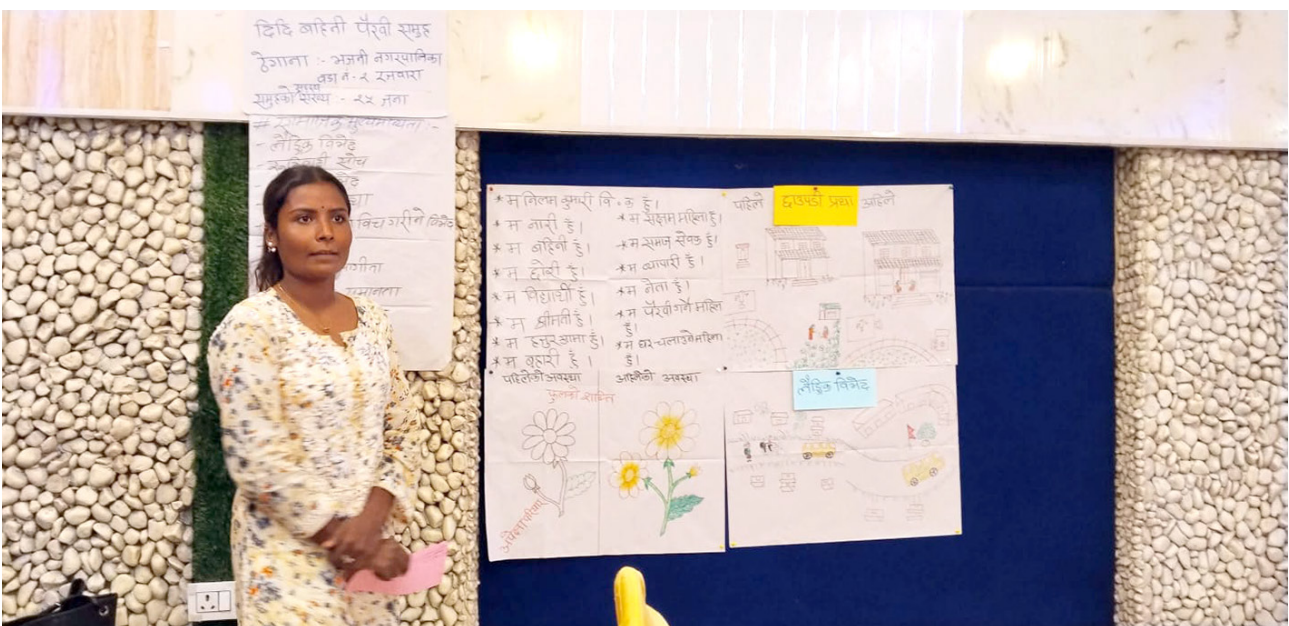
Because of untouchability, Dalits are often expected to wash their own tea glasses at hotels. Nirmala believes this practice must stop and that everyone should be treated as a customer with dignity and

respect. While she acknowledges that ending discrimination requires deeper changes in attitudes and beliefs, she emphasizes that the rational resistance of young people against discriminatory behavior can help drive change, although such resistance is not easy.

In the past, Nirmala often felt helpless when confronted with discrimination. Today, however, she has transformed into a confident advocate: counseling others, speaking out against caste-based discrimination, and raising her voice for justice whenever needed.

As part of Hamro Sahakarya Project implemented by JuRI-Nepal and FEDO, dalit women in their twenties in far west Nepal have experienced a huge change in their lives. They are empowered with confidence, courage and skills to fight against harmful practices such as untouchability, caste-based discrimination and gender-based violence.

Young women in Kailali, Doti and Surkhet are participants of regular training program (ToT) on facilitating gender transformative community dialogues and feminist leadership for the past three years. Now, they trained and lead a group of women in their respective communities that fights against harmful social norms and practices. Their community views them as their leaders, rights activists and harbingers of change. The ToT has been an eye opener for Nirmala and other volunteers to examine their own life, understand society and emerge as the





catalyst for change in their community.

Navigating through the bumpy road

In initial days, facing her group members and training them was difficult task for Nirmala. She struggled to respond to the queries by the group members. Traveling out of home to participate in program events was further challenging. “Sometimes, I had to travel alone and there was restrictions from my family,” she shared. As her group gained acknowledgement in the community for fighting against harmful social norms and practices, she won the trust of her family to travel away from home.

Rekha Nepali, a volunteer of Pariwartinshil self help group in Badikedar Rural Municipality-2, in Doti district



faced restriction of movement from family in the early days. Later, she won the trust of her family through her work. She also added that in past my confidence was very poor, I fear to speak in front of people. After enrolment in training program I built my skills and confidence as the training was very practical and simple, grounded with field realities; stories, games, group work, personal reflection, art and crafts. I got a safe platform to learn and share with more community leaders across different districts. My self-confidence and leadership skill has been enhanced. Now, I can put my views clearly and convinced my family members in my decision. I remembered I hesitate travelling to new places alone in past but now I travel alone during my work.



Similar experience was with Nilam BK, a volunteer of Didi Bahini SHG from Bhajani Municipality, Kailali. Nilam was also discouraged by her family to join the SHG as it did not provide a steady income and girls in community were not allowed to work outside home. I doubt how I can move ahead, Is it right path or not. With so many questions in my mind I join the group and attended meeting. I learnt about FEDO and project work, it motivated me to contribute towards my community. The training also enhanced my communication and facilitation skills, understanding about gender equality and human rights. This was turning point for my social work.

For Kusum BC, volunteer of Indreni SHG in Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City-1, in Kailali, the stiff opposition came from her grandfather. “My grandfather would argue that untouchability was their age-old culture and that no one should go against it.” She talked to her grandfather at home on their group activities against harmful practices. She also read out training materials to him. Later, he realized that his community had been upholding the harmful practice of untouchability for ages. She fondly quoted her grandfather as saying, “From now onwards you sleep inside your room during menstruation. If anyone in the community points finger at you, just tell me.”

Unstoppable growth

Brimming with the confidence, hope and infused with

leadership skills, the young volunteers have grown taller than their dreams. Participation in community activities has earned respect and enhanced their image. "I now know my strength. Nothing can stop me and community people has recognised me as social activist" said Kusum proudly. She participated as a panellist on a discussion on women's rights organized by Women's Rehabilitation Centre, Dhangadhi this year.

Sharing further about personal transformation Kusum says, "Before I was selfish and questioned myself why I should care for others. Now, I have learned to respect the feelings of others and provide them any help I can." Working for the program, she learned that



community is biased towards the survivors of gender-based violence because it believes that the 'survivors' are inherently bad people. "I tell people that rather than judging a person, they should try to understand him/her," she said. Over the years, she has earned the trust of her community. People in trouble visit her to share their concern. "They feel that they can get some help if they come to me. Youngsters regard me as their role model," she shared.

Kusum believes that women should be in the leadership position to bring structural changes through appropriate policies. "I know the pain of my community. Therefore, I want to contest in the upcoming local election. I can contribute more as a political leader," she shared.

Just like other young volunteers, Nilam Kumari B.K. is an inspiration to the youngsters. She does not

face family restrictions on movement. Her activities have inspired young women around her to exercise their freedom. Her cousin sisters also walk freely and they argue with their parents saying, "If Nilam didi (sister) can walk freely why can't we?", according to Nilam. She is now the secretary of Indreni village development committee, a committee formed to take care of her tole/village. She is also the secretary of the road construction user groups and successfully accomplished the road project in her village last year.

In Surkhet, Sharmila Nepali, a youth volunteer of Jyoti SHG in Birendranagar Municipality-1 explains how participation in the Hamro Sahakarya Project transformed her life. "I feel I was lucky enough to be a part of this program because I have transformed myself. My past was engulfed in the darkness. I did not know about my rights. I believed that gender-based violence and caste-based discrimination were natural part of my life. Now, I am an independent and powerful person who can speak against GBV," she shared.

She is continuously working to improve the lives of many people in her community. With her initiation, 16 poor children are getting educational support from Kopila Valley School in Surkhet. She supports female GBV survivors to get their citizenship certificates issued and also helps their children to acquire birth registration certificates.

Likewise, Urmila K.S., a volunteer of Jharana SHG in Gurbakot Municipality-12 of Surkhet has experienced a huge shift in her social outlook. "I no more think that women are inferior to men and that Dalits are inferior and cannot do anything great. I have also experienced how the youths can plan, decide and participate in activities for the betterment of their communities," she said. She has also been supporting marginalized people to get their rights. One case involved getting disability identity card issued for a blind woman in her community, which has eased her life as she can now access government facilities. She participated as a panellist in a discussion on the theme of digital GBV organized by the UN Women six months ago. People in her community seek support from her in case of problems such as domestic violence or GBV.

A Stitch Towards Empowerment: Ganga Damai's Journey in the Saturday Market of Dhangadhi, Kailali

"I feel more confident and content with my sewing career now," says Ganga Damai, a member of the Indreni Self-Help Group (SHG) from Ward No. 1 of Dhangadhi, Kailali. "I no longer go door to door selling clothes—instead, I set up a stall at the Saturday haat bazaar (market), which is much easier for me given my age and health."

At 65 years old, Ganga faces the daily challenges of living alone with limited resources. With no other source of income apart from the government's social security allowance, she resides in a rented room in Tribeni Chowk. Physical labor was never an option for her, so she turned to her sewing skills—an asset she had developed years ago. For a long time, she rented a sewing machine from a local tailor and stitched blouses, gowns, skirts, and baby clothes, which she then sold door-to-door or made to order.

"I have no house. My husband passed away 12 years ago, and my only son, who has mental health challenges, went to India and lost contact with us years ago," she shares. "Life has been full of pain, but I have learned to live with it."

Her turning point came through the support of the Indreni Self-Help Group, which Ganga describes as her "extended family." Through monthly REFLECT sessions organized by the group, she found a safe space to share her thoughts and experiences. These



interactive learning sessions introduced her to vital topics such as women's rights, harmful social norms, and the power of collective action. "These gatherings have helped me stay strong and speak up against caste based discrimination and gender-based violence," she explains.

Ganga first heard about the Saturday Market initiative during one of the SHG meetings. A community volunteer from her group informed her about the Dhangadhi Municipality's effort to promote women's entrepreneurship by offering stalls in the weekly haat bazaar—a platform for women to showcase and sell their products. Encouraged by the group, Ganga registered and received a stall to display her work.

Since then, she has participated in over ten Saturday Markets, earning between NPR 1,500 to NPR 2,500 per day—half of which is profit. "Customers often engage with me, share their preferences for fabrics and designs, and encourage me with their appreciation," she says.

Ganga believes that while the municipality's initiative has opened new doors for women like her, additional support such as access to raw materials, affordable loans, and advanced skills training could help sustain and scale their businesses—particularly for women



from marginalized communities.

Her efforts and determination were publicly recognized on 8 March 2025 during the International Women's Day celebrations. Her inspiring story was featured as part of a tribute to four women entrepreneurs participating in the Dhangadhi Municipality's Saturday Market. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor visited her stall, and Deputy Mayor Kandakala Rana pledged municipal support to help her further grow her business.

Ganga continues to invest in her venture with renewed energy. She carefully listens to her customers' feedback, selects materials based on demand, and refines her designs. Ever observant, she keeps track of trends by visiting nearby tailoring shops and

discussing styles with fellow SHG members.

In February 2025, the IndreniSHG extended its support to Ganga by providing her with a dedicated sewing machine through the Hamro Sahakarya Project. She received the machine on 24 March 2025, marking a significant step forward in her entrepreneurial journey by increasing her production capacity and removing the burden of rental costs.

Ganga's journey is a powerful testament to resilience, community support, and the importance of creating inclusive economic opportunities for women. With unwavering commitment, she continues to stitch a future filled with dignity, hope, and independence—one garment at a time.

From Dependence to Dignity: Empowering Women Through Collective Enterprise

“This business has been a blessing! I no more need to approach my husband or father-in-law for money. Now, I can fulfil the needs of my children from my earnings,” said Uma Pun Magar, 40, a member of Radha Krishna Duna Tapari Samuha (Women’s collective enterprise), a group that runs a small enterprise in Bhajani Municipality-2 of Kailali, to produce leaf plates. The enterprise produces plates from Saal leaves. A total of five women from the village started the enterprise a year ago with the support of JuRI-Nepal and FEDO under Hamro Sahakarya Project.



Uma lives with her in-laws and four children. Her husband works in India in informal sector. Pangs of poverty stung her whenever she walked past the nearby market as she had no money to buy candies for her children. “Now, I can eat my favourite dish and buy clothes for me and my children in every visit to the market,” she said proudly.

Igniting the power of solidarity

Besides uniting and empowering women to fight against harmful norms and practices in their communities, The Project also enhanced the skills of Self Help Groups (SHGs) members to run micro-enterprise through regular orientation and technical support for business development. Under project ten women’s collectives have been established and being operated at the local level in the leadership of women from SHGs. Altogether, 62 women’s from SHGs are engaged in these women’s collectives in the project location.

In the business development orientation sessions, SHGs members reflected and realised the importance of financial independence for the empowerment of women. They learnt skills on customer care, art of selling and marketing, negotiation, estimating costing and pricing of the product, record keeping, business

operation and management. They also developed business plan for their enterprise, learnt about business registration process and its significance. These sessions also helped them to identify their key challenges and mitigate timely to sustain the ongoing business. Furthermore, through these sessions’ women’s collectives members identified different like-minded stakeholders and service providers to approach for their support on growth of business in their communities.

Stumbling blocks

Stepping out of domestic sphere into business posed unique challenges for those women as they encounter resistance from the family members and the community.

As for Uma, a woman working outside of home and running a group business was an alien idea in her community. Her father-in-law was against it. He asked me to focus on domestic chores. I got the courage and support from my SHGs to start the business.

Participating in the business was not easy for Apekshya Pariyar, 26, as well. She faced a stiff opposition from her in-laws. “Neighbours had provoked my in-laws saying that they had made a mistake by letting me work outside home and I had to discontinue the work for a while,” she said. The group members motivated her repeatedly and she finally re-joined the business.



Likewise, a group of five women members have woven their way to financial freedom and empowerment through a group tailoring business in Bhajani Municipality-1, of Kailali district. The path to success of the tailoring business was also riddled with challenges.



“My husband opposed the idea of me joining the group business because he believed that women cannot run a business,” said Ganga Damai. Her husband works in the informal sector in India. “How long should I and the children depend on your income?” she argued and her husband relented. Now, her daily income ranges from Rs. 500 to 2000 per day. She bears the education cost of her children, runs the house and yet manages to save some money. With the money saved she recently bought a mother goat and a cow. “I have plan to make additional money by selling cow’s milk,” she added.

Putali Damai, 53, too had a hard time convincing her husband to let her join the group business. He believed that running a business in man’s job, women’s should take care of children and domestic chores only. She argued with him that women can do every things, running business required skills and ideas not gender and let him know that other women are also joining the group tailoring business. Now he supports her. “My husband takes care of domestic chores and lets me come at tailor early.” she said. Her income covers medical costs of her daughter and helps to run the house in a better way than past.

In the group, normally each member earns Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 6,000 per month through tailoring business. Their monthly earning stood at Rs.22,000 during festive seasons.

Life of hope and dignity

For Rajkumari, 30, the business has been a huge respite. She works to support her mother and a disable younger brother, who is under regular medication. Earlier, she went to neighbouring cities to work as a construction worker. People in her community looked at her with suspicion. “They thought, I was into some kind of unethical business because I worked away from home. Now, they know

what kind of work I do and they respect me,” she shared with joy.

Apekshya shared that now her family encourage her. If she is found strolling around home after 10 AM, her mother in-law asks her to leave for the business.

These days, Uma’s husband remits money to her bank account. And Uma’s father-in-law handover responsibilities to take care as a head of the house. Uma’s not only make decision for herself but also advise husband and father in-law. They trusted and admired her contribution.

These days, community see them as change makers and economic agents. Women are breaking the social barrier that limits them at house as an unpaid care worker and moving towards economic independence as a local entrepreneurs and decision maker.

The business has not only boosted their self-esteem but also earned the trust and respect from their family and community.

“When I go around the village people greet and praise me, something I never expected before. A man, who used to mock me earlier, now approached me with a humble request to get his wife employee at the enterprise,” shared Rajkumari.

The group gets dry Saal leaves from the nearby forest. Villagers deliver leaves in the enterprise which sell at Rs. 25 per kg. Their endeavour has been a source of income for the locals and has enhanced their livelihood. The demand for the leaf plates is on the rise in neighbouring urban areas like Dhangadhi, Lamki and Tikapur of Kailali.

To address those demand and growth of enterprise, the group has further plan “We have registered our company at the Office of Small and Cottage Industry. In future, we will plan to target nearby big cities and



produce leaves plates in a large scale. We are also planning to buy an automatic machine and make an attractive packaging with our brand logo.” said Uma.

The leaf plate business has provided a new source of income for the villagers who collect dry leaves and sell them to the leaf plate enterprise. Thus, it has been a steady source of income for some villagers.

As for the group tailoring business, the venture has been a life changing experience for Apsa Pariyar, 27. She could only stitch a petty-coat prior to joining the group. Now, she can cut and stitches various types of dresses. She has bought some jewellery for herself and has saved Rs. 35,000. She also buys stationaries for her children. “I no more have to beg money from my husband or father-in-law to fulfil my personal needs and those of my children. I enjoy more freedom and I am very happy,” she said.

For Nirmala Pariyar, 41, the tailoring business promises a steady job. She keeps on updating her skills by watching YouTube videos on tailoring and passes on new skills to her members. “Prior to joining this group, I worked for NGO project. I lost my job when project ended but my business will remain until I work.” From the saving of the business, she had bought an automatic sewing machine of Rs. 50,000.

The path ahead

Micro-enterprises runs by women groups in Kailali are exemplary initiatives with a promising growth. The leaf plate business has a bright scope in the domestic market as the plates can be sold in major cities across the country. That requires not only a higher investment in terms of capital but also efficient branding and marketing skills, which the women members lack at the moment. The business if scaled at higher level, can be a lucrative income source for the community people.

Likewise, the tailoring business can thrive only when all of its members are trained on advanced skills of designing and stitching to operate at a larger scale. The training part is crucial to compete with imported products that have dominated the market.

The project has supported ten women's group business/collective enterprises in the project locations where 62 SHGs members are engaged.

Overall, the group business by the members of SHGs has transformed the lives of women. Their enhanced skills on business management and participation on income generation activities has not only increased their self-esteem but also earned the respect from family and community. The women now enjoy financial freedom, higher-level of agency and dignified life.

Addressing discriminatory social norms and harmful practices through Community Action Plan (CAPs)

Hamro Sahkarya Project initiatives mainly focused on enhancing critical awareness and self-realization on discriminatory norms and harmful practices among women and community stakeholders through gender transformative dialogues that ignites them to understand the consequences from the perceptive of rights of women and girls.

Under the project 20 women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that includes 537 community women's from marginalized community. Each group received more than 40 reflect sessions that enhance their understanding on gender and social norms, rights and inclusion along with leadership skills, advocacy and movement building in the project period. The SHGs community volunteers played critical role on mobilizing these groups as they received 12 days ToT on facilitating gender transformative dialogues. All together more than 40 community volunteers were engaged in the community mobilization.

These reflect sessions also help them to reflect on their own life experiences, compare it with their fellows in SHGs and bring together in a consciousness of taking action against such harmful and discriminatory social norms and practices. First of all, SHGs identify community issues, then prioritized it and develop community action plans. They also identify different community stakeholders and service providers for their engagement and support during the implementation of CAPs.

Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Doti, Surkhet and Kailali of Western Nepal have made a noticeable progress in addressing deeply rooted discriminatory social norms and harmful practices like chhaupadi, caste based discrimination and untouchability, child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence in the project locations through implementation of CAPs. They are working collectively as a community change makers challenging harmful social norms and practices and promoting gender equality and dignified life.

Chhaupadi is a harmful traditional practice in western Nepal where menstruating women and girls are considered impure and are forced to stay in separate huts or cattle sheds during their periods. The practice is deeply rooted in socio-cultural beliefs about purity and fear of divine punishment, reinforced by patriarchal norms and community pressure. Economic factors such as poverty, lack of proper housing, limited access to menstrual hygiene facilities, and low awareness further worsen it. Despite being criminalized by the Government of Nepal in 2017, it persists, and incidents of Chhaupadi associated deaths have been reported in recent years. Women face serious health risks, social exclusion, and loss of dignity- and in some cases, loss of life due to snake bites, extreme cold, and suffocation from indoor fires used for warmth. Alongside, Chhaupadi, caste-based discrimination



Janautthan SHG celebrating 114th International Womens Day.



Chhaugoth Demolish at Dhangadi-12, Kailali

continues to marginalize Dalit and other vulnerable groups through practices of untouchability and controlled access to resources and services. Child marriage also remains prevalent, driven by poverty, gender norms, and social pressure, leading to early pregnancies, school dropout, and long-term health and economic consequences for girls.

In three local government units Badikedar, Bhajani and Dhangadi LGU of project, SHGs have facilitated the campaign to end chhaupadi and menstrual restrictions. They visited door to door and sensitized community people about menstruation restriction and consequences of such ill practices. They also organized street drama and initiate a community dialogues with local traditional healers and intergenerational groups on chhaupadi. They also engage local government, local police and faith leaders while demolishing the menstruation hut in the community. All together 78 menstruation huts were demolished in the project locations.

Demolition drive of menstruation huts in western Nepal have made regular headlines for decades, but kept resurfacing to haunt the lives of women and girls time and again. Chhaupadi is rooted in



communities as a culturally transferred practices from generations, still remains a challenge to end due to the deep rooted belief and fear of community people that it invites misfortune and harm to their family if it is not practiced. Nepal Government have address to end chhupadi and menstruation restriction in its policies and programs and guided by these mandates local governments have initiated menstruation huts demolished campaigns in western Nepal. These campaigns are breaking the huts but not breaking the beliefs system of people.

Focusing on those realities, Hamro Sahakarya project has worked on addressing the perception and belief system of locals and creating shared ownership and accountability for change. SHGs is recognized as a safe space and community learning platform to end harmful norms and practices.

“During menstruation I had to sleep in a dark shed. I was afraid. The family members did not let me share the toilet and I answered the nature’s call in a nearby bush. My pain was hidden and I never could open it. When, I joined SHG I learnt about the discrimination and harmful norms. I decided to abolish chhupadi from my own home first than taking it to the community campaign. My daughter in-laws are allowed to stay inside the house during their periods” said Jamuna Devi Parkhi of Adarsha SHG Dhangadi in Kailali.

Laxmi Saud, another member of the group echoed similar sentiments when she said, “The fear of snake bites and those of insects like scorpion gripped us in the dark shed during mensuration. Now, we sleep peacefully inside home.”

Bared from using the community tap installed in the public place, Manila B.K. used to walk to the river to take bath and wash her clothes during her period.

Tulsa Bohara, a community volunteer from Badikedar highlight that SHG members also visited their 'deuta' (shaman) and sought his advice on dismantling menstruation sheds. She quoted her deuta as saying, "Please do not cause harm to the place where the statues of the deities are installed. Apart from that do what is comfortable to you." Green signal from their deuta bolstered their demolition drive in the village.

Kausala Devi Bohora, a single mother of two daughters in Badikedar Rural Municipality-2, Doti was worried about the safety of her adolescent daughter recalling those days when she spent nights in her chhau shed during her period. She narrates, one day, the members from her SHG visited her place and demolished the nearby shed and she did not bother to erect a new one. "We use a room of our house to sleep during menstruation. We feel safe. My worry has gone," she shared.

The Aawaj SHG in Dipayalsilgadi -5, Doti was successful to rename the names of three local villages with the collective campaigns. In past the names of villages were kept by the name of dalits caste (Bhulbada, Loharbada and Aujibada) which carry the discrimination and stigma of being dalits to the resident of the village, children from villages also feel discrimination from their fellow classmates and were bullied. Aawaj SHG led the campaign being the voice of Dalit community to change the name of the villages. They coordinated with the local government, likeminded stakeholders and community in this campaign. Now they have renamed the villages with the dignified names like; Chetanabasti, Phulbaribasti and Betaldeu basti.

"In initial days, some elderly members in our group



did not drink the water I handed over to them because I belongs to Dalit community," shared Rekha Nepali, a community volunteer from Pariwartanshil SHG in Badikedar Rural Municipality-2, Doti. "Now we all share food and eat together. This change is resulted from the ongoing reflect classes which motivated women's in SHGs to start change from their own behaviors."

"Untouchability was a severe problem in my community. Dalits did not eat together with non-dalits. Being a non-dalit, I had to face challenges from my own family members and neighbors to participate in the SHG where majority of SHG members are from Dalits community. People started treating me as dalit but I ignored them and choose SHG as a safe space where I can share my feelings and relate to many others in my groups." said Khagisara Oli, from Jharana SHG Gurbhakot, Surkhet

"Before, we were afraid to spell our names in front of new persons. Now, we can confidently introduce ourselves and communicate with anyone," said Gaura Devi Nepali, a member of Pariwartanshil SHG in Badikedar Rural Municipality-2 in Doti.



Women's Leading for the Change

“Who understands the struggles of Dalits and women with disabilities better than I do? To address the issues we face, we need to engage at the policy level. This realization led me to join politics.” said Resha R.C, a member of Aakirti Self-Help Group of women in Bheriganga Municipality-12 in Surkhet. Resha, who gained leadership skills in past few years, has now taken membership of a political party based on her conviction that politics is the foundation for change and her meaningful engagement could create an impact. This conviction, however, did not emerge overnight but was shaped by her lived experiences, engagement with SHG through reflect sessions and the challenges she has endured in the past.



Life took an unprecedented turn for Resha after she fell down from a tree while collecting fodder six years ago. She sustained spinal cord injury, which left the part below the waist paralyzed. “Being disabled was a terrifying experience. “I could not stand the sight of someone walking past my house. So, I hide inside the house most of the time,” she recalled.

Her life took a different turn after a representative of the local government suggested her to join a Self Help Group. This was the learning and sharing platform aimed for combating harmful social norms and practices and enhance leadership skills. The learning in SHG and therapy alongside helped her to heal gradually. She actively participated in SHG activities and has now emerged as a woman leader in her community.

Resha was recommended for community volunteer from SHG. She received MTOT on facilitating gender transformative dialogues and reflect sessions in SHGs and her community. These trainings helped her to enhance her self-confidence, voice and agency. The first year training helped her to enhance critical awareness on gender, gender norms and human rights. In the second and third year of training program she enhanced leadership, stakeholders’

engagement and mobilisation skills.

“I learned about women’s rights and public speaking in the SHG. The group gave me a new lease of life!” she said. Resha lives a busy life supporting her community in various capacities. She is the vice-chairperson of the Gangamala Forest Consumer Committee, a member of the Parent Teacher’s Association at Sharada Madhyamik Vidhalaya (a community school) and the vice-chair of Utthanshil Krishi Samuha. She is also central member of Rastriya Loktantrik Apanga Sangh. Now, she is associated with local CBOs and CSOs. Resha shared that she contributed to the advocacy efforts that resulted into the allocation of Rs. 200,000 by the municipality last year for the capacity building of persons with disabilities.

Likewise, Indra Kumari Gharti Magar, a member of Srijanshil SHG, Lekbesi Municipality in Surkhet is known for her community work. Involvement in the SHG unleashed her potential to lead and serve her community. Indra is also the secretary of Naya Khola Drinking Water and Sanitation Project. Lobbying for a drinking water project is the most tangible achievement of her activism.

Her community of over 250 households was parched until a year ago. Women folks spent thirty minutes to fetch drinking water from the nearest spring. They had to wait for another thirty minutes in queue to fill their pitchers. Quarrels over skipping the queue were common.



Indra Kumari, is one of the community member who relentlessly work to bring into operation a drinking water project worth around Rs.200,00,000. She requested the municipality to provide budget to end

the water woes of the women. The municipality and NGOs allocated a budget of 2.2 million rupees to support the drinking water project. Ultimately, the project was succeed. Now, each household has a running water tap.

Involvement in community activities requires her to travel away from home for hours. Initial days were filled with challenges as her husband was reluctant



to take care of domestic chores in her absence. He often got angry and questioned her absence at home. “Explaining about community work to my husband was very difficult. One day, I asked him to join a reflect session on gender roles and engagement of men and family member to address gender stereotypes from home and community. That triggered him to change his perceptions for more equal roles on household work within the family. Now, he became supportive.

For Hira Bohora of Indreni SHG in Badikedar Rural Municipality-1 in Doti, participation in the SHG means awakening the hidden social activist in her. Since school, she had the desire to end harmful practices in her community. “I was aware of how we had to suffer during menstruation. I felt that it was not just right. Yet, the age-old superstition had silenced my



voice. Participation in group activities gave me the courage and the voice to fight against Chhaupadi practice,” said Hira.

After joining the group, Hira witnessed transformation within her. “In past, I heard about women empowerment as theoretical and ideological principles by some male political leaders that was not applied in the practice. Through reflect sessions, I learnt practical skills to put such theories into practice. I enhanced communication, negotiation and conflict management skills. Now, while talking to a group of people, I am mindful of whether they are attentive or not. I use hand movements and raise my tone to grasp their attention.” She also added, even at home, when there is a dispute with my husband. I does not rush to talk back. I listens carefully and respond calmly which help to solve family disputes.

After learning about harmful practices such as GBV,



caste-based discrimination and Chhaupadi, she stood in the frontline to lead her group in dismantling Chhau sheds in her community. I found the toilets in a deplorable state at Magaleshwor Primary School. I reached out to ward chairperson and lobbied for the improvement of toilet and sanitation facilities at school. The ward allocated budget to improve the toilets in school and now the school have accessible toilets and sanitation facilities.

Every member of the SHG has their own powerful stories of change and together these stories demonstrate emerging leadership of women at the grassroots level. Women are seen counselling family members, mobilizing communities, advocating to address harmful norms and practices, engaging with local authorities to influence decisions, access to resources and systemic change. They are also working collectively, raising awareness and working as role models to contribute for the positive social change in their communities.

Referral Village Clinics, a community driven initiative ensuring effectiveness of referral services in remote villages

Bimala Khadluk, Deputy Mayor, Lekhbesi Municipality of Surkhet reflected on her experience -

“I found many women and girls from this community have been facing domestic violence and other forms of gender based violence. They suffered a lot, but still were quite because they were not aware about referral support and services. Soon after we conducted referral village clinics in different communities’ people became aware on the services and its process, now people are reaching local government to access the services. The number of case reporting has been increased than past years. LGU is also directly coordinating with organisation like; One Stop Crisis Management (OCMC), Insec, FEDO, Aawaj and office of district attorney. I have realised this efforts required a long term collaborative approach. Thus, in year, 2025 LGU has channelized operation of GBV prevention fund and will be making it LGU service more effective.”

Hamro Sahakarya Project has been ensuring access to referral mechanism and services of GBV survivors through community driven approach **“Referral Village Clinic”** that has breezed the gaps of vulnerable and marginalized communities with local governments and like-minded service providers. Through this intervention project has not only promote the engagement and ownership of local governments and service providers but also has sensitized targeted communities about gender based violence, process to referral support, its importance, types of services and emergency contact details of service providers. The village clinics has also addressed the rights and dignity of survivors and motivated locals and community leaders to identify and support such people in community. Bringing different service providers in one common platform also helped to maximize its resources and cooperation.



Kusum BC, the volunteer of Indreni SHG in Dhangadhi in Kailali & member of LGU referral committee shared her experience that referral village clinics has not only inform community people about available referral services but also awaken the local government to identify the real needs of vulnerable communities by reaching and interacting in their door-steps. It has also helped local government to prioritise responding to GBV into their plan and programs, strengthening the capacities of local government on referral support. She further added that she is recognised as a women human rights activist in her village and people reach her seeking help to address cases of domestic and GBV. Due to the nature of her work, she frequently visits the OCMC, district court and police office, the staff over there think that she is a civil police officer doing her routine work. She also reflects that the services over there need to make more gender responsive.

The process for organizing referral village clinics started with a coordination meeting of LGU referral committees, where they shared key progress and challenges of referral services and identify different approach and initiatives. Along with this in each LGU the committee identify different vulnerable areas and groups and make a plan to organize referral village clinics, discuss on their key roles and responsibilities to facilitate it. As per the need they coordinate and mobilized different community groups, ward committees, female community health volunteers and other CSOs. In each referral village clinics a registration and psychosocial counselling desk is established and provide information and services for each individuals who seek services in their community. Each village clinics operate for three to six hours, the clinic day is the first screening day where, committee members and service providers identify survivors, understand their case/problems and advise them to visit service center like;



OCCM, women cell, lawyer and referral committee members. Latter on community volunteers and psychosocial counselor makes frequent visits at their door-steps and offer needed support.

Anita Bhatta, Psychosocial Counsellor in Dhangadi, Kailali shared that referral village clinics are being very effective in Dhangadi, after the event ward offices are being active to address GBV cases and are also recommending it to judicial committee, women cell and OCCM. Ward committee are collaborating with SHGs and conducting campaign to end domestic violence and child marriage in the community. Recently, in Dhangadi Ward Office-12 has allocated NPR. 65,000 to provide counselling and referral support to survivors and had committed to allocate more fund in upcoming year. With the support from ward office the SHGs have stopped four cases of child marriage in the community few months ago and provided counselling support to young girls.

Tara Giri, Focal Person OCCM, Dipayalsilgadi Doti reflected - "The needs of joint efforts to address GBV and ensure access to services in justice system. Often in many cases women fear to express the incidents of domestic violence as many women rely on their husband and in-laws. Local government, ward office need to be more responsible to sensitized locals about GBV and services that are offered free from government. I have found referral village clinics, a very effective initiative, this year I have closely work with FEDO and collaborate in referral village clinics. I

personally identified some of the survivors who latter visited OCCM and access needed services. The referral information booklet developed by the project is also very useful I have few copies at OCCM and I have provided many photocopies of the booklet to other LGUs and wards stakeholders so they can help survivors. "

The survivors who are brought in the referral pathways are offered all kind of needed support from the LGUs referral committees and like-minded service providers. Till now through the support of this project a total of forty referral village clinics were facilitated in ten local government units in Surkhet, Kailali and Doti districts where more than 2,800 community people are informed and sensitized about referral services. This has ensured access to referral services of 280 GBV survivors in the formal mechanism.

"I am a survivor of domestic violence. I was thrown out of my house. I was struggling alone in every situations. I was looking for help to claim my rights. I came to know about referral services during referral village clinic in my village and came to FEDO seeking support. Now I am taking psychosocial counselling and legal aid support as my case is registered in District Court. My husband disappear 17 years ago and I am living alone. Earlier, I even don't have my citizenship now with support from FEDO, I got my citizenship." - GBV survivors from Surkhet, Karnali Province

"I was not aware that survivor have rights to access free services under referral mechanism. This is so good to know, now I can inform my sister about these services and help her to access justice." - Mamta Pariyar, Participant in referral village clinic at Gurbakot, Surkhet

Observing its effectiveness and community needs now local governments are taking lead role on facilitating referral village clinics in their LGUs. They are allocating LGU budget and channeling



GBV prevention fund, coordinating like minded stakeholders. In Dipayalsilgadi Municipality, Doti, Lekhbesi and Gurbakot Municipality of Surkhet local government are organizing referral village clinics in different wards and villages of the LGUs. The local government are also planning to adopt this approach in promoting and ensuring access of people in social security schemes including vital registration.

Laxman Bahadur Singh, Chairperson of District Coordination Committee, Doti expressed - “FEDO has continued good initiation to bring all referral service providers together and discuss on the key challenges, ongoing support and discuss on future intervention. This has helped us to collaborate, share expertise and resources and at the same time it is supporting GBV survivors to effectively access the referral services. OCMC, LGUs and other CSOs should also allocate some budget for referral village clinics that can be taken to other wards/villages and LGUs of Doti.”

Kalawati Saud, Deputy Mayor of DipayalSilgudi Municipality in Doti emphasized on the need of

outreach program like referral village clinics in many other villages of LGU. After formation of referral committee LGU has made more responsible to ward office to identify and recommend GBV survivors in referral mechanism. Hamro Sahakarya Project



has taught us innovative and effective ideas for collaboration. LGU will continue the coordination meeting of referral committee and facilitate referral village clinics in coming days.



Through the ongoing referral support work, project has also learnt that local governments should be more responsible and resourceful to sensitize communities on available services, develop and effectively implement policies and plans, strengthen response mechanism at ward level, enhance capacities of elected representatives and focal person on gender responsive service delivery, case management and legal procedures. These areas should be prioritised in LGU budget and program and also needs multi-stakeholders collaborations.

Roshni (Pseudo name) Journey from survivor to community leader

Life is very unpredictable, the unfold chapters of my life teaches me to stay hopeful, calm and look for better alternatives even at adverse time.

Being a women, with disability from Dalit community from the early stage I faced multiple discriminations from my family, relatives and community. My one hand was burnt in childhood, this incident introduce so many obstacles to my life. My health, education, protection and needs were not in the priority list of my family. I and my brother were left by my mother in early childhood, being a senior child I was responsible to look after my brother. I couldn't get higher formal education, I was drop out from my school after class 10. I was responsible for daily household chores. Soon at the age of 16, I got married and settle my own family. I was hopeful for better life after marry. My husband and his family were very nice to me, I forget my pain and hardship after marriage. Soon after marriage, I became mother of a child. My new role demanded lots of time to take care my son. Gradually I started to face domestic violence from my husband and family members. Our economic condition was also shrinking due to irresponsibility of my husband who was only the breadwinner of the family. He used to spend his income in the alcohol and gambling. I was not allowed to go outside home and work.

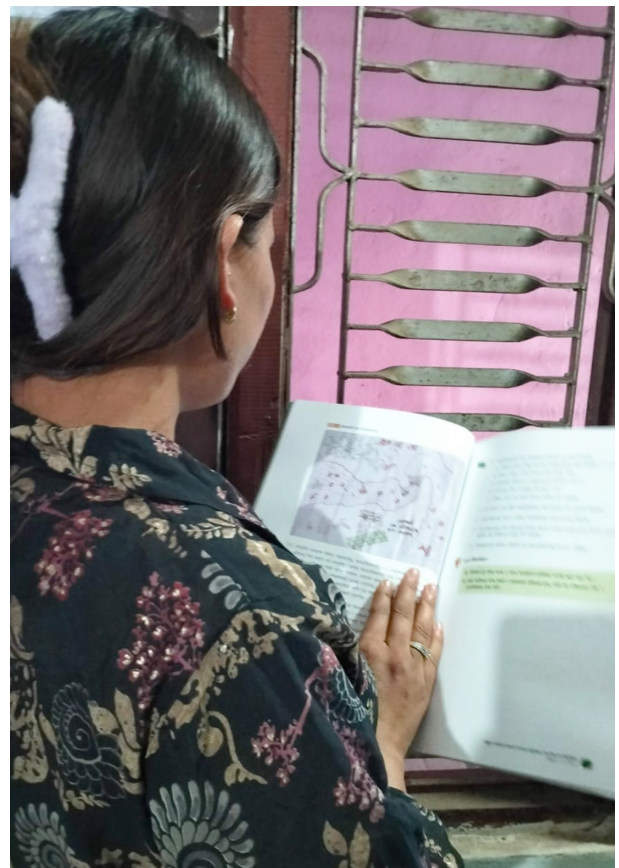
Constantly, I faced domestic violence without any reason. The day become very miserable to me, every day I had fear of getting beaten. There was no food for meal, my neighbor helped providing food. I decided to work in a village tailor to afford daily food for me and my son. I know some skills of sewing clothes that helped me to get paid in the tailor. My husband threatened me a lot to leave the work but I was committed to my decision. After few months I started facing sexual abuse from the tailor owner, he started to exploit me, touch my bodies, ask sensitive questions and offer to go dating with him. I was so helpless and worried. I couldn't share this situation to my husband and family members. I tried to ignore him and look for other options of income.

In this situations, FEDO entered with a program in my village. A self-help group was formed in my village, I was also a member of SHG. During the monthly meetings of SHGs I came to know about domestic violence, harmful practices like child marriage, caste based discrimination and chhaupadi practices, the group members also shared some of their experience on this issues. I also decided to share my situation of

domestic violence to the SHG and FEDO team. I was suggested not to tolerate such violence in the home. The SHG member also committed to help me in my hard time. I decided to report to FEDO if such incident comes. That day I felt very relief, I was happy to get a platform to share my pain and struggles. I also left the work and got similar work in another tailor.

After a week one night, I was badly beaten by my husband without any issue. Early morning I called SHG leader and FEDO staff. Within few hours same day FEDO team and SHGs came to my house and talked with my husband and family. They mentioned that the action was crime/domestic violence. Such offence is punishable by law if reported in the police. They also ask my husband commitment of not doing such offence and taking care of me and my son. They also threatened that if such an incident happened it will be reported in the police custody from the SHG.

From that day, the behavior of my husband was changed. He started to take care us, discuss family matters and we both started to earn and address daily





needs. I felt peace in my mind. Soon after that my husband went abroad for earning. I regularly attended SHG meeting and happily shared my changed situation, thanked SHG members and FEDO team. The SHG recommended me as a Community Volunteer to facilitate REFLECT sessions/group meetings, project activities in the ward. I was very happy and excited to grab this opportunities. Finally I was enrolled as a community volunteer of FEDO. I took orientation sessions, understand project goals

and its objectives and learn about my roles and responsibilities. I was also selected for the in kind support in year 2023. The in kind support items was helpful to fulfill my daily needs for few months.

I got opportunity to take twelve days MToT training on Facilitating the Gender Transformative Dialogue, where I met many other volunteers, came to listen their inspiring stories that again motivated me for this journey. The training helped me to learn about different community issues, roles and responsibilities of community volunteers to advocate for those issues. I also came to know about human rights, gender, gender roles, power and discriminations in the training. I learnt about different tools and games that can be taken in the SHG meetings. My self-confident & leadership skills has been enhanced immensely.

My identity has changed now, community people recognized me as a community leader and now I am earning becoming a full time staff of FEDO. The journey from being a survivor of domestic violence to a social leader was not an easy for me but with the support from Self-Help Group and project contributed towards a beautiful today where I am standing with a dignified life.

Together in a Campaign Against Discriminatory Norms and Harmful Practices.



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