

WHAT'S UP?

GENDER JUSTICE SPECIAL EDITION

OCTOBER 2024



OXFAM



Sita Ranabhat making braids for bag straps and purses. She has been working at Pokhara Women's Skill Development Organization (PWSD) since 2010. Her blindness did not deter her from success and leadership. She served as a member of PWSD Working Board from 2017 and 2020.. Photo: Pokhara Women's Skill Development Organization (PWSD)

INSIDE

2	We For Her
3	Saraswati's Trailblazing Achievement
4	From Dependency to Self-Reliance
5	Resilience in the Face of Floods: Anita's Dragon Fruit Triumph
6	From Darkness to Light
7	Survivor to Entrepreneur

We for her

As an intersectional feminist ally, Oxfam is committed to ending sexism and ensuring women are free from political, social, and economic oppression and exploitation. Oxfam as a global movement strives for a world in which women and their allies are supported to challenge and change the conditions of poverty and discrimination they experience and achieve gender justice and equality.

We centre the experiences and voices of women, women's rights, and feminist organizations, who play an essential role in promoting gender equality and realising women's rights to dismantle the inequalities that shape the experiences of all women and men around the world. All our work on gender justice and women's rights puts intersectional feminism at the centre, ensuring that it is strengthened at every stage.

Oxfam believes gender inequality is a fundamental driver of poverty and is dedicated to reducing gender disparity. Oxfam's commitment to gender justice aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 5, which advocates for gender equality.

Likewise, Oxfam in Nepal adopts two approaches namely gender mainstreaming and



Artwork Credit: Penkuro/Oxfam in Asia.

standalone Gender Justice programme to ensure that women and girls live life free of VAWG and empower them to take up leadership positions.

In the past year, Oxfam has enhanced the knowledge and capacity of 150 potential and elected women leaders on political system and leadership skills for their meaningful participation in local and provincial governance system. Owing to this, the women have raised issues such as gender responsive governance and budget, GBV programming, income generation programme, child vaccination, support to single women, etc. in their community. Likewise, 49 women participated in local level planning process and asked for budget and programme for women empowerment. They were able to secure NPR 715,000 budget for women economic empowerment,

gender friendly agricultural tools, GBV programme and for women leadership platform.

As a result of Oxfam's initiatives, 20 out of 55 Women leadership platform (WLP) and youth network members have taken up positions in various local-level networks, government, and non-government organization groups and mechanisms. Fourteen of them have achieved leadership positions, including 11 as chairpersons, 2 as treasurers, and 1 as a secretary.

Similarly, three CSOs have increased capacity to deliver effective, transparent, and accountable gender mainstreaming programme. Oxfam supported the CSOs on gender mainstreaming through training, mentoring staffs -connecting staffs for training and institutional capacity development.

Saraswati's trailblazing achievement



Saraswati Awasthi Ojha, first female Chairperson of Bhumiraj Basic School Management Committee at her office. Photo: Saraswati Awasthi Ojha

Saraswati Awasthi Ojha from Amarghadi Municipality, Dadelhdura district, Sudurpashchim Province has made history by becoming the first female Chairperson of School Management Committee at Bhumiraj Basic School. She was appointed the Chairperson on December 1, 2022.

Saraswati's journey into leadership was sparked by her interest in politics. In 2017 local elections, she was elected as a female Ward member. However, her initial excitement was overshadowed by the complexities of political processes and lack of understanding of her role and responsibilities. This disconnect led her to believe that politics might not be the right path for her.

A significant turning point came when Saraswati

became part of the Women's Leadership Platform (WLP)– a platform established by Oxfam and partner organizations to support networking of active, potential, and elected women leaders, in 2021. She was appointed the Secretary of WLP due to her prior experience. As the Secretary of WLP she attended numerous meetings and training sessions. These opportunities were vital for developing her skills, clarifying the complexities of her responsibilities as a ward member, and strengthening her leadership abilities.

Through her engagement with WLP, Saraswati acquired valuable insights and built her confidence. She learned about effective communication, strategic planning, and community engagement. The support network offered by WLP played a crucial role in her growth, providing her with a

platform to share experiences and learn from other women leaders.

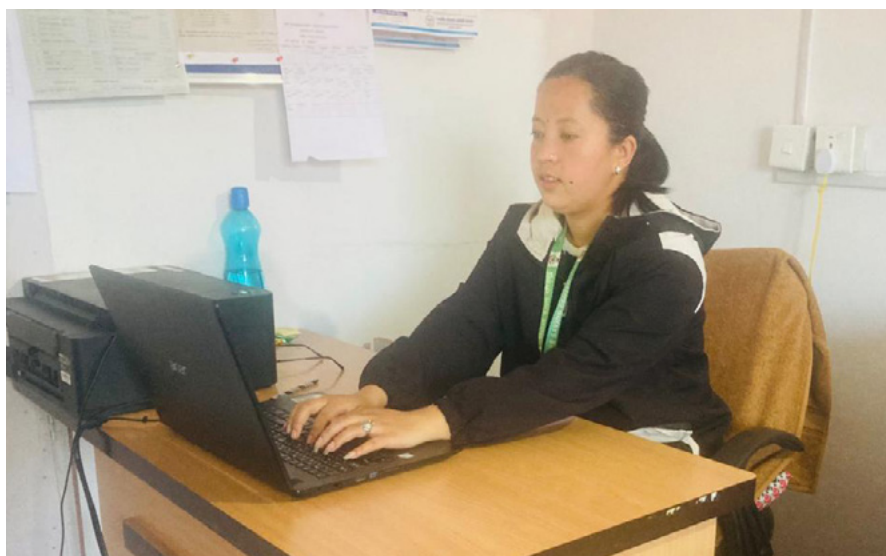
Empowered with this newfound knowledge and support, Saraswati decided to run for Chairperson of School Management Committee at her local school. Her campaign was inspired by her vision of improving educational environment and creating better opportunities for students. Her dedication and commitment resonated with the community, resulting in her historic election as the first woman to hold this position in Amarghadi Municipality.

Despite her significant accomplishment, Saraswati remains humble and recognizes the need for continued support and guidance from the Women's Leadership Platform. She is committed to furthering her development and his passionate about helping other women achieve similar successes.

Her journey highlights the impact of capacity-building programs and the importance of supportive networks in fostering female leadership. Saraswati's story inspires many women in her community and beyond, showing that with the right support and determination, significant barriers can be overcome.

From dependency to self-reliance

Sudha Rai, a 21-year-old from Amargadhi Municipality-2 in Dadeldhura district, Sudurpashchim Province comes from a family of smallholder farmers. The family of five comprises of her parents, elder brother, and a younger brother. The family relies on agriculture but it barely sustains them. Despite the family's economic challenges, Sudha managed to complete her education up to 12th grade.



Sudha Rai, member of Youth Network in Amargadhi Municipality works as a Finance Assistant at a non-government organization. Photo: Sudha Rai

Sudha's passion for social work led to her involvement in Youth Network – established by Oxfam and RUWDUC Dadeldhura to promote youth engagement in community development. As a member of the network, she attended monthly meetings and was exposed to various training sessions and workshops.

The trainings and workshops made her confident and she further sought guidance from local leaders on advancing women's roles, building their capacities, and eliminating discrimination. However, as a teenager from a humble background, she was unaware of political and community initiatives, training programs, and workshops. She felt her future would be limited to marriage and domestic responsibilities.

Equipped with her newfound confidence and the knowledge gained from trainings she attended, she has formed women's groups in the village and is involved in raising awareness of various local issues.

During one of the Youth Network meetings, she learned about computer training. She decided to pursue this training. Sudha started attending college in the mornings and computer classes in the afternoons. After mastering the basics, she enrolled in a computer institute to obtain her certificate. Even after receiving the certificate, Sudha continued to attend classes and further develop her skills.

Today, Sudha works as a Finance Assistant at Jeevan

Rakshya Kendra, a non-governmental organization based in the municipality. Reflecting on her journey, she says, "If I had not become a member of Youth Network, I would have been confined to household chores after marriage. The Youth Network is the foundation of my self-reliance and my ability to explore beyond the home."

Sudha and her family are now happy and proud of her achievements. Her engagement in social work continues, as she remains active in her community, educating women about their rights, building their capacities, and combatting discrimination. She actively participates in every women empowerment initiative in her community and attributes her significant transformation to the Youth Network.

Resilience in the Face of Floods: Anita's Dragon Fruit Triumph

Anita Sunar lives in Sonapur, Bhimdatta Municipality-13, Kanchanpur district, Sudurpashchim Province, an area prone to flooding. She lives with her four children while her husband works in Oman, middle eastern country. It is common for men from Nepal to seek work abroad because of the lack of opportunities at home. Like many women in rural Nepal, she is left to handle the household on her own amidst natural disasters and economic uncertainties.

Anita depended on her kitchen garden to feed her family, but the repeated floods destroyed her 10 katthas (3386.3 square metres) of rice-transplanted land, leaving her feeling hopeless.

"Oxfam and NEEDS Nepal launched Strengthening Community Preparedness, Rapid Response, and Recovery project in my village. It was a blessing for me," Anita recalls.

The organizations recognized Anita's challenges and offered her a sustainable solution: intercropping dragon fruit and seasonal vegetables. The project provided her with necessary training and resources such as 1500 dragon fruit plants, fencing, drip irrigation, seedlings, and a mini tiller. She was given the



opportunity to pursue large-scale dragon fruit farming, ensuring a reliable income for the family.

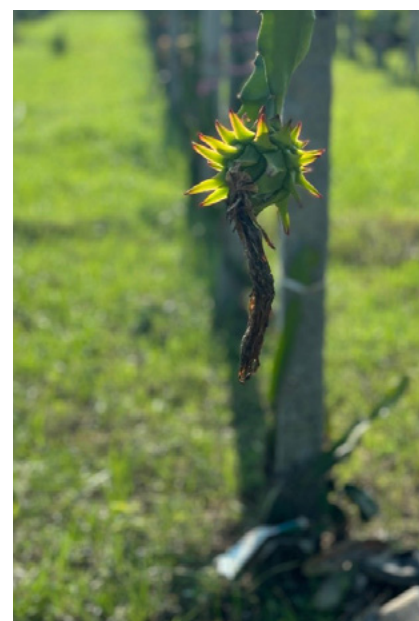
This year's monsoon flooding had minimal impact on her fields, with only two per cent of her dragon fruit plants affected. This success not only brought her great joy but also sparked hope for the future. The resilience of dragon fruit plants, which can better withstand natural disasters compared to traditional crops, showcases the project's impact.

"My dragon fruit plants stood strong during the flood, proving that with the right support, we can overcome any challenge," shared Anita.

When women like Anita are provided with the right resources and support, they can lead change and strengthen resilience within their communities. Investing

in women's empowerment not only transforms lives but also creates sustainable opportunities for future generations, encouraging us all to support initiatives that uplift vulnerable communities.

The project has also established a Community Disaster Management Committee (CDMC) in the locality to assess and respond to the challenges posed by flooding.



From Darkness to Light

Sita Ranabhat, a 48-year-old woman from Pokhara, Gandaki Province has encountered significant challenges since childhood but continues to inspire others with her resilience. Born into a family of six with one brother and two sisters, Sita's life took a difficult turn when she lost her eyesight at the age of 10 due to an untreatable condition, despite seeking medical help. Her blindness prevented her from accessing education.

While her brother and two sisters began working and moved out, Sita remained reliant on her parents for support. However, tragedy struck again when her parents passed away from heart disease in their early fifties. Left with no support, Sita's future appeared grim.

Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh, an organization for the blind, came to her aid and helped her relocate. In 2010, the organization linked her with Pokhara Women's Skill Development Organization (PWSD) – a non-profit Fair-Trade organization that has been working to empower socially and economically disadvantaged women of rural Nepal. This was a turning point in her life, providing her with financial stability and a renewed sense of purpose. Sita began her work at PWSD



Sita Ranabhat making braids for bag straps and purses. She has been working at Pokhara Women's Skill Development Organization (PWSD) since 2010.

by rolling cotton, which is used to create braids for bag straps and purses. Gradually, she mastered the craft of braid making, learning to interweave fabric strands into intricate patterns.

Her dedication and hard work did not go unnoticed, and between 2017 and 2020, Sita became a member of the PWSD working board, showcasing her leadership and commitment to the community, especially in supporting others with disabilities.

"In the past, I rarely stepped outside the house and was confined to household chores, completely reliant on others," Sita reflects. "But now, I earn my own money, visit different places, and live independently."

Oxfam supported Sita's

path to independence by providing entrepreneurship and technical skills training through PWSD. These programs helped her refine her craft, understand marketing, and find market opportunities. The capacity-building support has empowered Sita and many other artisans at PWSD, enabling them to sustain their livelihoods and build a future of self-reliance.

Sita's journey highlights how access to skills, market opportunities, and supportive networks can transform lives. From a young girl isolated due to blindness and facing economic challenges to becoming an empowered entrepreneur and role model, Sita demonstrates that with determination and the right support, lasting change is possible.

Survivor to entrepreneur



Maya from Dailekh district, Karnali Province working at her hosiery. She trains five students free of cost and they help her with her work. Photo: Rachana Mukhia/Oxfam

Maya* from Dungeshwor Municipality-6, Dailekh district, Karnali Province today runs a successful hosiery business. She also trains five students and aspires to expand her business soon.

Maya could never have imagined becoming an entrepreneur just a year ago. As a survivor of domestic violence, she returned to her parents' home with her two sons. The neglect from her husband and mistreatment by her in-laws compelled her to make the difficult decision to leave.

"I went through extremely difficult times in my life when my husband neglected me and our children. I returned to my family without any support from him. After separating from my husband, I did minimal labor work in construction near the riverside, trying to provide for my children and myself," shares Maya.

One day, I was approached by WAM organization and informed about their financial literacy class under Youth-led GESI project, jointly implemented in partnership with Oxfam and

Yuwalaya and co-funded by European Union.

Curious, I decided to join the program for three months. During the class, I had the chance to discuss my situation regarding my husband. After that, WAM worked with the local ward to provide me with legal support to pursue divorce and seek compensation from my husband. Ultimately, I was successful in obtaining compensation for my children. I now receive 8,000 NPR each month to cover their expenses and education.

The financial literacy class not only addressed my issue but also taught me how to run a business, the importance of investment, and why saving matters, among others. I was previously unaware of the various financial institutions and cooperatives in my area, but I learned about them and opened a bank account. Shortly after completing the financial literacy class, I had the opportunity to participate in a career counseling workshop organized by the project.

At the workshop, I expressed my interest in selecting a business that I wanted to pursue for my career. During my free time, I enjoyed knitting sweaters and bags, which I learned from YouTube. I felt that starting a hosiery business would be ideal for me. While I only knew how to knit by hand, I realized that we could also produce woolen sweaters and bags using a machine. With the support of WAM staff, I developed a business plan for "Haathe Hosiery".

We were then informed by the Municipality and WAM that a grant of up to NPR 700,000

would be awarded to the best business proposal. I applied with my proposal for NPR 300,000, intending to buy a knitting machine to open a shop. Later, I received the news that I had been selected for the grant support.

After selection, I got the opportunity to attend entrepreneur development training, where we learned how to write effective business proposals. I also learned about marketing and reaching out to suppliers and customers.

In the end, I received the grant after WAM conducted a thorough review of my proposal. I used NPR 100,000 to purchase four hosiery machines and NPR 200,000 for other knitting and tailoring supplies and set up my shop. I'm using my family's shutter as the shop space.

Besides running a successful business, she is also pursuing her studies.

"I was foolish to marry early without fully understanding the importance of education. After attending the financial literacy classes, I returned to

school and completed my 10th standard. I am now waiting for the results. I plan on continuing my studies," says Maya.

Today, Maya earns a monthly profit of NPR 15,000, which she uses to support her son's education outside of Dailekh for better opportunities. Furthermore, she has established a network in India and other districts beyond Dailekh, allowing her to receive orders from both India and those areas.

She encouraged her father to open a street food catering shop and convinced her brother to stay in Nepal. Now, her brother works as a barber and supports her business in his free time.

She wants to support other youths of her community, who are not employed, as well as gender-based violence survivors to become financially independent.

*Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.

If you have any concerns or queries regarding safeguarding, please contact the following number **16600150076** or send an email at **speakup@oxfam.org.uk**. For feedback and complains related to programme, please contact the following numbers— NTC: **9851179358**; Ncell: **9801571204**

FEEDBACK?

Do you have programme updates, stories, pictures, videos to share? Or, any important questions on the newsletter?

Please contact: **Rachana Mukhia, Media and Communication Officer at rmukhia@oxfam.org.uk**

www.nepal.oxfam.org | www.facebook.com/OxfamInNepal | www.twitter.com/OxfamInNepal

