

WHAT'S UP?



OXFAM

SPECIAL EDITION
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
MARCH 2024



Women Leadership Platform members of Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura district, Sudurpashchim Province attending a meeting. Since 2021, Oxfam came up with an innovative approach to reach and contribute to building capacity and confidence of elected women leaders - Women Leadership Platform. Women leadership platform has helped in reaching women leaders based on their interest and need. Photo credit: Oxfam

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Women Leadership in Politics

International Women's Day, celebrated annually on March 8 is a day for celebration of social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The campaign theme for International Women's Day 2024 is Inspire Inclusion. This year, the day calls for collective global activism to forge a more inclusive world for women.

Women's equal participation in political, economic, and public life is essential for ending gender inequality. Transformative leadership of women in politics being one of the priority areas of Oxfam, Oxfam in Nepal began its journey in women political leadership from 2017 – through "Strengthening women's political participation and leadership" project, supporting aspiring women leaders in materializing their dreams.

Around 400 community women leaders from Surkhet and Makwanpur districts were supported, and their capacities enhanced through orientation/trainings on constitutional provisions, political empowerment, leadership, and public speaking. Out of 400 women, 125 women contested in 2017 general elections, out of which 55 women were elected in key positions.

Building on this experience, in 2021, Oxfam scaled up the work with women leaders/elected

representatives to reach larger number of women leaders from local and provincial governance units specifically from most marginalized and deprived groups. Young potential leaders were also involved through women leadership platform created to raise and discuss concerns and empower women's participation in their respective communities. Adding to this, other Oxfam approaches such as women empowerment centers, farmer field schools, community disaster management committees have proven to aide in overcoming barriers that women face. With support of our partners, Oxfam strengthened 232 community groups and 41 women from these groups were elected in May 2022 local election as Deputy Mayor (1 individual) and ward members (40 individuals).

Nepal's 2015 constitution mandates 40.4 percent of all nominees' seats be reserved for women. This resulted in a historical milestone for gender friendly and inclusive development in 2017 Nepal elections with 41 percent women representations in local, 34 percent in provincial assemblies, 32 percent in federal parliament and 37 percent in National Assembly respectively.

However, the scenario changed in 2022 general elections.

The alliance politics hugely impacted women candidacy. Out of 46,693 nominations for executive positions at the local level –mayor, deputy mayor, chairpersons and vice-chairpersons and ward chairpersons—only 4,851 were women.

The election result of 2022 has given a lesson that it is equally important for us to work with leadership within political parties and influence them for making gender friendly system with their parties. Therefore, Oxfam will be focussing on closely engaging with elected women leaders in strengthening their network at local and provincial level. We will further focus on building confidence of young girls and women to be political leaders.

The significant number of women especially from marginalized communities coming into power has provided unprecedented opportunity for gender equality and inclusiveness. In this issue of our newsletter, we would like to invite you to read the stories of some of our phenomenal women leaders who have been trailblazing change in their respective communities.

Harvesting Leadership Through Farmers Field School

Indra Oli from Joroyal Rural Municipality-1, Doti district, Sudurpashchim Province has lived a life filled with challenges, triumphs, and a deep commitment to her community. She got married at the age of 17 and became a mother of five daughters.

Tragedy struck in 2004 when her husband met a fatal accident, leaving her alone to raise her daughters. Despite the odds, Indra worked hard to provide for her children. Her journey took her to community service when she assumed the role of chairperson for Dibya Jyoti Farmer's Group, a responsibility she carried for over a decade. She volunteered tirelessly for community forestry, committed to environmental conservation.

From 2015 to 2017, Indra served as a facilitator at Farmers Field School (FFS) in the municipality. She considers her time as a facilitator her most cherished moment as it was a feat, she achieved despite the challenges she faced as a single woman, enduring allegations, and accusations. Through her role as a facilitator, she was involved in raising awareness about various forms of gender discrimination and violence, such as Chhaupadi and unequal treatment of sons and daughters.

Indra's popularity in her village and years of dedicated volunteer service led to friends, seniors, and neighbors encouraging her to enter the political arena. With their support she ran for the position of Ward Member and was elected.

Reflecting on her political journey, Indra emphasizes the importance of teamwork, effective communication, and active listening in both her campaign and her work. She is overjoyed to serve her community. She has taken it upon herself to inform the citizens about various services available through local wards and municipalities. She raises awareness



Indra Oli, Ward Member from Joroyal Rural Municipality-1, Doti district, Sudurpashchim Province. Photo credit: Indra Oli

about judiciary committee and mediation worker and has referred numerous cases for resolution. Public sanitation campaigns, water source conservation, and promoting women's participation in public programs are among her other notable contributions.

Indra's commitment to empowering women from underprivileged groups remains unwavering. Her story serves as an inspiration to all, reminding us of the positive impact one individual can make when dedicated to the betterment of society.

She hopes to run for the post of Ward Chairperson in the next general election. She firmly believes that creative efforts and ability to win hearts of many are essential in political leadership.

Navigating Leadership and Empowerment



Dipa Kathayat speaking to a women leadership platform member. Oxfam has established 4 women leadership platforms in 4 municipalities of Baitadi and Dadeldhura districts and reached 1,171 women leaders and aspiring women leaders. Photo Credit: Oxfam

Oxfam promotes women's leadership in politics, and works via women leadership platform approach with elected women, judiciary committee at municipality, young girls, and their families to create an enabling environment for them to take up meaningful and substantive positions in government and process.

Dipa Kathayat from Amargadhi

Municipality-3, Dadeldhura district, Sudurpashchim Province was first elected as a female Ward Member in 2017 (2074 BS) general elections. However, at that time, she was uncertain about her role and responsibilities and wondered how to communicate with people as a Ward Member. She felt that she was unable to do justice to her role as she was in the public domain for

the first time. She had limited exposure to formal leadership and required capacities.

Later, Dipa became a member of women leadership platform – a platform established by Oxfam and partner organizations to support networking of active, potential, and elected women leaders. Oxfam and partners conduct various capacity building sessions including

regular meetings that includes local level stakeholders and previous elected women leaders to share their learning and challenges, local level planning process (LLPP), and public speaking sessions.

Likewise, Dipa's involvement with women leadership platform helped her in gaining exposure and confidence through mentoring, coaching and capacity building trainings organized by Rural Women's Development and Unity Centre (RUWDUC) and Oxfam. She was elected for a second term in the local level election in 2022 (2079 BS). She shares that this time her experience is different.

"I am very proactive and can identify my role and responsibility as a female ward member. I feel I can do justice to my position this time

around. I have been actively supporting the community in accessing ward-level services and raising awareness about the importance of citizenship and birth certificates. All of this happened because of the training and capacity development orientations provided by Oxfam and RUWDUC," Dipa shared.

Joining women leadership platform has made the elected women in the municipality more conscious of their role in decision-making. Dipa now actively participates in budget allocation for the ward level. However, she mentioned that some male members still hesitate to allocate a budget specifically for women. The municipality's GESI policy dictates allocation of at least 35 percent of the budget for marginalized communities

including women, children, people with disabilities, Dalit along with other socially, geographically deprived communities.

Dipa and other women leaders are working to make the men aware of importance of such allocations.

She adds, "Now I have a clear picture of what I can achieve as a woman if given equal opportunities. From knowing nothing to gaining knowledge from different sources, I've become wiser, enabling me to raise my voice at different levels."

The women leadership platform in Amargadhi Municipality is making a significant impact in fostering women's leadership in politics and promoting equal opportunities in decision-making.



Members of women leadership platform in Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura district, Sudurpashchim Province pose for a photograph after attending a meeting. Photo Credit: Oxfam

Sowing Change: Renu's Rise from Facilitator to Ward Chairperson



Renu Chaudhary, Ward Chairperson of Ward No. 3, Joshipur Rural Municipality, Kailali district. Renu was a facilitator at Farmers Field School (FFS) under Sowing Diversity Harvesting Security project (2019-2023) implemented by LI-BIRD and Oxfam. Photo Credit: Renu Chaudhary

Renu Chaudhary, Ward Chairperson of Ward No. 3, Joshipur Rural Municipality, Kailali district, Sudurpashchim Province is an epitome of leadership and unwavering commitment. Renu belongs to Kamaiya family (now abolished traditional system of bonded labour that was practised in western Terai region of Nepal). Her ancestors had toiled for years as bonded laborers in the households of landlords, and with their newfound freedom they started getting involved in shared cropping to earn a livelihood.

In her community, Renu was among the lucky few to get educated. Her family supported her educational journey, and she studied until intermediate level. Her education supported her in taking up the role of a

facilitator at Farmers Field School (FFS) implemented by Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) and Oxfam. She got the opportunity to facilitate seed system strengthening project "Sowing Diversity Harvesting Security" jointly launched by LI-BIRD and Oxfam in her village. This earned her respect and recognition from her community.

A pivotal moment in her life was when she underwent a transformative seven-day training program on conservation of local landraces and FFS facilitation skills. This training not only bolstered her confidence but also erased shyness she once grappled with.

The exposure she got as a facilitator equipped her with skills and knowledge necessary to start her political journey. Renu ventured into politics to make a tangible impact in her area. With unwavering support from her family, relatives, and friends, she vied for the position of Ward Chairperson in 2022 general elections.

As a Ward Chairperson, Renu is now focused on promoting women's empowerment and advocating for gender equality. She has been organizing various income generating trainings for the women such as sandal making, fiber bag production, and embroidery. She has been further recommending domestic violence cases to the Municipality's judicial committee.

Renu is also actively engaged in raising awareness on women and children's issues in partnership with Child Welfare Committee.

Renu Chaudhary is a beacon of inspiration, resilience, transformation, and effective leadership. Her commitment to women empowerment, gender equality, and community development promises to bring lasting changes in her society.

Nanda Nath: Homemaker to Changemaker

Nanda Nath is from Parshuram Municipality-5, Dadeldhura district, Sudurpashchim Province and is a member of Shivashakti Women Empowerment Center (WEC).

She faced hardships from a very early age due to which she could not get access to formal education.

"I could not even pronounce the names of organizations like Oxfam and RUWDUC, when I first got involved with Shivashakti WEC," shares Nanda.

Women Empowerment Center (WEC) is an approach adopted by Oxfam for empowering women. WEC brings women and girls as well as men and boys together for up to two hours regularly to strengthen their knowledge on women's rights, gender issues, local decision-making processes, improve their advocacy and leadership skills in participatory manner.

"I did not know how to introduce myself in a group. I was continuously afraid that I might say something wrong. My life passed doing household chores within four walls of the house," explains Nanda adding, "My in-laws and husband did not allow me to leave the

house. They would scold me and say that women should not go out."

Nanda is today a Ward Member from Ward No. 5 of Parshuram Municipality. She credits her success to WEC, Oxfam and partners. She mentions that WEC played a vital role in advocating for women's rights in her ward that led her to getting elected.

Nanda recalls learning how to introduce themselves for the first time after joining WEC. The members were shy of speaking up initially. WEC would meet twice every month. Later, WEC members started getting vocal about issues faced by the community. The members would approach ward and municipality officials with problems and demand that they be addressed.

WEC gave Nanda confidence and exposure to be part of the general elections in 2022 and she got elected as Ward Member. "Had it not been for the support and encouragement of WEC, I would never have entered the political arena," says Nanda.

WEC has now proved to be an enabling space for the



Nanda Nath (in purple sweater) addressing Shivashakti WEC members at a meeting.
Photo Credit: Suman Bhatta, RUWDUC

community members. "If we face any problems in our community, men and women members of WEC sit down together to discuss it and decide on way forward," explains Nanda.

Her community had been facing drinking water supply issues for a long time and WEC members had approached the ward office five years ago, but to no avail.

After taking up the position of Ward Member, Nanda has successfully allocated 700,000 NPR (5,263 USD) budget to solve the water issue. She is actively involved in addressing problems of her community.

Today, I am respected by community members. My family is also proud of me as they are now recognized as Nanda's children, husband, and in-laws.

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