

# WHAT'S UP?

SPECIAL EDITION  
WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

JUNE 2024



OXFAM



*Chanda Kumari Bam from Parsuram Municipality-6, Dadeldhura district, Sudurpaschim Province showing off her harvest this year. For the first time in 15 years, her once barren fields was covered in lush greenery following Oxfam's land reclamation initiative. Photo: Susma Panta/Oxfam*

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# #GenerationRestoration

World Environment Day is the United Nations Day celebrated annually on 5 June that encourages worldwide awareness and action to protect our environment. This year's World Environment Day campaign focuses on land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience under the slogan "Our land. Our future. We are #GenerationRestoration."

As we face the triple planetary crisis: crisis of climate change, crisis of nature and biodiversity loss, and crisis of pollution and waste, it is imperative that we direct our efforts to mitigate it. Billions of hectares of land across the world are degraded, affecting almost half of the world's population. Rural communities, smallholder farmers and the extremely poor particularly women are the hardest hit.

Oxfam has been endeavoring to raise awareness of the human impact of climate change

and how climate change, inequality and poverty are linked and reinforce each other. We advocate for climate justice – making sure that the voices of those most impacted by the climate crisis are heard and drive the solutions, above all women.

Similarly, in Nepal, Oxfam has been working with partner organizations to improve livelihoods, promote food security, equip them with necessary knowledge and trainings to manage climate emergency and build resilience.

Oxfam in Nepal has been promoting climate smart agriculture including promoting riverbank farming, greenhouse farming, enhancing the capacity of small holder farmers to access, develop, and use plant genetic resources to improve food and nutrition security, promoting vermi-compost production, use of organic fertilizers.

Likewise, Oxfam has been involved in land reclamation in Sudurpashchim Province. The flooded land that had remained barren for more than 15 years have yielded crops for the first time this year bringing happiness and hope for the communities.

Oxfam has further initiated citizen-led advocacy for more access and control over water resources as well as conservation and protection of Mahakali River, that borders India and Nepal.

Through this edition of our newsletter, we would like to share with you our efforts in protecting the environment and our contribution as #GenerationRestoration.



# From Flooded Fields to Full Harvest

This is more than just a story of land reclamation; it's a narrative of perseverance, hope, and resilience of 14 families who have endured trials for the past 15 years. From 1988 to 2007, the expansion of Puntura and Rangun rivers up to Simalkhet, Parshuram Municipality-6, Dadeldhura district, Sudurpaschim Province brought unprecedented challenges to 14 households. The first signs of trouble emerged in 1988 when the rivers began encroaching their arable land and filling it with sand and rock.

Chandra Kumari Bam recounts, "This river expansion wasn't a one-time event; it was an ongoing pattern, with little to no significant action taken."

"When we first settled in this village, the land was fertile. It yielded bountiful harvests, sustaining our families and even allowing us to sell surplus produce to cover expenses, including school fees for our children," Chandra added.

Oxfam's Community Disaster Risk Reduction (CRDRR) project facilitated the reclamation of barren land in 2023. The initiative has benefitted the families with around 2.95 hectares of land being reclaimed. This has allowed the community to cultivate a variety of crops such as rice, sesame, and wheat. For the first time in 15 years, these 14 families harvested rice, a symbolic achievement signaling a return to self-sufficiency.

Despite challenges like seasonal waterlogging and the need for ongoing maintenance, the families remain hopeful and optimistic about the future.



*Before land reclamation*



*Land Reclamation in progress*



*After Land Reclamation*



# Journey from Barren to Bountiful



*Dipak Sawad irrigating his rice plantation*

In the heart of Dadeldhura district in Sudurpashchim Province lies Thanda Jala village, where for more than 20 years, around 3.4 hectares of land remained barren. Although Rangun and Puntura rivers flow nearby, the community faced significant challenges in accessing water for agriculture, jeopardizing the livelihoods of 16 households.

“Our land remained barren for years. We could only harvest crops during monsoon season. Without proper irrigation, we could not plant other crops. We had to buy vegetables from the market,” says Dipak Sawad.

Through various consultations with local stakeholders, it was evident that the immediate need was to establish a reliable

irrigation system. Oxfam and local partner National Environment and Equity Development Society (NEEDS) Nepal devised a solution together with the community. A piped irrigation scheme was established that has proven to be a game-changer for the community. With water now readily available, the once barren land has begun to flourish. Farmers rejoiced as they witnessed their once barren fields transform into lush green fields.

Community members share that they have started growing a diverse range of vegetables, both seasonal and off-season such as chilies, tomatoes, brinjal (eggplant), cauliflower, cabbage, and more. They

will be harvesting these vegetables in May this year. They hope to sell some of their harvest in the market.

The Thanda Jala community is a shining example of what can be achieved through collective effort and unwavering determination. What began as a story of hardship has blossomed into a testament of resilience and success.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of their irrigation system, the community has implemented a rental system for agricultural equipment like mini-tillers, fans, and chaff cutters. The collected rent is then used for maintenance of the irrigation system.

# Fields of Change

Bal Kumari Ghimire from Chandrapur Municipality-4, Rautahat district in Madhesh Province represents the spirit of resilience and entrepreneurship. She is a treasurer at Integrated Animal Developmental Agricultural Group. She lives with her husband and in-laws, while her two children pursue education outside the district. Bal Kumari and her family are engaged in agriculture & livestock as their source of livelihood.

Bal Kumari had harbored a hoped to venture into vermi-compost production for the past nine years. However, with no technical knowledge and support from her husband, her aspirations did not materialize. Instead, she invested in a buffalo farm, which became her primary source of income.

The turning point came with the implementation of Oxfam's Climate Change Adaptation & Advocacy Project (C-CAAP) in Chandrapur Municipality jointly implemented by local partner Rural Development Centre Nepal. Through her agricultural group's association with the project, Bal Kumari's potential for climate-smart agriculture caught the attention of the project team. They recognized her existing infrastructure, the buffalo farm, as an ideal foundation for vermi-compost production.



*Vermi-compost produced by Bal Kumari Ghimire*

Through the project, Bal Kumari received technical guidance and support to establish the vermi-compost production initiative. With close guidance on infrastructure construction, bed preparation, and moisture management, Bal Kumari embarked on her journey towards sustainable agriculture. The project provided essential resources, including vermi-worms and other basic requirement materials support for vermi composting, enabling her to kickstart the production process.

Few months of dedication and hard work resulted in Bal Kumari successfully producing vermi-compost, which she sold in the locality and utilized on her own agricultural land.

"I will expand vermi-compost production by increasing the number of beds of vermi-compost production. I am planning on packaging it in 1kg and 5kg packets to sell in market to meet the growing demand," shares Bal Kumari. Bal Kumari's achievements were further validated when she won the vermi-compost manure showcasing event organized by Small Farmers Cooperatives within the municipality.

Today, Bal Kumari serves as an inspiration to her peers, advocating for adoption of vermi-compost as a sustainable alternative to chemical fertilizers. Her home has become a hub for vermi-compost sales, reflecting the increasing demand for her eco-friendly products.



# Citizen-led River Health Report

Oxfam has been working with communities living in the banks of Mahakali River in Sudurpashchim Province through Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA) project, for more than five years. The project aims to empower riverine community for more access and control over water resources, shared between the two bordering countries – India and Nepal.

Community members are trained to collect and test water samples of Mahakali River to generate data on water pollution. Citizen scientists regularly conduct these tests in specific locations to identify changes in pollution level over a period.

The data collected contributes to citizen-led River Health Report. The report comprises process for identification of common transboundary water related problems, prioritisation of issues, application of citizen science tools to understand river health and develop appropriate strategies for increasing Transboundary Water Cooperation.



*Anjali Devi Bohra, Nirmala Kathayat, and Laxmi Bhandari test the quality of Mahakali River in Kanchanpur district, Sudurpashchim Province. TROSA project has trained citizen scientists to test water samples of Mahakali River to generate data on water pollution to advocate for effective policies and raise awareness. Photo: Kishor Sharma/Oxfam.*

The shared rivers are always neglected due to high sensitivity, overextraction of resources in the absence of cooperation among communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), and riverine countries.

Despite the socio-cultural ties between communities from both countries there has been no joint efforts in the conservation and protection of the river. This is where Oxfam has stepped in and pushed for collaboration between both communities to ensure that resources such as sand mining, water for irrigation, fishing is shared equally.

To overcome riverine communities' suffering, citizen science tool has significantly contributed to community mobilisation, empowerment, and data generation. The data is collected by citizen scientists from Nepal and India and shared during transboundary meetings. This has helped influence Mahakali basin stakeholders to agree and develop joint action plan during Mahakali Sambad (Dialogue in English). The meetings are attended by ministers, political leaders, local government officials, communities, CSOs, journalists, women leaders, and researchers from both countries.

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## FEEDBACK?

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

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