



# **YOUTH LED GESI INITIATIVES FOR COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES AND ACTION IN NEPAL**

Empowering Youth, Transforming Societies



Co-funded by  
the European Union



**OXFAM**

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# FOREWORD

Oxfam has been working in Nepal to strengthen civic spaces and peoples' actions to end all forms of inequalities and social injustices, through various initiatives on climate, gender, water governance with a deep commitment to inclusive local partnerships including locally led humanitarian leadership. Oxfam adopts a feminist approach to all our work, our organizational culture, and our behaviors.

The Youth Led GESI Initiatives for COVID-19 Recovery Strategies and Action in Nepal project was a three-year project launched to promote youth-driven efforts towards achieving gender equality and social inclusion in the development process of post COVID-19 crisis. The project not only promoted youth participation in politics and the economy but also enabled building capacity of young people in Karnali and Sudurpashchim Provinces post-COVID-19.

Primarily, this project sought to empower youth to advocate for inclusive youth engagement and opportunities within policy-making processes, while simultaneously strengthening their understanding and commitment to gender equality and social inclusion.



Tripti Rai  
Country Director  
Oxfam in Nepal

Challenges remain, particularly in terms of continued commitments from local governments to implement GESI policies and fully integrating youth into political leadership roles. This project made significant strides in addressing these challenges by fostering collaboration and understanding between local governments and youth by facilitating platforms and enhancing meaningful engagements.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the European Union for their crucial support in co-funding this project. I also want to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the Oxfam in Nepal team and partners, and especially youth leaders whose hard work and collaboration were instrumental to the project's success.

This booklet features inspiring stories of young people and the transformative changes in their lives. We hope these stories will motivate and encourage other young people and galvanise support of decision makers, development partners and supporters to continue to strengthen youth leadership to actively play leadership roles to help achieve an Equal and Justice Future for all.



# CONTENTS

Oxfam International	3
Oxfam in Nepal	3
Gender Justice	3
About the Project	4
Project Achievement	5
Reflection from Local Governance	9
Financial Literacy Class (FLC) Approach:	13
Financial Support to Third Party (FSTP) Approach:	16
Strengthening Local GBV Service Providers and Supporting Survivors	25
Youth Network Formation	35
Reflect Approach	39
Mentorship Approach	43
Male Role Model Approach	45
Challenges And Learning	47

## OXFAM INTERNATIONAL

Oxfam is a global movement of people fighting inequality to end poverty and injustice. Across regions from local to global, Oxfam works with people on transformative changes. Oxfam's work is grounded in the commitment to the universality of human rights. Driven by diversity and founding our tasks in evidence and experience, we take

side against poverty and injustice everywhere. Our vision is a world that is just and sustainable. Oxfam is a global confederation that includes 21 member organisations, or affiliates, who contribute their diverse strengths and expertise to help achieve our shared goals across more than 79 countries, including in Asia.

## OXFAM IN NEPAL

Oxfam has worked in Nepal since the 1980s through various development, humanitarian and influencing initiatives in close collaboration and partnerships with people, organisations, and institutions. Oxfam's vision for Nepal as a humanitarian and development organization is to strengthen civic space and peoples' actions to end all

forms of inequalities and social injustices, informed by a decolonial feminist lens rooted in the Global South.

Oxfam in Nepal has 3 interconnected programs viz. Gender Justice, Resilience and Climate Justice, and Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Water Governance to meet the country level goals.

## GENDER JUSTICE

Oxfam believes gender inequality is a fundamental driver of poverty. The organisation is dedicated to reducing gender disparity and ensuring that women and girls and gender non binary people enjoy their human rights. Oxfam's commitment to gender justice aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 5, which advocates for gender equality. For this, Oxfam in Nepal adopts two approach – gender mainstreaming and standalone Gender Justice thematic area.

The Gender Justice Program is committed to ensuring women and girls live life free of violence, where girls

and women are empowered to have free choice, equal opportunities, holding position broad leadership positions.

The program endeavours for social and economic empowerment of women by working against Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWGs). The program further aims to enhance the capacity of women leaders to fulfill their potential for social and gender transformative leadership.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Youth-led GESI Initiatives for COVID-19 Recovery Strategies and Action in Nepal, a three-year project co-funded by the European Union, was implemented by Oxfam under Gender Justice Program in partnership with Yuwalaya and Women Association for Marginalized Women (WAM). The project's main objective was to promote youth-led gender equality and social inclusion in the development process of post COVID recovery of Nepal, in addition to enhancing the political and socio - economic participation of youth from Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces.

This project also took a Youth Sounding Board (YSB) group as a strategic network to support the project in quality ensure and provide support to the project in youths-based actions and analytical feedback. Youth empowerment is a top priority for European Union Commissioner for International Partnerships. The Youth Sounding Board (YSB) is a consultative space for Nepalese youth to have an influence on the European Union's actions, making them more participatory, relevant, and effective for youth. It is an all-inclusive platform of engagement designed to bring together youth voices at the table to guide the European Union partnership with Nepal.

This project worked with 1st and 2nd Cohort of Youth Sounding Board of Nepal with total 50 youths. The YSB members composed of different thematic areas 1. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, 2. Climate Change and Youth & Governance. Youth Led GESI project worked with the GESI group to especially use their expertise on certain components of project and also create space for them to understand the Nepal challenging context in terms of GESI.

**The project is focused on two major areas:**

### 1. Capacity Building of Youths:

1.1. Creating platform for the young people of all gender on GESI advocacy, policy dialogues, campaigns, and informal educations to enhance their knowledge in GESI and enhance the youth capacity in youth's

governance and ensure the GESI advocacy in different platforms through youths

- 1.2. Support to create the youth's structure at ward and municipal level to enhance the youth's capacity in local governance and ensure youth's participation in local governance planning process for inclusive youth's target budget.
- 1.3. Enhancing the capacity of youths of all gender in financial literacy and micro business through vocational trainings and financial grant support to third party (FSTP) to ensure the economic enhancement and financial security of local youths.

### 2. Capacity Building of Local Governance, service providers and other stakeholders:

- 2.1. GESI policy influencing at local governance and support to endorse the GESI policy to ensure the enabling environment from local governance that ultimately support community to have GESI mainstreamed service and opportunities.
- 2.2. Support to local governance to ensure that the local governance forms the local youth's council structure as mandated by National Youth Council policy and guideline.
- 2.3. Capacity building of GBV service providers in survivor centred approach and referral mechanism to ensure dignified and easy access of survivor to GBV service and reporting.
- 2.4. Lobbying and coordination meeting with local cooperatives and financial institutions to ensure that local youths have sustainable transaction with cooperatives and financial institutions which shall support them in sustainable financial security.

# PROJECT ACHIEVEMENT

**907 young people (668 female)** enhanced their capacity in financial literacy participating in 3 months of FLC course



Financial Literacy training

**301/ 907 youths (231 female)** have financial transaction with different local financial cooperatives and bank



Linkage support to youths to local financial cooperatives and banking

**101 youths (70%female)** enhanced their existing business (poultry farm, mushroom farm, hen rearing, goat farming with their own investment within 1 year of the project after enhancing their knowledge in financial literacy



Business startup

**31 best business youth entrepreneurs (3 male)** were selected for FSTP award in coordination with local municipalities

Financial Grant support award



**88 business plans/proposal** were developed by youths and submitted for FSTP award (financial support to third party grant)

Financial Grant Support Opportunity call open



**Further 55 interested youths (43 female)** were supported with career counselling training to support the youths to select their desired career

Career Counselling Training



**31 selected youths entrepreneurs** understood about their business product market  
Youths learned to develop the business proposal, procurement process, supply chain, value chain and marketing of the product



Entrepreneur development training

**31 youths** already have established the micro business.  
**28 are already** making income



Business startup

Project further did the continuous support to the FSTP target participants including other participants of FLC to wider their market, informing them about the existing supply chain within and outside district through EDF and Youth facilitators



Supply chain and market linkage

**24 identified FSTP target participants** supported with vocational trainings for their sustainability of the business scope

Vocational training for remaining who further needed skills and were not selected for the FSTP award



**31 business of FSTP target participants** are already registered in the small and medium enterprises at local level with the support of project.  
**8 livestock** insurance are done by participants in support of project lobbying

Registration of business



GESI policy and Youth council guideline established at **4** target municipalities.



**34** wards level youth clubs formed

**4**



**4** municipalities formed Municipal level youth network

**3**



**3** municipalities now have formal local youth council in their structure, on basis of developed youth council guideline

**4**



All **4** municipalities now hold strategic action plan for policy implementation in support of project.

## A. CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT OF YOUTHS IN GESI, YOUTHS GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY

**5** Federal level, **2** Provincial Level and **6** Local level policy dialogues among policy makers were led by youths for the advocacy of inclusive youths' participation and opportunities- **284** youths participated.

**92** youths participated in good governance training led to clarity on the governance roles, structure, function, and accountable approach.

**16** local youths were provided opportunities to work as intern in the local governance to understand both administration and political structure and mechanism of local governance.

**24** Intergenerational dialogues were led by youths reaching **571** local youths with an agenda of harmful social norms, and youths rights and opportunities.

**4** groups were formed of youths as shadow governance to support the local governance as strategic partners.

## B. SERVICE PROVIDERS CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND LINKAGE

1. Through Coordination with and capacity building of 16 service providers (that includes OCMC, ward, municipality women section, health posts)



**25 cases** were referred by safehouse and OCMC to Oxfam local partner WAM for legal aid support, where they received support with legal aid (acute response).



Mapped and established GBV referral pathways within 4 target municipalities and disseminated referral pathway to local communities.



**42 GBV survivor** received training on legal rights and process, OCMC and safehouse services, referral and reporting mechanism.

2. Through Lobbying and interaction meetings among local financial institutions and cooperatives and youths



**310 (231 female)** youths currently are registered and have transaction with local financial institutions, cooperatives, and banks

3. To enhance the access of youths to sexual rights and reproductive health rights



**4 health posts** are supported to develop the youth support corners.

## REFLECTION FROM LOCAL GOVERNANCE

“The project has played a crucial role in empowering individuals and fostering economic growth.

The financial assistance provided to individuals in the municipality through Youth-led GESI project is noteworthy. This has provided the community with income generation opportunities. I am optimistic about future partnerships with organizations that align with the municipality’s goals of promoting economic development and reducing poverty.” - Gauri Singh Rawal, Mayor of Patan Municipality, Baitadi district, Sudurpashchim Province



“The best part of Youth-led GESI project was enhancement youth capacity through mock parliaments, good governance, and shadow governance training, providing a platform for policy dialogues. The project has further supported economic empowerment by providing financial grants, enabling many youths to establish businesses and generate income.

As a deputy mayor I have been advocating for utilizing GESI responsive budget as per its standard criteria. The GESI policy that the Municipality has developed with the support from the project has brought some level of awareness among us. I am hopeful the strategic action plan that the Municipality is developing through project support will help bring more clarity and in budget allocation.” - Kamal Singh Bohara, Deputy Mayor of Patan Municipality, Baitadi district, Sudurpashchim Province





"It was interesting when representatives from Yuwalaya, WAM, and Oxfam approached us to introduce the Youth Led GESI project. A key strength of the project was its alignment with the municipality. Every activity and plan were coordinated with us and the MPAC focal point.

I was impressed by the project's dual focus on youth capacity building and municipality capacity enhancement. This approach has enabled the municipality to better understand

the importance of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and youth engagement in the planning process.

While our municipality now has a GESI policy in place, its implementation remains a challenge. I assure that the Municipality will prioritize the implementation of the policy through a strategic action plan supported by the project."

- Ganesh Bahadur Thapa, Chairperson of Bhagwatimai Rural Municipality, Dailekh district, Karnali Province

"Over three years, the Youth-led GESI project, in collaboration with the municipality, worked with economically, socially, and ethnically vulnerable groups in five wards of Bhagwatimai RM.

I was satisfied with the project's focus on marginalized communities. I personally attended REFLECT and financial literacy classes conducted by the project. I was impressed by how the REFLECT approach empowered young people with knowledge about gender-based violence prevention, gender equality, youth rights, and social mapping. Additionally, the financial literacy classes have helped young people, particularly women, understand financial management.

The project further provided financial grants to seven female youth entrepreneurs in Bhagwatimai RM, empowering them to start their own businesses and generate income. The project also supported GBV survivors with legal aid, in collaboration with the municipality and OCMC. I am appreciative of the work done by the project.

I commit to visiting the households of youth entrepreneurs to monitor their progress, challenges, and needs. The municipality also offers various support mechanisms, such as agricultural machinery, vocational training, and skill development training, to help these women entrepreneurs sustain their businesses." - Deputy Chair, Bhagwatimai Rural Municipality, Dailekh district, Karnali Province

## FINANCIAL LITERACY CLASS (FLC) APPROACH

Financial Literacy Class (FLC) was one of the initial components of the project designed to help individuals understand and manage their personal finances effectively. The goal was to equip participants with essential knowledge and skills for making informed decisions about budgeting, saving, investing, debt management, and other financial matters, which would ultimately support young people to grow economically. The three-month long course was conducted on the first and second year of the project. In the initial phase, a Training of Trainers (TOT) program was implemented to equip specific groups with financial literacy knowledge. Subsequently, these trained individuals conducted two sessions of financial literacy classes, engaging a total of 907 young individuals, of whom 668 were female. The financial literacy class targeted vulnerable and marginalized youth, both male and female, as outlined in the project criteria.

### Building Confidence and Financial Security Through FLC

Financial Literacy Class (FLC) conducted under Youth-led GESI project has significantly impacted 30-year-old Krishna Kumari Sharma's life. The classes not only improved her financial knowledge but also boosted her self-esteem. Despite an early marriage and financial challenges, Krishna Kumari and her husband have persevered.

Krishna Kumari Sharma from Bhagwatimai Rural Municipality-1 of Dailekh district in Karnali Province lives with her husband and two daughters. Today, she runs a cosmetic shop and a small local grocery store, while her husband works at a local NGO.

Krishna Kumari, a +2 graduate, started her grocery store in 2008 to support her family. The minimal income helped cover daily expenses, but the family struggled to provide a good environment for their children. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated their challenges, leading to decreased motivation and energy.





The Financial Literacy Class (FLC) was a turning point for Krishna Kumari. The classes not only improved her financial knowledge but also boosted her confidence and motivation. She learned about saving, credit, and financial planning, empowering her to make informed financial decisions. The FLC helped her overcome feelings of inadequacy and inspired her to pursue her goals.

After completing the Financial Literacy Class, Krishna Kumari expanded her business by opening a cosmetic shop, in addition to her existing grocery store. She and her husband have now opened savings accounts

in local banks and invested in land. These financial advancements have significantly improved their family's standard of living, enabling them to provide better care and opportunities for their children.

Krishna Kumari credits the Financial Literacy Class (FLC) for empowering her and boosting her confidence. She shares, "The program has helped me realize my potential and inspired me to pursue my entrepreneurship. I hope to continue expanding my business and achieving financial independence."

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THIRD PARTY (FSTP) APPROACH:

Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) is a grant-based approach used by the European Union (EU) to empower vulnerable communities. Through this approach, the EU supports initiatives that address gender equality, inclusion, climate resilience, youth governance, and humanitarian issues.

In the context of the project, FSTP was utilized to fund two primary objectives: income generation and youth-led actions. Oxfam's local partners, WAM and Yuwalaya, implemented FSTP. They developed guidelines and selected 31 young entrepreneurs (including 3 male) to receive grants of up to NPR 7 lakh for various ventures, such as livestock farming, agriculture, and small businesses.

Additionally, FSTP supported 21 youth-led collective actions focused on addressing harmful social norms, promoting indigenous culture, and building digital skills.

### Empowering Women Through Collaborative Entrepreneurship:

Deepa Thapa Magar (34), Jamuna Buda Thapa Magar (25), and Nirmala Ale Magar (33) from Dungeshwor Rural Municipality who have formed a bamboo-based business with support from the Youth-Led GESI project. Despite early marriages and limited education, they have taken the initiative to improve their economic situation.

Deepa, Jamuna, and Nirmala, sought to improve their family's financial situation by starting a joint business. Inspired by Nirmala's bamboo craft skills, they decided to pursue this venture. Nirmala, who had received training in bamboo craft, would produce small quantities of bamboo items like chairs, racks, and mirrors for local sale. However, limited resources hindered her from scaling up production.

The three women participated in a three-month Financial Literacy Class, which significantly impacted their understanding of financial management. Inspired by the training, they developed a business plan for bamboo product business with the help of WAM facilitator and applied for FSTP grant from the Youth-Led GESI project.

Their proposal was selected following which they got an opportunity to participate in entrepreneur development training which helped them to revise the budget planning for business as per actual cost and estimation. They secured a 400,000 NPR grant and used the funds to purchase raw materials like bamboo and ropes and equipment to start the bamboo furniture business.



Today, Deepa, Jamuna, and Nirmala generate a monthly profit of approximately 30,000 NPR from their bamboo business. They sell their products locally in Dailekh district. They also maintain a joint bank account and reinvest the profits into their business and family needs, such as medical expenses, education, and special occasions. Their families are supportive of their entrepreneurial endeavors.

The Municipality has also acknowledged their entrepreneurial spirit and dedication to their business. Deepa and Jamuna recently completed vocational training in bamboo craft. To address the seasonal nature

of their business, they have started planting bamboo trees on their land to reduce future costs.

Nirmala explained, "Monsoon is a bad season for bamboo business, as the items get moldy. We have utilized this vacant period to plant bamboo trees on our own land, which will help us save on production cost. We have already planted 10 bamboo trees."

The women plan to expand their business by opening a shop in a local market, hoping to reach a wider customer base. They are grateful for the support from the project, which has revitalized their lives and empowered them to achieve economic growth.



## Nurturing Entrepreneurship with Eco-Friendly Leaf Plates

With the encouragement of DUNGESHWOR Rural Municipality, a group of women entrepreneurs, have launched a Leaf Plate (Duna Tapari) business. Ganga Kumari Gurung (32), Shanti Kumari Lamsal (26), and Lalita Thapa (29), residents of DUNGESHWOR Rural Municipality-6 in Dailekh district have established the business named 'Paati Sauda.'

This venture, supported by FSTP grant from the Youth Led GESI project, aims to promote sustainable practices by replacing single-use plastics with eco-friendly, traditional leaf plates.

The group received NPR 450,000 to kickstart their business. A significant portion of this fund was invested in purchasing the leaf plate making machine, while the rest was allocated for operational costs. To reach a wider audience, the women entrepreneurs are leveraging the power of social media, particularly TikTok, to market their products.

"Before the financial literacy classes (FLC), we had limited knowledge of financial management. We primarily focused on managing household expenses. However, the FLC taught us the importance of saving and investing, which could help us increase our income and start small businesses," shared the group.

Before their involvement with the project, they were primarily housewives engaged in domestic chores and livestock care. Through the project, they received financial literacy training and were connected to financial institutions, empowering them to start their own business.

"Our husbands are migrant workers; however, their contribution is not enough to meet the household expenses. After FLC, we were in close contact with WAM staff and the Municipality. We learned about FSTP grant and sought WAM's Enterprise Development Facilitator's (EDF) support in developing the business plan.



Our plan was selected. We also attended a two-day entrepreneurship training program, which helped us further refine our business plan and budget," added the three.

The group stated, "The Youth Led GESI project has been instrumental in empowering us and helping us realize our dream of starting our own business. We never imagined that this would become a reality. Thanks to the project, we've gained valuable skills and knowledge. Our business is now generating a monthly profit of 10,000 to 15,000 NPR. We are grateful to the project and the organizations involved for providing us with the opportunity to become successful entrepreneurs."



## From Aspiration to Achievement

Eighteen-year-old high school student Sangita B.K. from Patan Municipality-4, Baitadi district, Sudurpaschim Province exemplifies the power of financial literacy and entrepreneurship. She is already financially independent at such a young age. "I cover my school expenses, including stationery and tuition fees from my own income," shares Sangita with pride.

The Financial Literacy Class (FLC) she attended, equipped her with the knowledge and skills to make informed financial decisions. It was through WAM she learned about the class. After completing the course, she gained knowledge about financial management, saving, banking, and loan options.

As the three-month FLC course ended, the participants were informed about financial support under FSTP grant. The applicants had to apply with proper business plans. A competitive process, based on the strength of business plans, determined the grant recipients.

Sangita worked with a WAM facilitator to develop a strong business plan for a beauty parlor. Her hard work eventually paid off as her well-prepared plan was awarded the grant. The selected participants received entrepreneur development training where they learned

about developing business proposal, product market, supply chain and procurement process. This training helped her understand about real business process and in choosing the location for her beauty parlor.

With the financial assistance of NPR 450,000, she ventured into entrepreneurship. She used the grant to attend a month-long beautician training course and start her own beauty parlor.

Sangita, who always dreamed of being a beautician, is now living her dream. She effortlessly balances her business and studies. She attends tuition classes from 6:00 am to 8:00 am and opens her beauty parlor for business at 9:00 am. Sangita is also training two aspiring beauticians.

Coming from a humble background, Sangita faces the challenges of a low-income family. Her father's modest salary as school support staff and her brother's earnings as a waiter abroad barely suffice to meet their family's basic needs, let alone their educational expenses.

"Had it not been for the project, I would not have been able to support my family. The project has helped enhance the capacity of young people like us and made us financially independent," says Sangita.



Today she earns NPR 4,000-5,000 per week. Her younger sister Sanju assists her in running the parlor while balancing her studies.

However, she has her own fair share of challenges as a young entrepreneur. She shares that the rent of the shop is too high right now and is looking for someplace else with affordable rent.

"Beauty parlor is seasonal. The income is not stable. Wedding season and festivals are more profitable," she adds.

## Inspiring Change Through Entrepreneurship

Nirmala Kumari Awasthi Panta (25) from Patan Municipality-6, Baitadi district, Sudurpashchim Province proudly claims, "I motivated my husband to come back from India to support me in establishing the poultry farm business which I started through support from the project."

Despite being married at 16 and having only completed 10th grade, Nirmala has proven that with determination and the right support, one can achieve their dreams.

The Financial Literacy Class she attended and FSTP support from the project has helped Nirmala transform her life. Her husband, who used to work at a restaurant in India, now contributes to their family business.

Nirmala and her husband now operate their business on leased land, while their two daughters stay with her in-laws. Despite facing challenges and criticism from neighbors, Nirmala remains determined. She has increased her monthly income from 16,000 NPR to 30-40,000 NPR and aspires to create job opportunities for local youth by expanding her business.

Nirmala shares, "I am deeply grateful to Oxfam and WAM for introducing the Youth-led GESI project in our community."

She participated in a three-month financial literacy course, which helped her gain knowledge about financial management. Subsequently, she received financial support and entrepreneur development training from the project.

With the 250,000 NPR grant from the project, Nirmala established a poultry farm, initially purchasing 400 chickens. She made a income of 60-70,000 NPR from the first lot. However, she faced a setback in the second lot of chickens due to a virus outbreak. As she had insured the chickens, she received compensation of 45,000 to mitigate the loss.

Nirmala now supplies 20 chickens daily to a nearby hotel. She has opened two bank accounts and regularly saves money, improving her family's financial situation.

"Now, me and my husband are easily managing our household expenses including our daughters school expenses," Nirmala says happily.



## STRENGTHENING LOCAL GBV SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

The project prioritized legal support for GBV survivors, ensuring they had access to justice and understood their rights. A cross-cutting approach was adopted to mainstream GBV survivors' rights and resilience.

25 survivors received legal aid and psychosocial counseling, while 42 were trained on legal processes, OCMC services, and referral mechanisms. Some survivors also received financial literacy training and grant support to enhance their resilience.

Likewise, Service providers were oriented on survivor-centered approaches and supported in developing codes of conduct. Additionally, health posts were supported in establishing youth-friendly corners to promote sexual and reproductive health and counseling services.

### Survivor to Entrepreneur

Maya\* from DUNGESHWOR Rural 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.

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.

### Youth Corner: Ensuring Youth Access to SRHR

Tarka Raj Joshi, a health worker with more than 10 years of experience, observed that adolescents were hesitant to seek consultations on sexual and reproductive health issues in the past. However, with the establishment of Youth Corner at Dashrathchand Municipality Ward No. 6 Health Post, there has been a significant increase in adolescent visits, particularly among females. "After the Youth Corner was established, around 102 youths have visited the health post in the past one year," he adds.

The Youth Corner provides information on sexual and reproductive health, addresses concerns related to menstruation and reproductive health, and offers counseling on safe sex and hygiene practices.

The Youth Corner has four full time staff – one health worker, two nurses and one support staff.

Patient confidentiality is a top priority at the health post, with locked registers and nurse-assisted consultations available for privacy.



The Youth-led GESI project has significantly improved the health post's infrastructure, providing essential resources like furniture, medical equipment, a disability ramp, and improved toilet facilities.

"The support from the project has helped create a more welcoming and accessible environment for young people, ensuring they can receive care in a safe and dignified manner," shared Tarka Raj Joshi.



## Ensuring Safety for GBV Survivors Through OCMC



Saraswati Lekhak, a case manager at Baitadi District Hospital OCMC, highlighted the critical role of Youth-led GESI project in providing legal aid to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

“The support was particularly crucial during emergency situations when survivors faced isolation, threats, and unmet basic needs,” said Saraswati.

The project's collaboration has enabled OCMC to refer survivors in need of emergency assistance, ensuring they received timely support for their immediate needs.

Dr. Suraj Nepali who heads the OCMC section of the hospital emphasized the urgent need for support during the acute phase of a survivor's experience, when necessities like footwear are often lacking.

“The timely intervention of WAM and Oxfam has been crucial in addressing these immediate needs. We do not have enough staff and resources to ensure the safety and security of survivors,” highlighted Dr. Nepali.

Dr Nepali is equally appreciative of the Municipality for supporting the OCMC by directly recruiting two staff. He stressed the importance of long-term support to help survivors rebuild their lives and achieve financial independence and psychological well-being.

The project has helped ensure collaboration and coordination with safe houses and organizations that provide legal assistance to the needy.



## YOUTH NETWORK FORMATION

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated challenges faced by Nepali youth, limiting opportunities and marginalizing young people. The establishment of Local Youth Network in Dailekh and Baitadi districts, facilitated by Yuwalaya, emerged as a crucial strategy to empower youth, and amplify their voices.

These networks provide a platform for youth to participate in decision-making processes at the municipal level, addressing local issues and advocating for their rights. They have also played a vital role in promoting gender equality and fostering inclusive communities.

The establishment of these networks represents a significant step towards a more youth-inclusive future in Nepal, enabling young people to shape their communities and drive positive change. The collaboration between the local government and Yuwalaya has ensured the impact and sustainability of these networks.

### Youth Rise as Strategic Partners for Local Municipalities

The Patan Municipality Youth Network, a 15-member group (11 male, 4 female) led by a male chair and a female co-chair, has emerged as a powerful force for youth empowerment in Patan. The Network was formed with the support of Youth-led GESI project.

Prior to the network's formation, young people in the municipality lacked opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and community initiatives. The network, guided by the newly developed youth council guidelines, has created a platform for youth engagement and has significantly increased their visibility and influence.

Sanjay Bhandari, Chair of the Patan Municipality Youth Network, highlighted the significant impact of the network's formation.

"Before the project, there was no existing youth network structure at the ward or municipality level. The newly formed network, guided by the youth council guidelines, has empowered young people by providing them with opportunities to participate in cultural, political, and social events," shares Sanjay.

Sanjay adds, "Our youth members are now actively participating in various consumer committees and advocating for youth interests in ward and municipality development projects. In the past, youth were often overlooked in budget allocation, with funds primarily directed towards sports. Now, youth network members are submitting project proposals to the municipality, and the municipality is receptive to allocating funds for youth capacity-building programs."

The youth of Patan Municipality have benefited significantly from the project, not only through the formation of a youth network but also through capacity-building opportunities. These opportunities have included participation in federal and local policy dialogues, good governance, and shadow governance training. This has equipped young people with a comprehensive understanding of local governance roles, functions, mechanisms, and budget processes.

A significant achievement has been the allocation of youth-targeted funds by Wards 2 and 4. The youth network members, empowered through project capacity-building successfully secured funding for a mock

parliament to educate local youth about governance. This successful initiative, involving local youth, municipal representatives, and other stakeholders, has strengthened youth capacity. Additionally, the first Youth Conference was organized on Youth Day 2024 addressing youth issues and advocating for increased access to services and opportunities. The Network has further developed an advocacy charter based on federal-level policy dialogues and presented it to the Nepal Youth Council and Patan Municipality.

The Youth Network is making significant strides, and the municipality is gradually recognizing the importance of

youth engagement in local governance. The Network, composed of individuals with diverse expertise, is committed to utilizing these skills to support vulnerable communities.

Chandrika Bhatt, Deputy Chair of the Youth Network, emphasized the significant impact of her role, "Previously I was not engaged in community activities. Being a Deputy Chair has enhanced my public speaking skills and made me confident. I am now advocating for greater female representation in leadership positions to empower women and girls for a more inclusive and equitable future."



## REFLECT APPROACH

The REFLECT approach, a key component of the Youth-led GESI project, is an educational program designed to foster self-reflection, critical thinking, and personal development.

By encouraging self-reflection, the REFLECT approach helps youth to identify their strengths and weaknesses, set personal goals, and develop effective coping mechanisms.

Through critical thinking, youth learn to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and make informed decisions. This skill is essential for addressing complex social issues, such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health rights.

By fostering personal growth, the REFLECT approach helps youth to develop empathy, resilience, and leadership skills. These skills are crucial for building strong relationships, overcoming challenges, and contributing positively to their communities.

A total of 40 REFLECT classes were conducted over two years, reaching 500 youth. The program significantly enhanced youth's understanding of SRHR, GBV, and community resources and opportunities.

### Reflect: Youth-Led Learning and Development

Maya Bhatta, a 26-year-old second-semester Master of Business Studies (MBS) student from Dashrathchand Municipality-5, played a vital role as a REFLECT class facilitator in the Youth-led GESI project. Over eight months, she conducted 65 classes, each with 14-15 participants.

Maya's efforts have contributed to a positive shift in community attitudes, with a noticeable decline in traditional practices like menstrual taboos.

"Our community continues to grapple with challenges such as high school dropout rates and substance abuse among young people," shared Maya.



Maya highlighted, “As a facilitator, I identified and encouraged several students struggling with drug and alcohol abuse to participate in REFLECT classes. After completing the course, I observed positive changes in their behavior and attitudes, including increased involvement in household chores. However, they are yet to return to school.”

The REFLECT classes has had a profound impact on the participants, fostering their personal and professional development. By providing opportunities for public speaking and presentation, the youth are now confident communicators. The focus on key topics such as vegetable plantation, seasonal calendars, and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence has equipped participants with valuable knowledge and skills.

Maya shares, “As a facilitator, I have also benefited, gaining experience in public speaking and presentation. This was a great opportunity for the youths, and I feel this needs to be continued.”

Sunil Bhatta, a 22-year-old REFELCT class participant highlighted the positive impact of the class. He noted that the program provided a supportive environment for students who often faced discrimination due to academic performance.

“Personally, I have benefited from the class as I have gained a deeper understanding of gender discrimination and equality. I am thankful to Maya for facilitating the classes. I am now actively working to challenge gender inequality within my family and community,” added Sunil.



## MENTORSHIP APPROACH

The Mentorship Approach of the project was centered on peer mentorship, a relationship characterized by individuals with similar experiences, backgrounds, or knowledge levels supporting each other's growth, learning, and goal attainment.

A total of 16 months of mentorship sessions were conducted over a two-year period, reaching 205 mentees (131 female) through the guidance of 32 mentors.

The mentorship program contributed to personal growth, fostering leadership skills, empathy, and communication abilities among mentors, and boosting confidence and broadening perspectives among mentees. It also fostered a sense of belonging, increased engagement, and enhanced problem-solving skills.

### Mentoring for Change

Nisha Damai, a 22-year-old agriculture student from Dashrathchand Municipality-5, has mentored 11 young people as part of Mentorship Program under Youth-led GESI project.

Nisha remarked, "I focused on addressing key issues such as school dropout, menstrual health, and addiction. I successfully encouraged one mentee to seek medical attention for irregular periods and another to overcome their addiction to mobile gaming. I have further helped a mentee build confidence in public speaking."

Nisha shared that the Mentorship Program not only benefited her mentees but also transformed her own life. She overcame her shyness and developed the confidence to engage with others. She emphasized the importance of giving continuity to such initiatives for supporting youth development.

The Program has empowered young people by providing access to essential information and services related to health, legal rights, and practical needs.

One of Nisha's mentees, 18-year-old Manish Pariyar shared how the Mentorship Program transformed his life. Previously addicted to gaming, he neglected his studies and social life. Nisha's consistent support and counseling helped him overcome his addiction and develop essential life skills.

"I was so addicted to mobile gaming that, I would even forget to take my meals," mentioned Manish.

"Nisha visited me twice a week for eight months. Since then, I've completely changed. I limit my gaming to just a couple of hours a day. You can see how much more confident I am now," shared Manish.

Today, Manish uses technology responsibly and has gained confidence in social interactions.



## MALE ROLE MODEL APPROACH

The Male Role Model Approach of the project focused on behavior change sessions facilitated by individuals who have made significant contributions to gender equality, advocating for women's rights, challenging traditional gender norms, and supporting equal opportunities for all genders. This specifically targeted young people aged 16-30 years, providing them with opportunities to learn from inspiring male role models and engage in discussions about gender equality and social inclusion.

A total of 12 sessions were conducted throughout the project, reaching 507 young people in Dashrathchand and Patan Municipality of Baitadi District and DUNGESHWOR Rural Municipality and Bhagwatimai Rural Municipality of Dailekh District.

The program featured local male role models who have actively contributed to promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) through their actions and advocacy. By sharing their personal stories and experiences, these role models aimed to inspire participants to reconsider their perceptions of gender roles and adopt more inclusive practices in their daily lives.

The purpose of this initiative was to challenge deeply ingrained patriarchal values, eradicate toxic masculinity, and redefine traditional gender-based roles and responsibilities within households and communities. By highlighting relatable and impactful narratives, the program sought to create awareness and motivate behavioral changes among participants, particularly male members of the community.

### Men as Agents of Change

Karan Dutta Panta, a 21-year-old from Dashrathchand Municipality-11, believes that male role models can play a crucial role in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful social norms.

He explained, "Male role model sessions provide a platform for men to share their experiences and inspire others to challenge discriminatory practices."

Karan himself was influenced by a male role model who highlighted the negative impact of menstrual taboos. This experience shifted his perspective, leading him to recognize the importance of menstrual health and challenge discriminatory practices.

Karan observed stark differences in how women were treated during menstruation in his own family compared to his role model's family.

"Women and girls in my role model's family were not discriminated and mistreated during menstruation. I saw that everyone was working closely together even when the women were menstruating," shared Karan.

Inspired by the more inclusive practices he witnessed; Karan began to challenge the discriminatory norms within his own family. He now lives independently in a rented room away from home to pursue his studies and demonstrates respect for women's menstrual cycles, sharing common spaces without prejudice.



## CHALLENGES AND LEARNING:

### Shabnam Pokharel, Technical Coordinator/ Oxfam in Nepal

“While Nepal has made significant strides in GESI legislation and policy, effective implementation remains a challenge. A major gap exists between central-level GESI policies and their implementation at the local level. Local governance bodies often struggle to understand and utilize gender-responsive budgeting to address the specific needs of women and men.

In my experience working in Dailekh district of Karnali Province and Baitadi district of Sudurpashchim Province, both local governments have shown strong support for gender transformation and youth leadership. However, a lack of clarity in implementing policies has hindered capacity building. This project effectively supported local governments in integrating GESI policies into their plans and facilitated the formation of local youth networks. It has significantly improved the understanding of the importance of GESI and youth participation in governance.

Despite hailing from one of Nepal’s most underdeveloped provinces, the youth in Dailekh and Baitadi districts possess remarkable resilience and potential. However, both male and female youth face significant challenges in accessing capacity-building opportunities. While these challenges are common to both genders, women and girls often face additional barriers due to deeply ingrained cultural and social norms that limit their confidence and opportunities. This project has made progress in addressing these challenges by empowering women to take on leadership roles, engage in public speaking, and establish their own businesses. Through financial literacy training, career counseling, and financial support, the project has helped women overcome societal barriers and achieve economic independence.

A significant challenge during this project was selecting the appropriate target group. Collaborating with local municipalities proved to be both advantageous and

challenging. However, by conducting regular MPAC meetings and maintaining strong coordination with local government officials, we were able to effectively identify and reach the desired target group. This project underscores the importance of community-based approaches and the need for sustained efforts to enhance community capacity and promote development.”

### Chudamani Rijal, GESI Officer/Women Association for Marginalized Women

“The Youth Led GESI Initiatives for COVID-19 Recovery Strategies and Action in Nepal project offered a valuable platform for young people, especially those from marginalized communities who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

One of the most impactful aspects of this project was the financial support provided to young entrepreneurs especially women. This support has empowered women from marginalized groups to establish their own businesses, generate income, and contribute to their families’ financial well-being. This has led to a more equitable distribution of income and has challenged traditional gender roles within their communities.

The project partnered with OCMC and safe houses to provide legal aid support to GBV survivors. This support helped survivors navigate the legal process and access essential services, including safe shelter. To ensure long-term impact, it is crucial to implement sustained projects that address the needs of marginalized and socially backward communities.”

### Sonika Kunwar- YSB member from Second Cohort

“As a member of the Youth Sounding Board (YSB), I had the opportunity to visit Dailekh district to contribute to the project. During this visit, I gained firsthand insights into the challenges faced by women and marginalized groups in the community. This experience underscored

the importance of such initiatives in addressing these challenges and promoting gender equality and social inclusion.”

The project’s REFLECT classes and intergenerational dialogues created a space for open dialogue, empowering women, and marginalized groups to voice their concerns and suggestions. A prime example is that of a GBV survivor, who, through these sessions, recognized the abusive nature of her marriage and gained the strength to leave. Her story underscores the transformative power of education and awareness. Additionally, SRHR sessions conducted at local schools provided young people, particularly girls, with vital information about sexual and reproductive health. These sessions empowered youth to make informed decisions and challenge societal norms.

Despite significant progress, challenges such as cultural stigmas surrounding GBV and SRHR discussions, particularly among men, hindered broader community engagement. Additionally, the initial disinterest in REFLECT classes due to a lack of financial incentives highlighted the need for sustained motivation and a balance between community engagement and immediate benefits.

My visit to Dailekh was a profoundly personal experience. It exposed me to the deep-rooted cultural norms and gender biases prevalent in rural Nepal. Leading SRHR sessions allowed me to witness firsthand the power of youth in driving social change, even on a small scale. Moreover, the inspiring stories of women who overcame adversity and took control of their lives, solidified my passion for gender equality and social inclusion.”





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