



# STORIES OF CHANGE



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# About CARE

## CARE International

CARE is a leader within a worldwide movement dedicated to ending poverty. From emergency response to long-term sustainable solutions, CARE is known for our unshakeable commitment to the dignity of all people.

We work to empower women and girls, so we can effectively address the root causes of poverty and create pathways to economic freedom for all. We do this in partnership with men and boys and community leaders locally, regionally, and globally.

For nearly 80 years, CARE has been there, from the first CARE Packages delivering relief in Europe after World War II, to every major global crisis since. Our long-term development programs and trusted local leadership continue to impact the lives of millions of people around the world. This year, CARE and partners worked in 121 countries, implementing more than 1,450 poverty-fighting development and humanitarian aid projects and initiatives that reached 53 million people.

## CARE Nepal

CARE started its operations in Nepal in 1978 and is one of the first international aid agencies to work in the country. During the last 4 decades, CARE Nepal has been working with the most vulnerable communities of Nepal to address the issues of poverty and social injustice, along with challenging harmful social practices, building capacities and empowering livelihoods. Today, CARE Nepal works to address systemic and structural causes of poverty and social injustice such as discrimination based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity or geography.

CARE Nepal aims to demonstrate positive and transformational change in the lives of 2.5 million women and adolescent girls by 2025. CARE believes that if the most marginalized women and adolescent girl populations in Nepal experience increased social and economic empowerment, benefit from inclusive social structures and changing social norms, are able to exercise their social, economic and political rights, and build disaster resilience, then they will not only be able to withstand shocks but also overcome poverty and injustice. This transformational change in the lives of women and girls will in turn promote poverty reduction and inclusive justice for members of their households, immediate communities, and the wider society.



## About Fill the Nutrition Gap Project (FNGAP)

Madhesh Province is one of Nepal's most underdeveloped regions. About 24.2% of its population lives in multidimensional poverty, which is significantly higher than the national average of 17.4% (Policy Commission, 2021). Most households from marginalized communities in the province are either landless or own very small plots of land, contributing to severe food and nutritional insecurity, particularly among landless and smallholder women farmers. Poor dietary diversity, harmful food practices driven by social norms, limited access to income, resources, and employment, along with weak financial literacy, exacerbate the problem. According to the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2022, 51% of children in Madhesh are anemic, 27% are underweight, and 52% of women of reproductive age suffer from anemia. This is the highest rate among all provinces in Nepal. These challenges are especially acute among marginalized Dalit communities.

To address these urgent nutritional and structural issues, the Fill the Nutrition Gap Project (FNGAP)) was launched in 2023 with funding support from Latter Day Saint Charities (LDSC). The project targets women of reproductive age (15–49) and children under two years in 10 municipalities across Siraha, Saptari, and Udayapur districts, focusing on extremely poor and marginalized Dalit communities, who face deep-rooted exclusion, poverty, and food insecurity due to limited livelihood options

The project focuses on improving access to nutritious food through nutrition gardens and providing agricultural inputs for nutrition gardens, training, and awareness on better diets and iron intake. As gardens flourish, families are able to produce sufficient nutritious food for their consumption and sell surplus produce locally, generating income. Through nutrition behavior change sessions and the Farmers' Field Business School, the project also addresses harmful social norms and promotes positive nutrition behaviors, particularly among women and girls. At the local level, it supports nutrition and food security steering committees and helps marginalized women access resources such as land, agricultural inputs, credit, and technology.

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**CARE, Always There**



## Nurturing Health: Transforming Lives in Madhesh

Nestled in the southern plains of Nepal, lies the Balan Bihul Rural Municipality, which, like many others in Madhesh, has long struggled with malnutrition and poverty. Scarce water resources and limited agricultural productivity only add to the challenges faced by the local communities.

Among the residents of this region is Mrs. Shyam Kumari Ram, a 30-year-old woman with her father-in-law, husband, two daughters (aged 10 and 7), and her 2.5-year-old son. Managing the household and cooking for her family of six was a daily struggle for her. The family relied heavily on purchasing vegetables from the market, which strained their limited resources. This often meant that their diet was not balanced, leading to malnutrition and health issues.

**In April 2024, a ray of hope arrived in the form of the Fill the Nutrition Gap project. This initiative helped Shyam Kumari's community form a women's group named Ram Samaj Female Farmers Group, comprising 27 active female members.**

One day, during a routine health screening, Shyam Kumari's son, then 1.5 years old, was identified as suffering from Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM). At the time, he weighed only six kilograms. The news was devastating for Shyam Kumari, but the project provided a lifeline. Her son was admitted to the Nutrition Rehabilitation Home (NRH) in Rajbiraj, where he received intensive care and nutritional support. Remarkably, he returned home after two weeks weighing eight kilograms.

With newfound knowledge through the classes conducted by the project and her determination, Shyam Kumari transformed family's dietary habits. She began growing a variety of vegetables in her garden. The garden flourished, and soon, the family no longer needed to buy vegetables from the market.







The most significant change Shyam Kumari observed in her son was his remarkable recovery from malnutrition. After receiving intensive care and nutritional support at the NRH, he gained weight and became more active and playful. His overall health improved, and he no longer suffered from frequent illnesses.

Over time, Shyam Kumari noticed several long-term improvements in her son's health and development. His increased weight and improved nutrition led to better physical growth, and he became more energetic and engaged in daily activities. His immune system strengthened, resulting in fewer illnesses and a more robust ability to fight off infections. This allowed him to participate in childhood play activities, further aiding his cognitive and social development.

The ripple effect of these changes extends beyond individual households, creating a culture of nutritional awareness and sustainable living that will endure long after the project has ended and help the communities overcome the challenges of malnutrition and poverty.





# Empowered Women, Empowered Communities

In the rural corners of Madhesh Province such as Sakhuwanankarkatti, women empowerment through nutrition interventions were once a distant dream. The Fill the Nutrition Gap project has been a catalyst for change, transforming the lives of many, including Babita Kumari Mandal.

Babita, a resident of Sakhuwanankarkatti Rural Municipality, is the chair of Genda Female Farmers Group. This group, comprising 33 empowered women, has become a symbol of financial and social independence. Babita now sells items worth NPR 6,000 (approximately USD 44) a month, sometimes even more, and uses the earnings to fund her children's health and education. "I used to go to the market for vegetables, but now I save that money," she says with a smile. She adds that communities like hers are now witnessing significant improvements in children's health and nutritional status



Ashok Kumar Yadav, Health Inspector at the Sakhuwanankarkatti Rural Municipality, echoes Babita's story. "With the project's support, we initiated a malnutrition screening campaign across the local level with the slogan 'Reach Every Day.' For all the Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) cases, we provided cash vouchers, and for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) cases, we ensured regular healthcare for all affected children," he explains. The results have been remarkable, with SAM cases dropping from 17 last year to 8 this year, and MAM cases from 8 to 6. "We are now focused on preventive measures rather than curative ones," Ashok adds.



The introduction of organic fertilizer has revolutionized their farming practices. Babita ensures her children's meals include green leafy vegetables, which she washes prior to chopping to reduce vitamin loss.

Her husband, who works abroad, initially was reluctant to allow her to attend meetings. "Now, he encourages me to participate," Babita proudly shares.





Bhogendra Yadav, Chair of Ward-3, highlights the group's role in enhancing empowerment. "The members are now regularly attending group meetings. They are aware of malnutrition and are taking initiatives to scale up their learnings," he says. As the Ward Chair, Bhogendra ensures their voices are heard at the Local-Level Nutrition and Food Security Steering Committee. "We plan to scale up the project's achievements within other areas with our own resources," he assures.

**The project has not only improved nutrition but also empowered women like Babita to take charge of their lives, proving that with the right support, change is possible even in the most remote areas.**

The long-term impact extends beyond immediate health improvements. As women like Babita gain financial independence and leadership roles, they inspire others in the community to pursue similar paths. This ripple effect fosters a culture of self-reliance and collective growth. Over time, the community is expected to see sustained improvements in health, education, and economic stability. The project's emphasis on preventive measures and local resource utilization ensures that these benefits are not just temporary but will continue to empower future generations.

Babita's successes highlight the growing empowerment and active involvement of women in various socio-economic activities, contributing to the overall development of the community. The strengthened social fabric and enhanced community resilience are testaments to the project's enduring legacy.





## Sustainable Empowerment: Support for Community-Led Initiatives



On a bright sunny morning in early spring, a community deep in the heart of Madhesh Province is gearing up to harvest fish from their community pond. As the female members eagerly await to weigh the harvested fish that their husbands and other male family members helped to catch, Amrita Kumari Paswan, the chairperson of Saraswati Female Farmers Group—the women's group doing the fish farming—exhales breathe of satisfaction." Our lives have changed for the better. We are healthier, more knowledgeable, and united as a community," says Amrita.

In April 2024, the Fill the Nutrition Gap project helped establish the Saraswati Female Farmers Group, a women's nutrition group in Balan Bihul Rural Municipality in the rural southern plains of Madhesh in Nepal. This group, consisting of 24 dedicated female members, has since become a cornerstone of their community. They are now housed in a community building, which serves as a hub for their activities and meetings.

The Saraswati Female Farmers Group has transformed the lives of its members. Members now grow a variety of vegetables, rear ducks, and farm fish, ensuring a steady supply of nutritious food for their families. **The group members contribute NPR 50 (approximately USD 0.36) per month to a fund, which they use to treat children whenever they fall sick. This fund also provides loans to members, who repay the money with interest, ensuring the fund's sustainability.** Their group's registration is nearing completion, marking a significant milestone in their journey.



With support from the project, the group located in a water-scarce area received a motor to collect water for agricultural purposes, enabling them to grow a variety of vegetables. Each member also received a coop for duck rearing, and they have become well-versed in vermi-composting, enhancing their agricultural productivity.







Recognizing their progress, the local government provided the group with a community pond. Here, they farm marketing-friendly fish species such as silver carp, Rahu, and Naini. They sell the fish to group members at a discounted rate, ensuring that everyone has access to nutritious food. While the female members oversee the fish farming, their male members help them with catching fish—building a sense of support and cohesion among the family members.

The impact of the nutrition-related sessions provided by the project has been profound. Members have gained a deeper understanding of malnutrition, food groups, and nutrition. Pregnant women in the group are encouraged to eat more, ensuring they receive the necessary nutrients for a healthy pregnancy.

Significantly, women in the project areas now have become empowered leaders, forming groups that drive community activities and financial independence. Malnutrition rates have dropped significantly due to improved access to nutritious food and better farming practices. The community now enjoys economic stability, with women earning steady incomes and having access to loans. Preventive health measures and nutritional education have led to healthier families and a more resilient community, ensuring long-term benefits for future generations.

The project's role in community development has been crucial as the communities are now cultivating a healthier future.







## Nourishing Communities: Contract Farming as the Sustainable Solution

In the heart of Dhagadhimai Municipality in the deep heart of Madhesh Province—southern plains where Nepal's neediest communities reside—two remarkable female groups, Mahabir Female Farmers Group and Dina Bhadri Female Farmers Group, have joined forces to transform their lives through contract farming.

Leasing 20 Kattha (6,772.63 sqm) of land, they divided it into smaller plots enough to cultivate variety of agricultural products for 12 out of 25 members from Mahabir Female Farmers Group and eight out of 17 members from Dina Bhadri Female Farmers Group.

Initially, the women faced numerous challenges, including lack of employment opportunities, financial constraints, and limited agricultural knowledge.

**Anita Mandal, Chairperson of Dina Bhadri Female Farmers Group, added, "Contract farming has given us a new lease on life. We are now able to provide for our families and contribute to the local economy."**



Despite paying a minimal annual fee of NPR 2,000 (approximately USD 15) for land rental, the returns have been substantial. One member recently sold fish worth NPR 10,000 (approximately USD 72.5) from their pond, showcasing the potential of their collective efforts.

Before forming these groups with the project's support two years ago, most members were either unemployed or working as daily wage laborers, earning a meager NPR 300 (approximately USD 2.2) per day. This income was insufficient to even buy vegetables for their families. Now, they not only grow their own vegetables but also sell the surplus, saving money and improving their quality of life.

The project provided each member with a cash voucher of NPR 15,000 (approximately USD 109) and an additional NPR 4,200 (approximately USD 30.5) through the Kishan (English: Farmer) Card—a digital payment system initiated in collaboration with Nepal Investment Mega Bank. This financial support has been a game-changer for the group members.





**Sita Devi Sada, one of the group members, has her eyes wide open as she recalls a personal story of how the vouchers were lifesaving. Her son was diagnosed with Moderate Acute Malnutrition. "I am glad I received the vouchers. They turned out to be lifesaving support for me to revive my son back to being healthy," Sita said with gratitude.**

Contract farming has proven to be a vital strategy for these women, offering numerous benefits. It provides a stable and predictable income and reduces the risks associated with market fluctuations.

**"The support from the project has been transformative for us, and we are extremely grateful for the support," said Maya Devi, Chairperson of Mahabir Female Farmers Group.**

Over time, women in the area have transitioned from struggling with unemployment and financial instability to achieving financial independence and improved health for their families through contract farming. Initially, they faced numerous challenges, including lack of employment opportunities and limited agricultural knowledge. However, with the project's support, they leased land, diversified crops, and adopted sustainable farming practices. This evolution has led to a stable and predictable income, reducing the risks associated with market fluctuations. The financial support through cash vouchers allowed members to safely invest in their agricultural activities and address urgent health needs.

As these women continue to thrive, they inspire others in the community, creating a ripple effect of empowerment and economic stability. The knowledge and skills gained through the project are poised to be transferred down to future generations, building a legacy of resilience and prosperity. The strengthened social cohesion and enhanced community resilience are testaments to the project's enduring legacy, showcasing the transformative power of collective effort and support.







## From Knowledge to Practice: The Nutrition Garden Initiative

Among rural communities in Nepal's southern region of Madhesh, there has long been a shortage of knowledge on nutrition. Local cultures sometimes tend to neglect the importance of having a good diet, resulting in high malnutrition. However, that trend is changing now, thanks to the Fill the Nutrition Gap project. In Sakhuwanankarkatti Rural Municipality, the project's interventions have yielded inspiring results.

Bibaha Kumari Sada, a resident of this village, is a testimony to this change. She, along with 17 other women, are organized through the Maa Baishnodevi Female Farmers Group, a two-year-old organization that has been assisted by the project.

Among their remarkable achievements is the creation of organic pesticide, Jholmol. This organic pesticide is created from raw domestic materials including cow urine, neem leaves, and other herbs. It not only does its job to manage pests but also benefits the environment since it reduces the consumption of chemical pesticides.

In addition, each member of the group has also established a nutrition garden in their household. The project also provided each member with 10 ducks, which contribute to their food through eggs and meat, and help in pest control by eating insects.

Now, the group members care that the malnutrition has severe health implications, especially in children and pregnant women. In addition, they focus on getting protein from sources like ducks and legumes that are necessary for growth and repair of body tissues.







**Hari Narayan Yadav, Agriculture Section Chief of Sakhuwanankarkatti Rural Municipality, appreciates the success of the women. He adds, "The rural municipality has been encouraging 'zero tillage farming' to keep the soil healthy and sustainable. The municipality has provided rice, wheat, pulse seeds, etc., to the groups and provided them with training on various sides of nutrition. We are also assisting them with the contract farming process."**

Before the project's initiative, the rural communities in Madhesh faced significant challenges due to a lack of knowledge about nutrition and its critical role in maintaining health. Malnutrition was rampant, particularly affecting children and pregnant women, as local cultures often overlooked the importance of a balanced diet. However, the project's interventions have brought about a remarkable transformation by way of behavior and social change—among the Dalit and marginalized community.

Through education and practical support, such as the establishment of nutrition gardens and the provision of ducks for protein sources, the community members have become more aware of the severe health implications of malnutrition. They now prioritize nutritious diets, leading to improved health outcomes and financial savings, as they no longer need to purchase vegetables from the market. This shift has not only enhanced their overall well-being but also promoted a more sustainable and self-sufficient lifestyle.

This story of Bibaha Kumari Sada and her team is an inspiration to the way support and information can transform lives, resulting in a healthier and sustainable society.



# Growing Food, Growing Futures



In the vibrant community of Dhagadhimai Municipality in southern Nepal, a group of 22 determined women formed the Maa Saraswati Female Farmers Group with the support of Fill the Nutrition Gap project just one year ago. This group, now officially registered at the municipality, has opened a bank account and each member diligently saves NPR 100 (approximately USD 0.72) every month.

With the project's support, the women learned essential water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) methods for themselves and their children. They also acquired the skills to cook Khichdi, a nutritious local porridge made from rice, lentils, vegetables, salt, ghee, and other locally available nutritious ingredients. Additionally, they learned to prepare organic farming input.

**By ensuring their children receive nutritious meals like Khichdi, the women of Maa Saraswati Female Farmers Group are investing in the health and potential of the next generation, breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition and poverty.**

Through a demonstration plot, the women learned to integrate various vegetable species on their farms and have since started their own nutrition gardens. The chair of the group, Mrs. Manju Kumari Ram, who represents the marginalized and Dalit community, proudly states, "This has changed our lives forever. Our nutritional status has improved."







A significant turning point for the group was receiving NPR 14,500 (approximately USD 105) worth of food vouchers from the project. These vouchers were used to purchase items for nutritional improvements, such as seedlings, organic farming sprays, and food, through selected vendors connected by the project. The women participated in a game of snake and ladder, where ladders represented good food practices and snakes represented bad food habits, to guide their purchases. This innovative approach helped them understand the importance of good nutrition.

Now, the women cook Khichdi for their children three times a day, replacing the junk food they previously bought from local shops. With the cash vouchers, they also purchased milk, eggs, and other nutritious items. As a result, the group has witnessed a remarkable reduction in child illnesses.

Before the project, the women of Dhagadhimai Municipality faced significant challenges related to malnutrition and poor health practices. Local customs often overlooked the importance of nutritious diets, leading to widespread health issues among children and adults alike. However, with the project's support, the Maa Saraswati Female Farmers Group has undergone a profound transformation. The women have learned essential WASH methods, nutritious cooking techniques, and sustainable farming practices, which have drastically improved their health and well-being.

The introduction of nutrition gardens, organic farming inputs, and the regular cooking of Khichdi have replaced unhealthy food habits with beneficial ones. This shift has not only enhanced their nutritional status but also empowered them financially and socially, as evidenced by their savings and the reduction in child illnesses.

The project's innovative approaches and targeted support have been pivotal in driving these positive changes, breaking the cycle of malnutrition and establishing a healthier, more sustainable community.





# Seeds of Change: Nutritional Health Cultivates Economic Empowerment

In the core of Madhesh, where the shadow of malnutrition has loomed large for generations, a remarkable transformation is unfolding. The Fill the Nutrition Gap project is revolutionizing lives, turning the tide against malnutrition, and igniting a wave of economic empowerment among the local women.

Mamata Kumari Das, a resident of Laxmipur Patari Rural Municipality in the region, is a shining example of this transformation. Through the nutrition class sessions provided by the project, she learned advanced agricultural practices. She, along with her group, Radhakrishna Nutrition Garden Female Farmers Group, consisting of 17 dedicated members, is in the process of registering at the local level.

Each member of the group received a cash voucher from the project, which they utilized to enhance their agricultural activities. In a family of six that previously had to purchase vegetables from the market, Mamata's newfound skills have made a significant impact. By selling surplus vegetables, her family earned an additional income of NPR 20,000 (approximately USD 145) in a year. "We no longer need to buy vegetables; instead, we sell them and earn money," Mamata proudly shares.

The group has also adopted improved washing practices and regularly conducts cooking demonstrations to promote healthy eating habits. "Our neighbors often ask for our methods, and I am more than happy to help them learn," Mamata says with a smile.

The introduction of the Kishan card has further facilitated their agricultural endeavors. Mamata's group has managed to save NPR 45,000 (approximately USD 326), a portion of which includes fines of NPR 15 (approximately USD 0.10) paid by the members. This saving has given them the liberty to make independent economic decisions. "We now have more economic freedom and can use our earnings as we see fit to improve the nutritional status of group members and their families," Mamata explains. She has a newfound sense of increased self-esteem and confidence, enabling her to contribute more effectively to their families and communities.

**In Madhesh, where malnutrition and poverty are prevalent, economic empowerment through the project not only addressed immediate nutritional needs but also created a foundation for long-term economic stability and growth.**







**Mamata's neighbors now look up to her as a role model, inspired by her journey from dependency to self-sufficiency. "Seeing the positive changes in our lives, our neighbors are motivated to follow in our footsteps," Mamata concludes.**

Before the project, the communities faced severe malnutrition and economic hardships. Local customs often neglected the importance of nutrition, leading to widespread health issues. However, the project's interventions have brought about a significant transformation. Women like Mamata Kumari Das have learned advanced agricultural practices and essential nutrition knowledge, enabling them to establish nutrition gardens and adopt sustainable farming methods.

The provision of cash vouchers has empowered them to enhance their agricultural activities, resulting in improved health and increased income. Mamata's family, which previously relied on market-bought vegetables, now earns additional income by selling surplus produce. This shift has not only improved their nutritional status but also fostered economic independence and self-sufficiency.

Through the project, women like Mamata Kumari Das are not only combating malnutrition but also paving the way for economic empowerment and community development in historically deprived regions of Madhesh.







## Homegrown Health for Family Nutrition

Puja Mandal lives in a family of eight, with her two young children and extended family members. Her husband, who works in Qatar, is the sole breadwinner. The burden of ensuring her family's well-being falls heavily on Puja's shoulders.

Puja became a member of the Shree Janaki Female Farmers Group in Laxmipur Patari Rural Municipality, a group of 20 female farmers established through the project's support. The group received Kisan (English: Farmer) Cards in August 2024, which allowed them to purchase essential items for setting up nutrition gardens at their homes. With the help of a vendor identified by the project, Puja and her fellow members bought hose, agricultural tools, seeds, and other necessities to cultivate their gardens.

Puja joined the group while she was pregnant with her second child. She already had a five-year-old and was determined to ensure her new baby received proper nutrition. "I knew only a little about malnutrition before joining the group, but the project taught me how to take care of my pregnant body and my children," Puja shared. She meticulously followed the guidance provided, ensuring her second child received adequate nutrition during the crucial first 1,000 days.

With newfound knowledge, Puja began washing all food items before cooking and learned to prepare nutritious meals like Satuwa or Lito, a local porridge made from a mix of grains, milk, and ghee, and Khichadi, a porridge made from rice, spinach, beans, and lentils. Her efforts paid off—her children are now healthier, and the entire family enjoys balanced diets from their own farm's produce. She also sells the surplus, earning additional income.

Puja recalls a particularly challenging time when her first child fell ill due to malnutrition. "I felt so helpless and worried," she said. Her second child, who is now eight months old, is thriving. "My baby is growing well and is much healthier than my first child was at this age," Puja proudly noted.

The importance of food distribution within the family has become a shared value, ensuring that everyone receives the nutrition they need.







In Madhesh, where chronic malnutrition has long been a critical issue, families like Puja Mandal's have faced significant challenges. The support provided by the project allowed Puja to purchase essential items for her nutrition garden, leading to healthier eating habits and improved health for her family. Puja's careful application of the project's guidance ensured her second child received adequate nutrition, resulting in a healthier and thriving baby. This shift from dependency to self-sufficiency has empowered Puja and her group members, fostering economic independence and better health.

Puja's story is a testament to the power of community-driven initiatives and the profound difference they can make in combating malnutrition and improving livelihoods. Through the project's support, families in Madhesh are not just surviving—they are thriving.



# Growing Strong



In Madhesh, traditional social practices significantly impact women and children's nutrition and overall health. For instance, there are age-old beliefs that certain fruits are harmful to pregnant women, which restricts their diet and affects their health. Children meals are typically heavy on carbohydrates, with little inclusion of vegetables, proteins, or other essential nutrients. This imbalance can result in malnutrition, stunted growth, weakened immune systems, and developmental delays.

By addressing these social practices and educating communities on the importance of a balanced diet, the Fill the Nutrition Gap project is helping to improve the health and future prospects of children in Madhesh.

Parbati Rishidev, a 26-year-old resident of Naraha Rural Municipality, is a shining example of this transformation. Living with her husband, Saroj Kumar Sada, 29, and their two children—a 3-year-old son and a 17-month-old daughter—Parbati's life has changed dramatically since joining the Janachetana Female Farmers Group, a women's farmer group with 24 members that the Fill the Nutrition Gap project helped establish.

Her first child is suffering from hearing loss, suspected to be due to malnutrition, and her second child was diagnosed with Moderate Acute Malnutrition, affecting her ability to walk and develop properly.

Traditionally, social norms in their marginalized community did not allow varied diets, especially for children. Parbati's family used to rely heavily on market-bought food. In January 2024, the group received training on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), the four-food types, and kitchen gardening through the project. Now they are self-sufficient, growing spinach, onion, garlic, cabbage, brinjal, and more in their own backyard nutrition garden.







She used to prepare Khichdi with just plain water and rice, but now she enriches it with vegetables, ensuring a balanced diet for her family. "This has been lifesaving support for us—we are very thankful to the project," Parbati shared.

Her children, who previously struggled with walking and other developmental issues, have shown remarkable improvement. With the project's support and regular health check-ups, her daughter began to thrive.

Saroj Kumar Sada, Parbati's husband, also expressed his gratitude: "We had the least knowledge how important a balanced diet was for our children's health. Our children are healthier and happier now."

The project's interventions have brought about a remarkable transformation. By educating communities on the importance of a balanced diet and providing training on water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH), and kitchen gardening, the project has empowered families like Parbati Rishidev's to adopt healthier practices. Parbati's family, once reliant on market-bought food, now grows a variety of vegetables in their backyard nutrition garden and prepares nutritious meals. This shift has resulted in significant health improvements for her children, who are now healthier and more active.

**"We are deeply thankful to the project for their unwavering support and guidance," Parbati added. "Our lives have changed for the better, and we are committed to sharing this knowledge with our community."**

The project's support has been lifesaving, enabling families to break free from the cycle of malnutrition for families like Parbati's in combating malnutrition and achieve self-sufficiency in agriculture and nutrition. Their journey from struggling with malnutrition to becoming self-sufficient in agriculture and nutrition is a testament to the project's impact.





# Breaking Traditions: New Practices Transformed Child Health in Bansbatti



In the Madhesh region of Nepal, improper child feeding practices, often influenced by longstanding social behaviors, have led to widespread malnutrition and frequent illnesses among children. However, in Rupani Rural Municipality in the heart of Madhesh Province, the story is different. Thanks to the Fill the Nutrition Gap project, families like that of Santoshi Mandal have embraced healthier practices.

Santoshi Mandal, a 22-year-old mother of two, lives in a family of seven. Her husband is currently working abroad, leaving her to manage the household and care for their children, aged three and one and a half.

Santoshi is a member of the Shri Mahalaxmi Female Farmers Group, a group of 24 women farmers. Before joining the group, she had no knowledge of saving money. Now, every group member saves at least NPR 100 (approximately USD 0.72) per month.

Her family now uses cow dung as fertilizer on their farm and has proper water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities such as toilets and taps for handwashing. She meticulously washes her hands before cooking and uses only organic pesticides, a practice she learned from the project.

With the knowledge gained from the project, Santoshi ensures her children receive home-cooked meals. She prepares 3-4 meals daily, including khichadi, a nutritious dish made from rice, lentils, and vegetables. Santoshi, instead of frying eggs, now boils them—a healthier option she learned from the project. Her meals now include a variety of fruits and vegetables, which she washes before chopping to preserve their nutrients.

On their farm, Santoshi and her group members have adopted integrated farming, growing multiple nutrient-rich crops. This practice has reduced their need to buy food from the market, allowing them to save more money for their children's growth. Santoshi now understands the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life and ensures her children consume the four-food group daily.



Santoshi has noticed a significant difference in the health of her two children. While her first child fell sick almost every other week, her second child, who has been fed a high-nutrient diet, is much healthier and falls sick less often—maybe once a quarter, if at all. "The children in nearby houses are falling less sick now. They even have their farms," she adds.

Before the implementation of the project, families like Santoshi Mandal's had limited knowledge about nutrition and hygiene, resulting in poor health outcomes. However, the project's interventions have brought about a significant transformation in Rupani Rural Municipality. Families like Santoshi Mandal's have embraced healthier practices, thanks to the project's support. Santoshi's family has learned essential WASH methods, organic farming techniques, and the importance of a balanced diet. Her family now uses cow dung as fertilizer and has proper sanitation facilities. Santoshi prepares nutritious meals, enriched with vegetables, and has adopted integrated farming, reducing their reliance on market-bought food. This shift has resulted in improved health for her children, who now fall sick less often.

Her community also has witnessed several changes in community norms, including greater emphasis on hygiene practices, such as regular handwashing and the use of organic pesticides, as well as a shift towards more balanced and nutritious diets for children. The community, which did not have knowledge of the importance of early childhood development, now values the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life and ensures that children consume a variety of nutrient-rich foods.

The project's impact extends beyond individual families, advancing positive changes in community norms around child feeding and hygiene practices. As a result, children are healthier, and families are more knowledgeable about nutrition, paving the way for a brighter future.





# Empowering Change: The Journey of Integrated Farming in Madhesh



Hello! I am Somni Devi Khang, a 37-year-old resident of Rupani Rural Municipality in southern Nepal. I live with my family of 12 members. Being the chair of Mahalaxmi Female Farmers Group, I experienced firsthand the struggles of depending solely on the nearby market for agricultural products. It was disheartening to see our hard-earned money being spent on vegetables that we could have grown ourselves if we had the right knowledge and resources.

In the Madhesh region of Nepal, the lack of integrated farming practices has long been a challenge for families like mine. Despite the fertile soil and favorable climate that support the cultivation of various crops such as rice, wheat, maize, sugarcane, and pulses, we often relied on single-crop farming. This placed a significant economic burden on us.

The Fill the Nutrition Gap project brought a ray of hope into our lives. The project helped us establish Mahalaxmi Female Farmers Group and introduced us to the concept of integrated farming. We learned how to cultivate multiple crops in a single season.







Before the project, our community used to grow only one type of crop per season. This limited our access to a variety of vegetables and forced us to buy from the market. But now, thanks to the project's support, we grow 12-13 different items on our farms, including carrots, cabbage, eggplant, spinach, and radish. We only need to buy oil and salt from the market now.

The impact on our local economy has been significant. We used to spend around NPR 400 (approximately USD 2.9) every month on vegetables, but now we save that money and even earn extra by selling surplus produce. For example, one family sold NPR 1,200 (approximately USD 8.69) worth of cabbage monthly in a recent season. This additional income has eased our financial burden and allowed us to invest in other areas of our lives.

**The knowledge gained from the project, such as proper seedling growth and the use of organic pesticides, has been invaluable, reducing reliance on harmful chemicals and promoting healthier farming practices.**

Our community is now more informed and healthier, encouraged to continue these practices beyond the project's support. The project has truly empowered us, transforming our lives and adopting sustainable agricultural practices.





# Sowing Seeds of Independence: Contract Farming

In the heart of Madhesh, where land scarcity has long plagued marginalized communities, a transformative change is taking root. Sanechri Devi Sada, a resident of Rupani Rural Municipality, and the Chair of Denavadri Female Farmers Group, is leading a remarkable journey of empowerment and self-sufficiency of marginalized women in the region.

Through the Fill the Nutrition Gap project, Sanechri and 25 other women have embarked on a new path of contract farming on 52 Kattha (17,576 sqm) of land. This initiative has not only provided them with the means to cultivate their own vegetables but has also instilled a sense of pride and independence. Contract farming has allowed these women to secure land for cultivation, which was previously inaccessible to them due to economic and social barriers.

**The project-supported trainings have equipped these women with the knowledge and skills needed for successful vegetable farming. As a result, their children now enjoy healthy meals, and their own produce is used in their kitchens. This shift has led to improved eating habits and better health outcomes for their families.**







"We never used to farm at all," Sanechri recalls. "We were daily wage laborers, earning Rs. 300-500 per day (approximately USD 2.21) during seasonal agricultural practices. Now, we are engaged in farming, and it has changed our lives."

"Earlier, we had to pay for food with our minimal wages," Sanechri explains. "Now, we have the liberty of harvesting crops according to our needs, which costs us less money. Beyond contract farming, we are also looking to contract more farmlands where we can apply our learnings and farm on our own. This means more money and food for our families."

The impact of this project extends beyond just economic benefits. Pregnant women and new mothers in the community are now practicing safe eating habits, ensuring better health for themselves and their babies.

This financial independence allows them to make decisions that benefit their families, such as investing in better education for their children and improving their living conditions. The ability to harvest crops according to their needs and manage their own farming operations has empowered them to break free from the cycle of poverty and dependency, fostering a sense of self-reliance and economic stability.

Sanechri's story is evidence of the power of collective effort and the importance of providing marginalized communities with the resources and knowledge they need to thrive. Through the project's support, these women have not only filled the gaps in their nutrition but have also paved the way for a brighter, more sustainable future where they can live with economic independence and dignity.



# Breaking the Cycle of Malnutrition: Munni's Story

In Rupani Rural Municipality, where malnutrition is a major issue for Dalit and marginalized communities, a mother's determination and a supportive intervention have brought hope, resulting in healthier and happier lives for many families.

Munni Kumari Sada Dev, a 25-year-old mother, faced overwhelming hardship. Coming from an economically disadvantaged background, Munni struggled to provide nutritious meals for her four children, including her two-year-old son. Like many in her community, she had little knowledge of malnutrition and its consequences—until the Fill the Nutrition Gap project supported her in her journey.

Munni's son was identified as suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) during a routine screening supported by the project. Weighing significantly below the healthy range for his age, he exhibited alarming signs of malnutrition. Through the project, Munni received NPR 3,000 (approximately USD 21.75) in additional support to purchase food supplements and learned how to prepare nutritious meals. For the first time, she was able to feed her son three healthy meals a day.

**"I didn't know what malnutrition was or how to cook nutritious food," Munni recalls. "The project taught me how to provide my children with balanced meals. I followed their guidance and saw my son improve within months."**







Beyond financial support, the project encouraged Munni to visit the local health post regularly for six months. Through these visits, she closely monitored her son's progress and received continuous guidance from healthcare workers. Gradually, his weight increased, his energy levels improved, and his overall health stabilized.

A critical component of the project was empowering mothers like Munni with sustainable solutions. With the project's support, Munni started growing her own vegetables at home. What was once an extra financial burden has now become a sustainable food source. "I don't have to buy vegetables anymore," she says proudly. "I can grow enough for my family."

The impact of the project extends beyond Munni's family. She now actively shares her learnings with her neighbors, ensuring that other mothers in the community understand the dangers of malnutrition and how to prevent it. "Even after the project ends, I will continue practicing what I learned," she affirms. "I will keep monitoring my child's health and help others do the same."

The project has not only saved Munni's son from malnutrition but has also empowered a mother to build a healthier future for her family and community. Through additional knowledge, resources, and support, the project has turned the tide against highly prevalent malnutrition in such areas, ensuring that children like Munni's son get a chance to thrive.

**Munni's newfound knowledge of preparing balanced meals and growing her own vegetables has reduced her financial burden and ensured a sustainable food source. This shift has not only improved her family's health but also empowered Munni to share her knowledge with her community, promoting a collective effort to combat malnutrition.**

The project's impact extends beyond individual families, creating a ripple effect of healthier practices and better nutrition, ensuring that children like Munni's son have a chance to thrive.



# A Mother's Mission: Asha's Battle Against Malnutrition and Social Stigma



Living in Agnisair Krishnasawaran Rural Municipality in Nepal's southern region, Asha Kumari Khang, a 24-year-old mother of three, has led by example to bring about changes in her community. The region has struggled with malnutrition, particularly among women and children, due to a lack of awareness and deeply ingrained social norms. Harmful norms such as the belief that women should eat last and least, restrictions on women's mobility, and the undervaluing of women's health needs have added woes to the malnutrition crisis.

Asha, the secretary of Shree Sasiya Maharaj Female Farmers Group, was no exception. When she was pregnant with her daughter, now four years old, and later with her twin sons, who are 11 months old, she had little knowledge about the importance of nutrition. "I didn't know that eating just once a day wasn't enough for me or my children," she recalls.

However, everything changed when the Fill the Nutrition Gap project reached her village. Through the project's support, Asha learned that she needed to eat 3-4 times a day and include a variety of foods in her diet. She now regularly consumes meat, vegetables, and eggs, understanding that these foods are crucial for her health and the development of her children. She prepares nutritious Lito, a traditional porridge made from roasted ground grains and legumes, three times a day for her twin sons. She also makes Khichdi, a wholesome dish of rice and lentils, enriched with vegetables and sometimes meat, ensuring her children receive a balanced diet. "I now know that child health development starts from pregnancy," Asha says with a smile.





**Breaking free from restrictive social norms, Asha now confidently engages in agriculture, a field traditionally dominated by men in her community. "I wish I had known more about malnutrition and the importance of a proper meal when I was pregnant with my daughter," she reflects.**

Before the project implementation, the community in Agnisair Krishnasawaran Rural Municipality struggled with deeply ingrained social norms that exacerbated malnutrition, particularly among women and children. Harmful beliefs, such as women eating last and least, and restrictions on women's mobility, contributed to poor health outcomes.

However, the project's interventions have brought about significant changes. Asha's efforts have not only improved her family's health but also their financial situation, as she earns additional income by selling vegetables from her garden. She has become a community educator, teaching others about nutrition and the negative effects of junk food. This shift from ignorance to empowerment has broken restrictive social norms, fostering a healthier and more informed community. Asha's story highlights the transformative impact of education and community support in combating malnutrition and promoting well-being.



# A Rural Revolution of Chemical Dependence to Organic Independence



Sitadevi Sada, aged 35, of Agnisair Krishnasawaran Rural Municipality in Nepal's southern territory lives with her nine-member family, including her three-year-old daughter. She is a dedicated member of the Dinaram Bhadri Krishi Mahila Samuha, a women's farming group formed about 1.5 years ago, which now has 15 members.

Sitadevi and her family have begun a path of nutritional benefits and family health through sustainable farming with the help of Fill the Nutrition Gap project. They started vermi-composting, or as it is locally known as Gadyaule Mal, in a 2-meter length by 1-meter breadth by 1 meter pit height constructed with the project's help. The compost thus obtained is from vegetable and food waste decomposed at household levels by using various species of worms, predominantly earthworms.

The project has also supported constructing fishponds in the intervention sites, which measure 3 meters in length, 2 meters in width, and 1 meter in height. The ponds not only provide a source of protein but also a source of income for the group.







The most significant contribution of the group is the manufacture of Jholmol, a liquid biopesticide. Jholmol is a biopesticide produced by fermenting locally available materials such as animal urine, water, microorganisms, farmyard manure, grass, and plants in specific proportions. Jholmol controls insect pests that damage crops efficiently, protects against fungal and vector-borne diseases, and enhances plant health.

**Sitadevi recalls, "Our land was becoming useless due to overuse of chemical pesticides. We were investing substantially in these harmful chemicals, which gave rise to more issues than solutions."**

The employment of biopesticides like Jholmol and Gadyaule Mal has been a miracle. "We are happy to witness the fertility of our land rising due to the use of biopesticides," says Sitadevi. "We save more, and we are able to cover the nutritional needs of our families." The project not only improved their farming practices but also economically empowered them.

The enthusiasm among the group members is profound. They are currently interested in selling and making their farm products organic, and this has greatly enhanced their income. They sustain their family's nutrition by eating food produced in their backyard at a minimal cost and produced without exploiting the environment.

Sitadevi's story tells us how sustainable agricultural methods, such as organic farming, yield more nutritious returns and economic wealth. Through her practice, not only does her community gain fertile land and healthy harvests but also a reliable source of wholesome food. The collective approach in this manner highlights the importance of the contribution made by members of the same group towards achieving food security, environmental health, increased nutritional levels, and economic power.





# A Journey Towards Better Nutrition: Tulasha Chaudhary's Story



In the serene village of Saptakoshi Municipality in eastern Nepal lives Tulasha Chaudhary, a 27-year-old mother of an 8-year-old son. Her family of six has seen a remarkable transformation in their nutrition and health, thanks to the Fill the Nutrition Gap project.

Tulasha's son attends school each morning with enthusiasm, spurred by a nutritious breakfast of vegetables from their backyard plot. This plot is the fruition of the skill and knowledge Tulasha acquired as a member of the Laligurans Female Farmers Group. This cohort of 21 women like Tulasha was initiated in December 2023 and registered in the municipality in February 2024 with the assistance of the project.

The Fill the Nutrition Gap project brought together these women and provided them with trainings on nutrition and agriculture. They learned how to comprehend malnutrition, feeding children, food and nutrition groups, and preparing meals that are healthy by using vegetables, fruits, and meat. They also learned how to prepare nutritional gardens, cooking demonstrations, hygiene and cleanliness, distribution of food among the family, and the effect of junk food.





Tulasha recalls, "Before the project was implemented in our area, I would wonder if it was feasible for me to engage in similar practices at home but lacked technical knowledge and finances. Training and support provided by the project enabled me to start my own nutrition garden."

One of the significant project inputs was the construction of fishponds at the project sites. These 3-meter-long, 2-meter-wide, and 1-meter-high fishponds are not only a valuable protein source but also add to the income of the group. The family also received a flock of ducks and a coop. Tulasha's family now receives fresh fish from their pond as well as duck meat from their own coop, adding diversity and nutrients to their diet, which they missed earlier. From the project learnings, Tulasha's family has completely shifted towards the use of organic pesticides, where there is no need for chemical pesticides any longer. It has not only improved their health but also saved them money previously spent while buying vegetables and pesticides. "We now eat only organic fruits and vegetables, and our family members are healthier than ever," says Tulasha proudly.

**The project empowered Tulasha and numerous other women within her community to enhance agricultural practices, thereby enhancing the nutrition and health of their families.**

The project's interventions have brought about a remarkable transformation. The families now have access to diverse and nutritious food sources. Fresh vegetables, fish, and duck meat are now part of their daily diet, significantly improving their nutrition and health. The shift to organic pesticides has further enhanced their well-being and reduced expenses. Tulasha's family, for instance, enjoys better health and financial savings, and she proudly shares her learnings with the community.

The project's impact extends beyond individual families, helping create a healthier, more self-sufficient community and inspiring others to adopt similar practices.





# From Barren Sands to Golden Lands: A Story of Agricultural Triumph



Lying in the floodplains of Triyuga river in eastern Nepal, Belaka Municipality, Baluwatar, a place whose name literally translates to "a dry land consisting of sand only," agriculture was once a distant dream. For years, the residents believed that cultivating crops here was impossible. However, the Fill the Nutrition Gap project brought a ray of hope to this desolate land.

Lila Bishwakarma, a 34-year-old resident who migrated to Baluwatar seven years ago, recalls the initial challenges. "When I first came here, agriculture was non-existent. The land was just sand, and we couldn't even imagine it fertile," she says. Lila is now the secretary of the Baluwatar Female Farmers Group, a women's farmers' group formed with the project's support. The group is officially registered at the municipality, thanks to the project's assistance.

Similarly, Parbati Bishwakarma, the 47-year-old chairperson of the group, has been living in Baluwatar for the past nine years. She shares, "It wasn't until the project helped us establish the group and taught us how to farm in sandy areas that we saw a change."







Agriculture in sandy areas presents unique challenges due to the soil's low water-holding capacity, poor nutrient content, and loose structure. However, the project introduced innovative techniques and proper management to help communities here cultivate crops successfully. The project provided the community with seeds and introduced innovative techniques such as drip irrigation to cultivate crops in sandy, barren land. The group prepared an organic natural fertilizer made from locally available resources, which significantly reduced the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. By adopting these methods, the members transformed sandy, barren land into productive agricultural fields.

The group meets on the 6th of every month to discuss new ideas and strategies for their farming practices. Each member saves NPR 30 (approximately USD 0.22) monthly, which they can borrow at a minimal interest rate to meet their nutritional needs or purchase seeds. This small savings initiative has empowered the women to take control of their resources and invest in their future.

**The transformation has instilled a sense of pride and confidence among the residents. "The project gave us hope and a 'can-do' mentality," says Lila. "If we can turn barren land into fertile soil, we can achieve anything."**

The economic impact of the project's support at Baluwatar has been profound. Families now earn additional income by selling surplus produce, which has eased their financial burden and allowed them to invest in other areas of their lives. For example, Parbati's family saves money previously spent on buying vegetables for the family. This financial independence has fostered a sense of pride and confidence among the residents, encouraging them to continue these practices and dream bigger. The community is now more self-sufficient, healthier, and economically stable, paving the way for a brighter future.



# Seeds of Prosperity



In the wooded inlands of Belaka Municipality in Udayapur District, Koshi Province, nestled in the inner hills of eastern Nepal, a transformative shift is taking place.

Traditionally, farmers in this region relied on single-crop farming, cultivating either millet or maize throughout the year. However, with the introduction of Fill the Nutrition Gap project, a new era of diversified agriculture has emerged. This initiative has encouraged farmers to transition from non-farming practices to cultivating multiple crops, enhancing both food security and economic stability.

Singha Maya Tamang, a 27-year-old resident of Belaka Municipality, is a shining example of this agricultural revolution. As an active member of the Mahalaxmi Female Farmers Group, a group of 26 dedicated female farmers, Singha Maya has embraced tunnel farming with the project's support. Her family of eight, including her two young daughters aged five and one, now thrives on the produce from their diversified farm.







Previously, Singha Maya's family relied on the hard-earned money sent by her husband working abroad to buy vegetables from the market. The expenses amounted to around NPR 1,000 (approximately USD 7.25) every month. However, with the project's guidance, she now grows a variety of crops on her farm, including tomatoes, cucumbers, spinach, carrots, radishes, beans, pumpkins, gourds, chilies, onions, garlic, coriander, mustard greens, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, potatoes, sweet potatoes, eggplants, and okra.

Singha Maya practices perpetual farming, ensuring that while one crop is ready for harvest, another is growing, and yet another is just sprouting. This method, along with off-seasonal farming, has significantly boosted her productivity. She also sells seedlings to other members of her group. Importantly, she uses only organic fertilizers and vermicompost, which she learned to produce through the project's training sessions.

**The financial impact of this transition has been profound. Singha Maya now earns more than NPR 2,000 (approximately USD 14.5) every week from selling her produce. This not only helps her save money but also ensures a steady income for her family. "I used to worry about how we would manage our expenses, but now I feel secure and hopeful for the future," she says with a smile.**

The impact of the project on the future of Belaka Municipality is promising. By introducing diversified agriculture and innovative farming techniques, the project has laid a strong foundation for sustainable development. Farmers like Singha Maya Tamang are now equipped with the knowledge and skills to cultivate a variety of crops, ensuring year-round food security and economic stability. The shift from single-crop farming to perpetual and off-seasonal farming has significantly boosted productivity and income, empowering families to become self-sufficient.

As more farmers adopt these practices, the community will continue to see improvements in nutrition, health, and financial well-being. The project's emphasis on organic farming and resource management will also contribute to environmental sustainability, creating a healthier ecosystem for future generations. Overall, the project is not only transforming lives today but also paving the way for a brighter, more resilient future for the entire community.



# Harvesting Community Transformation through Nutrition



In the Madhesh region of Nepal, the lack of female social empowerment has long been a significant issue. Women often face numerous challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. However, in Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality along the India-Nepal border, the story is different, thanks to the efforts of Sabita Kumari Mandal and the transformative impact of the Fill the Nutrition Gap project.

Sabita Kumari Mandal, the group chair of the Shree Shashiyamaharaj Female Farmers Group, has become a harbinger of hope and change in her community. Her journey began in a place where vegetables from the market were laden with heavy pesticides, causing frequent illnesses in her children. "My kids used to be sick all the time," Sabita recalls. "We had to visit the health post frequently."







Determined to improve her family's health and well-being, Sabita and her peers formed their own Dalit saving group, consisting of 29 members. This initiative was supported by the project, which provided them with essential training and resources. Through the Farmers Field School, Sabita learned various agricultural practices that significantly improved her family's food habits. "We used to cut and wash vegetables, but now we wash and cut them before cooking," she explains. This simple change ensured better nutrition for her children.

The project also introduced Sabita to improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) practices and gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) integration in the social activities. The members including Sabita learned how to fight harmful social practices such as alcoholism and inadequate care for pregnant women in her community. "In the past, pregnant women didn't receive proper care," Sabita says. "Now, they are able to eat well and receive the nutrition they need."

**Equipped with seeds, tools, and techniques from the project, Sabita's farming practices flourished. With the project's support, she constructed a fishpond and started teaching vermi-wash techniques to other groups, promoting sustainable agriculture. The introduction of the Kishan card was another significant achievement, as it helped significant number of female members obtain citizenship, empowering them further.**

As a Senior Female Farmer Volunteer, Sabita regularly coordinates with municipal leaders, advocating for her community's needs. "We now have a voice," she proudly states. Her dedication and hard work have not only transformed her own life but also brought positive changes to her entire community.

Sabita Kumari Mandal's journey is a deeply moving tale of empowerment and community transformation. Sabita's tireless efforts have not only uplifted her own life but have also brought profound positive changes to her entire community. Her journey is a reminder that with determination and support, even the most challenging circumstances amidst deep-rooted social norms can be transformed into opportunities for growth and empowerment.



# Bridging Digital Divide



In the rural heartlands of Madhesh, vital registration remains a significant challenge. Many residents, particularly women, lack essential documentation such as citizenship cards, which are crucial for accessing various services including better access to financial services, healthcare, and education. This issue is especially prevalent in areas like Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality, where women often face challenges from obtaining these vital documents. Without citizenship cards, women are excluded from numerous opportunities.

Kabita Kumari Mochi faced this very challenge. Despite her hard work and dedication to farming, she struggled to access the resources needed to improve her agricultural productivity.

The Kisan Card, launched by CARE Nepal in collaboration with Nepal's leading commercial bank—Nepal Investment Mega Bank Limited (NIMBL), R&D Innovative Solutions, and the National Farmers' Group Federation helped address this issue.

However, Kabita's journey with the Kisan Card faced a crucial hurdle: she did not have her citizenship card. "I had never thought about getting my citizenship card before," Kabita shared. "But when I learned that it was necessary for the Kisan Card, I went through the process." This step not only enabled her to participate in the Kisan Card initiative but also opened doors to other vital services beyond the project period.







The Kisan Card has had a profound impact on women in Madhesh Province like Kabita. Nearly 85% of the program participants have opened bank accounts for the first time and are now connected to the banking system. This financial inclusion allows smallholder and landless women farmers to access credit and savings, which are crucial for investing in their farms, purchasing inputs, and expanding their agricultural activities.

By enabling cashless transactions for agro-product purchases and sales, the Kisan Card reduces dependency on cash and provides a more secure and transparent method. "I no longer have to worry about carrying cash to the market," Kabita explained.

Access to credit services through the Kisan Card is vital for these farmers to invest in their farms, whether it's buying seeds, fertilizers, or agricultural equipment. This access helps them increase productivity, improve crop yields, and ultimately enhance their incomes.

**"With the credit I received, I was able to buy better seeds and tools from the certified vendors knowledgeable on our needs and requirements," Kabita said. "All of this would not have been possible if I had not obtained my citizenship card."**

For Kabita and others like her in Madhesh Province, having citizenship is of immense importance as it serves as a gateway to numerous opportunities and essential services. Citizenship provides legal recognition and a sense of identity, enabling access to financial services, healthcare, education, and social benefits. However, women often face significant challenges in obtaining citizenship, including bureaucratic hurdles, lack of awareness, and social barriers. The project helped address these issues by guiding women through the process of obtaining their citizenship cards.

With a citizenship card, women like Kabita can open bank accounts, apply for loans, and participate in government programs designed to support farmers and improve agricultural productivity. This legal status also ensures their inclusion in community decision-making processes, empowering them to advocate for their rights and the needs of their family.

Importantly, citizenship is a lifelong status, offering enduring benefits and security.

Once obtained, the citizenship provides a stable foundation for determined women like Kabita and their descendants to build upon, ensuring sustained access to resources and opportunities for generations to come.







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