



Government
of Canada



Rights and Economic Development for Nepal's Empowered Women (RENEW)

Project Brief – Year 1



Empowering women and transforming lives - Nuwakot RENEW Women

Introduction

The living condition of Dalit's and most vulnerable groups of Nepal are socially, economically and politically marginalized. The state has declared the country as gender equality in all aspects but in practice it has not been followed. In the society, inequality between men and women and gender discrimination still exists. However, it is important to empower poor and marginalized women socially and economically to reduce gender discrimination and inequality between women and men.

RENEW is a fully gender equality four years project which aims to enhance the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls, especially from Dalit and most vulnerable groups of Makwanpur and Nuwakot districts. The 5 major components of RENEW are climate change adaptation, micro- small enterprises, cooperative education, social inclusion and women leadership, human rights and gender equality. The ultimate outcome of the project will be achieved by bringing a human rights- based approach (HRBA) to economic and social growth – focusing on climate change adaptation (CCA), enhanced performance of micro/small-scale enterprises, increased access to the products and services required by these enterprises, as well as on the social empowerment of women and girls enabling them to effectively engage in their communities.

The HRBA helps to promote a strong sense of community inclusion and sisterhood, which will boost women's and girls' aspirations, confidence, decision-making autonomy and leadership, and as a result women and girls can enjoy their human rights (HR). Furthermore, capacity building will enable to increase women's and girls' participation and leadership in community decision-making while better promoting and advancing human rights (HR) and gender equality.



Darshan Village Women Group,
Makwanpur



Laxit Village Women Group,
Nuwakot

Goal:

To enhance social and economic empowerment of the women and girls particularly Dalit and most vulnerable groups in Makwanpur and Nuwakot, Nepal.

Objectives:

- To improve economic status of women and girls, particularly from Dalit and most vulnerable groups.
- To increase participation and leadership in community decision- making by women, particularly by Dalit and most vulnerable groups.
- To enhance exercising of human rights by women and girls, particularly from Dalit and most vulnerable groups.



Cornerstone training, Thanapati VWG,
Nuwakot



Market Readiness Training,
Makwanpur

Expected outcomes:

1. Improved Knowledge and skills for climate change adaptation (CCA) through sustainable agriculture and environmental management among women smallholder farmers.
2. Enhanced capacity for micro and small-scale enterprise management by women and girls.
3. Strengthened skills of village women's groups to support the social and economic empowerment of women and girls.
4. Enhanced capacity among local partner NGOs to advance the social and economic empowerment of women and girls.
5. Increased community knowledge and understanding human rights issues affecting women and girls.
6. Increased agency of most vulnerable women and girls to advocate for their own human rights.



Women in Monthly meetings
Makwanpur (above) and Nuwakot

Target Area:

15 communities of Nuwakot and 15 communities of Makwanpur districts of Central development Region (CDR).

Direct and Indirect beneficiaries

Direct Beneficiaries:

- Total 900 Dalit and most vulnerable women and girls, 450 from Nuwakot and 450 from Makwanpur districts.
- Men and boys of the same households as the targeted women and girls
- Local stakeholders (Rural Municipality, ward members, teachers, women and youth associations)

Indirect Beneficiaries:

- The other community members from Makwanpur and Nuwakot districts
- NGOs, and community organizations
- Private sector

Since April 2021, Nepal has been battling a new surge in coronavirus cases and deaths prompting the government to impose a 15-day lockdown that started at the end of April. Nepal experienced oxygen shortages, with hospitals operating under extreme strain.

Specifically, the number of cases in the rural areas, where RENEW is being implemented was highly affected. However, maintaining the safety measures the project was able to achieve outcomes to some extent.



Baseline Survey, Nuwakot



Baseline Demographic Survey

The Baseline Demographic Survey was undertaken from 886 women initially recruited for Village Women's Groups (VWG), including 436 women in Makwanpur and 450 in Nuwakot.

In keeping with our expected results for both gender equality and social inclusion, the majority of women recruited were drawn from the Dalit and most vulnerable groups, representing 544 of the 886 respondents or 61%. Nearly all the beneficiaries are women aged 19 and older. The majority are married (92%) and largely dependent on male family members' income (only 9% are the primary breadwinners in their households).

Households are large, with an average of five additional household members, of whom only two are children. The fact that participating women have numerous other adults living with them is significant to understanding the power and decision-making dynamics in their households.



Baseline Survey, Makwanpur

Outcomes Achieved:

Enhanced social and economic empowerment of women and girls particularly Dalit and most vulnerable groups in Makwanpur and Nuwakot, Nepal

Despite the challenging implementation context of this reporting period, some positive changes to the context and experience of women in Makwanpur and Nuwakot are also being observed which are promising signs of progress towards RENEW's ultimate outcome. The following have been observed and documented by the RENEW team in their engagement with communities:

Participating women in the Sajhatol and Makkari communities of Makwanpur are challenging existing gender bias by starting to send their girl children to the same school as the boys. This is a change from the norm of prioritizing boys education and sending boy children to the more prestigious private/boarding schools while girls, if sent to school at all, are sent to the government school which are free. It was reported that 10 girls from Kopila VWG, 15 girls from Ram Mandir VWG, 10 girls from Krishna Mandir VWG and 7 girls from Ghaiya Danda VWG have been sent to the private/ boarding schools since the beginning of the project.

18 women from 12 different VWGs have reported that agriculture and animal husbandry farms have been registered in their names (5 in Nuwakot/13 in Makwanpur) and three women from Makwanpur have registered tailoring shops in their names. This empowers the women in question with more autonomy and decision-making over the income generation activities, which, it is hoped, will translate into more equal participation in decision-making about financial matters within their households. The fact that these women hail from 13 different VWGs is also a promising sign that attitudes are changing in many participating villages. It also provides the opportunity for women in all 13 VWGs (and beyond) to be inspired by their peers and consider a future where they have more autonomy in their economic activities.

Similarly, as a result of knowledge imparted through the project about tax exemption benefits 49 women from 14 different VWGs have also registered land in their own names (3 in Nuwakot/46 in Makwanpur). This is a tangible example of the empowerment gained through application of new knowledge gained through the project training.

Men in 26 households in Makwanpur are demonstrating changed attitudes about their wives participation in household financial management through their new practice of sending home remittances (from incomes earned away from home) in the names of their wives. This includes women from 10 different VWGs. This is a change in practice from the past norm of funds being sent in the name of male family members. This empowers women with more control over financial decision-making at the household level, a trend we are monitoring and expect to see spread further through participating villages.

131 women from 12 different VWGs have opened bank accounts in their own names. This is an important step towards financial independence and economic empowerment as it allows women to manage their own savings and to have financial security, which is not dependent on male family members.

Fostered by the safe space created through the establishment of VWGs, women from the Chisapani and Sanantar VWGs have begun discussing and sharing experiences of their attempts and successes in increasing their participation in household and financial discussions with their households.



Kanchi Maya Titung of Namuna VWG in vegetable farming

Improved economic status of women and girls, particularly from Dalit and most vulnerable groups

During this first year, RENEW implemented activities that contribute to empower women economically through enhancing agricultural livelihoods and investing in micro/small-enterprises headed by women. The training on organic farming and cash crops, and microcredit loans management enabled VWG participants to gain knowledge as well as confidence so they could start small businesses. Women invested some of their capital but also succeeded in borrowing from financial services.

This exemplifies key successes such as deciding which small business to create, making profits and managing to save, adopting sustainable agricultural practices and negotiating with the banks the best interest rates for their income-generating activities.

These are contributing towards expected results in income diversification, increased personal savings and application of CCA and sustainable agricultural practices. Some specific examples of progress observed include:

- Sarita Moktan of Ghaiya Danda VWG invested Rs. 450,000 for poultry farming business and raised 1000 chickens and made net profit of Rs.100, 000 (excluding the expenses of business).
- Seven women from three VWGs in the Makkari area have started to diversify their incomes through raising goats after learning, through the project, that a quick profit can be made by raising goats and using and/or selling the manure for fertilizers for organic farming.

- Three of the VWGs in Makwanpur have already started to implement savings and loan policies for effective management of their groups. This will yield results in the coming period as women are able to access loans and invest in income diversification.
- In Makwanpur women have started to apply the knowledge gained already through the project to improve their goat shed, grow vegetables without the use of pesticides, replace fertilizers with manure for improved crop yields and reuse water to irrigate crops. This is an indication of uptake of new sustainable agricultural practices.

Prior to the project, when women needed loans they would take loans at 18-20% interest from micro-finance companies to start agriculture and animal husbandry business. But now after receiving training on micro credit loan management, women who have land registered in their names are applying to learn by using land as collateral to access bank loans at much lower interest rates of 2-3%.



Parbati bista of Gurans
VWG selling milk



Sarita Moktan of Ghaiya
Danda VWG in Poultry farming



Merina Malla Thakuri of Parijat VWG
selling flowers and garlands



Sunita Pandey of Thanapati VWG
in buffalo raising



Sharmila Praja of Dolbari
VWG in Goat raising



Rupa Praja of Dolbari VWG
in pig raising

Activity wise immediate outcomes achieved:

Improved knowledge and skills for climate change adaptation (CCA) through sustainable agriculture and environmental management among women smallholder farmers

During this first year of implementation, efforts focused on understanding the baseline levels of knowledge and skills for Climate Change Adaptation through agriculture and environmental management and providing training adapted to the needs of women in Nuwakot and Makwanpur. To-date, 98 women farmers have completed the training (109% of annual target).

A survey using a structured questionnaire divided into four sections: basic information, understanding of Climate Change, sustainable agricultural practices, and experiences and perceptions of the respondents. The survey was conducted using a combination of virtual engagement and field visits (as feasible given COVID-19 restrictions).

A training on Climate Change Adaptation for women farmers in Village Women's Groups was adapted, recognizing:

1. Understanding and capacity of the people as well as of local stakeholders that needs to be catered and be provided with basic skills to adapt with the changing climate;
2. Alternatives to the traditional farming would be beneficial as we have not been able to uplift the productivity as well as the quality;
3. Concepts of organic farming, permaculture, IPM should be shared and imbedded amongst the people;
4. Integrated farming would help families to improve their means of living as well as their ability to use local resources more efficiently and effectively.

With this information the Climate Change Adaptation training was conducted in Makwanpur in coordination with the local government. The training was also facilitated in Nuwakot in coordination with the local government. The VWG members were consulted by the field supervisors regarding local cropping and harvest time in order to schedule the training when small-holder farmers would be able to take the time away and to coordinate with windows where movement in and out of the community was possible under COVID-19 guidelines.

The venues were selected with commute times in mind and to accommodate female hygiene needs, space for breastfeeding mothers and where babysitting was arranged as required. The VWGs and smallholder farmers were trained on adaptation skills to combat climate change impacts in agriculture, including: use of manure in lieu of fertilizers, reusing household water for irrigation and natural pest management.



Ms. Shobha Pradhan Shrestha, Executive chair, WPD Nepal
in Climate change training, Nuwakot



Climate change adaptation training in Makwanpur

Increased access to financial services for micro and small-scale enterprises (agricultural and otherwise) headed by women and girls

During this first year of implementation, efforts focused on developing and launching training for Village Women Groups to build capacity for micro-credit loan management and supporting women to open bank accounts in their own names. To-date 62 women (30 in Makwanpur and 32 in Nuwakot) have completed the four-day training (103% of annual target) and 131 women in Makwanpur have opened bank accounts (131% of target for this reporting period).

The training focused on group formation and community dynamics. Exercises highlighted the greater strength that comes with numbers, with the lesson being that groups should not be static but must learn how to grow in order to improve services, outreach and sustainability. This led to a discussion on the difference between savings and credit groups as opposed to savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOS); the former were seen to be smaller, informal and generally unsustainable while the latter were seen to be larger, usually formal and with the capacity to become sustainable financial institutions. Training also focused on the tangible managing of cooperative funds, expectations of roles and responsibilities, risk management and group decision-making.



Micro Credit Loan Management training, Nuwakot and Makwanpur (right)

Increased participation and leadership in community decision-making by women, particularly by Dalit and most vulnerable groups

Progress towards increased participation, leadership and decision-making is being observed both within Village Women Groups and in the community. The eagerness shown by the women and girls from target communities to get involved in VWGs and to take part in training, commenting that “their motivation to take part in the training while managing all their household chores is itself an example of women moving towards empowerment.

In Nuwakot, two women from two different wards of Shivapuri rural municipality have been invited by the local authorities to take the role of mediators to resolve the disputes in their respective communities. Also, three women from the Sayepatri VWG were invited to be members of the Women Network of Shivapuri rural municipality, Nuwakot, one of whom has also taken the role of Treasurer of the network.



Godawari VWG in cornerstone training, Makwanpur



Dolbari VWG in cornerstone training, Makwanpur

Increased capacity for social inclusion among women and girls

During this first year of implementation, efforts focused on the establishment of Village Women's Groups (VWGs) and recruitment of women, with a focus on identifying and engaging the most vulnerable. To-date 30 VWGs have been created (30 in Makwanpur and 30 in Nuwakot, 100% of target) engaging a total of 836 women (480 in Makwanpur and 356 in Nuwakot, 93% of target) who are meeting regularly each month.

During this first year, progress has also been made in fostering a feeling of 'sisterhood' among VWG members through our first workshops. A total of 836 women, along with 58 men (22 in Makwanpur and 36 in Nuwakot) participated in education sessions on social inclusion, with an emphasis on COVID-19 and gender which provided important opportunities to explore the experience women in particular are having. These same 836 participants also completed the Cornerstone Training, facilitated by WPD, covering important groundwork for their engagement together and core issues related to their lives and livelihoods.



Srijanshil VWG in Cornerstone training, Nuwakot



Dui Kanya VWG in Cornerstone training, Nuwakot

Enhanced capacity among local partner NGOs to advance the social and economic empowerment of women and girls

To build the capacity of the local partners, local stakeholders and Village Women Groups on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) series of discussions on social and economic empowerment of women and girls were organized in Makwanpur and Nuwakot between and among local government, civil society organizations, academicians, women networks and members of village women groups.

Where 54 participants participated in the discussions. The participants reflected on the gender dimension of their work and approach to ensure responsiveness and appropriate to the needs and interests of the most vulnerable girls and women. The participants identified the need for all the concerned stakeholders to work more closely in collaboration to address the socioeconomic issues and to achieve GESI.



Annual discussion meeting on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, Makwanpur



Annual discussion meeting on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, Nuwakot

Involved in the project implementation process by the local government, local stakeholders and village women groups

The RENEW team organized different levels of sharing meetings with the local authorities and local stakeholders in Makwanpur and Nuwakot. The local authorities were involved in the implementation process of RENEW which has been fruitful in creating not only the ownership of the RENEW but also in gaining commitment to work for gender equality and social inclusion together.



Manahari Rural Municipality, Makwanpur

Enhanced exercising of human rights by women and girls, particularly from Dalit and most vulnerable groups

To create awareness on human rights and the specific protections and resources for women, discussion meetings were conducted where high engagement and enthusiasm among the participants in learning more about their rights and in exploring how they can work together to secure the human rights of members was observed. After the training it was observed that the joint participation of Dalit and non-Dalit women was very promising and that they observed a general acceptance that the rights in question should apply equally to all.

Further, it was observed that discussion among women extended to actions they could take to lobby for inclusive development systems in their communities, a sign that they are already beginning to think about human rights and other development challenges as connected. Also, VWGs of Nuwakot have started to discuss in their monthly meetings that women should not keep quiet but file a case if anyone faces any kind of woman violence or gender-based violence.



Shivapuri Rural Municipality, Nuwakot



Annual Meetings with local government / stakeholders in
Nuwakot and Makwanpur (Right)

Increased community knowledge and understanding of human rights issues affecting most vulnerable women and girls

During this first year of implementation, efforts focused on the completion of a KAP survey to assess understanding of sexual and gender-based violence among participating women and girls and the facilitation of workshops to identify the specific Human Rights (HR) issues affecting the most vulnerable women and girls.

The KAP surveys were completed among all VWG participants in both Makwanpur and Nuwakot. The survey was deployed using KOBO Toolbox which allows for offline data collection entered on a digital device and automatic upload to cloud data storage for easy export and analysis. A KAP Survey was developed to assess knowledge, attitudes and practices among men and boys as relates to gender relations, sexual and gender-based violence and human rights. This has complemented the information garnered from women and girls for a full picture understanding of the experience of human rights in participating communities. The data collected was analysed and used for strategic activity plans, addressing key issues and gaps.

A total of 118 women (45 in Makwanpur and 73 in Nuwakot), along with representatives of local authorities and key stakeholders, participated in the workshops (Makwanpur and Nuwakot). Some of the common issues raised were: child marriage, domestic violence, inadequate health and education services, gender inequality and social inequality more broadly. It was apparent to facilitators that women had little understanding of their rights and responsive mechanisms.



Makhmali VWG in monthly meeting,
Makwanpur

KAP survey in Nuwakot (above) and
Makwanpur

Stories of Change

Story of Change 1: Sarita Muktan

“Cornerstone training has brought a lot of positive changes in my life. It's been a foundation, built my confidence and made me realize that I can do something for my family”.

Sarita Muktan, aged 36 is a resident of Manahari rural municipality, Makkari. There are nine members in her family: father-in-law, mother-in-law, husband, four daughters and a son. Her husband works as a carpenter.

She became a member of Ghaiya Danda VWG formed under RENEW. She participated in various training and awareness programs such as cornerstone, micro credit loan management, awareness on COVID-19 and gender, human rights and climate change adaptation in agriculture as well as group monthly meetings. Among all the training she received, she found cornerstone training the most beneficial, because it has built her confidence to manage her day-to-day activities in her life.

Before becoming a member of the group, Sarita with her family used to raise goats but did not make sufficient income to meet their household expenses and her husband's job was not regular either. Therefore, they had a hard life.

After becoming a member and receiving cornerstone training, she got confidence to take a loan and start a business. She convinced her husband and both decided to do a poultry farming business and took a loan of Rs. 5, 00,000 by keeping the land as a collateral in the bank. They built a chicken coop and raised 1000 chickens. From the first lot, she was able to make a net profit of Rs. 100,000.

Sarita shared that with enhanced confidence she applied for a three-months tailoring training announced by Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), which was organized by local government and got accepted.

After receiving the tailoring training she opened a small tailoring shop from which she is able to earn Rs. 500 to Rs. 700 per day by sewing clothes. This has helped her to support her family to meet their household expenses.



Sarita Muktan of Ghaiya Danda VWG

Stories of Change

Story of Change 2: Urmila Praja

“Thank you for providing various training sessions and helping us to become independent. Thank you for all the support, knowledge and building my confidence.”

Urmila Praja, aged 32 is a resident of Manahari, Dolbari. There are five members in her family: husband, two sons and a daughter. Urmila is a member of the Dolbari women group formed under the RENEW program and she is able to save Rs.100 monthly in the group fund.

Before being involved in the group, Urmila did not have any knowledge about women groups. She was unaware of the benefits of being in such a group. She was a shy person and hesitated to share her views and opinions with others. She worked with her husband in their small farm, which did not support enough to meet their household expenses and therefore, had a difficult life.



Urmila Praja of Dolbari VWG

After being involved in the Dolbari group, Urmila participated in cornerstone, micro credit loan management, awareness program and human rights training under RENEW Project. After receiving the training she took a loan of Rs. 5,000 from the group fund and started doing cucumber farming from which she was able to make a good profit of Rs. 20,000 by selling the cucumbers. With the profit, she has been able to meet her household expenses as well as do monthly savings in the group fund. Also, she invested in poultry farming and raised 12 chickens with the money saved after her household expenses and monthly savings. Now, she has realized the importance of being in the group.

“Thank you for providing various trainings and helping us to become independent”

Partners / Collaborators / Consultants

International partners

Government of Canada (GAC)
World Accord (WA)

Collaborators / Advisor

Shivapuri Rural Municipality, Nuwakot

Manahari Rural Municipality, Makwanpur

Hetauda Sub Metropolitan City, Makwanpur

Raj Babu Pandey, local stakeholder, Nuwakot

Local partners

Women for Peace and Democracy Nepal
(WPD- Nepal)

Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)

Rural Self- reliance Development Centre
(RSDC)

Microfinance and Cooperative - Consultant,
Bishnu K. Shrestha

Environmental Management and
Climate Change - Consultant,
Damodar Dhital

Information Technology - Consultant,
Hempal Shrestha



**Government
of Canada**



Contact information:

Women for Peace and Democracy- Nepal (WPD-Nepal)

Central Office:

Post box: 20297, Lainchaur, Kathmandu, Nepal,

Tel: +977-1-4024099,

Fax: +977-1-40244100

E-mail: info@wpdnepal.org.np,

shobha.shrestha@wpdnepal.org.np

Website: www.wpdnepal.org.np ,

Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/WPDNEPAL