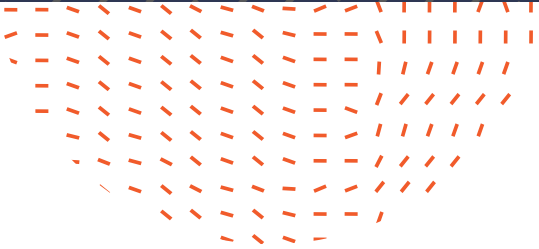


# A Tale of Community Transformation and Leadership

CASE STORIES COLLECTION






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# FOREWORD



The Natural Leaders are self-mobilized women and girls from marginalized communities who are trained and supported to raise community awareness regarding safe abortion services, the impact of unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion, the benefits of using contraceptives including post-abortion contraception, reducing harmful social and community norms and practices including gender-based violence, and linking community women and girls to service sites. So far, Ipas Nepal has successfully mobilized 152 Natural Leaders in 21 Rural/Municipalities of Nepal. The Natural Leaders are selected by the Local Government, who are motivated to be community leaders and catalyze the community change process.

The case stories were collected by authors through discussion and based on the lived experience of changed situation and practice on the issues of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, safe abortion services, gender based violence prevention and response, and climate justice.

These case stories showcase and celebrate the experiences, learnings, and successes of Natural Leaders, a flagship initiative of Ipas Nepal. These case stories also highlight the importance of strengthening capacity, building agency, and mobilizing women and girls to enhance knowledge and understanding of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, including safe abortion. Similarly, the authors of this case study, in their own words, have shared how they have contributed to making local government accountable towards women's sexual and reproductive health and rights through rigorous advocacy. The case stories also indicate the effectiveness and efficiency of mobilizing Natural Leaders in reducing harmful social and gender norms and increasing uptake of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We would like to thank the Local Government, Natural Leaders, and the partner organizations who have supported and contributed to the community movement building in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Ghimire', written over a horizontal line.

**Jagadishwor Ghimire**  
Country Director  
Ipas Nepal





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PAPPU SARU

Social Mobiliser

Shitaganga Municipality-1, Arghakhanchi

## An Agent of Change at the Community

Faced with financial constraints and difficult family circumstances, Adarsha (name changed) had to drop out of school to reduce the financial burden on his family. Despite their financial struggles, the family of five was wealthy in familial trust and harmony. They sincerely believed in his ability to create a wonderful future, not just for him but for the entire family. However, doing so was difficult in the rural outskirts of Shitaganga Municipality of Arghakhanchi District - Subarnakhal - where access to higher education was rare for someone like Adarsha.

As the eldest son at the age of 22, Adarsha shouldered the responsibility of freeing his family from the shackles of poverty. He dreamt of seeing his family financially and socially successful and well-established in society. Determined not to bear the label of "unemployed," he persisted in his struggle to secure a job.

Due to his unwavering determination and perseverance, Adarsha finally got the opportunity to work as a social mobilizer in the Social Service and Environment Conservation Group in Arghakhanchi. His family was happy for him and cheered him on. Diving into the task of raising

awareness on sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion, climate change, and gender equality without proper prior experience in facilitating or speaking up in any social forums and gatherings, Adarsha's path was filled with challenges. The most difficult part, however, was effectively transforming the conservative values and mindset of the villagers on these matters.

To fulfill his duties in the best way possible, Adarsha participated in a five-day training to deeply understand the intricacies of sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion services, gender equality, climate change action, etc. He obtained more than just general information; the program also shed light upon how Adarsha could facilitate positive social change. He was now finally confident he could significantly impact the community.

Engrossed in his work, Adarsha never finds the time to idle away. He has been facilitating the social movement for sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as Climate Justice, in collaboration with Natural Leaders. Whether visiting the health posts, discussing future action plans in the municipality office, meeting with schoolteachers and students,



**Whether visiting the health posts, discussing future action plans in the municipality office, meeting with schoolteachers and students, or supporting Natural Leaders' community sessions, he proactively advocates for these fundamental aspects in the government's policymaking and implementation bodies.**

or supporting Natural Leaders' community sessions, he proactively advocates for these fundamental aspects in the government's policy-making and implementation bodies. He has also been involved in ward-level discussions to formulate the Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) and has contributed to collecting necessary data. He has brought about great changes. Conversations on sexual and reproductive health are no longer considered taboo, and the community has grown to accept new ideas. Identifying harmful social beliefs and raising awareness against them, Adarsha has established himself as a harbinger of change in his community.

The positive impact he has brought to the community can be tangibly felt. Within a span of just five months, Adarsha was able to reach out to a whopping 450 people in more than 8 communities, raising awareness of legal provisions for safe abortion, contraceptives, gender-based discrimination, and climate change.

He was also an integral part of the team collecting data for and formulating the local climate change adaptation plan of action for his municipality. In addition, Adarsha actively advocated for programs to be included in

next year's budget plan, including activities for establishing sexual and reproductive health and rights, and climate action.

Adarsha's contribution to the community was paramount, but to truly witness widespread changes, we need hundreds of Adarshas, one in

each community. Since social movements cannot bring groundbreaking changes in a short period of time, constantly working to change society's mindset, values, and behavior is increasingly important. Therefore, it is high time we consistently and collectively supported passionate changemakers like Adarsha to keep the light of hope burning for a better society.



## Rambha Rural Municipality Takes Ownership

Having observed overwhelming change in women's sexual and reproductive health in Rambha Rural Municipality, Ward Number 1, the local government decided to endorse the noble cause by providing the community a generous sum of Nrs. 20,000.

The change in Rambha Rural Municipality has been a drastic one, to say the least. In the past, conversations on women's sexual and reproductive health were reserved to stay within the four walls of health posts. Female Community Health Volunteers and Health Mother Group Members would attempt to start conversations in the community, but they would just remain among the mothers of the neighborhood. When trying to highlight these matters in the family and community, individuals would be subject to negative public scrutiny and character assassination. Fundamental aspects of safe abortion would also barely arise, and cases of abortion after unwanted pregnancies would always be an accusatory medium for people in the community to demonize and stigmatize women.

However, Rambha has been observing significant changes since last year. We, the Natural Leaders, have been self-mobilized in the community. The

community awareness sessions that we conduct on safe abortion and sexual and reproductive health have proved to be immensely effective in establishing acceptance of it within the community and preventing unwanted pregnancies. Public discourse on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, and safe abortion services has begun between men and women in the community. Conservative societal beliefs are gradually indeed changing, showing immense possibilities for a better future in Rambha Rural Municipality.

Once the community grew familiar with the importance of sexual and reproductive health, five of us Natural Leaders decided to go to the municipality and make them aware of the poor condition our locality was currently in. We highlighted the pre-existing challenges the lack of reproductive health awareness was causing in the community. To raise awareness in our village, we passionately pushed the municipality to include awareness campaigns on sexual and reproductive health in next year's budget plan. We argued that it was one of the government's core responsibilities to maintain and provide access to sexual and

**SHANTA BHANDARI**  
Natural Leader  
Rambha Rural Municipality, Palpa



**Having observed overwhelming change in women's sexual and reproductive health in Rambha Rural Municipality, Ward Number 1, the local government decided to endorse the noble cause by providing the community a generous sum of Nrs. 20,000.**



reproductive health and rights to women. Paying heed to our demands, the local government allocated a sum of NPR 20,000 to each of the five wards to raise awareness of reproductive health for women. Following this, on April 5 2023 AD, we conducted a one-day awareness program on reproductive health rights for women in Ward No. 1 and 3 of Rambha Rural Municipality. We had invited decision-makers in the local government to make them hear what legal provisions were in place in connection with the sexual and reproductive health and rights of people.

After the program, during his speech, the chairperson of Rambha pledged to increase the budget for future awareness campaigns and extend generous support to encourage the mobilization of Natural Leaders and Female Community Health Volunteers. According to him, raising awareness among women in the community will contribute significantly to modifying health policies. This has proved to be a successful way of relaying hope to the community's people, signaling greater positive change.

As someone who could barely stand up for herself and speak, I have now become a leader capable of fighting for budget allocation for necessary health policies and conducting awareness programs only because I could channel my passion for social

change into my actions. More importantly, I have been able to act as a rock, an anchor, and a friend to all the sisters in my community. Being known as one of the most critical actors in establishing sexual and reproductive health and rights in my

community is something I greatly pride myself on but will never take for granted. The love and support I receive from my community have always been the driving force that constantly urges me to push my limits and toil for a better future for them.





## Preventing and Combating Gender-based Violence

**BHAGARTHI DHAMI**  
Social Mobiliser  
Dadeldhura

Gender-based violence is not something anyone should bear in silence. Community sessions conducted by Ipas Nepal on gender-based violence and its types and legal provisions have become a source of strength, urging adolescent girls to stand up for themselves in the face of violence. However, heartbreaking stories of young girls facing fear, paranoia, and constant violence are still present. And this one is no different.

In the silent streets of Amargadhi Municipality ward no. 1, an adolescent girl lived in constant fear. With her very uncle teasing and harassing her on her way back home from school, she only knew a life of terror. She was in a miserable state where she could neither



talk about this with anyone without her honesty being questioned, as it would be her uncle she was accused of. More importantly, she feared the social scrutiny and brutality she would be subject to if she were to talk about this. Fear swallowed her.

One day, a Natural Leader and a member of the Adolescent Forum walked into the school building of the little girl. They were part of the organizing committee of a sexual and reproductive health and rights awareness campaign being organized in school. In their open discussion, they constantly reminded the schoolgirls that they should not remain silent if someone treats them in a way they do not want to be treated or inflicted violence upon them. They further shared with the students about the types of Gender-based violence, its prevention and response, including various legal provisions and mechanisms to punish the perpetrators and provide justice to the survivor. After the program, the young girl approached the ladies and told them how her uncle behaved with her on her way home from school. The ladies, infuriated hearing about this incident, told the young girl that this was a form of gender-based violence and had to be dealt with as soon as possible. They decided to come up with a plan.

As always, the young girl headed out to go back home. Unsurprisingly, her uncle was waiting for her and began verbally abusing her the second he laid his eyes on her. But today was different; the young girl's friends were prepared according to the plan. Once they knew the uncle was teasing her, they arrived at the spot and supported their friend. With her friends supporting her, she let all the pent-up frustration spill out with a tight slap across her uncle's face. By the time the uncle recovered, the lady from the school, the Natural Leader, and a member of the adolescent forum arrived at the site of the incident and quickly confronted the uncle. The uncle admitted to his crime and asked for forgiveness. The ladies clarified that the law gave nobody a second chance and asked him to apologize to the young girl. After making him apologize while doing squats, he was forgiven with the assurance that he would never do anything like this to anybody else without facing severe legal consequences.

Now, having faced embarrassment publicly, the uncle moved to India. To the young girl's relief, she can now walk the streets of Amargadhi loud and proud without the fear of being teased or harassed.



**In the silent streets of Amargadhi Municipality, Ward no. 1, an adolescent girl lived in constant fear. With her very uncle teasing and harassing her on her way back home from school, she only knew a life of terror.**



## Information and Awareness for Sexual and Reproductive Health

A 23-year-old Kalpana (named changed) lived in Wayal, K.I. Singh Rural Municipality-4, Doti, with her husband, son, and daughter. To provide two meals daily for their children, both husband and wife labor hard throughout the day. Even though she wants to be part of social work and communal discussions, she feels that her financial condition severely limits her desire to work for her community.

One day, a group of Natural Leaders arrived in her community to conduct an awareness session on reproductive health and safe abortion. All the women of the community were prepared to participate in the program. Although Kalpana wanted to attend this awareness program and engage in fruitful discussions with people from her locality, her unavoidable work obligation constrained her flexibility in managing her time. Despite this, she decided to postpone her schedule and make time for the meeting.

As the meeting progressed, discussions on reproductive health, safe abortion services, gender equality, and the elimination of gender-based violence were brought forth. Kalpana actively took part in the discussion. Everyone shared their related problems, and their solutions were discussed. She felt particularly connected to the discussion since she was 9 weeks pregnant with an unwanted pregnancy. Lacking information or awareness regarding safe abortion services in her vicinity, she and her husband were considering giving birth instead to prevent any health complications. They also feared being viewed negatively by the members of their community.

However, after they discussed the legal provisions ensuring safe abortion for women, Kalpana felt a sense of great relief. According to the information provided, the health post in her community offered safe abortion services to women up to 10 weeks of gestational period and assured



**Now, she actively uses and advocates for the use of contraceptives. Having seen her deal with her unwanted pregnancy so efficiently highlights the unquestionable help awareness and information alone could provide people with.**



them that their abortion would be kept confidential. She was also elated to know that women could independently ask for abortion in the health facilities. After considering everything, the husband and wife decided to abort the pregnancy and begin practicing the use of contraceptives.

After the discussion with both the Natural Leader and her husband, Kalpana contacted a listed provider from the listed health post and received safe abortion services. Now, she actively uses and advocates for the use of contraceptives. Having seen her deal with her unwanted pregnancy so efficiently highlights the unquestionable help awareness and information alone could provide people with.





## Safe Abortion Brings Happiness to the Family

Nisha Budhamagar (name changed), 45, lives in Mirul, Thawang of Rolpa district with her two sons and two daughters. Her husband is employed in a foreign country.

Two years ago, when I first conducted my session in a Health Mother's Meeting after receiving Natural Leaders' training on sexual and reproductive health and rights, women in this community were extremely supportive and wanted the sessions to happen again. Nisha was also a regular participant in the sessions. Sharing the knowledge I possessed with a community that wholeheartedly welcomed me was a wholesome experience. As we discussed the existing sexual and reproductive health and rights, Nisha grew tangibly emotional. Sensing something was wrong, I approached her separately after the program. She shared her experience with me.

When her husband returned to Nepal during the holidays, they engaged in unsafe sex, causing her to become pregnant. Since she already had 4 children, she was not keen on giving birth to another, and she did not know of any alternatives

to deal with her unwanted pregnancy.

After hearing about safe abortion services during the program, Nisha decided to opt for safe abortion. She took further advice from me and contacted the listed health institution that was providing safe abortion services in her community. Nisha then discussed the abortion procedure with the service provider there and successfully conducted the procedure. Doing so gave Nisha a great sense of relief and joy. Her family was also pleased.

If it were not for awareness programs like this in communities, Nisha would be compelled to go ahead with the pregnancy, although unwanted. Thousands of women like Nisha are facing similar problems due to the lack of awareness and information available to people in rural areas. Some people are also known to commit suicide for the same reason. To prevent such heartbreaking happenings, we should proactively support and conduct awareness campaigns on reproductive and sexual health in rural communities.



**If it were not for awareness programs like this in communities, Nisha would be compelled to go ahead with the pregnancy, although unwanted.**

**RABINA ROKAMAGAR**  
Natural Leader  
Thawang Rural Municipality-3, Mirul, Rolpa

## Breaking Chains: Ending the Practice of Child Marriage

SUSHILA JOSHI  
Natural Leader  
Dadeldhura

After receiving Natural Leaders' training, I conducted awareness sessions in my neighborhood to spread awareness of sexual and reproductive health among women and adolescent girls. It created new opportunities for women to discuss their reproductive rights and the gender-based violence they faced elaborately.

While conducting the sessions, I learned that my neighbor's daughter was about to be married. Even though matching may not be a big deal, underage marriage without the consent of the individual is highly unfair and illegal as well. The parents had decided to marry off their daughter at age 18. The sentiment behind this decision was absurd, as they believed that keeping their daughter single would cause their family to face social embarrassment, and their daughter would go down the wrong path. Despite her argument that she did not want to marry right now and instead wanted to study, her parents

were depriving her of the right to make decisions for herself. Since her family refused to listen, she felt comfortable approaching me and sharing her feelings.

She was terrified, trembling at her fate in a completely different house where she was not ready to step in yet. She sincerely requested me to talk to her parents and convince them that sending her off with marriage was a bad decision. I knew this was wrong. Even considering it legally, the minimum age for marriage here is 20. With a lot to say, I arrived at her house. I confronted her parents explicitly, asking them to reconsider their decision as they could receive a jail sentence for forcing their daughter into child marriage. I also told them that marrying their daughter off right now would only psychologically and physically affect her daughter, suggesting they let her study. I also emphasized that

“

**I confronted her parents explicitly, asking them to reconsider their decision, as they could receive a jail sentence for forcing their daughter into child marriage.**



once she was 20, they could discuss with their daughter and decide whether she wanted to marry, suggesting that she would enjoy her life better if she were to be married after she was financially independent.

The parents agreed. They called off the marriage and thanked me for informing them about the legal consequences of child marriage and how they were unaware that it was a problem. Harmful social values and beliefs are the reasons people consider their daughters to be a burden and are often compelled to send them off to another house as soon as possible. Transforming the life of a young budding individual and letting them explore the wonders of their life is truly a source of pride for me.





## Sexual and Reproductive Health Is Women's Right

**MINA MARASINI BHATTARAI**  
Natural Leader  
Bhumikasthan Municipality- 9, Arghakhanchi

I am 38 years old. I was married at the age of 18. I was a victim of child marriage. Barely within the first 2 years of marriage, I bore my first daughter. My husband left for foreign employment with our daughter in my care to earn a livelihood for the family. He would occasionally come back. In a few years, I gave birth to four children. However, life does not always treat you right. The grief of losing two children still haunts me to this date.

Regardless of internal family problems, people should always be in touch with their community. I was actively participating in discussions with women from my community, sharing the happiness and difficulties of life. Within the next 2 years, I received the opportunity to be part of a safe





abortion training. In the training, I was taught about reproductive health rights, safe abortion services, gender equality, and gender-based violence throughout the program.

Returning from the program, I started conversations on reproductive health rights and safe abortion in my community. However, openly discussing these issues was still not a possibility in the community with the existing stigma around abortion and sexual or reproductive rights. People who talked about these problems were demonized, and their voices were suppressed. Due to this, I felt uncomfortable sharing information on reproductive health and abortion initially. Later, I gathered enough courage to actively start advocating for women's right to reproductive health services, and women from the community joined this venture with me. Gradually, the social perception of viewing abortion as something demonic changed as awareness increased in the community.

Nowadays, I am not just limited to the community. I constantly contact the ward office to advocate for women's rights. I have also formally demanded ward-level programs on sexual and reproductive health and rights from the ward office based on the conversations I have had with the women in my community. Having contributed to my community, everybody knows me as a Natural Leader here. People here do not hesitate to reach out to me to ask about reproductive and sexual health.

To improve the sex life of the people in my community, I try to spread awareness of legal provisions that exist. I genuinely enjoy spending time having these conversations and educating people. In the coming days, I shall consistently advocate for women's rights and actively engage in problem-solving initiatives, positioning myself as a catalyst for social transformation and positive change in the community.



**Having contributed to my community, everybody knows me as a Natural Leader here. People here do not hesitate to reach out to me to ask about reproductive and sexual health.**



## Natural Leader's Training: Sparking Transformation

As far as I remember, discussing sexual or reproductive matters as a student in class always involved a lot of mischievous snickering, red faces, and turned heads in the classroom. Since families and society generally did not encourage such discussions to be openly held, teachers also felt uncomfortable talking to students about these essential aspects of life, often asking us to study it on our own and not discuss it in class.

When the health facility and the ward office selected me as a Natural Leader for my community and sent me to a training program for sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion services, and gender equality, I finally was able to realize the importance of these matters to be brought to public discourse. At the end of my training program, we were all responsible for advocating and spreading awareness in our communities. However, hundreds of scary questions played inside my head. How was I supposed to start discussions on a topic our community has avoided for so long? What might the reaction be? Would I be able to change my community?

Swallowing the fear I felt, I met with the chairperson of my ward, who urged me to further the campaign in the community. With the assistance of Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs), we set up a meeting with all the mother groups in the community. During the meeting, I felt extremely awkward trying to begin discussions on sexual and reproductive health. Overcoming the fear was hard, but once I got a hold of myself and received curious responses from the audience, I could relay the information and knowledge I had acquired in the training program. Over time, I grew more and more comfortable with the crowd there, making the job a lot easier for me. When discussing solutions to the community's awareness problem, everybody agreed to spread awareness in their families and the community together. Surprisingly, it was a huge success.

Recently a few months back, I received news about one of my relatives going through an unwanted pregnancy. As they already had two sons and daughters, she did not want to go ahead with the pregnancy, fearing that she might not be able to take care of a child properly once it was

**HUMA THAPA MAGAR**  
Natural Leader  
Malarani Rural Municipality-8, Arghakhanchi



**Hundreds of scary questions played inside my head. How was I supposed to start discussions on a topic our community has avoided for so long? What might the reaction be? Would I be able to change my community?**



born due to financial and time constraints. She approached me in an attempt to know what she was to do in this situation. I calmly asked her to go to the nearest listed safe abortion service site and ask for abortion services with the listed provider. She had asked me to accompany her, but I could not since I had to attend a national conference for Natural Leaders around the country. So, she went with her husband to receive safe abortion services. After the abortion, my husband was made aware of her worsening condition as she was losing blood. Since my husband was also well-informed about how to deal with conditions like that, he accompanied them to the hospital. After informing the doctor about her condition, the doctor cleaned her up and asked them not to worry as she would be fine.

Right after I returned from the conference, I visited them. I was informed that she had a drastic health improvement and that they were doing well. I was elated. Being able to work for my family and community's wellness has proved to be an undeniable blessing. I would like to thank the ward for appointing me as their Natural Leader. Reflecting, I have noticed a significant internal change in myself as well. Social work and helping women like me have strengthened my willpower to contribute more to the community and vulnerable people. I will always be part of the reproductive and sexual awareness campaign.



## Pride in being the Natural Leaders

RAMA KHANAL

Natural Leader

Bhumikasthan Municipality-1, Arghakhanchi

From 4th February to 8th February 2021, I was part of the Natural Leaders' training program regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights and safe abortion. Back home, I organized an awareness campaign calling women from my community there. Once I began talking about sexual and reproductive health, a lot of women and girls left the session immediately. The remaining participants scanned the room for any men or boys, fearing that they would judge them if they heard them discuss 'disgusting' things like this. Some were giggling the whole time.

Despite all these discouraging factors, I persevered with unwavering willpower. I decided to continue the program on sexual and reproductive health, focusing on safe abortion services, gender equity and equality, and ways of reducing gender-based violence. The ones who were previously ashamed started to engage in fruitful discussions in the meetings openly. I firmly believe that men's engagement is a crucial aspect of establishing sexual and reproductive health and rights in the community. To make men part of this program, I

began by befriending them while allying with five friends who spread the word around.

To ensure tangible changes were made at the institutional level, I also befriended ward representatives as my five friends. This has helped ensure the real problems and needs of the community reach the ward and the municipality assemblies and influence the development of policies based on it. With the help of the ward representatives, who are now my allies, I have also started spreading awareness in other communities. I realized that allying with people from different sectors helps expedite the change process.

Now, I have established myself as a change-maker in the community who fights for reproductive rights, safe abortion services, and gender equality. Mother groups from other communities also request me to share what I know in their meetings. Increasing support in social work has evolved the way I view society and the possibility for change. I am now confident that change is possible in



**Increasing support in social work has evolved the way I view society and the possibility for change. I am now confident that change is possible in rural communities if the right approach is taken.**





rural communities if the right approach is taken.

Including my community, I was able to reach out to 3 more Mothers' Groups to spread awareness on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning, safe abortion, and elimination of gender-based violence. While conducting these awareness sessions, three people who were facing unwanted pregnancies personally consulted me for advice. I instructed them to go to their nearest listed health institution and seek out safe abortion services. After going through with the abortion safely, all three of them are now living healthy lives. Being able to help people in need and wash their problems away has been a humbling experience that I pride myself on having been part of.



## Samjhana's Path to Empowerment

**SAMJHANA SUNAR**

Natural Leader

Shitaganga Municipality-1, Arghakhanchi

Samjhana Sunar (name changed), 18, a shy and timid girl, lives with her family of 7. As part of the Dalit community, she faced financial insecurity, caste discrimination, and everyday quarrels at home due to poverty. As the eldest sibling in the family, Samjhana is determined to uplift her family from poverty and earn respect in society.

One day, Samjhana's ward chair approached her, offering her the opportunity to become a Natural Leader and help her community. Excitedly, she shared the news with her mother, who wholeheartedly supported her decision to attend the training program.

During the five-day training, Samjhana learned about sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion services, family planning, gender equality, and the impact of climate change on SRHR. After each session, Samjhana tries to connect the things she learns with her community and herself. Samjhana gets further interested in reaching out to the community with messages on the issues she was trained in.

She digs out further information on the issues. On the final day of the training, Samjhana makes an action plan for her community work. The greatest takeaway from the training was first to change yourself and go to the community with the message of change.

When Samjhana talked to her mother about what she learned in the training program, her mother retrospectively shared her experience on how safe abortion services were not present during her time. She asked her daughter to always spread awareness of it and save women's lives. Grandmother had a different perspective. She still thought that girls and women should not be talking about sexual and reproductive health and worried that Samjhana was taking the wrong path. However, Samjhana was deeply convinced that it was about the rights of women and girls, and there was no going back.

Samjhana began conducting community sessions on sexual and reproductive health. The first session she conducted was not great



**Samjhana made five more friends, sharing the knowledge she had gathered at the training, and asked them to reach out to more women, adolescent girls, and boys. Now, Samjhana, her five friends, women and girls, men and boys, and the ward office raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health, including safe abortion.**



- she was hesitant to find women older and more experienced than her in the audience. She, however, found women listening to her attentively when it came to legal provisions on safe abortion. Women responded, saying, “It looks like the days of unsafe and costly abortion have gone. We did not know that we could terminate unwanted pregnancy legally and safely, and with confidentiality maintained.”

Sexual and reproductive health and safe abortion are not openly discussed in the community. But the issue is so vital that Samjhana realized it should be discussed openly across all communities. So, Samjhana made five more friends, sharing the knowledge she had gathered at the training, and asked them to reach out to more women, adolescent girls, and boys. Now, Samjhana, her five friends, women and girls, men and boys, and the ward office raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health, including safe abortion. Now, what Samjhana started in the community has taken the shape of a community movement.

Samjhana knows that bringing about change in society is not an easy feat, but with concerted effort, the changed behavior of the campaigners

themselves can transform society. She also drew an insight that you could openly discuss negative issues in society, bring in legal provisions on those issues, and urge for positive change. She has a deep conviction that society can be changed.

Samjhana knows well that she may be unable to work as a Natural Leader forever voluntarily because of her need to overcome her financial circumstances. Still, she will continue to lend her support in establishing the rights of women and adolescent girls to sexual and reproductive health.



## Happiness of Being Recognized as a Woman Leader

**NISHA ROKAYA**

Natural Leader

Gaumul Rural Municipality, Bajura

My name is Nisha Rokaya. I have been working as a Natural Leader at Gaumul Rural Municipality for the last two years. Before working as a Natural Leader, I had not taken any training. I was a shy girl, hesitant to speak in public or before a group or a committee. I married and had a child after receiving my School Leaving Certificate (SLC). As my husband had been out of the country for a long time as a migrant worker, I did both household and farm work. Currently, I am known as a Natural Leader or the Community Leader of the Nakrada community in Mankot.

As part of the Safe Abortion project, I was given training to become a Natural Leader by PeaceWin Bajura with support from Ipas Nepal. Since I became a Natural Leader, I have experienced a significant change in myself. I can stand before a large audience and speak my mind. However, it was a different story at the beginning. In the first few community sessions, I could not confidently speak in front of women in the community. As a result, some did not listen to me and even

denied participating in the next session. However, as I conducted more and more of the community sessions scheduled twice a month, I developed the skills to speak in front of a large mass of people, and I now believe that I am an excellent public speaker.

My husband had left for work abroad just a year into our marriage. However, upon hearing about the great things I have been able to do in the community, he has come back with the conviction that one can earn enough even in the home country. Now, he is engaged in poultry farming. In addition to being a Natural Leader, I support my husband in agricultural work and his poultry entrepreneurship. My husband also participates in the community sessions I conduct. This has enhanced family warmth and given society a positive message about husband and wife working unitedly. Moreover, the family income has been raised.

In the past, discussions about Sexual and reproductive health and rights and Safe Abortion



**Under my leadership, women and adolescent girls even go to the Ward Office and Municipality Office and ask the offices to ensure their rights.**





were considered taboo within our families and society. If anybody spoke about them, they would be taken otherwise. But the situation has changed now. Women and adolescent girls openly discuss these issues in community sessions and discussions conducted by Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) and Mothers' Groups. Not only are they talking about their sexual and reproductive rights, but they are also actively asserting them. Under my leadership, women and adolescent girls even go to the Ward Office and Municipality Office and ask the offices to ensure their rights.

I am now known in my community, the entire ward, and the rural municipality. After becoming a Natural leader, my skills have greatly enhanced, and my relations with my family members have also gotten warmer. As my husband supports me in my work, I feel encouraged to work further. The entire community is benefitting from the increased awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights and safe abortion services. Women and adolescent girls do not have to lose their lives because of unsafe abortions now. I will continue to take the leadership in this movement of establishing sexual and reproductive health rights and safe abortion services in the community, coordinating with the Ward and Municipal office throughout.



## Natural Leaders: A Life-Saving Hero

**KIRAN BHANDARI**

Natural Leader

Budhiganga Municipality, Bajura

38-year-old Niru Damai lives at Kudi, Budhiganga Rural Municipality-1, Bajura. She has a massive family of eleven, seven daughters, two sons, her husband, and herself. As the family wanted a son, she had no respite in giving birth to children. She gave birth to seven daughters. Fortunately, in her 8th pregnancy, she gave birth to twin sons. She and her husband were happy to welcome the twin sons into their family.

The initial euphoria of having sons died as Niru had to look after her children, do the household chores, and help on the farm. She could not ask her husband to help her out because she believed that her husband, as head of the household, deserved the utmost respect, and it was her duty to obey him.

Niru did not have any experience participating in community meetings. So, she felt awkward even introducing herself at public events should such an occasion arise. However, one day, she had the opportunity to participate in one of my community meetings. There, she learned about sexual and

reproductive health and rights and safe abortion services.

It was the first time Niru had attended a session on sexual and reproductive health. Earlier, she was unaware of her rights to sexual and reproductive health, safe abortion, and contraceptives. She lived under the impression that sexual and reproductive health matters should not be discussed in public and that they are embarrassing issues. In the session, Niru realized everyone should know about sexual and reproductive health matters and that these matters should not be kept to oneself. She felt bitter at having to keep an unwanted pregnancy. Had she known about her right to terminate unwanted pregnancy and that it could be done safely and freely, she would not have to face the difficulties of life today.

When Niru learned that an unwanted pregnancy could be terminated legally and safely at a listed health facility, she felt reassured that should a pregnancy occur in the future, she would opt for termination. She would also advise others to do the same if the pregnancy was unwanted.

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**Kiran is a God for me. If she had not given me the information on sexual and reproductive rights, I cannot imagine how my life would be. I could not have lived with a new pregnancy in a body that was tired after year after year of pregnancy. I am alive today because of the support of the Natural Leader.**



By chance, Niru was impregnated again when the twins were just seven months old. She had known that the use of contraceptive devices could prevent pregnancy, but before she could use the contraceptives, she got pregnant. However, Niru now knew what to do: terminate this unwanted pregnancy through safe abortion services. She came to me for further counseling, and with my guidance, she went to Brahmatala Health Post and terminated her unwanted pregnancy. Niru says, “Kiran is a God for me. If she had not given me the information on sexual and reproductive rights, I cannot imagine how my life would be. I could not have lived with a new pregnancy in a body that was tired after year after year of pregnancy. I am alive today because of the support of the Natural Leader.”

Niru has protected herself from further pregnancy using Depo-Provera. She advises women in the community on sexual and reproductive health and gives away information on safe abortion to women in need.



## Insights on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Right Unveiled through Community Session

**RADHA SAUD**

Natural Leader

Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality, Achham

Ganga Tamata (named changed), 35, lives at Kalika Tole of Thapa Gaun in ward no. 5 of Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality in Achham District. She has six family members, including three daughters and one son. Her husband works in India to support the family.

Ganga is literate but never got the chance to complete her schooling. She was a victim of a society that shrugged off the education of women as useless for the family: Why would a girl child need to be educated? After all, she will be married off at another's house. But now, realizing the importance of education, Ganga works hard to educate her children.

However, as her husband is out of the country, she must manage all the household chores and farm activities all by herself. Despite this hard work, she finds time to attend community sessions. She has learned a lot from the discussions held at the community sessions and finds discussions helpful in her life.

Being a Natural Leader, I conduct various sessions on sexual and reproductive health and safe abortion in the community. Ganga participates in the sessions and believes that the Natural Leader's community sessions are helpful to women and adolescent girls.

Ganga knew nothing about sexual and reproductive health and safe abortion services before. She never got the chance to hear anything on the issues. She was married off at a young age, and by the time she was 18, she had already given birth to her children. Despite the hard times she was undergoing, she never discussed sexual and reproductive health-related issues she had, fearing that she would be called shameless.

However, after participating in the community sessions, she started learning about sexual and reproductive health. Throughout ten sessions and the discussions that followed, Ganga gained insights into sexual and reproductive health,

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**These days, Ganga uses pills to prevent pregnancy. She shares the things she learns at the community sessions with her husband, and now her husband is also aware of sexual and reproductive health and rights.**



including her rights in this regard, safe abortion, family planning, and contraceptive methods. In hindsight, she thinks she would never have given birth to four children if she had known about all these before.

Ganga said, “I never knew that safe abortion could be done at the health post nearby, and my husband also never told me about it. I was under the impression that abortion can be done only in a big city like Dhangadhi and in India. I did not have the resources to go far off for abortion. Thus, I gave birth though unwanted.”

“I do not know how many births I would be subjected to if the fourth child did not happen to be a boy. Thank God, the fourth child is a boy,” Ganga added.

Ganga's husband returned from India as she was enjoying the new-found knowledge. As her husband was in India, she had not found the need to use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. But suddenly, her husband arrived home. She knew she or her husband had to use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy but thinking that the use of contraceptives would only create mistrust, she had unsafe sex with her husband and was impregnated for the

fifth time. This was an unwanted pregnancy. She discussed terminating the pregnancy with her husband, and the husband agreed. Ganga then went to Jayagadh Health Post and underwent a safe abortion as per the advice of the health worker.

These days, Ganga uses pills to prevent pregnancy. She shares the things she learns at the community sessions with her husband, and now her husband is also aware of sexual and reproductive health and rights. She says, “The community sessions that occur twice a month have completely changed my life.”



## A Journey from Natural Leader to Local Elected Representative

**DHARMA ROKAYA**  
Program Officer  
Peace Win, Bajura

Radha Saud, 30, is a permanent resident of Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality, Ward No. 5. She is literate but never finished school. She has a family of four: a husband, a daughter, a son, and herself.

Her family is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Besides the household chores, Radha helps her husband on the farm. Importantly, she finds time to participate in meetings, seminars, and workshops conducted in the community. This has allowed her to be known by everyone in the community.

Because of her active participation in issues that matter to the community, she was chosen as a Natural Leader from her ward for the Strengthening the Safe Abortion Ecosystem Project implemented under the partnership of Ipas Nepal and Peace Win Nepal.

After she participated in the Natural Leaders' training, she started running community sessions on sexual and reproductive health and rights once every month. The responsibility of being a Natural Leader provided her with the opportunity

to hone her skills as a public speaker and created a different image of her in the community: a person dedicated to the development of the community.

Soon, the local elections were announced. Political parties wanted to field her as a woman candidate for a ward member in the open category. She ran for office and won the elections.

After being elected to the Ward Office, her responsibility has been added. She works for the family, the community, and the ward office. As she was elected as a ward group, stepping on the foundations set by her role as a natural leader, she continued to take the community sessions. She has been learning about sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion services, family planning services, and gender equality. She has been sharing her knowledge with community members such as women and adolescent boys and girls.

Radha's efforts have paid off. Women and adolescent girls and boys have been taking family planning services and safe abortion services from the nearby health facility.



**Under the leadership of Radha, Kalika Tole of Ward No. 5 created an action plan for raising the awareness of women, men, and adolescent girls and boys on sexual and reproductive health. The Ward Office allocated NPR 50,000 to implement Kalika Tole's action plan.**



Despite assuming responsibility as a ward member, Radha continued participating in the movement. She established the rights of women and men to sexual and reproductive health in her community. As a Natural Leader and a Ward Member, Radha has been continually raising her voice for improving sexual and reproductive health services and safe abortion services in her ward health facility. Under the leadership of Radha, Kalika Tole of Ward No. 5 created an action plan for raising the awareness of women, men, and adolescent girls and boys on sexual and reproductive health. The Ward Office allocated NPR 50,000 to implement Kalika Tole's action plan. With that fund, the residents of Kalika Tole conducted an intensive awareness-raising program. The ripple effect of the awareness campaign was also observed in the entire health sector beyond sexual and reproductive health. This has helped increase the accountability of Jaygadh Health Post and the Municipality Office. It has further developed a positive impact on women who come from a marginalized ethnic background like Radha.

Radha demonstrated that social empowerment and self-determination establish an individual in society, and community leadership can create political leadership opportunities. And Radha has been able

to transform society. She has brought down the number of women resorting to unsafe abortion at home, and the proper use of contraceptives has prevented women from unwanted pregnancies. Radha vows that she will continue to demand more budget for establishing sexual and reproductive

health and rights. At the core, Radha is a women's activist. She says, "Though I have been elected a member of the ward for five years, I am essentially a women's rights activist and will continue to work for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women."





## Elevate Community Interest on Sexual and Reproductive Health

**BHAWANA ROKAYA**

Natural Leader

Gaumul Rural Municipality, Bajura

Sushila Rokaya (named changed) lives in Ward No. 1 of Gaumul Rural Municipality. She has had a basic education, and so has her husband. They have two daughters and one son. The Rokayas make their living from farming. Though they never went to college, they know the value of formal education, and both want their children to be educated.

One day, Sushila learned from a Mothers' Group a community session that I conducted on sexual and reproductive health was scheduled for her community, where I discussed sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion, the use of contraceptives, and child spacing in the session. This was the first time Sushila had taken the community session. Once it was over, she ruminated: Had she known all this before, she would not have opted to have all three children.

Neither Sushila nor her husband knew women could access safe abortion services from the

Nearby health facility, Dahakot Health Post. That's why there was no alternative. It was either giving birth or trying an unsafe abortion and putting one's life at risk. She had heard that she must go to Dhangadhi, a city far away, or even further to India, for a safe abortion. As Sushila could not afford to travel that far, she gave birth to three children, whether she liked it or not. Sushila wondered how many births she would have to give if the third child was not a boy, as she was part of a society that valued men over women, and women were taken as just machines for giving birth.

Sushila also thought: If she had known about it earlier, how easy her life would be, raising and educating the desired number of children. How she wished community discussions and sexual and reproductive health were held earlier when she needed them most.

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**If she had known about it earlier, how easy her life would be, raising and educating the desired number of children. How she wished community discussions and sexual and reproductive health were held earlier when she needed them most.**



Sushila learned from the community sessions about the several contraceptives available for both men and women, for example, condoms, pills, Depo-Provera, IUCD, and implants. She also understood that the use of any of them would prevent unwanted pregnancy. She would take the counsel of Natural Leaders, Female Community Health Volunteers, and health workers at the health facilities in using them in the future.

Sushila also expressed her commitment to propagate the message to other women like herself and even advocate for better services in safe abortion and contraception with the local authorities.





## Managing Menstruation Without Discrimination

PUJA B.K.

Natural Leader

Chure Rural Municipality-4, Kailali

My name is Puja B.K., and I come from the Dalit community, traditionally treated as untouchables and discriminated against inhumanely. Worse still, my family was very poor. And I was a woman, a category society discriminates against. The combination of these traits made me a weakling, confined to following the dictates of the family and societal hierarchy. I was not able to influence anything in my family and society. Nobody would listen to me and my family. I hesitated even to strike up an ordinary conversation with others, fearing unpleasant remarks.

My society is discriminatory against women. Untouchability against women during menstruation takes discrimination against women to an extreme level. A menstruating woman cannot touch her father and brothers, nor can she touch a baby under five/six months. This extreme discrimination against women is a result of society's failure to take menstruation normally, a natural process that women undergo every month. I was no exception to this discrimination. I suffered from it like many other women in my society.







**These days, during menstruation, I live like any other normal day. My family no longer views menstruation as an issue of untouchability, and in the community, discrimination against women during menstruation is decreasing.**

During the menstruation period, women were separated from the family. They had to stay in an unhygienic shed far from home because, for society, menstruation was synonymous with untouchability. I missed school and during menstruation. My family's discriminatory behavior suffocated me. I could not speak up despite my conscience insisting it was wrong.

When I was chosen to be a Natural Leader, I underwent training to mobilize the community on sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion, gender-based violence, and gender equality. Returning home after the training, I initiated discussions within the family and community to raise awareness. Gradually, families that considered these issues taboo began to show signs of change. Women became increasingly aware that menstruation should be managed properly and hygienically rather than taking it as an issue of untouchability. Even within my own family, members drastically changed their behavior when my mother and I were menstruating.

Ipas Nepal's training provided me with grit and determination. It offered me insight into discrimination and how individuals can organize themselves to fight against it. The training instilled a strong belief that I can change people's behavior in society. The change begins with the individual. These days, during menstruation, I live like any other normal day. My family no longer views menstruation as an issue of untouchability, and in the community, discrimination against women during menstruation is decreasing, though not entirely eradicated.

The training I underwent as a Natural Leader and the changes I witnessed during awareness campaigns have strengthened my resolve to continue dispelling misconceptions about sexual and reproductive health, abortion, contraception, and menstruation. I am committed to transforming the harmful beliefs and behavior of the community, working towards an inclusive and equitable society.

## Safe Abortion: A Women's Decision

**SASHIKALA BUDHA**

Natural Leader

Thawang Rural Municipality-2, Rolpa

Once I, Sashikala Budha, a Natural Leader for Ipas Nepal, returned home after completing training, I started taking community sessions on the issues I was trained on: Sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion, family planning, contraceptives, and gender equality.

I gave my first session to the Health Mothers' Group. In the session, Rama Budhamagar (Name Changed), 32, and her elder sister participated along with other women in the community. Rama is a resident of Ward No. 2, Thawang Rural Municipality, Rolpa. She has a family of four: 2 sons, her husband, and herself. Her husband works abroad.

After a few days, Rama's sister came to me for consultation on safe abortion services on behalf of Rama. Rama was impregnated when she and her husband, who had come

home on vacation three months ago, engaged in unprotected sex. Her husband had flown back to work. She asked for advice on what Rama should do to terminate her pregnancy. Rama did not want to have another child because she already had two.

The next time, both Rama and her sister arrived at my place. I advised them that Rama could terminate her pregnancy at a government-certified health post nearby. The health post would maintain her confidentiality. I also told them that opting for a safe abortion can be the sole decision of the woman. Thus, they went back home, deciding to terminate Rama's pregnancy, and were reassured about their concerns.

Then I went to the government-listed health post and informed health workers there about Rama's need: a safe abortion under utmost



**Health workers from the certified health facility also thanked me for working tirelessly in providing the correct information on safe abortion, helping women and adolescent girls in need of the service, and, in many cases, saving their lives.**



confidential circumstances. The health workers were ready to provide the service. The next day, Rama went to the certified health facility for an abortion. The service providers terminated her 6-week pregnancy safely using just the medicine. Rama was satisfied with the service provided.

She was thankful to me for providing her with timely advice. Health workers from the certified health facility also thanked me for working tirelessly in providing the correct information on safe abortion, helping women and adolescent girls in need of the service, and, in many cases, saving their lives. I am also proud of myself for being able to extend support to fellow women and adolescent girls as a Natural Leader, sharing with them the knowledge I have in sexual and reproductive health.





## Safe Abortion Service Saved Life

**SHARMILA GHARTI MAGAR**

Natural Leader

Lungri Rural Municipality, Rolpa

Sarala Punmagar (name changed), a resident of Lungri Rural Municipality -7, Rolpa, was newly married. Shortly after marriage, her husband went abroad for work, leaving her incredibly lonely. During his absence, Sarala engaged in a physical relationship with an old-time friend of hers. After some time, she fell in love with another guy. She left her husband and eloped with him.

Shortly after the eloping, her new husband and his family discovered that she was pregnant from her previous relationship. Neither the new husband nor the old-time friend accepted her. Her pregnancy had already gone into its fourth month. She found her situation deeply shameful and wanted to end her life.

Aware of safe abortion through community sessions I conducted, a few women who learned about Sarala's predicament suggested she seek my support. Sarala and I met, and after listening to her problem, I informed her about the provision of safe abortion services. I advised her to go to a listed health facility and take the safe abortion service, counseling her to brave the odds of life.

Following my advice, she took the safe abortion service. If Sarala had not known about safe abortion in time, we do not know whether Sarala would still be alive today. She is single now but happily living her life. I feel a sense of accomplishment in fulfilling the responsibility of a Natural Leader and assisting Sarala. I will continue to be involved in this noble work long into the future.



**Neither the new husband nor the old-time friend accepted her. Her pregnancy had already gone into its fourth month. She found her situation deeply shameful and wanted to end her life.**

## Natural Leaders- Harbinger of Awareness and Advocacy

KAMALA SUBEDI

Natural Leader

Malarani Rural Municipality-1, Arghakhanchi

My name is Kamala Subedi. I live in Chhedakothanti at Ward No. 1 of Malarani Rural Municipality in Arghakhanchi District. I have a small family of 5 members: My husband, me, two sons, and one daughter. Since I was young, I wanted to work for the community, particularly women's rights. I was looking for an opportunity. However, as I had financial constraints, I could not leave my home village for the opportunity. I was hoping to work in my home village.

Fortunately, Malarani Rural Municipality selected me for training on sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion services, and gender equality. I did not have prior knowledge of the issues. I took the 5-day training enthusiastically, inspiring me to work and make a difference in the community. I promptly shared my newfound knowledge with the Ward Chair, outlining my plans for community

engagement – collecting participants and sharing the knowledge I gathered at the training. In the presence of the Ward Chair, I engaged participating women in discussions about sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion, family planning, and contraceptives.

I informed women that they could take safe abortion services from the nearby health post for up to 10 weeks of pregnancy and that, too, is the autonomous decision of the women. During monthly community sessions with the Health Mothers' Group, I addressed the use of contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancy and the associated challenges of abortion.

Beyond these sessions, I also discussed sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion and family planning services, and mitigation of gender-based violence



**Recently, I trained elected woman representatives of my Ward and created a ward-level Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Committee. Mobilizing this network for policy advocacy, we successfully designated Mareng Health Post as a government-listed facility for safe abortion services.**

with female community health volunteers, police officers, elected representatives, teachers, and students.

My efforts have created positive change in the community. I have created a natural leader identity for myself in the community. I am also more confident than ever in my work.

Recently, I trained elected female representatives of my Ward and created a ward-level Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Committee. Mobilizing this network for policy advocacy, we successfully designated Mareng Health Post as a government-listed facility for safe abortion services.

I am committed to raising awareness of women and adolescent girls in the community regarding safe abortion and actively advocating with local government to improve and expand sexual and reproductive health and safe abortion services in the community.





## Awareness Reducing Unintended Pregnancy in Community

**SANGITA HITANG**

Natural Leader

Tansen Municipality-11, Palpa

Living in a peaceful neighborhood in Tansen municipality, ward no. 11, my 35-year-old sister-in-law led a content and happy life with her two children. Unfortunately, having skipped her contraceptives resulted in an unwanted pregnancy, a secret she kept from her husband, fearing his insistence on keeping the child.

One day, on her way back from Tansen Bazaar, she bought an abortion pill. Irresponsibly, she consumed a total of 5 pills at once, hoping to expedite the process, resulting in excessive bleeding. Since she was aware that I conducted awareness campaigns on sexual and reproductive health in the community, she felt comfortable sharing her experience with me. I advised her on the legal option of seeking a listed health facility for cost-free and safe abortion services. She told me that her fear of her husband's pressure had driven her

impulsive actions. Urgently, she went to a hospital, where timely checkups and medication averted potential risks, ensuring a speedy recovery.

As a pre-emptive measure against unwanted pregnancies, she has resumed the use of family planning devices. She has been using the Depo injection. Now, she advises other women in her community to use family planning devices and explains their importance to them. She also helps me set up social discussions on similar issues. She agrees that Natural Leaders are great friends for women. She also appreciates and praises Natural Leaders for carrying out such noble work of helping different people in the community. I also observe tangible changes in my community. Women's use of family planning devices has increased by a huge margin in the community. Thus, I am pleased that positive changes are being observed through my awareness campaigns, which provide me with hope and motivation to continue my work in the future.



**One day, on her way back from Tansen Bazaar, she bought an abortion pill. Irresponsibly, she consumed a total of 5 pills at once, hoping to expedite the process, resulting in excessive bleeding.**

## Right to Safe Abortion, Right to Bodily Autonomy

**NISHA ROKAYA**

Natural Leader

Gaumul Rural Municipality - 5, Bajura

Sarita (name changed), 35, lives with her husband, 3 daughters, and a son in Gaumul Rural Municipality, ward no. 5, Parikot, Bajura.

Busy with her everyday chores in the village, Sarita was unaware of sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion services, and contraceptives. After her marriage, Sarita gave birth to her first daughter. She then gave birth to two additional daughters, which led to rising complaints in her family for not giving birth to a male child. She was compelled to go through another pregnancy in hopes of a son. Thankfully, she bore a son during her fourth pregnancy, which relieved Sarita immensely. Despite this being a reason for celebration, properly raising a large family with 4 children was an immense ordeal for the family.

One day, Sarita decided to attend a community discussion hosted by the Natural Leader, Nisha Rokaya. The discussion held in the Mothers' Group dealt with sexual and reproductive health and

safe abortion services in detail. Having never been exposed to such a session, her curiosity peaked, and she listened intently. She learned all about safe abortion services and family planning. Sarita, who feared speaking up in front of her husband and in-laws, realized that if she had known of contraceptive devices before, she wouldn't have given birth to as many children.

An awful coincidence hit her. Right before she was made aware of contraceptives and family planning methods, she had engaged in unprotected sex and was already pregnant. As she was present in the session, she was aware of safe abortion services. She conversed with the Natural Leader in her community for further information on safe abortion and decided to go to the nearest listed health facility to carry out the procedure. Before the session conducted by Nisha, she did not have the opportunity to access valuable information like this. After 6 months of participating in the session, she was successful in making a self-decision to prevent her unwanted pregnancy.



**Looking back, Sarita wishes that nobody experiences what she did, so she has begun spreading awareness on sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion, and family planning devices.**





Now, Sarita is using contraceptives to prevent any further pregnancies. Looking back, Sarita wishes that nobody experiences what she did, so she has begun spreading awareness on sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe abortion, and family planning devices. She is now determined always to help the women in her community gain access to the information she can when she needs it the most.

Generally, the desire for a son and the lack of access to contraceptive devices have been significant factors causing unwanted pregnancies, compelling women to give birth to a child even though they do not want to. Some women are also pushed to a point where they are ready to throw away their precious lives by resorting to unsafe abortion practices. Now, Sarita looks back and thinks that if it were not for the Natural Leaders, things would have become a lot worse for her as well. What Sarita wants more than anything now is to help women in the same situation as she was a few months ago, as she enthusiastically strives to spread awareness in her community consistently.



## My Pursuit for Community Transformation

**PRAMILA NEPALI**  
Natural Leader  
Budhiganga Municipality-6, Bajura

I, Pramila Nepali (name changed), 24, live with my son in Bajura's Budhiganga Municipality - 6, Sayal. My husband is employed in India to meet the family's financial needs.

Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) in the region tried their best to make people aware of family planning devices, but safe abortion services were rarely talked about in the community. The people found it incredibly shameful and unbearably embarrassing to converse about sexual and reproductive health or abortion generally.

Per the municipality's selection committee, I was chosen as a Natural Leader for the community and sent to a training program. As someone who could barely converse with people, I wondered whether this training program would help me. I was equally scared of returning home and talking to people about things that everyone in the community felt uncomfortable discussing.





**People who disagreed to talk openly about these matters before now praise me for my work. Women are a lot more aware in my community. Unwanted pregnancies are now being dealt with much care.**

However, the thought of organizing an awareness program intrigued me. All I was worried about was deciding how to present such a difficult issue in front of a crowd that had grown so traditionally ignorant.

After the 5-day training program, I conducted a community session in the Mothers' Group regarding sexual and reproductive health. Teaching the women present about the things I learned during the training program on sexual health, reproductive health, and abortion services while discussing the existing social problems that hindered the progress were a few things that I was responsible for. As I interacted with the participants during the program, I felt my confidence and public speaking skills grow astonishingly. Sexual and reproductive rights and safe abortion services were a few things that I made people aware of with the collaboration of FCHVs that helped me access the municipality and health posts where I was able to ask for a portion of their budget to be utilized in a noble cause like ours. As a Natural Leader, I have been successful in instilling change in people who thought of sexual and reproductive health as something demonic and taboo.

As a Natural Leader, I have been constantly raising community awareness as well as advocating for quality, safe abortion services. In addition, I have emphasized a lot on the importance of family planning devices and contraceptives as they prevent unwanted pregnancies. Collaborating with the health facilities, I have been spreading awareness to students in schools about the importance of reproductive health, safe abortion, and family planning.

People who disagreed to talk openly about these matters before now praise me for my work. Women are a lot more aware in my community. Unwanted pregnancies are now being dealt with much care. The municipality and the local health posts are increasingly becoming more responsible and reliable when providing abortion services to people. Having brought immense impactful changes to society has been very fulfilling to me, and I hold pride in being able to do so. I shall always spread awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights and safe abortion services and fulfill my duty as a Natural Leader for my community.

## Combating Violence Against Women: Pursuing Legal Action

**HIMKALA JOSHI**  
Social Mobiliser  
Peace Win, Bajura

Manisha (name changed), 27, lives in Chaurpati Municipality - 1, Siudi, Accham, with her son, daughter, and husband. Since the family was in a dire financial condition with very few employment opportunities in the region, her husband went back and forth to India for employment.

Her husband - who was in India for a long time - communicated with Manisha on the phone. However, they had lost contact since her husband had stopped calling her. Manisha was distraught. She feared that he was extremely sick and there was no one to look after him. She desperately searched for alternatives to reach out to him, but none seemed to work.

On Magh 23, 2079, her husband arrived at home without any word before his arrival. Accompanying him was another woman. Seeing the husband arrive, the village was there to welcome him. After asking him about his general welfare, they asked who the new woman was. He answered by telling them that she was also his wife. Manisha, who

was initially happy that her husband had arrived back home, was in a pool of tears when she came to know about her husband's new wife.

As somebody who attended a lot of awareness campaigns on gender discrimination, patriarchy, and sexual and reproductive rights, Manisha did not want to bear the discrimination that was done against her. She appealed for justice with the Health Mothers' Group, Natural Leaders, and Political Leaders. Everybody advised her to reach out to the justice committee and write an appeal to the police against polygamous marriage, reassuring her that they would be there for her in every step ahead.

At the discretion of the justice committee, Manisha and her husband were called for a discussion. After a thorough discussion, Manisha's husband was pressed with charges of engaging in polygamy, with legal consequences waiting for him. A portion of the family wealth was given to her to assist Manisha

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**Even though it was an outrageously heartbreaking experience for Manisha, the community was happy that she received justice. She was also able to set an example for women to never succumb to patriarchy and remain silent.**





in raising her two children. With the help of the members of the mother's group, the justice committee, Natural Leaders, and the local government, the discrimination against Manisha was dealt with smoothly with the perpetrator behind bars and financial reparations provided for her children's growth.

Even though it was an outrageously heartbreaking experience for Manisha, the community was happy that she received justice. She was also able to set an example for women to never succumb to patriarchy and remain silent. This incident has caused women in the community to grow increasingly optimistic about discussing sexual and reproductive health, safe abortion services, and gender discrimination. It has also highlighted the importance of social mobilizers and Natural Leaders who work hard to make people aware of the situations they are and can be in. The community has now vowed to fight for women's rights and welcome social practices that facilitate this movement with utmost determination.



## Putting an End to Unsafe Abortion

**TULSI JOSHI**  
Natural Leader  
Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City - 17, Kailali

Kalpana Nepali (name changed), 27, lives in Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City - 17, Kailali districts with her two sons and husband.

Kalpana does not want to have any more kids. Both husband and wife commit equally to housework and find time to engage in community activities when necessary. The family was doing great. However, having had unprotected sex, Kalpana was now pregnant. Since it was an unwanted pregnancy, they decided it was best to abort the pregnancy.

One day, Kalpana went to a private medical store to get medication for abortion. After consuming the medicine, she started bleeding. Worried that the medicine had not worked, and the bleeding would not stop, she decided to go back to the pharmacy and question the seller. The seller dismissively replied by accusing her of coming too late to the pharmacy and that the fetus was already at a stage where it could not be aborted. The profit-

driven seller was clouded by greed and could not sense the magnitude of the problem the medicine they sold had caused for Kalpana.

In a state of desperation, she decided to reach out to me, a Natural Leader, asking for help. Having heard her entire plot, I found that she resorted to the wrong action by trying to independently abort her baby through an unsafe abortion practice of taking uncertified pills from the pharmacy. If only she had accessed a government-certified health institution, this situation would not have happened. Lecturing her on safe abortion services would be nice, but we had many urgent matters in hand. We had to rush her to the hospital for a checkup immediately.

Kalpana's husband and I approached the pharmacist who sold her the uncertified medicine. We threatened to place a legal complaint against the seller with a charge

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**I love that I am part of a community that unconditionally helps people, and each interaction with new individuals in the community just fuels my drive to do more.**





of attempted murder by selling unauthorized medicine to people. We emphasized how Kalpana could have possibly lost her life if she could not get proper treatment in time. The seller was frightened. He took her to a hospital and sponsored all the medical bills.

Kalpana and her husband thanked me for giving them the proper guidance at the right time. I felt I had fulfilled one of my responsibilities as a Natural Leader. Natural Leaders are not just viewed as people who spread awareness but people who deal with people who promote unsafe services, people who fight for women's reproductive and sexual rights, and people who are there to help you and answer your questions when you need them. For this very reason, I love that I am part of a community that unconditionally helps people, and each interaction with new individuals in the community just fuels my drive to do more.





## A Narrow Escape from Death

A 28-year-old girl from Mellekh Rural Municipality, Hattikot, aged 8, lived there with her four daughters. Her husband often goes to and from India for employment. He has been staying at home lately.

As they already had four children, they did not want another child. The societal pressure to give birth to a son overwhelmed her. She found herself pregnant again. She was now already 10 weeks pregnant. The couple decided they wanted to know the sex of their child. Praying to God for a son, the couple arrived at a medical clinic in Sanfebagar and did a video x-ray. To their unpleasant surprise, the x-ray revealed a timid framework of a precious female child. Post-sex revelation, the couple discussed and came to a consensus on aborting the baby inside.

I received the news during a call with her. She confided in me that she did not want a baby and wanted to abort it as soon as possible. Acknowledging their decision, I recommended they go to a hospital in Bayalpata to get a safe abortion. During the day of the visit, I tagged along with them to the hospital. Unfortunately, the hospital there did not have the right doctors and

sufficient equipment to terminate a pregnancy that was already over 10 weeks old. As a solution, I advised them to go to the district hospital next to get a safe abortion procedure done.

Despite my constant concern, the girl I considered my sister decided to go to a pharmacy instead. There, she bought an abortion pill and took it on her way home. This action had severe consequences. In the span of 2-3 days, she had started bleeding with increasing intensity over time. And when I called her to find out how she was doing, I was met with a shocking reply. She had lied to me about going to the hospital and had instead taken an unauthorized pill from a pharmacy. I was genuinely disappointed. I told her that unsafe abortion measures like pills were a mistake and were to be avoided at all costs. In the next few days, her health deteriorated at an astonishing rate.

Aware of my sister's miserable state, I visited her in Sanfebagar again. She was there at the same clinic where she bought the medicine. The person in the clinic urgently asked us to move to a hospital for treatment. I was infuriated. Angrily, I told the shopkeeper that the unauthorized medicine that they sold was killing people. I also threatened him

PARVATI SUNAR

Champion

Bannigadhi Jayagadh Municipality, Accham



**My sister decided to go to a pharmacy instead. There, she bought an abortion pill and took it on her way home. This action had severe consequences. In the span of 2-3 days, she had started bleeding with increasing intensity over time.**



with a lawsuit for his irresponsible actions. He accompanied me to the hospital in Bayalpata. The doctor, having checked my sister, alarmingly approached us. They informed us that she had lost blood heavily and needed four packs of blood as soon as possible.

I spread the news everywhere and made sure the four packs of blood reached the hospital in time. After she was provided with the blood, positive changes were observed. Post-observation, the doctor reassured me that my sister was no longer in a life-threatening condition. She would live. I was extremely relieved; long streams of tears fell down my eyes. My sister glanced at me worriedly, seeing the tears on my face. I toughened up. I had to. As consoling her and providing reassurance was my responsibility, I had to remain calm. I told her that she would be okay now, giving her the hope she needed for a better recovery.

Later, I talked with the doctor. They told me how significantly worse her condition would have been if she had been brought to the hospital any time later. Having stayed under medical observation and care for five more days, my sister was finally discharged. She was on bed rest.

After some time, she was fully recovered. This was when I strictly advised my sister to use family planning devices and safe contraceptives during sex. Listening to my advice, she has now taken the Depo injection. She feels guilty for not taking my words seriously, which could have possibly killed her. She is very thankful to everyone who supported her and said she is alive because of them.

