

EDWON NEWSLETTER

December 2011



Breaking New Ground: Beyond Subsistence Farming

Kalpna Thapa, EDWON's resident agricultural trainer, is crouched over a tiny plot of land covered with a greenish fuzz. Pointing to it, she tells the crowd of women around her that their hard work and attention to detail is paying off. They cheer and laugh.

We are equally excited to share this story of a new Livelihood Project that we have started in Taklung, Gorkha. EDWON has brought in several agricultural experts with whose help members of the local women's groups are literally breaking new ground. With a broad-based approach incorporating training from experts, cooperative agriculture and marketing, the women are learning new techniques for growing cash crops on their land. The move beyond subsistence farming could be life changing. In tune with EDWON's bottom-up approach, the goal is to enable Dalit and other poor women to lead their community towards a better future, financially and socially.

This summer Kalpna has been living and working in Taklung, a village with 11 veteran women's groups. She is training 60 women, mostly Dalit, to make the leap to organic cash crops with training both in the field and in the class-room.

Kalpna and other advisors hired by EDWON have proven their techniques in other areas of Nepal. They first taught the women that the most important success factor is selecting crops and varieties appropriate to the region and conditions. The women have learned to test the soil, and how to select the proper field for each crop. They are practicing irrigating with every last drop of available water, and fashioning simple greenhouses out of plastic sheets and bamboo.

It would be hard to find more eager and excited students than the 60 women in our Taklung Livelihood Project.



Top right: Checking for pests on young cabbage plants

Above: Khadgabir Thapa with Taklung women.

Below: The women show off their ginger crop on Farmers Day .



As the plants mature, the advisors teach them how to fight disease and insects with herbal remedies and handpicking. Instead of chemical fertilizer, they learn to carefully measure and time the application of manure, so that over the next few years, the hard, yellow soil will be restored to health, while saving money on fertilizer.

Ginger is their first crop, because it is easy to grow and fetches a good price. But tomatoes, cabbage and cauliflower are also being introduced, as the women learn to grow these in specially prepared nursery beds made of old rice sacks.

Meanwhile, Kalpana and EDWON's staff have formed a local Project Monitoring Group, which includes Dalits and non-Dalits, men as well as women. The PMG monitors the crops, coordinates the training and activities of the project and advocates for the participants. The PMG is also the focus of the "training of trainers" plan so these women can go on to spread their new knowledge. This collaborative approach involving multiple women's groups is expected to eventually grow into a farming cooperative for distributing and selling the crops.

The program will also involve a marketing strategy to ensure the financial success of the project. In October EDWON celebrated a communal Farmers Day attended by local dignitaries, the media, and representatives from NGOs and the government to sell the produce and to raise awareness of the program and money for replication in other communities.

Women and men farming in rural Nepal have relied on knowledge passed down from generation to generation. Since most innovations and improvements in agricultural methods have never reached them, this training program has generated more excitement than any other EDWON project. And next year these women will pass their knowledge on to other women in their groups, and most likely to their cousins and sisters in neighboring villages.

With your help, the Taklung women are well on their way to another level of empowerment, and to better health and nutrition for their families.



THANK YOU to our fantastic supporters and volunteers, who enable EDWON's women to transform their lives and their communities.



Khagisara Excels

Educating a Girl is Key to Progress

By Pranali Trivedi

Back to school season for Nepali Dalit children is truly a time to celebrate!

Just ask Khagisara BK, a 13 year old Dalit girl who has finally been given the chance to attend school. She lives in a remote village in Devasthan, Baglung District with her parents and two younger brothers. Khagisara has an older sister who is married already, at age 15. If not for EDWON's programs, Khagisara may have suffered the same fate.

Most Dalits in rural Nepal do not have the chance to attend school. Oftentimes the building is too remote or requires a lengthy or dangerous walk. Parents do not always understand the importance of their children's education; this is especially true for girls, who are often charged with caring for younger siblings and completing chores while parents tend to the fields. The result is many children growing up unable to read, write, or perform simple calculations.

EDWON runs the annual Blue Shirt Campaign, a fundraising effort to provide uniform stipends to children whose families cannot afford to send them to school. \$10 covers the cost of the required uniform by Nepali public schools. In addition, EDWON has established a "pre-school" in Khagisara's village. This is a way for children kept at home beyond normal school age to receive an informal education in basic subjects, preparing them for the entrance exam to place into formal schooling. Once they are placed, the Uniform Stipend program helps to ensure those children can continue to attend.

Thank you for helping us grant hundreds of children this life-changing opportunity!

Khagisara dances and sings as EDWON's staff distributes school uniforms. When it is her turn to be recognized as a recipient, she smiles shyly as the excitement escalates around her. Khagisara and her friends Chhamu, Manikala, and Aitamala clap and cheer for each other.

This is the second time Khagisara has received the



Above: Khagisara and her classmates at an EDWON Uniform Stipend ceremony



Left: Khagisara

stipend. A gifted student, Khagisara was admitted directly to grade 3 from the "pre-school" program! She has a real thirst for knowledge and learning, and enjoys reading for pleasure. Khagisara even shares her skills with women in the community; she helps perform calculations for women in EDWON's Microfinance program, of which her mother, Maya, is a member. The gift of education clearly spreads beyond the initial recipient and continues to give.

Khagisara's story stands in sharp contrast to her sister Shanti's circumstances. Child brides experience pregnancies at a young age, high infant mortality, the birth of many children, persistent of poverty, and unfortunately for Shanti's children, the repeating cycles.

Leading development organizations, including the World Bank and UNESCO agree: educating a girl is the key to progress. When a girl goes to school, she

brings valuable information back to her community, future husband and children. She becomes a tool to teach and further strengthen the empowerment agenda.

In the last two years we have seen that a mere \$10 annually for Khagisara's education has gone far. The opportunity to attend school has changed her life. Khagisara could have become yet another victim of an ancient systemic problem, much like her sister. Instead, she continues to excel in the classroom and beyond, and she is an inspiration to everyone in her community.

With your help, EDWON hopes to continue giving the gift of empowerment



Did you know?

A single year of schooling for a girl

- reduces infant mortality by 5-10%
- reduces fertility rates from ~6 children to ~3
- increases social status, promoting equality in the household & community
- increases household wages by 10-20%
- increases life expectancy for herself and her future spouse



A Jewel of the Nation

Few Dalit women have been publicly recognized for their achievements in Nepal. EDWON's founder Bishnu Pariyar is a rare exception.

In June of this year, *The Sagarmatha Foundation* honored Bishnu at a large televised event in Kathmandu. As the only woman among 18 recipients, she was given the prestigious **Jewel of the Nation Award (2068 Nepal Samman)** for her contributions to Nepal's educational, social and cultural development.



EMPOWER
DALIT WOMEN OF NEPAL

Our New Look

As part of a renewal process, EDWON is sporting a new look! We hope you like our freshly minted logo designed by graphic designer Miriam Kasell!

The interconnected figures create a center of growth and beauty. We like the balance of positive and negative space, its symmetry, elegance and strength.

EDWON Walks for Nepal!



EDWON members join the Walk for Nepal parade in South Boston, helping to raise funds for causes in Nepal

On November 6th EDWON participated in the first annual **Walk for Nepal** in Boston.

Together with our friends from *Help Nepal Network*, *Nyaya Health*, *Nepal ko Yuwa*, *Friends of Maiti Nepal* and *The Nepalese Children's Education Fund* we raised over \$20,000!

Festivities at the event included a concert by *Rock for Nepal* and delicious Nepali eats provided by *Kathmandu Spice* in Arlington.

Join us next fall! www.walkfornepal.org

In Control of Her Life

Many of you read about Pampha Nepali and Sajita Pariyar last year when we introduced several participants of our Ambitious Girls Program. We'd like to give you a heartwarming update.

You may recall that like many other Dalit girls in rural Nepal, Pampha Nepali was not sent to school at the appropriate age of six or seven, because her parents were poor and she was a girl. But while still a young child, she sneaked off to join a local adult literacy class sponsored by the government. She was the fastest learner in the group, and soon her parents allowed her to join the regular school. Nevertheless, every so often, she felt pressured to leave school and go to work.

Pampha is now an empowered woman herself, and in a position to empower others.

But Pampha persevered and passed her 10th grade exam with honors. That is when she became one of the first beneficiaries of the Ambitious Girls Fund. Like her friend Sajita, she chose to study nursing, and both graduated from the 3-year program in 2010.

Pampha had always wanted to give back to her community; and now she found an opportunity to work with poor and underserved women. She recently landed her dream job -- as a staff nurse at a Marie Stopes International clinic in Eastern Nepal. Founded in England in 1921, this organization partners with the UNFPA and is renowned for delivering quality family planning and reproductive healthcare to poor women in many countries.



Pampha (right) is a staff nurse with Marie Stopes International.

Thanks to her education—which you and others made possible—Pampha is now an empowered woman herself, and in a position to empower others. Your continued generosity is helping the next generation of girls to spread their knowledge and dedication to foster change all over Nepal. The Ambitious Girls fund is currently enabling numerous other girls to reach their potential: 16 girls are preparing to become teachers, 5 are studying management, and 2 are studying to become nurses' aides.

Thank you for enabling Pampha, unlike so many of her sisters, to be in full control her own life. We hope you will continue to support girls like Pampha through the The Ambitious Girls Fund.

The Power of Knowledge

From Fujel, a Gorkha village on a dry plateau, there is a beautiful view of the Annapurna Range on a clear day. Fujel also boasts a Shiva temple considered important in the region; during major Hindu holidays the temple attracts a fair number of pilgrims.

Many of Fujel's residents are Dalits, but for centuries, the Hindu upper castes have forbidden them to enter the temple because they perceive Dalits as impure. And although Dalits of course are also Hindu, they are prevented from practicing their religion in local temples.

In part as a result of Nepal's 10-year civil war and the pervasive call for social justice, many Dalits are now less submissive to these clear violations of their civil rights. Social change is in the air, yet when a group of Fujel Dalit men sought to enter the temple with everyone else they were met with violence and left the temple with broken bones.

But EDWON has worked with women in Fujel for years and now has 11 groups in the area. In response, some of them decided to act, Phunu Pariyar among them. Phunu is a well respected Dalit leader, who understands social action. A number of women, dressed in their finest, lined up in front of the temple, holding red tikka powder and homemade flower malas for the deity. Prepared for the worst, but with quiet determination, the women entered the temple one by one. To everyone's surprise, no one lifted a hand, as they completed their worship and quietly went home.



Fujel women with flower malas

Since that spring day, Dalits worship in the Fujel temple along with everyone else. The explanation for this surprising and peaceful change is not that men out of chivalry don't beat women; violence against women is as widespread as caste discrimination. But these particular women, members of EDWON groups, are recognized in the village for being knowledgeable about their rights-- as women and as Dalits.

We are proud of the women's actions that day, and of the entire community for letting the women show them how to live together in harmony.

The traditionalists, who used violence to preserve the status quo, are aware that their actions are illegal, but haven't worried too much about it. That has all changed now, in large part due to EDWON's



Fujel 2009: EDWON's Human Rights Workshop





Phunu Pariyar is an activist in Fujel

activities with women. In their early literacy training, and through discussions at group meetings, women are introduced to the concept of human rights. EDWON also holds workshops where women learn how to lodge a complaint if their rights are violated.

EDWON held such a workshop for the women in Fujel in 2009 at the local school. It was a highly visible affair and the entire community knew that the women were being given tools in the form of knowledge that could be uncomfortable for their oppressors. We are proud of the women's actions that day, and of the entire community for letting the women show them how to live together in harmony.

We are also proud of EDWON's successful efforts in human rights education, and we know that your continued support will hasten important social change for Nepal's most oppressed citizens.

It's Simple to Empower Women and Children in Nepal!



- **\$10 keeps a child in school.**
Pays for a school uniform and supplies for a year.
- **\$50 brings a woman into a savings group.**
Provides a small seed fund, training, and 3 years of staff support.
- **\$100 provides literacy for 3 women.**
Covers a 6 month, 6 day/week literacy program.
- **\$300 gives human rights training to 100 Dalit women.**
Educates Dalit women on their rights.
- **\$700 covers college tuition for a young Dalit woman.**



EMPOWER

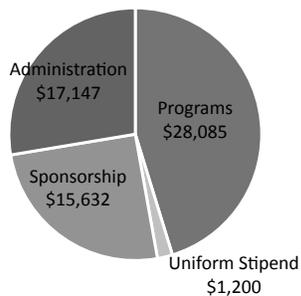
DALIT WOMEN OF NEPAL
A human rights organization for low-caste women and children. Through self-help groups, education, and micro finance, EDWON provides tools to end poverty and discrimination.



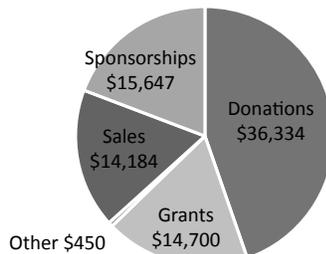
Kindly return an envelope with your donations to:
EDWON, P.O. Box 550076 N. Waltham, MA 02455

Financial Update 2010-2011

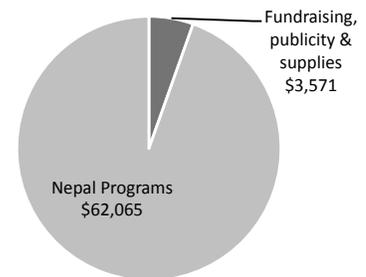
Programs \$62,064



Revenue \$81,315



Expenditure \$65,636



THANK YOU EVERYONE!

Your generosity has already changed the lives of thousands of marginalized women and children in Nepal.



For Major Gifts:

Kevin and Timothy Baird, St. Charles, IL
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