

Friends of ADWAN Nepal

2016 Newsletter



Bishnu Launches New Organization

We are pleased to announce the creation of Friends of ADWAN Nepal (FAN), the new fundraising arm of Association for Dalit Women's Advancement of Nepal (ADWAN). Bishnu Maya Pariyar and nine of her colleagues most committed to improving the lives of Dalit and marginalized women and children in rural Nepal began formally meeting in July of last year and received 501(c)3 nonprofit status in October 2015. Since Bishnu founded ADWAN in 1998 the organization has grown to serve more than 1,500 children and 2,200 women as part of 78 Women's Groups in seven districts. FAN proudly supports ADWAN's grassroots agenda to build women's solidarity across caste lines in order to decrease caste and gender discrimination; their work to ensure that many more children, especially Dalit girls, stay in school and even earn college degrees; their efforts to increase Dalit and

marginalized women's socioeconomic status through access to group savings and credit, microloans, and livelihood trainings; and, finally, their determination to raise the awareness of communities about Dalit and women's rights, hygiene, and women's health.

On behalf of ADWAN, Kamal Babu Pariyar (ADWAN's Executive Director), wanted to extend his appreciation of the partnership with FAN and our philosophy of grassroots-led initiatives. "We want more assessments from Fieldworkers to find out the women's needs and to find out what is effective," he explained. "Fieldworkers can find the root cause and ADWAN the solution with FAN's support." With your help, we hope to support Kamal and the staff of ADWAN in significantly improving the lives of Dalit women and children in Nepal.



Devi and her Ducks

Devi Gaire of Chitwan is a courageous, determined, and resourceful woman. Devi had tried many strategies to protect herself and her son from her alcoholic husband's abuse. She called the police and had him taken into custody, but to no avail. She tried to move to her mother's house; but he followed and threatened her. Then Devi's brother gave her a small plot of land to build a new home; but her husband fought with him until he took his offer back. Finally, Devi concluded that she could only escape if she earned enough money herself to buy a house beyond the reach of her husband. This realization emboldened her to join an ADWAN's women's group in order to benefit from the micro-lending program.

Even though Devi owns no land and works as a day laborer, she managed to save NR 300 (\$3) to become a member of the Saraswoti Women's Group. (The fee is required of new members to maintain fairness in the group; so that new members would not be benefiting from the considerable sum saved by the group without contributing anything substantial themselves.) With a NR 5,000 (\$50) loan from the group Devi purchase two ducks and a cage and started a duck-rearing business. Devi has already earned NR 9,000 (\$90) from selling eight ducks and still has eight ducks left. She is optimistic that soon she will have enough saved to move to that far away house where she and her son can live in peace.



Bulletin: Announcing Eight New Groups



In the year since FAN partnered with ADWAN five new Women's Groups formed in Chitwan (130 members), two in Tanahun, and one in Gorkha. These groups, ranging in size from 17 to 34 women from Dalit and other caste backgrounds, came together on their own and appealed to ADWAN for training before they were incorporated into the organization. The Narayani Women's Group in Chitwan serves as an excellent example of the range of starter services all new groups receive with very little cost. Initially, Bimala Nepali, an ADWAN fieldworker, met with the women to help them set up their group savings and loan program. Bimala taught them how to save, how to distribute loans and calculate in-

terest, how to write their names (to avoid the indignity of signing by thumbprint), and basic information about health and nutrition. In addition the group received a microloan of NR 30,000 (\$300) from ADWAN as well as \$10 stipends for each of their children. This money covers school fees for a year as part of the Blue Shirt Program, which supports the children of new Women's Group members for three years. This is how every ADWAN Women's Group is launched; and the Narayani Group is off to a promising start, with optimism and excitement about the future for themselves, their children, and their community.



Gorkha Earthquake Update

On April 25, 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck the Gorkha District, killing nearly 9,000 people, injuring almost 22,000, and leaving more than 300,000 homeless. A year and a half later little has improved for those with destroyed homes. Although emergency relief from national and international aid agencies reached survivors immediately, the Nepali government only delivered the first round of funds for citizens to rebuild their homes after a long delay. It is a mystery when anyone will get the second and third installments.

Adding to the frustration, the government has allotted subsidies of NR 200,000 (\$2,000) per house only for those earthquake victims who plan to build earthquake-resistant houses. According to the government's own estimates, these homes cost between NR 500,000 (\$5,000) and NR 2,500,000 (\$25,000), so many residents

will not have enough funds to rebuild their homes.

Recently Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, or "Prachanda," requested that parliament approve an additional NR 100,000 (\$1,000) to Nepalis building earthquake-resistant homes (making the total NR 300,000 (\$3,000)). Even if approved, the higher subsidies would be sorely insufficient for people living in extreme poverty (less than the international poverty line of \$1.25/day).

As a result those who are too poor to qualify for government subsidies to build earthquake resistant homes receive nothing. Without external support or interest-and-collateral-free loans, the poorest people simply lack the means to build the government-subsidized houses. Consequently, Dalit and other disenfranchised people have been living under tarps (essentially



in tents) or in small makeshift homes made out of thin corrugated metal, and sometimes even moved into their former cowsheds.

The majority of ADWAN's women have recovered from the earthquake, although some are still in trouble. In ADWAN's program area most women have a temporary shelter and have received the first installment of NR 50,000 (\$500) to build the earthquake-resistant homes, and ADWAN provided members in three regions of Gorkha with temporary shelters. Furthermore, Gorkha women who learned new livelihood skills through ADWAN's EU grant thrive in terms of earnings and knowledge about their rights; but for some unemployed women who couldn't participate, who lack farmland and income-generating skills, the future looks bleak unless ADWAN receives the necessary funds to serve them.





Samjhana Ale's Inspirational Story

When Samjhana Ale was 12-years-old, her mother ran away with another man. Devastated, her father had a nervous breakdown and returned to his childhood home in Gorkha, leaving Samjhana and her younger brother with relatives in Chitwan. Before she gained a sponsor as part of the Sponsorship Program, Samjhana struggled to buy food for her brother and herself and often missed school in order to work in the fields for subsistence wages. Fortunately, a generous donor in California heard her story and felt compelled to sponsor this determined girl.

This year Samjhana passed the difficult School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam at the

end of tenth grade, required to graduate high school in Nepal. She has chosen to study business and accounting during the "10+2" stage, Nepal's two-year period between secondary school and university (equivalent to junior college in America). Her ambition is to pursue banking after earning her bachelor's degree. For \$200 annually her faithful sponsor makes it possible for her to live at home with her brother, and for them to have enough to eat while she finishes 10+2. ADWAN's Ambitious Girl's Fund also helps to pay her tuition.

Samjhana hopes to sponsor a needy child herself one day.

Board Members

Daryl Caggiano

Secretary & Communications Director

Over the past seven years, Daryl has done communications for a variety of nonprofit organizations. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Non-profit Management.

William “Bill” Fisher

Bill is Professor of International Development and Social Change, Associate Provost, and Dean of Graduate Studies at Clark University.

Joan Goldmann

President & Sponsorship Coordinator

Joan has been empowering Nepali Dalit women and children for the past decade. She is a psychotherapist in private practice.

Namita Kiran-Thuene

Treasurer

Namita has experience managing accounts for major hospital grants. Now she works in the Boston Public School System as a special education teacher.

Bishnu Maya Pariyar

Founder

Bishnu founded ADWAN in 1998 and Friends of ADWAN Nepal in 2015. She serves as a member of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Bishnu currently works as a social worker at CarePoint Health in New Jersey.

Partners, Advisors, & Volunteers

Volunteers: Laura Haughey, Prabin Kanel, Jung Lee, Barb Levine, Colleen Mullaney, Prakash Pariyar, Yenifer A. Prajapati, Pradeep Thapa, Thomas Thuene, Tracy Ware

Advisors: Jessica Bethoney, Amy Gray, Carolyn Jacoby, Pradeep Thapa, Tracy Ware

Partners: Sharing Resources, Inc.

Special thanks to the Florence and Richard Koplou Charitable Foundation for their generous support!

2015-2016 Financials

October 1 - September 30

Revenue

\$43,090

Expenditures

\$24,692

Programs: \$24,297 (98%)

US Operating Costs: \$395 (2%)

Meet Kamal Babu Pariyar, ADWAN's Exceptional Leader

Kamal Babu Pariyar, the charismatic Executive Director of ADWAN, has served ADWAN nearly since its inception. Since becoming executive director three years ago, he has professionalized the organization, secured ADWAN's first major grants, and expanded the reach of ADWAN into many more areas. Kamal's tireless work ethic leaves him little time for anything other than the many responsibilities he has as executive director. However, as a way of introducing him to ADWAN's American supporters, he sat down for an interview in between trips to the field where he manages ongoing projects.

Kamal, age 41, is the fourteenth child of twenty from his father's two wives (his mother had 16 children). He left his small village in Gorkha District to attend the University of Allahabad (the fourth oldest college in India), more than 300 miles away. Just as he completed his bachelor's degree, and had begun a Master's in Sociology and Rural Development, his mother suddenly passed away. His studies were interrupted when his family needed his financial support; and he worked at the nearby Philips Service Center in India, training employees to fix TVs and VCRs (making use of his previous diploma in Electronics).

Kamal returned to Nepal one year later, looking for employment in his true passion, rural development. Although he held a degree from a prestigious university no one would hire him because of his Dalit status; therefore he decided to get a diploma in accounting. Fortunately, as

Kamal was completing his studies he met his future wife, Gita, who served as a social mobilizer for ADWAN. He quickly became engaged in the organization, jumping at the chance to advance the cause of Dalits in worse circumstances than his own.



With his talents, dedication, and discipline Kamal advanced very quickly. In 2000 (just two years after the organization began) ADWAN hired Kamal as a Preschool Teacher in the Jumpstart Program; the next year he was promoted to Group Organizer; the year after that he moved to Kathmandu to help as a Program Manager, and advanced to Program Officer two years later (where he remained for five years). He served as Program Coordinator from 2010 to 2013 when he was appointed Executive Director in September of that year.

In his new role Kamal drafted new, more transparent and efficient financial and personnel policies as well as a strategic plan that he developed for over two years with board members and staff. He also reached out to potential donors and partners in Nepal; and, in the beginning of 2014, he developed a connection with a member of the British council. By the end of the year that relationship led Kamal to win ADWAN its first major grant with the European Union (EU). Then in 2015, even as the earthquake destroyed his home in Gorkha, he met with a representative from London-based Karuna Trust (which funds organizations serving Dalits and other marginalized groups in South Asia) and again submitted a successful grant

proposal in 2016.

Kamal's Karuna Trust pilot project, "Improved Livelihoods of Earthquake Affected People," benefits 144 women (and, indirectly, more than 700 individuals including their families and communities) in two of the villages hardest hit by the earthquake. The project, running from July 2016 to August 2017, serves two vitally important purposes. First, since the earthquake destroyed the means of earning a living for many in the hardest hit regions, Dalit and marginalized women in Gorkha have been struggling to find new income-generating activities. In focus groups with Kamal, the women resolved to learn ginger and mushroom cultivation and pig breeding. They based their decision on the availability of local resources for small businesses as well as the products that would fare best in the market. Second, this pilot project fosters a safe and friendly environment where women can gain confidence in their businesses and raise awareness about gender inequality in their communi-

ties. To this end, every month Kamal leads meetings for activists on violence against women, workshops for Dalit and marginalized women on government policies and programs that benefit them, and public hearings on women's issues.

When asked what he enjoys most about his work, Kamal answered with a characteristic focus on helping others. "Developing skills by providing training and financial support through microfinance to poor Dalit women—so they can increase their income," he said. "Providing a better education for Dalit girls and boys—a weapon for social, economic, and political change. And education gives them the knowledge to stand up for their rights. To make women and girls aware of their rights and gender equality." Even in a personal interview, Kamal's focus on helping Dalit women is never far from his mind.



Changing a Village



In 2005 ADWAN started the Milijuli Women's Group in a small village in Baglung. The women who joined were awkward and shy to the point of hesitating to tell ADWAN staff members their names. They lacked self-confidence and were unaccustomed to speaking with others beyond their families because their husbands did all the talking. They were unaware of their rights or the value education. In fact, Dalit girls were not sent to school and instead kept home to help with chores. This was in 2005.

When ADWAN's staff visited the group of 42 members this year, the women confidently greeted them and enthusiastically shared the many ways that ADWAN has helped them to bet-

ter not only themselves but also their communities. Significantly, once they learned the importance of educating girls they began sending *all* their children to school! Even more, as a result of ADWAN workshops on issues from Dalit and women's rights, to health and hygiene, to advocacy skills, the women have taken leadership roles in improving their village's infrastructure.

During monthly meetings group members brainstorm ideas for solutions to village problems, which often means seeking out donors or government agencies to support projects. With the women's extensive knowledge of their rights and mandated government services for rural communities, particularly Dalits and women, they feel empow-

ered to hold their local representatives accountable. Furthermore, many group members themselves serve on the school board, as leaders in the new Citizen Awareness Center, and on the Village Development Committee (VDC), the main governing body at the local level.

Examples of improvements that have the Milijuli Group's imprint include building solar-powered streetlights to make the village safer and installing a toilet in every home, along with community training about the importance of cleanliness and good hygiene. But what the women point to as their greatest achievement is

that every house now has its own water tap, which saves them from traveling to the communal well to bathe, wash clothes, and collect household water.

Empowering vulnerable women to become self-sufficient and to believe in their own ability in order to gain self-respect and dignity happens one individual at a time. Working in solidarity the women of the Milijuli Women's Group transformed themselves, the lives of their children, and their village.

Meet ADWAN Board Member Sapana Pariyar, Nepal's Next Dalit Journalist

Sapana Pariyar, age 26, received an Ambitious Girls Fund stipend from ADWAN for her undergraduate education and in 2015 graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Mass Communication in order to gain the credentials to cover news about Dalit women. She is well placed as an ADWAN board member to report on this community; but it is a competitive field, and without connections in the industry she needs a master's to write the stories she wants.

Growing up as a Dalit in Gorkha, Sapana's dream of becoming a reporter began when a team of journalists visited her village to write a story about the practice of untouchability. She realized from this experience that she could use journalism as a tool to shed light on the condition of Dalits and possibly promote change. However, she still had to pass the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam at the end of 10th grade, an exam that only 4% of Dalits pass, compared to 18% of students nationally. In fact, according to a 2009 report published by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Dalits have the lowest literacy rate—35% (54% being the overall average)—of any group in Nepal; and 0.4% of Nepali Dalits earn a bachelor's or above (while 3% is the national average). Daunting statistics to overcome, but Sapana was determined to give voice to her



Sapana (left) with her mom

community. Fortunately, ADWAN's Ambitious Girls Fund exists to fund higher education for young women like Sapana, bringing them one step closer to realizing their dreams.



Women's Group Helps Earthquake Victims

Like most of the women in ADWAN's Women's Groups, Sangita Thapa Magar, Milan Women's Group President, explained that when the group formed in 2010 none of women had ever before saved money. At first they struggled to each save 10 Nepali rupees (equivalent to a penny) a month. But with the help of a fieldworker, they eventually learned to save by rationing their staples of rice and dhal. That proved to be a worthwhile sacrifice because once they contributed more to the group fund they were able to take out larger loans to build more ambitious businesses.

The Milan Women's group, however, was not only interested in improving the quality of their own lives and raising the status of Dalit women in their community, but in also helping

those even less fortunate than themselves. Sangita pointed out that the group maintained an emergency fund in order to help impoverished community members who fell ill or had an accident.

After the devastating earthquake in Nepal last year this group took the long journey from Chitwan in the Terai plains to Taklung in the Gorkha foothills, the epicenter of the quake. The women from Chitwan trekked nearly six hours in order to deliver rice, salt, and sugar, as well as tents, all purchased with the money they had saved, to the survivors of the earthquake. The empowerment that the women of Chitwan felt from their initial savings enabled them to look beyond themselves to help their fellow neighbors in need.