

A photograph showing a woman with braided hair braiding a young child's hair. The woman is wearing a light blue t-shirt with a cartoon pattern and a red wristband that says "ONE". The child is wearing a green t-shirt. They are sitting under a wooden structure with a corrugated metal roof. In the background, there is a grassy field, a blue plastic chair, and some buildings. The text "STORIES FROM FIELD" is overlaid in white at the top right.

STORIES FROM FIELD

**CHANGE STORIES
FROM NEPAL AND KENYA**



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Gender Equality

Change through education



Sanju Gupta, resident of Rajpur-1, Kapilvastu district, was nearly married off last year. Her family members were also thinking about it for they were not able to continue their daughter's education because of poor economic condition. After all, Sanju had studied up to grade 10, which, her family thought was adequate enough for a daughter. Several of her peers had already been married off. Sanju herself did not know whether to quit study or continue it.

But her meeting with VSO facilitators at Rajapur last year became a turning point of her life. These facilitators met her parents and told them that marriage before 20 was illegal and that since she is still studying, they need to give continuity to her education. But her father (a motorbike mechanic) and her mother (homemaker) said that their low income was not sufficient to teach the daughter and that they were receiving marriage proposal. But VSO facilitators still insisted that they should think of studies of their daughter more than marriage. And it changed everything. After the meeting with VSO facilitators, they became ready to continue their daughter's school education. Then they stopped talking about, even thinking about, marrying off Sanju.

VSO's Sahaj Project was implementing programs to maximize income alternatives for those who are above 16 and already married and those below 16. Sanju fell into this program's priority. Then Radha Gupta, Sanju's mother, opened a *ghumti* shop with the financial assistance of Rs 30,000 provided by the VSO

project. "The VSO facilitators kept coming to our house and told us that we must educate the daughter. They showed us the fear of law and they also helped through livelihood program. Thus we could give continuity to Sanju's education," said Radha Gupta, Sanju's mother.

Kanij Phatima, the facilitator of VSO project, and her associates went to Sanju's house several times. "We went there many times. We told them about how we could help in their daughter's education through livelihood project. Then they became ready to continue their daughter's education. Now their family is committed to continue her studies," said them.

Sanju makes history

Sanju enrolled in grade 11 this year. This is the highest level of academic anyone has achieved in their family history. All of her three brothers had quit when they were in grade eight. Ram Kulan Gupta, her father, looks to be the happiest person with his daughter's success. "She is the one who has studied up to the highest grade," he said. "In our family history, even sons had not studied further than grade eight." Her uncle, Sitaram Gupta, is of the opinion that Sanju has brought an honor to the whole village and believes that she will be able to accomplish even higher grade of studies. More important, the Guptas have been convinced that education can change the family status and they are not going to stop Sanju's education. The shop that Radha, Sanju's mother, runs has added confidence in them.

These days one sees Sanju reading books almost all the time, even while managing the household chores. The support she has found from the family has added to her confidence. Her role in the family has also changed. Her father, who earlier used expletives to admonish her and her mother, has now changed. They participate in the community discussions by taking turns and they have learned a lot from the interactions in the community. This has created a completely different atmosphere in the family.



"She is the one who has studied up to the highest grade. In our family history, even sons had not studied further than grade eight."

-Ram Kulan Gupta

Social inclusion

Change is not a big deal



Many families in Rajpur of Taulihawa Municipality-1 of Kapilvastu district discuss the gender violence. After VSO's Sahaj Project started in the community, the cases of family violence have sharply decreased. This has created a different kind of situation in the entire community. And this change has meant much better days for the women and girls.

But the situation was different until recently. The Sahaj project started in Rajpur last year. The project started to implement livelihood programs for the 20 households selected based on community priority and raised awareness programs for the whole community. It is these initiatives which have brought changes in the village. Of the 20 households thus selected the Sahaj project had to run some targeted family programs. The project had assisted the community by supporting education of children below 16 in education and for children above 16 by getting them involved in livelihood program.

The VSO facilitators had launched discussion in their livelihood program among the adolescent girls and their families regarding gender violence and family reconciliation. The discussion had been launched separately with adolescent girls and family members (mothers and fathers). After separate discussions for a few days, they also

launched such discussion in a group and it was focused on sharing of works in the family, family violence and causes of such violence. The series of such discussions helped them to change their mindset.

Abdul Ansari was one among the 20 households selected by the community. After he attended the discussion program conducted by the facilitators of the project, he started to change the way to look into things. He realized that he had been discriminating between his son and daughter. In Muslim community girls are forced to wear veils from the age of 10 and they are married way too early. They were not allowed to go out of the house. After participating in the discussion program, Abdul decided he would lift the restriction on his daughter and that he would start from his own family. Then he started to treat his daughter with respect. "Daughter and son are equal. We had been treating them differently because of our wrong mindset. Times have changed. The old mindset should also change," said Abdul, who is a bus driver and who drives the school bus. He would often return home late in the evening. Nowadays, he arrives home much earlier, at 6.

Sahana Khatun, Abdul's wife, is also happy to see the change that has come in her husband. She shared that she learned a lot during the discussion on violence against women and men and that women need not use veil while walking. Now that her husband has also understood the things well, says her, he allows her to go out of the house. "It sometimes feels like new age has come for us," said Sahana.

Mohammad Jamil Khan, a local, is also committed against not discriminating between son and daughter. "After participating in the program, we learned how we should behave with wife and children at home. Even small things can bring big change. Our thoughts and behaviors have changed. This is what is change, actually. To marry off daughters and sons at early age is to ruin their future. This does not help anybody," said Mohammad. "For years, we failed to realize how early marriage affects the whole life," he added. "We need to be conscious about this. Otherwise, another generation will suffer."

Gender discrimination:

Change is possible, early



Kharsaltol of Rajbiraj-6 in Saptari district is predominantly a Dalit settlement. Munni Kumari Ram, a resident of this settlement, is a facilitator of Samagra Janautthan Kendra, a local partner of VSO. There were many social ills in this village including those related with health and education. One among them was the issue related to gender discrimination. But Munni Kumari has learned a lot many things to minimize gender discrimination in the community and to ensure reconciliation. They have a lot to educate and inspire.

Munni Kumari says that violence and personal conflict arise when family members do not discuss the family issues with themselves. There are several issues in the family and it is difficult to address everyone's concern. Thus understanding each other is important and it also helps to minimize the family conflict, opines Munni Kumari.

The Sahaj Project of VSO has brought a different experience for the community. Some of the families of Kharsaltol of Rajbiraj have already benefitted from the programs of the project. A youth was married last year. He was thinking how he would manage the family and the household after marriage. He had seen for himself how after marriage family relations had changed for bad in his own neighborhood. He did not want that to happen in his family. Meanwhile, social facilitator Munna Kumari brought a news that a

program was being launched for 20 households of the community. It was about income generation training for newly married women and it was said the members of the family also had to take that training. When Shrawan came to know about it, he discussed the matter with the family and enquired about the program. He was selected for the training.

After this, Shrawan, his wife (Renudevi Ram), his mother (Pramila Devi) and father (Rudi Lal) all took the training on gender equality. This training became the turning point to change the behaviors of the whole family. About the skills and knowledge in training, Shrawan said: "I learned from the training what I had not learned in school and college. I hesitated to share things with my parents. Now after the training, my parents have also changed themselves." Pramila Devi, Shrawan's mother, also shared the learning from the training. "We should regard son and daughter-in law equally. We would not think so before. We would discriminate between daughter and daughter-in-law. Such behavior brings conflict in the family. Now we have understood this very well. All should understand this."

The perspective of Rudilal Ram, Pramila's husband, has also changed. He would not much care about the household works before, much less assist in cooking. But after receiving the training he is even seen to be sweeping the floor with broomstick. "I even broom," he said. Munni Kumari has been watching all this closely and she knows better. She says that people's perspective on girls and women has changed. Sahaj Project has been working with 20 newly married women and their families. According to the business plan submitted by the 20 families, the project is going to provide Rs 30,000 economic assistance to each selected family for income generating activities. The project hopes that it will contribute to rising income of the families.

Munni is happy that training has triggered change in the village. She used to think it takes long to realize change but after the changes she observed after being involved in the project she has come to this conclusion: Change can happen much faster too.

Disability Inclusion

Way of Inclusion



Janet Auma was born deaf. Aged just 17, she originally hails from Kamaseno Kokwanya, a small village in Kisumu County of Kenya. Despite having disability, she has created an opportunity for herself. In the present, she is learning parlour-related skills. She knows that she will soon start earning with the skill she has been learning. The skills she has acquired have paved the way for her better future.

She spent the past few years sitting idly at her home doing nothing more than little of household task. That was becoming her everyday life. She didn't go out of her house too often. Both her parents had passed away many years before. With nobody back home to take care of her, she has now been living with her mother's younger sister for the past couple of years.

Ray of a New Hope

Under VSO's Access to Quality Education T (AQET) project, some local VSO ICS Volunteers came across Janet. The project aimed to provide help and support to people with disability so that they get access to quality education. After coming into contact with VSO, Janet and her family underwent family sessions and later through the same project, she received support from VSO to continue her education and vocational training. Janet found a new hope after coming into contact with the project.

Through the support from the project, Janet had an opportunity to learn commercial work as well. Janet's aunt and grandfather are delighted and relieved to see Janet more hopeful, committed and confident in her work. Her interest, dedication, and enthusiasm in learning parlour-related skills have been influential in making her fast learner and a good student at Sikri Vocational Training Centre. Only after a few months of training, she has been able to work as a parlour lady. Janet has set herself as an example for many other individuals.

Janet's aunt, Quinter Atino, says that Janet's self-confidence has visibly increased after she received the training. Quinter says: "Between now and before, a lot have changed. Since Janet has been to the training, she has developed self-confidence and

now has a dream to follow."

Quinter's father-in-law, George Otieno Karede, says, "Janet is an example for thousands of people living with disability in Kenya. People (like her) should learn from her."

Emanuel gets a new life

Far from Kasemo Kokwanona, the story of a boy in Awasi border is also captivating. This is a story of the young Emanuel and his mother Ripsa Ochuwela. Emmanuel was born disabled. When other children in the village could walk and run around, Emmanuel's limbs didn't function. Many years after the birth of Emmanuel, Ripsa came to realise that Emmanuel couldn't walk. It let her down. On reaching Emmanuel's home, at Awasi Border-1, Kisumu, Emmanuel was playing with his mother. Emmanuel's mother Ripsa seemed happy. Emmanuel seemed fine. The poverty was visible, but there was tremendous joy in the atmosphere. Emmanuel could walk normally. He could go around and play with other children, just as normally. It was truly spectacular when Emmanuel was seen running along with some of the chickens his mother had farmed. Emmanuel was born with deformity on both the lower and upper limbs which would swell occasionally presenting a lot of pain, the feet were club-shaped and hence cannot step on the ground naturally. The hands from the elbow joint cannot open up. Thus writing and doing simple every day routine is a nightmare. This has posed mobility problems to him. Somebody had to take him to and from school. If that support is not available Emmanuel would just stay at home.

"I always took Emmanuel to clinics for treatment and follow up. The cost of treatment was so high, given my economic strength I could not afford. I lost hope of seeing my son lead a normal walking life." -Ripsa, Emmanuel's mother.

Ripsa got the information of an outreach assessment which was to be conducted in Nyangoma County hall for children with disability organized by local NGO. She did not really see this as anything important because she had taken Emmanuel for numerous assessments in the past. Emmanuel was assessed and corrective surgery recommended.

Ripsa attended numerous VSO activities from the disability inclusion workshop on awareness to mass assessments in May, delivery of assistive devices in August and October. And on 19th of November, she received a call from VSO that requested Ripsa to take her son to Neema Hospital in Nairobi for confirmatory assessment to enable the hospital carry out the surgery.

In Neema Hospital, the boy was assessed and booked for surgery. As we speak the first surgery of the legs have been accomplished and the boy is progressing well.

Social Inclusion

Maurine has changed her life



Maurine Aseo is a youthful girl aged 20. She originally comes from Bunyore in Vihiga County. When her father passed away, she moved in to stay with her mother's sister who is married and stays in Muhoroni Township within Kisumu County. This was due to inability of her mother to take care of her health needs as she had persistent epileptic attacks that made her miss school and gradually reduced her intellectual ability to a level of performing dismally at KCPE examination. She thereafter couldn't get admission to secondary school and had to stay at home helping her aunt with domestic chores.

For close to two years, she was at home until she requested her aunt to take her to a tailoring shop in the market to learn tailoring course. Despite the challenges in finance, the aunt took her for the apprentice training which she did for six months, before VSO stepped in and took her to Sikri for vocational training.

From February 2018, when she first interacted, she has gone through trainings on financial literacy where she reports to have basic skills on drawing fiscal plans for her business and how to ask for assistance in relation to her vocational skill. She then underwent vigorous two-days training on life skills which grounded her on communication skills, made assertive and taught how to relate with friends of either gender in all her undertakings.

On admission to Sikri VTC, Maurine tells of reformed lifestyle. She has made use of the compulsory Agriculture lessons in the morning and has developed a special liking for poultry keeping.

She has mastered the skills of taking care of layers from infancy to moments of culling. She says that collecting eggs in the morning and in the evening is a part of her chore. She carries well-arranged five crates of eggs at a bare minimum in two shifts to the store keeper at least three times a week.

Her progress in clothes and textile course has been tremendous. Her apprentice training in Muhoroni provided basic skills of cloth's design and cutting. Then she quickly learned the ropes of joining the parts into a cloth on the sewing machine that she had never touched. Within four months of staying at the class, she mastered the ability to use sewing machine so well that her trainer recommended her to sit for grade three NITA exams in December, 2018. She has reported back to school in January 2019, waiting for her results, which she anticipates to pass and register for grade 2 exams which should be doing in July 2019.

She said: "Upon finishing my grade 1 NITA exams, I would like to start up my sewing shop in Muhoroni, in the whole hope that I will get start up from VSO and any other donor. I propose to help and train at least three girls in a year so that they can equally do NITA exams and be as independent as possible."

Aunt Jacqueline: "She is doing very good now. Thanks to VSO and Erick (Dickson's) organisation, we have received great help. Since, Maurine has been doing the training the society accepts her for what she is. She is not discriminated due to her disability. It's been a lot better now."

Dickson quotes: "We are helping people like Maurine in income generation trainings and programs. We believe that this project will prove to be beneficial for people with disability. VSO has been supporting us with this project which has been very helpful."

Elisha Olando Afwata, National Volunteer: "Youths with disabilities go through series of challenges in life. Disability and poverty are almost like Siamese twins. Most of these youths come from families that are faced with myriads of socio-economic challenges. AQET project has been impactful in helping such youths with disability so that they can overcome poverty."

