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Saath-Saath Project



Saath-Saath Successes:
*Moving together towards
a brighter future*

Part 3

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Saath-Saath Project

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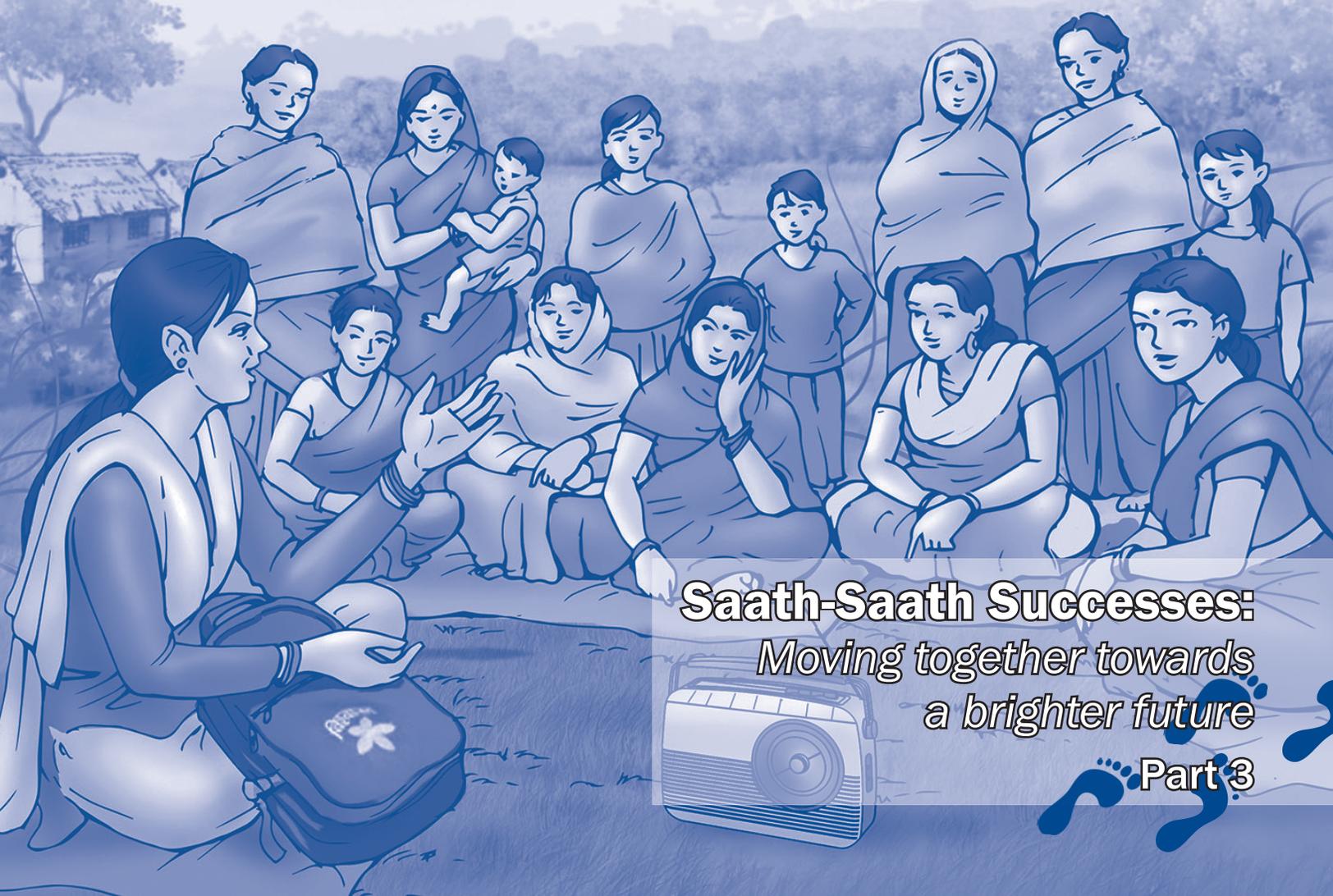
Ph: +977-1-4437173, Fax: +977-1-4417475

Email: fhinepal@fhi360.org

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Part 3

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Foreword

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Saath-Saath Project (SSP) (October 2011-September 2016) provides HIV prevention to care, support and treatment services along with family planning (FP) services through its outreach activities and expanded integrated health service sites. The project builds on more than two decades of support from USAID to the government-led national HIV response in Nepal. SSP works in partnership with Government of Nepal (GoN) and its activities contribute directly to Nepal Government's National HIV and AIDS Strategy and Action Plan. The five year project works in 33 districts across Nepal and its activities are implemented through more than 40 local NGO partners. SSP's efforts are primarily targeted for female sex workers (FSWs) and their clients, migrant workers and spouses of migrant workers and people living with HIV (PLHIV).

This booklet "Saath-Saath Successes: Moving together towards a brighter future" captures the vital contribution made by SSP and its local NGO partners among the key populations through the implementation of a wide array of activities to mitigate the effects of HIV and promote FP use. Through the publication of this booklet, we also hope to motivate others who have shared similar ordeals in life and also our NGO partners to continue their invaluable work.

We thank all individuals who permitted us to share their life stories. In addition we also thank all our NGO partners for support in compiling these stories from the field. Likewise, we thank SSP staff members, external designers and illustrators who contributed to the overall designing and printing of this booklet. We also welcome feedback from our readers to further improve such publications in the future.

Saath-Saath Project



When I found out about STIs and HIV, I felt as though I had learned something very important; I have now decided to supplement condom-use with another family planning method.

Reassurance through Dual-Protection

My name is Asha Shrestha (name changed) and I spent my childhood in Rupandehi district's Piparaiya village. Although my parents struggled economically, they worked hard to send me to school and get me through the tenth grade. Immediately after my SLC, however, I got married, gave birth to two children, and began my life as a wife and mother. To provide for our growing family, my husband sought employment in Qatar. He tried to send money home, but as work didn't go as smoothly as planned, he was unable to send enough to feed the family. My in-laws began to treat me with extreme disrespect: every day, I would be subjected to the kind of verbal abuse, ill-treatment, and mistrust that rendered our familial relationship impossible.

Although I tried to brave the ill-treatment-even when family members accused me of having relations with other men while my husband was away-I soon began to think that it would be better to leave home than to remain in the midst of such turmoil. At the age of thirty, I left my children and severed all ties with my

husband's family. That is when I started working as a sex worker.

Even after four or five years of being in this profession, it was still difficult for me to make ends meet and I wasn't able to find stable clients: one month I would be with one man; the next month with another. I was working myself to death and wasn't paying any attention to my health. I missed my children and family a lot during this time; at times hoping to find a man who would treat me well and settle down with him. Soon afterwards, I became involved with a Bihari rickshaw driver from India. He would be away at work all day and would bring home 200 rupees. We are still together but he has a wife and four children of his own, and they routinely come to argue with and beat me. I bear it all because I think that I am destined for such familial sorrow.

I am still working as a sex worker. I first came across Community Mobilizers from Saath-Saath Project NGO

partner Namuna Integrated Development Council (NAMUNA) when they were giving advice to a friend of mine at a hotel; intrigued by what I heard, I lingered to learn more. They were talking to her about the dangers of unprotected sex and were demonstrating how to apply a condom properly using a dildo. They also talked about going to the clinic routinely to get blood work done. When I first started working, I used to be embarrassed to use condoms, but had recently begun using them with increased regularity. Through conversations with Community Mobilizers from NAMUNA, I became more aware of their use in preventing HIV and unwanted pregnancies. I was still reluctant to go to the clinic, however, and it took several additional conversations with the NAMUNA volunteers before I decided to go. When I did eventually make the trip, I was very impressed by the services that Saath-Saath's clinic offered. I even got tested for HIV and STIs, and thankfully the tests came back negative!

In addition to helping me learn about HIV and STI-related prevention, the clinic healthcare worker

also counseled me on family planning. I told them that since I was already mother to two children, I had no interest in having additional offspring. So they informed me about family planning methods, especially the need to supplement condom-use with a birth control device. After being informed about all of the options that I had, I decided to get an IUD. The healthcare worker at the clinic provided me with an IUD and helped alleviate my fears of an unwanted pregnancy.

I continue to go to the clinic for free check-ups because it provides services in a very supportive, non-judgmental environment. I also encourage other women like me to take advantages of the services that the clinic offers – it has been such a reassuring presence for me, and I want to get the word out to everyone I know so that they can get support as well.

(Based on conversation with Namuna's Project Coordinator Vijay Gyawali and Outreach Educator Renuka Dhakal)

Timely Treatment and Support through CHBC

When Mohan Mahato found out that unprotected sex had led him to contract HIV, he didn't think that he would survive. Now, he not only lives with optimism but works towards bolstering the confidence of others with HIV.



When Community and Home Based Care (CHBC) workers at Lumbini Plus (Saath-Saath local NGO Partner) in Nawalparasi were apprised of a potential HIV patient by one of the participants of their training programs, they went to his home straight away to see what they could do to help. They found that Mohan Mahato (name changed) had been ill for a while and that his body had not responded to routine medical treatment. After conversing with the CHBC team for a while, Mohan himself revealed that he did in fact have HIV, and he also told them that he had given up hope of treatment since he knew the illness was fatal.

Mohan talked to the CHBC team at length about the fears he had about dying, his body not responding to medicine, and being discriminated against by members of his community. The CHBC team listened to Mohan as he talked about how, as a youth, he had gone to India in search of employment and had had unprotected sex on three separate occasions. Mohan also talked about his family: his current wife

was his second (the first having left him) and he had two grown children, all of whom had HIV as well. The CHBC team listened patiently to Mohan's story and then talked to him about his options for HIV treatment and the need for a CD4 count. It was evident that Mohan appreciated the patience and support which the outreach coordinator provided.

The outreach educator referred Mohan to Bharatpur Hospital and helped him get there, too, since he had no one to take him. The hospital conducted a thorough examination, which revealed his CD4 count to be 175, a number that required ART treatment. They also found that he had Tuberculosis, which would have to be taken care of before ART began. Mohan's wife and children also had their CD4 count and were put on ART immediately. Over the course of treatment, Mohan and his wife showed significant signs of improvement, but their son did not. The hospital referred him to IFC in Kathmandu and Lumbini Plus made provisions to send him there with his mother. After eight months of treatment at IFC, Mohan's son's condition also began to improve.

These days, the CHBC team goes to Mohan's house on a regular basis to provide additional treatment and support, including continuing ART and giving information on nutrition and hygiene. His condition-and that of his wife and children-is gradually improving; he is even able to work as a wage laborer to make ends meet at home: "I was at death's doorstep," shared Mohan. "If [Lumbini Plus] hadn't made provisions for my treatment, there's no telling how long I would have survived. They continue to come to my home and bolster my hopes; the support they've provided me is far more than that which I have received from any of my relatives."

Mohan has continued employment as a wage laborer and he also works on a small farm when he has time. For nutrition, he and his wife have planted fruit trees beside their home and they make sure to cook healthy foods like beans, lentils, and greens. They both continue to take ARV, get regular check-ups at Saath-Saath clinic, use protection during intercourse, and ensure that their home is hygienic. If they ever come across health problems, they immediately notify the CHBC team and

ask them to come to their home for a check-up. They are aware of the myriad services that the Saath-Saath clinic provides and they know that all they have to do to get assistance is just make a phone call.

Most recently, Mohan took part in Lumbini's Plus's Positive Prevention program as a positive speaker and he shared his experiences with the participants. He told everyone about the immense support and care that Lumbini Plus provided with regards to ART, CD4 count,

and general encouragement, and he rearticulated his gratitude for their helping him survive. "Regular ARV consumption has a significant impact on improving the health of those with HIV," he told them. "If we all get regular treatment and make sure to take care of our health, there's nothing stopping us from living happy lives."

(Based on the conversation with Lumbini Plus Program Coordinator Prakash Acharya)

A Life Replete with Potential Never Takes Off

HIV had rendered Dipen's health untenable, but he was resolute in his desire to help those coping with HIV.



Dipen Rai (name changed) was the third of five children born to Gunmaya and Shukraraj Rai. He spent the majority of his childhood in Dharan and went to school there until the eighth grade. He and his friends began using drugs at an early age, slowly progressing from smoking and inhaling to employing injections. His family was extremely worried about his health and his future, and when he was 32 they took him to a rehabilitation center for treatment. While there, it was found that Dipen had contracted HIV.

Although news of the illness came as a shock, Dipen refused to let it ruin his life. He became an active member of the Dharan Positive Group and worked with the group on multiple outreach activities. In 2007, he even helped implement community and home based care (CHBC) program under USAID's ASHA Project (2006-11). HIV had rendered his health untenable, but he was resolute in his desire to help those coping with HIV: he sought to live his life informing others about free services offered throughout the county, reminding

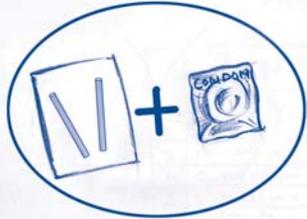
them to ask their health care providers about ART, and helping them fight against daily discriminations. To streamline his efforts for greater impact, Dipen even began to volunteer for CHBC. In March 2013, however, his life took an unfortunate turn when he succumbed to Hepatitis C, which struck a significant blow to his health.

Several health facilities including Nava Jeewan Samaj, Sunaulo Bihani Plus, Dharan Positive Group, Disability Rehabilitation Center and Dharan Municipality Recovering Fellowship aided Dipen with Nrs. 33,000 during the course of his two-week treatment. As a result of this concerted effort, Dipen was able to recover and return to work. But tragedy struck again in May of the same year, when he began to display similar symptoms as before. This time, things seemed worse. He was taken first from the emergency ward to the

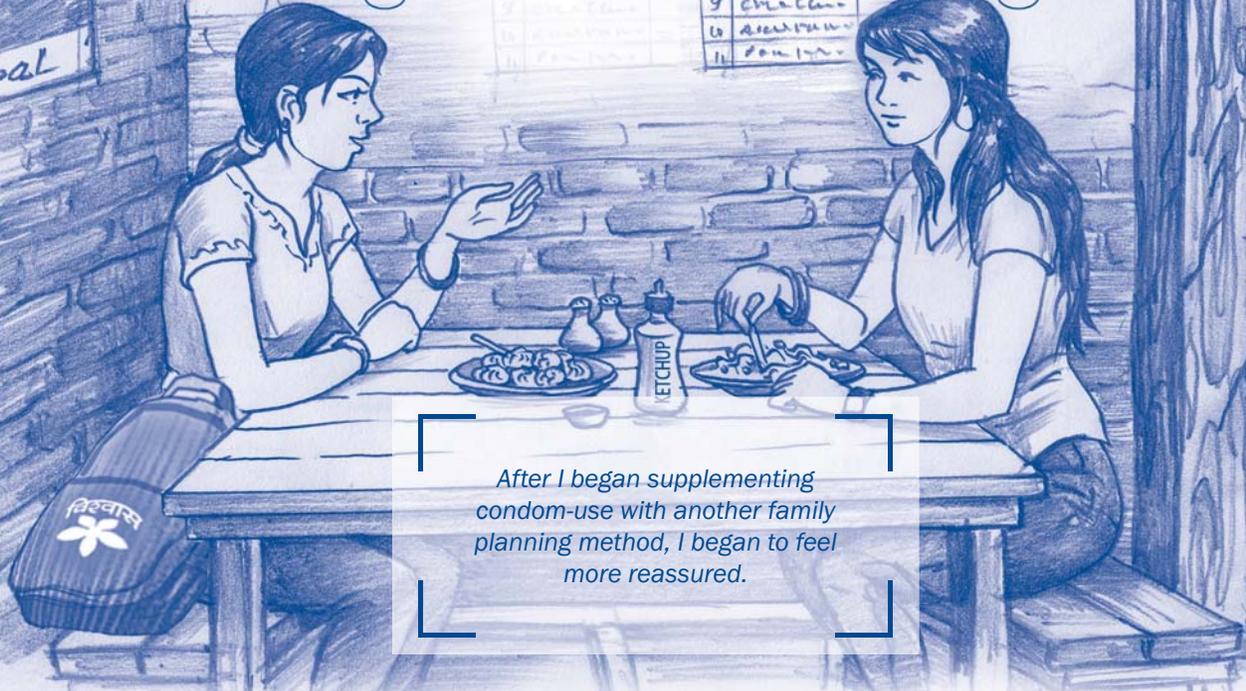
medical ward and then finally to the tropical ward, but the hospital's efforts were in vain: Dipen passed away on the tenth day during the course of treatment.

Dipen's passing signaled a loss not only for his family but for the community as well, including Dharan Positive Samuha and CHBC; he was an incredible human being with untold potential who, if alive, would have passionately continued the fight against HIV. His hard work and dedication has helped many like him to come forth, seek treatment and even actively get involve in helping others. Dipen's contribution and the efforts of Saath-Saath continues to build upon this as more and more PLHIV in Dharan and other districts are availing vital services through the CHBC program.

(Written by Nilam Devi Rai, Project Coordinator, Dharan Positive Group)



MEN	
1	Chia...
2	Tulle...
3	MEMO...
4	C. M...
5	Veget...
6	M...
7	Small...
8	...
9	...
10	...
11	...



After I began supplementing condom-use with another family planning method, I began to feel more reassured.

The Considerable Benefits of Dual Protection

My name is Rina Lama (name changed) and I am a 28-year-old native of Ramechhap district. For the past fifteen years, I have been living in Kathmandu with my husband, who is currently abroad for work. Life in Kathmandu is tough for families like ours: prices are high and it's difficult for us to make ends meet. I am employed in a restaurant and regularly get paid for sex by other men. My husband doesn't know that I am a sex worker.

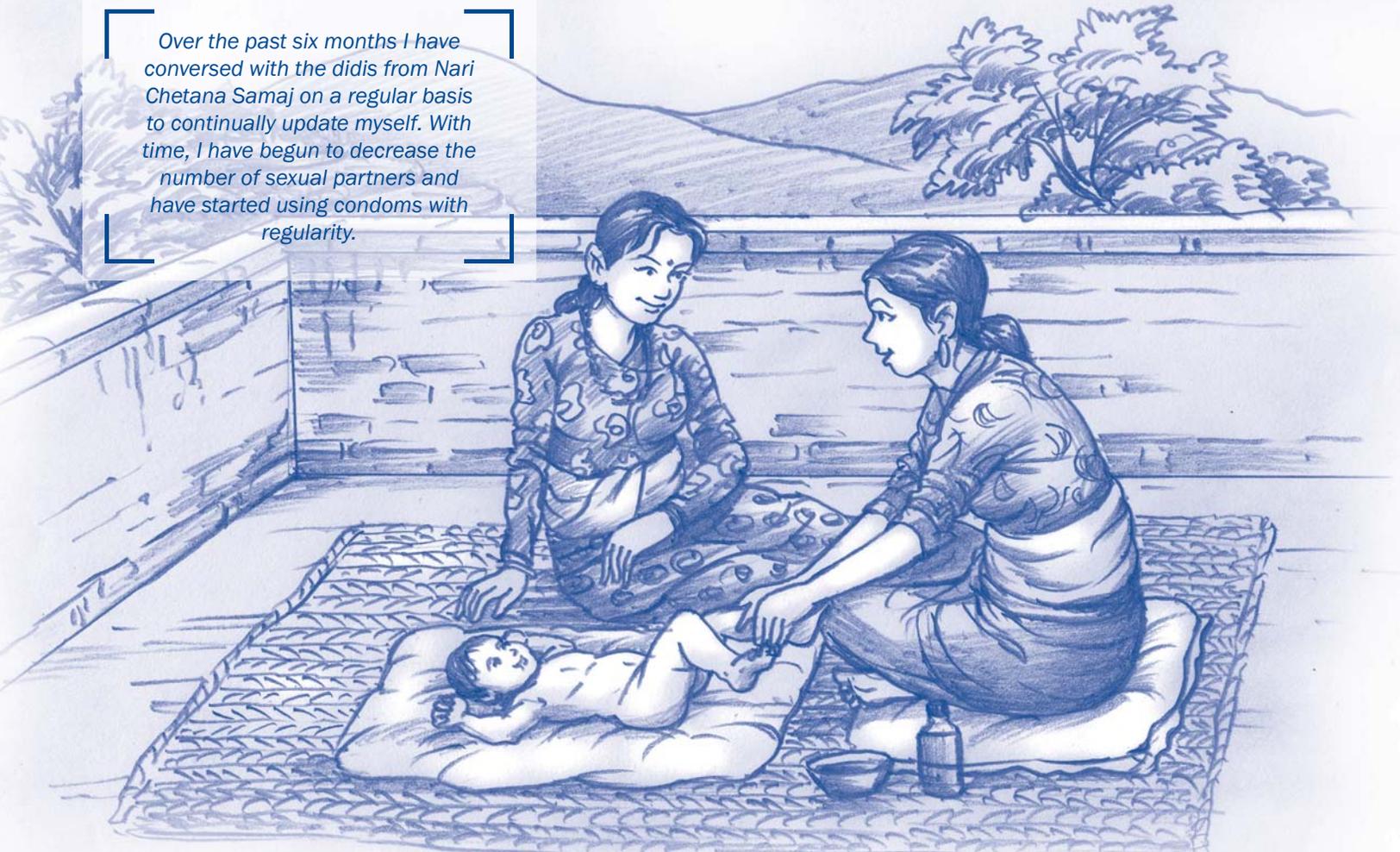
I first met with Ranjana didi (sister) from Nari Chetana Samaj (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) nearly twelve years ago and I have kept in touch with her to this day. Over the years, she has given me a lot of valuable information about HIV and AIDS and condom-use, which has made me acutely aware of the risks of unprotected sex. She has also shown me the various information materials on condom-plus (dual method use) and apprised me of the benefits of adopting this method. Although I'd always known that there are many options for birth control, didi has

really helped me internalize-and learn to mobilize-this important information.

Conversations with Ranjana didi have had a huge impact on my decisions, one of the most important of which has been my choice to decrease the number of clients. In my attempt to protect myself from HIV and STIs and unwanted pregnancies, I have taken didi's advice about getting regular check-ups and adopting the dual method of protection. I was also referred to visit the clinic managed by STD/AIDS Counseling and Training Services (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) to get free birth control implant, which has significantly increased my confidence. I want to thank the didis at Nari Chetana Samaj for their support and their promises of confidentiality; I encourage others as well and hope they are able to benefit from dual protection as well.

(Based on conversation with Ranjana Rai, Community Mobilizer, Nari Chetna Samaj)

Over the past six months I have conversed with the didis from Nari Chetana Samaj on a regular basis to continually update myself. With time, I have begun to decrease the number of sexual partners and have started using condoms with regularity.



Carving a New Path

My name is Shrijana Karki (name changed) and I live with my husband and son in Kathmandu. A while ago, my husband went abroad for work but he was unable to provide enough money to support as all. Thus I became involved in sex work. When my husband was abroad, I was able to pursue this work for nearly two years without any hindrance. I had already received information about HIV and STIs and I knew that condom-use was important, but I didn't use condoms with regularity. My clients were also hesitant to use condoms, which influenced my decision to forgo protection.

During the course of my work, I met Laxmi didi from Nari Chetna Samaj (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner), who provided me additional information about HIV and family planning. I told her that because I already had a son, I received Depo injections to prevent conception. She told me that I should supplement my Depo injections with condom-use to prevent unwanted pregnancies and infections including HIV. I got a lot of important information from her and over the past six months I have conversed with Laxmi didi as well

as others from Nari Chetna Samaj on a regular basis to continually update myself. With time, I have begun to decrease the number of sexual partners and have started using condoms with regularity.

Currently, my husband is home, still unaware of my profession. I have decided that I am going to slowly get myself out of sex work so that I do not fall prey to HIV and infect my husband as well. I also don't want to spend the rest of my life doing this kind of work. With the help of Nari Chetna Samaj, I have begun part-time employment caring for women who have recently delivered children and I am confident that this work—along with effort from my husband—will help ensure that we are financially secure. I continue to visit the clinic managed by STD/AIDS Counseling and Training Services (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) to regularly get tested for HIV and STIs. I really hope that Nari Chetana Samaj is able to continue this amazing work and help women like me find ways to carve new paths in life.

(Based on a conversation with Laxmi Pandey, Outreach Educator at Nari Chetna Samaj)

I Will Never Let HIV Cripple My Abilities

Dang Plus has colored my life in positive ways and has greatly bolstered my self-confidence.



I was married at the age of 14 to a police officer in Dang named Padam Budhathoki. Because the political environment at the time had rendered security in our community extremely untenable—and therefore dangerous even for officers—my husband decided to try his luck outside of the police force. He left for Malaysia in search of employment and remained there for five years; he visited me several times during that time. We had our first child before he left and our second had already been conceived.

When my husband came back from Malaysia, we had our third daughter, after which he left for India. While there, Padam fell ill and returned just three months of his departure. We went to seek treatment at Rapti Regional Hospital, where blood-test revealed that he was HIV positive. My blood-test came back positive as well, though thankfully our daughters' did not.

At the hospital, I met ART counselor Shobha Kunwar, who introduced me to Chamkala Bhandari, an outreach

educator for Dang-Plus (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner). I was initially hesitant to invite her to my home, but when I realized that my husband was in denial about his diagnosis and that community members were blaming me for his illness, I decided to call her. Chamala provided my family members information about HIV and clarified some of the misconceptions that we had. The session was very helpful to me, but my husband refused to listen; soon, he started drinking and fighting with me, which led me to leave home with my daughters. My parents gave me Rs. 13,000 to support myself and my children and with that money I opened a small store.

I take several steps and precautions to ensure my continued health: I speak with outreach educator Kalpana Chaudhary once a month about family planning, nutrition, and hygiene; I get check-ups from CHBC team leader Binita Budhathoki and follow her advice regarding my medication; and I make sure to maintain a healthy and hygienic household. My husband was unable to take care of himself and he passed away just a few months ago.

I continue to keep in touch with members from Dang Plus—and for good reason. Just a while ago, I was a little strapped for money and was unable to buy additional merchandise for my store. When I talked to Dang-Plus staff about my condition, they provided me assistance in the form of Rs. 7,500, which allowed me to purchase the material I needed to keep my store running. They also gave me advice on saving my money, which helped me save up over Rs. 20,000 in my account. This money assures that my children are able to go to school: my oldest is in grade nine, my middle daughter is in grade eight, and my youngest has just started grade one. I am very proud that I have been able to educate my children and to provide for them and I would like to thank Dang Plus for helping me find a way to not let my illness cripple my capacities.

(Based on conversation with Maya Giri (name changed) and Dang Plus CHBC team member Binita Budhathoki)

Even though life has thrown many challenges my way, I have never stopped believing in myself. Saath-Saath has helped me maintain that self-confidence.



Dual Protection for My Well-Being

I am a native of Kaski district and grew up in a large family with my parents and six siblings. I got married at the early age of fourteen when I was still studying in grade five. I had a happy four years with my husband before he began drinking heavily. The drunken rages were accompanied by continual physical abuse. I tried to withstand the ill-treatment, hoping it would subside, but it did not. As the abuse increased, I left my husband and moved back in with my parents.

My natal family was not well-off. Adding another mouth to feed meant additional burden. I was young and capable of taking care of myself, so I avoided being an encumbrance to them. I moved to the lakeside city of Pokhara where I started working as a dishwasher for a local restaurant. I noticed that my co-workers, who were on the same pay scale as me, led a significantly better lifestyle: they wore expensive clothes and had extra money to spend while I was barely making ends meet. On asking a few on how they were able to live so well on such meager salary, I came to know that they

were all involved in sex work. Enticed by the glamor of extra money, I soon got involved in sex work myself.

A few months later, my estranged husband returned to me, claiming to want to mend our relationship and to start afresh. He even professed to have given up his old ways. While my scarred past still haunted me, I accepted his request; we moved in together and started working as daily wage laborers. Within a year, I was pregnant. My husband suddenly took to his old ways and the cycle of heavy drinking and physical abuse began again. Worse still, he started sleeping with other women. Money became scarce and my husband splurged most of it on alcohol and women. I had no other recourse except to leave him again and return to sex work to support myself and my newborn.

It was around this time that I met with Sushma Poudel, a Community Mobilizer from Child and Women Empowerment Society Nepal (CWES), (Saath-SaathProject local NGO partner). Sushma and I started

interacting frequently. I confided my entire story to her. We discussed everything from sexually transmitted infections and HIV to the benefits of dual protection methods. Much of this was information I never knew of or really bothered to look into. She even referred me to a clinical site managed by Saath-Saath Project's local NGO partner Naulo Ghumti (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) to get tested for STIs and HIV and to learn more about the use of family planning methods. Luckily, the tests were negative. However, to protect my unborn child and myself, I stopped having multiple partners and took extra care of my health. Sushma would visit me regularly to check in on me and to remind me to get tested regularly. After a year, I was blessed with a baby girl. A few months later, I returned to sex work again.

These days, I live in a restaurant in Pokhara. I continue to meet with CWES outreach staff who ensure that I continue to practice safe sex. We also talk about family planning and the importance of dual method use (condom and a family planning method) to protect from STIs including HIV and unwanted pregnancies. My past holds a scary recollection of everything I have done, but luckily I never contracted HIV—and neither have my children.

Such dual protection option is crucial for sex workers. Wanting to play my part in this important initiative by Saath-Saath Project, I work as a Peer Educator to inform my colleagues and others involved in sex work to adopt the dual method of protection and to lead a safe and healthy life.

(Based on conversation between Laxmi KC (name changed) and Sushma Paudel, Community Mobilizer, CWES)

My Life of Independence

Adopting the dual-protection method has changed my daily life and has reassured me about my health.



My name is Shanti B.K. (name changed) and I am 25 years old. My mother died when I was very young and I grew up under the care of my grand parents. Because our household was financially unstable, I was unable to attend school and instead had to wash dishes at other people's homes. So progressed the majority of my adolescence until I was married at the age of 13.

My husband and I had our first child three years later and he went abroad to work shortly thereafter. He never came back and my in-laws began to treat me with immense disrespect and physical abuse. Sometimes, they wouldn't even let me eat. I tried in vain to withstand the abuse and soon left home for Butwal with my young daughter. I began working as a dishwasher yet again, but I was not earning enough to make ends meet; on top of that, the families that I worked for treated me badly and sometimes refused to pay me my wage. I couldn't stand the situation any longer, so I moved with my daughter to Birgunj, where I had a friend who I thought could help me find employment.

I stayed at my friend's apartment and soon found a job at a small restaurant (bhatti), but the owner didn't pay me enough money to feed my daughter and myself. This is when my friend suggested that I become a sex worker; it's easy money, she told me. I was extremely hesitant to begin: how could I possibly have sex with a stranger? I thought to myself. But when it became nearly impossible for me to provide for my daughter, I decided that I had no choice but to listen to my friend's advice. I began working as a sex worker.

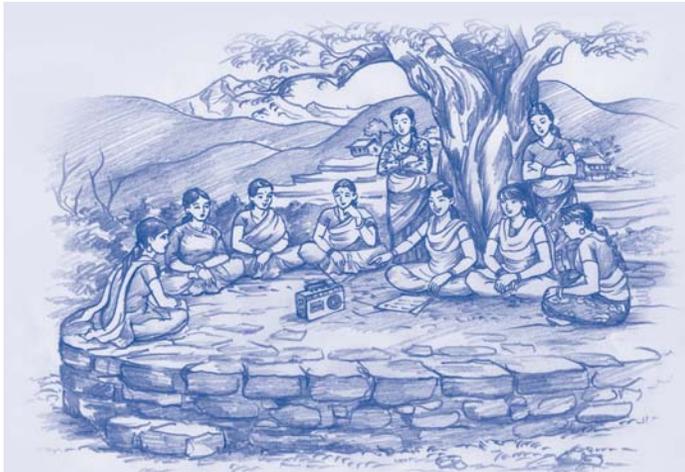
During the course of my work, I met with an Outreach Educator from BIJAM (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) who talked to me about the health services that the project's clinic offers to women like me. When I first started sex work, I only used to use condoms; on one occasion, a condom had broken and I had become pregnant. I'd gotten an abortion soon after because there was no way for me to support another child. When I talked to didi (outreach educator) about this, she told me that there were many ways to prevent

such a situation from arising in the future. She also referred me to the clinic, where other staff provided me additional information about family planning and talked to me about the different options that I had to prevent unwanted pregnancies. I chose the three-monthly Depo injection, which I now use to supplement my condom-use, and am reassured of protection against unwanted pregnancies as well as from HIV and STIs.

My life now is a lot better than it used to be. My daughter is eight years old and I am able to send her to school. I am still involved in sex work, but I practice my profession safely. Every month, I visit the clinic for a check-up and every three months I get the Depo injection. These measures have helped ensure that I live a simple, rewarding, and independent life.

(Based on the conversation between Shanti B.K. (name changed) and BIJAM's FP Educator Usha Kiran Chaudhary)

I believe that I have helped instill, especially in women, a sense of reassurance about sexual health and a willingness to talk freely about these issues. I feel very proud of this achievement.



My name is Sushila Rimal (name changed) and I live in Palpa. I am 40 years old and have a family that includes a husband and two sons. My husband regularly travels abroad for work and for the past year I have had the opportunity to work as a facilitator for a radio show that informs listeners about family planning methods and the prevention of HIV and STIs. My work is done through Indreni Samaj Kendra (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner).

A little over a year ago, I was in conversation with Rupa didi, a female community health volunteer and Cooperative Manager Saraswati didi. While we were talking, Samsher Saru, an Outreach Educator for Indreni Samaj Kendra, came by to chat with us. He talked at length about Saath-Saath's new radio show on HIV and STI prevention and family planning that specifically targeted listeners who worked—or had spouses who worked—abroad. Within a few months, Samsher, along with Indreni Samaj Kendra Field Coordinator Nirmala Darnal, oriented us on HIV and

STIs. They also helped us form a listeners' group, through which I was nominated as the facilitator of radio listener group.

Though intrigued, I was initially reluctant to get involved: my husband was abroad and I was the only caretaker for my young sons; I didn't think that I had enough time to devote to the project. But when Sumsher told me that I would only have to facilitate the group discussion once a week on Saturday and that I would get the opportunity to share my knowledge, I decided to invest my time.

Initially, I was quite nervous about the prospect of facilitating listeners group. What if I'm not capable enough? I asked myself. What if something goes wrong? This fear was exacerbated by the fact that members of my community were shocked and rather hesitant when I told them about the content of the program. But I mustered up the courage to continue, and with support from my husband, I began conceptualizing how to be a good facilitator. I also received a two-day training beforehand, which

provided me with a lot of great information on HIV, STIs, family planning methods, and ways to ensure well-being. I parlayed this information to community members during the program. Every Saturday, I began to talk in depth about each of the aforementioned issues and answer questions such as "What is HIV? How does it get transmitted? What are some ways for prevention? Which groups are vulnerable? Through my efforts, I have been able to inform my community and encourage women to get tested on a regular basis.

These days, the women who listen to the radio program talk to their friends and the transfer of knowledge continues. Whereas at the start I had hardly any listeners, nowadays women make time to listen to my show. I believe that I have helped instill, especially in women, a sense of reassurance about sexual health and a willingness to talk freely about these issues. I feel very proud of this achievement.

(Based on the conversation between Sushila Rimal (name Changed) and Nirmala Darnal, Field Supervisor, Indreni Sewa Kendra)

Ensuring Soundness of Health and Mind

I had heard many rumors about the problems associated with family planning tools. After using family planning myself, I have come to realize that none of these rumors are true.



28-year-old Nepalgunj resident Rita Shahi (name changed) got married to a driver roughly eleven years ago and within a year, they had a child. As financial and familial responsibilities began to mount, Rita noticed that her husband stopped going to work and started disappearing from home for large amounts of time. When financial burdens got the best of her, she became a sex worker. This is Rita's story.

After I got married, my husband began drinking heavily and completely avoided his financial accountabilities, not to mention his responsibilities as a father to our young son. I withstood his reckless behavior for nearly ten years before deciding to take the situation into my own hands. I talked to my friend about not being able to send my son to school and not even having enough money to pay rent, and she told me that there was an easy way to make the kind of money that I needed to run my household. She took me to a hotel nearby where I immediately found someone willing to pay me Rs. 1,000 for sex. This became routine and I began

making enough money to not only send my son to school but also to run my household smoothly. I even got a loan to help send my husband abroad for work, but he returned within three months. To pay off this loan, I had to find additional clients; on some days, I would be with three or four men.

I soon had another son. My husband and I decided that we needed to begin family planning, so I regularly went to the medical center to get a Depo injection. During one such visit, I met Rama didi from Institute of Community Health (ICH) (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) who taught me a lot about HIV, STIs and family planning. She referred me to a nearby clinic managed by Nepal STD and AIDS Research Center (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) providing free HIV and STIs testing services along with family

planning services. I visit ICH staff frequently since then and also visit the clinic for my Depo injections. Also as advised by the clinic staff, I began to use condoms consistently.

I am acutely aware of my financial responsibilities, especially the education of my children, and I want to ensure that both my health and finances are sound; this free service provided by Saath-Saath has helped create that possibility for me. This is why I think it is important for me to encourage other women, especially those involved in sex work, to avail services that such clinics provides.

(Based on conversation between Rita Shahi (name changed) and ICH Community Mobilizer Rama Acharya)

The Dual Method Approach

The radio program Sancho Bisancho has helped us better understand HIV and AIDS, family planning, and dual protection.



My Name is Sita (name changed) and I am from Tansen. I fell in love and got married when I was just seventeen. My husband and I still love each other very much and we have a seven year old son. Our family cannot be together because of economic constraints: dire poverty is pervasive, jobs are scarce, and many people are forced to migrate abroad in search of better options; my husband is no exception. He first went to Malaysia in search of employment and now frequently travels to India for work. He is home now, but will be leaving soon.

Indreni Samaj Kendra (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) provides services in HIV prevention, care, support, and treatment as well as family planning for migrant workers, their spouses, and people living with HIV in Palpa district. A while ago, they aired a radio program called "Sancho Bisancho" and formed a local radio listeners' group (RLG) comprising of other spouses of migrants just like me. Every week, our group would sit together to listen to the radio program and then

discuss the messages provided on family planning and HIV; our discussions were always lively and extremely helpful in allowing us to better understand family planning methods and HIV prevention.

Samsher Saru, an Outreach Educator from Indreni, would regularly visit our homes for additional conversations, to allow us to ask more questions, and to engage with us through fun games. He gave us condoms. It was Indreni that taught me about the appropriate age for marriage and childbearing. I wish my husband and I had had this information when we first got married; as we had no one to educate us about the risks of childbearing at a young age, we had conceived immediately.

In the beginning, my husband was reluctant to use condoms, but I managed to convince him to do so to safeguard us both from HIV, STIs, and unwanted pregnancies. He admits that he was surprised by my knowledge! I even convinced him to get tested for HIV; it was such a relief to know neither of us had HIV. While at the clinic, we also sought advice on family planning options and after counseling, the clinic health provider gave me a Depo injection. We now supplement that with consistent condom-use. This dual method allows us to feel reassured about our sexual health. I now want to make a concerted effort to convince other families in my village to adopt this approach and to visit the Indreni clinic for more information.

(Based on the conversation between Sita BK (name changed) and Indreni Samaj Kendra Outreach Educator Samsher Saru)

How Meeting the CHBC Team Changed My Life

Even though I had a home—a family—I had to live on the streets. I didn't have food. Why should I continue to live like this? Why should I exist under such hellish conditions? I asked myself. That is when I decided to make a change.



When I first found out that I was HIV positive, it seemed my life was over. The HIV counselor consoled me and introduced me to Saath-Saath's community and home based care (CHBC) team from Junkiree (Saath-Saath Project NGO partner). The CHBC program was designed for individuals like me to provide services at my door steps. I found out that one of their own team members was also HIV positive and that CHBC provides information, tests, medicine, and support for those coping with HIV. They asked me if I wanted to avail these CHBC services; there was no reason for me to refuse.

They suggested that I get the CD4 count and I did so at the Bheri Zonal Hospital. My result showed a very low CD4 count—just 146—and thus was advised to immediately enroll in ART. The next day, I showed my report to the counselor at the ART center and he prescribed me ARV drugs, which I took diligently for roughly 14 days. During this time, the CHBC team from Junkiree took very good care of me and bolstered my optimism about my health.

After six or seven months, however, I began using illicit drugs and stopped taking my medicine. When my family found out about my drug use, they refused to let me stay at home; I lived on the sidewalks with little to no food and shelter for nearly three months. I would just lie on the sidewalk all day and I could feel my illness taking hold over me. Even during this desperate time, the CHBC team continued to meet with me; they even talked to my parents and tried to urge them to let me come back home. But because of my drug use habits, my family flatly refused. This made me think deeply about myself and about the need to clean up my act if I wanted to see my family again.

I personally went to see my family with the CHBC team and I promised them that I would stop my drug use. My parents believed what I was saying and decided to give me the opportunity and support to improve my life.

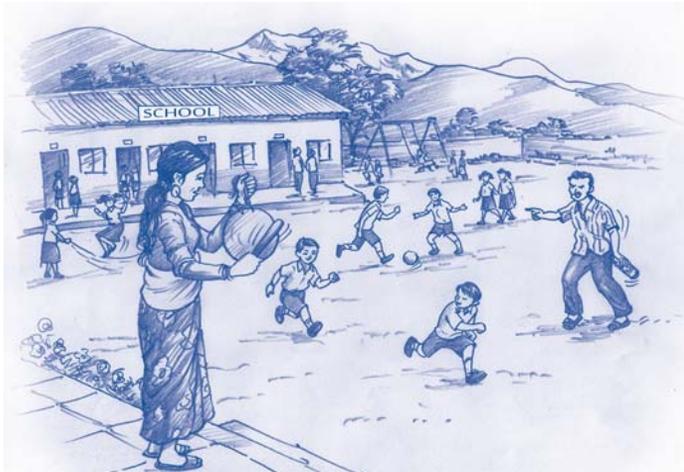
After this meeting, the Junkiree team took me to Bheri Hospital to re-enroll me in ART. After continued intake of ARV medicines, my CD4 count gradually improved from 222 to 368 to 430!

I still live with my family and provide financial support to my parents by working the same job that I had left when my drug use habit had kicked in. My family and members of my community are very surprised by this change in my behavior, and I have the CHBC team at Junkiree to thank for this transformation. If they hadn't supported me in my efforts to cope with my illness and to convince my family to take me in, I wouldn't be leading the life that I am today. I want to thank the team as well as the project that makes their efforts possible.

(Based on a conversation between Rajiv Poudel (name changed) and Junkiree Group)

Transcending the Darkness of Ignorance

These days, I go to the clinic for regular check-ups and for three-monthly Depo injections. I also always use condoms during intercourse.



My name is Binda Thapa (name changed) and I grew up in a simple household in Makwanpur. My family often found it hard to make ends meet, so instead of attending school, I spent my childhood cutting grass, looking for firewood, herding goats, and doing wage-based labor for landowners. At the age of 16, I was married off to an uneducated man from a family just like mine.

The situation in my new household was comparable to that at my maternal home: my husband worked as a laborer as did I, and this is how we put food on the table. Within two years of marriage, we had our first child, a daughter. This is when my husband began drinking heavily. Within two years of the birth of our first child, our son was born. Our responsibilities doubled, but my husband continued to spend all of our money on alcohol. We began to struggle and I felt immense stress. I decided that I had to take the situation into my own hands.

I began to talk to and seek help from well-off members of my community. I soon found employment as a peon at one of the schools in our village, work for which I received Nrs. 4,000 per month. I used this money to run my household. My husband, on the other hand, stopped working and instead tried to use these funds for his alcohol abuse; if I refused him money, he would yell at and beat me until I acquiesced. He even went to my school and created quite a commotion by arguing with the teachers there, which led to the termination of my employment. This was a devastating blow as there remained no way for me to feed my children. I wanted to find a solution, but it was difficult to conceive of anything because my kids were all so young; I couldn't just take them to a new city in search of new work. In the end, I decided to leave my children at my maternal home and head to Hetauda for work.

Within the first few weeks of my being in Hetauda, I met and befriended a young woman who worked as a sex worker. Intrigued by her stories of easy money, I espoused the profession as well. I began making a good income and was able to rent a decent room in the

city. I also sent money to my kids and made provisions to enroll them at the local school. I continued to scour the city for well-paying clients. This is when I first met an Outreach Educator from General Welfare Pratisthan (GWP) (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) who tried to speak with me and find out more about what I did for a living. I was embarrassed and was hesitant to open up to her; it was only after two or three meetings that I began to confide in her.

The GWP staff began to talk to me about HIV and STIs and family planning, and she reminded me to use condoms consistently. I used to be quite negligent about protection, and even had to get an abortion after a condom broke while I was with a client. I told her all this. The GWP staff also gave me a referral card for its clinic and suggested that I go there to get tested; I was initially reluctant, but after additional conversations with her, I decided that was the best way to alleviate my fears about my sexual health. I asked her to come along with me and I was very grateful that she did. After I got tested, I was informed that I had an STI, though thankfully it was not HIV. The clinic

provided me with free medicine and also gave me a Depo injection.

I now go to the clinic every three months to get the Depo injection and to get check-ups. I also try to help spread the word about GWP by talking to other women like me. Most recently, in December 2013, I took part

in a discussion forum as "Peer Champion", where I shared about my experiences and tried to encourage participants to learn about—and espouse—temporary birth control mechanisms.

(Based on the conversation between Binda Thapa (name changed) and GWP)

Sugam Goes Back to School

After Syangja Support Group held a training session on HIV for community members, teachers, and local officials, Sugam was able to go back to school.



Ram Bahadur B.K. (name changed) is a native of Putalibazaar who migrated to India at the age of 16 in search of gainful employment. Unlike others who travel abroad for work, Ram Bahadur found success relatively early, and was able to send home money at regular intervals. After two years of hard work, he returned home to marry Bishnu B.K. (name changed) and the pair eventually had two children. Ram Bahadur continued to go to India periodically; during the course of one of his visits, Bishnu fell ill. The two went to several health facilities before Western Regional Hospital in Pokhara informed them that Bishnu had contracted HIV; it turned out that in addition to money, Ram Bahadur had also brought along this infection.

When a staff from Syangja Support Group (Saath-Saath Project local NGO partner) found out about Bishnu's condition, he came by immediately to provide much-needed advice and support: "The information that our friends from Syangja Support Group gave us rekindled our hopes," says Ram bahadur. "Being

able to take part in various programs and actively engage with members of the support group has been incredible.”

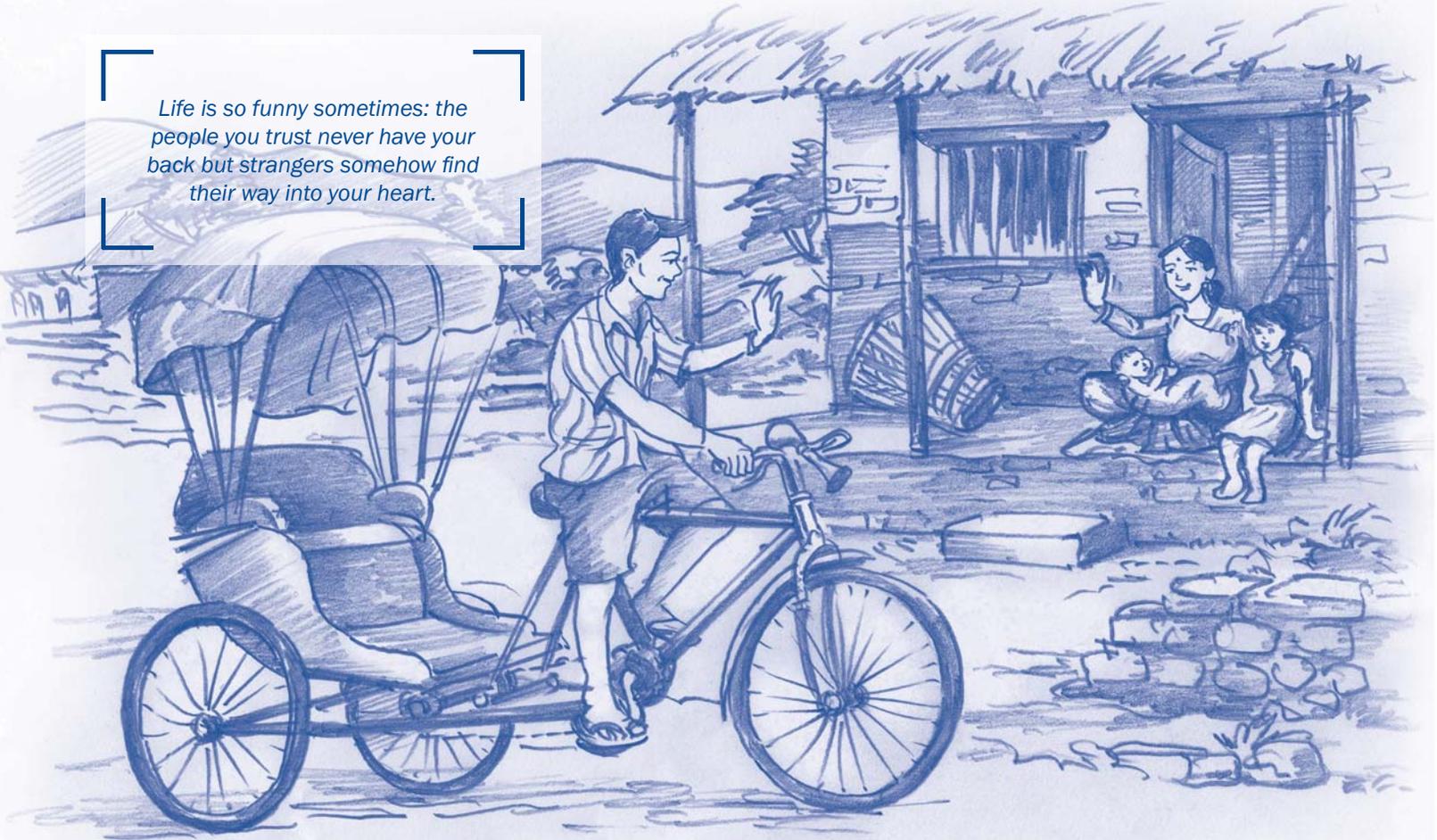
The younger of Ram Bahadur and Bishnu’s children, Sugam, lives with them at home while the older lives with his mother’s parents. Sugam is five years old and goes to B.P Memorial School where prior to his parents’ HIV diagnosis, people treated him kindly. After news broke, however, his friends began to behave differently towards him, and he became so ostracized that he stopped going to school altogether. When members of the Syangja Support Group heard about this, they went to the school along with Ram Bahadur to find out what was wrong. While there, the principal told them that he was unable to include Sugam in the school’s activities because of pressure from community members: “I am not trying to prevent Sugam from getting an education.

But parents are threatening to stop sending their children to school if Sugam continues to be here,” he remarked.

It was difficult to convince the principal to let Sugam come back to school, so Ram Bahadur had to temporarily enroll his son at a different institution. In the meantime, Syangja Support Group decided to hold a HIV-related stigma and discrimination reduction training session among the community members, teachers, and local officials there. This event had immediate impact: not only did the school agree to let Sugam come back, his friends now look at him as an equal and other community members treat him with kindness.

(based on conversation between Ram Bahadur B.K. (name changed) and Syangja Support Group)

Life is so funny sometimes: the people you trust never have your back but strangers somehow find their way into your heart.



Transforming My Health, Transforming My Life

My name is Sanu Lama (name changed) and I am a native of Makwanpur. As an only child, I spent my childhood under the loving care of my parents and older siblings: life was vibrant and days progressed blissfully. All of this changed when my mother passed away and my father remarried. I was just in second grade at the time. Life changed thereafter. Unable to endure my Step Mother's ill-treatment, I ran away with my elder sister three years after. I hoped for things to get better but in this new city, even my sister was different. But with no other option, I withstood her abuses till I was 15 years old and then moved in with my Brother. He had promised to help me secure employment at a carpet factory, but I soon came to realize that he had no intention of doing so; instead, he too beat me until I could stand it no longer. Everyone that I thought I could trust betrayed me, and I was completely disillusioned.

I left my brother's home and began working at a carpet factory. For three years, I lived by myself and worked hard to make ends meet. This is when I met Suresh

and we developed a strong connection. Life is so funny sometimes: the people you trust never have your back but strangers somehow find their way into your heart. Suresh and I started working together and soon after got married and moved to Kathmandu. After four years of marriage, we had our first child, a daughter, whom we both loved very much. We moved from Kathmandu to Chitwan and Suresh began working as a rickshaw driver to support our family. In a few years, we had another daughter who, for reasons unknown to us, became very ill immediately after her birth. We were extremely worried, but because we had so little money, we could not take her to the hospital. It was only when her situation worsened beyond our control that we took her to have her examined. The doctor who checked our daughter immediately asked Suresh if he had HIV. Suresh was taken back and he answered 'no.' Our daughter passed away a few days later.

A few years later, when I was 28, I was taken to Bharatpur Public Hospital for an appendicitis operation. During

the course of surgery, doctors tried to inject blood into my system, but they were unsuccessful; for some reason, it just didn't work. The staff told me to go to a cancer hospital, but I returned home because we couldn't afford such expensive treatment. When I became ill again, I went to another hospital, where it became clear through a blood test that I had HIV. Suresh hid this fact from me and told me that I had blood cancer. The private hospital referred me to the public hospital, where Suresh also got tested. The test proved we both had the virus. I had trusted Suresh and now I didn't know what to make of our long relationship. I was angry, afraid how the community will react to us being HIV positive and most importantly what will become of my daughter. I had to accept my fate nonetheless.

Today, Suresh and I continue our marital life. I have forgiven him and he is doing his part to provide for the family by working at a vegetable stand. We now make a decent earning. What changed, you ask? When we had lost all hopes, we came into contact with

a community and home based care (CHBC) worker from Chhahari Mahila Samuha (Saath-Saath Project NGO partner), Sweety Shrestha. Upon knowing about our HIV status, she along with CHBC Team Leader Sharmila Poudel would visit us regularly at our home to provide basic health checkup and information on positive living and family planning. In addition, Sweety and Sharmila also helped Suresh enroll in a local training on vegetable farming.

I don't think that I can thank Saath-Saath and the Chahari team enough. The home-based service and support that we received from Chhahari was monumental. They really inspired us to take the situation into our own hands and not let HIV ruin our lives. I can only hope that my telling this story will help them continue the work that they so tirelessly do.

(Based on the conversation between Sanu Lama (name changed) and Chhahari Mahila Samuha Outreach Educator Sweety Shrestha)



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Saath-Saath Project
GPO 8033, Baluwatar, Kathmandu
Ph: 977-1-4437173, Fax: 01-4417475
Email: fhinepal@fhi360.org

Saath-Saath Project