

STITCHING HER WAY THROUGH LIFE

From bonded laborer to a business woman

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Rajani Chaudhary stands tall donning her traditional Tharu attire confidently addressing a Girls Education Challenge seminar full of government officials and donor agencies. It is difficult to believe she was working as a Kamlari (bonded laborer) not so long ago in Bardgodiya Municipality of Kailali. Chaudhary was born in a poor family with five sisters and a brother. On top of working for another family, the daily household chores and hard toil in their little owned land put her education in the backseat. Despite being released from her duties as a Kamlari, she was unable to graduate from school. Young marginalized girls, who have given a shot at education and fail to graduate, have no other options but to marry at an early age or even consider working as a Kamlari.

Luckily, Chaudhary was able to enroll in a vocational training class conducted by Backward Society Education – an implementing partner of Mercy Corps STEM II project

- aimed at providing requisite skills and knowledge to girls who have dropped out from school to pursue different occupational paths. She received three-month training and started work as an apprentice in the same tailoring business for about a year or so. After possessing the much required vocational skill and experience, she herself opened up a small tailoring shop in her village.

After paying off the small amount of loan she had taken from her neighbor to acquire a sewing machine, she now wished to expand her business to make a decent earning rather than just making ends meet. To do so,

Chaudhary received a loan of NPR 150,000 from a local cooperative, as part of Girls Transition Fund (GTF) of STEM II project of the Girls Education Challenge. The fund provides access to finance to girls who have dropped out from school for startup small scale businesses. She also received financial literacy training and business skill development training further capacitating her for her new venture in life.

Through the loan, Rajani bought 5 additional machines, shifted to a bigger location and revamped her once tiny one-sewing-machine shop. She earns NPR 25,000 a month and also trains young girls like her wanting to make a life out of themselves for a small fee.



“I am where I am now because of the loan provided by the project without collateral for marginalized girls. I am very motivated and inspired and wish to become a role model for young girls who want to do something for themselves,” says Chaudhary.

Nowadays, you can see her happily working away in her shop with her trainees and assistants. If not, you will see her passionately

advocating on girls' rights and education not only as a former Kamlari turned entrepreneur but also as an emerging girl champion and a voice for marginalized girls in the southern rural communities of Nepal.