

## A Supportive Family is Essential for Women's Engagement



*Chandrawati Kumal served as treasurer on the Nayabasti bridge user committee.*

Chandrawati Kumal, 35, is currently working as the secretary of a local agriculture cooperative in Sitaganga Pallika in Argakhanchi, Nepal. Chandrawati says she was hired for this role thanks to her experience working as the treasurer in the user committee during the construction of the Nayabasti bridge in 2013.

Chandrawati first heard about the yet to be constructed bridge from her neighbors, who encouraged her to become a part of the user committee. At that time, she was a community health worker in her village, and was reluctant to take a leading role in the committee.

Chandrawati says that the support of her husband, understanding shown by her in-laws, and the assistance provided by the secretary of the committee gave her the encouragement to become an active member.

In her role as treasurer, she learned new skills such as bookkeeping, and was entrusted to keep accounts and mobilize laborers during construction.

Chandrawati says that her tasks were time consuming and needed to be balanced with her household duties. It was not easy, but her husband's support helped greatly. She says, "He did not tell me not to go to the meetings and did not criticize me for spending my time at the site to oversee the construction, and that made things easier." She adds, "There were times when I had to travel to Sandikharka, the district headquarters, for official business with other male members of the committee. I was apprehensive about how it would be viewed by my family and in-laws, but they never complained or forbid me."

There were even occasions when the other daughters-in-law would take up her cooking responsibilities and help feed her children so that she could take part in the meetings. "They would tell me, 'Didi, don't worry, you go to your meetings and we will take care of the meals'." Chandrawati says these small gestures made a world of difference to her.

She recalls that expressing her views at committee meetings did not come easily at first, but she made an effort and gradually gained confidence. Chandrawati is particularly proud that through her efforts single women were also provided labor opportunities during bridge construction. She says, "Other committee members thought that they would not be able to work. But I told them that they should be given the opportunity if they wanted, and it worked. Five single women earned money during the construction of the bridge."

After the completion of the bridge, Chandrawati applied for the position at the cooperative. As the secretary, she is responsible for managing day-to-day activities and keeping records. She says that many of the secretary duties are similar to what she had done in her committee role, which made her application stronger. She now crosses the Nayabasti bridge daily to reach her office, and says, "It gives me immense satisfaction to know that I was actively involved in its construction."