

## Trail Bridges Provide a Stepping Stone to Success



*Thamsara Pun, center, served as secretary of the Khamlaghat trail bridge user committee before entering politics.*

“Holding the position of secretary in the user committee of Khamlaghat trail bridge was a stepping stone to success for me,” says Thamsara Pun. “Now I am the Chairperson of Dhaulagiri Gaon Palika.”

Thamsara is from Myagdi, a part of Gandaki Pradesh, which is one of Nepal’s most popular tourism destinations, famous for the Pun Hills, Ghorepani, Tatopani Hot Springs and trekking routes. Trail bridges have played a vital role in connectivity not only for locals but also for tourists since these remote areas have poor basic facilities and seasonal roads.

Thamsara was chosen as secretary of the user committee because of her education (she is a teacher) and motivation. As part of her role, she regularly interacted with government officials, NGOs, the Trail Bridge Support Unit and the community. This helped widen her network and polish her communication and negotiating skills.

The chairperson and Thamsara took the lead on the bridge build. After completing the Khamlaghat trail bridge, Thamsara worked as a social mobilizer, providing support in

building schools, and in the health and water sectors. She was the principal of Chandra Jyoti Secondary School before taking up the position of Gaon Palika Chairperson. Her inclination towards politics took shape when she joined the then UML, and she stood for election in 2017.

Thamsara says that her role as Chairperson presents opportunities as well as challenges. She now has the “resources along with authority,” which helps her to directly implement small projects. Along with other development initiatives, she focuses on trail bridges, which are one of the most important means for rural transport; a budget has been allocated for new trail bridge construction that emphasizes timely completion as well as routine maintenance.

Females represent only 2% of all Chairpersons. This leads to a working environment that poses particular challenges for women, who often have to prove themselves to be accepted in unconventional roles due to a patriarchy mindset.

Thamsara says she gives full credit for her achievements to the trail bridge program, because she learned so much through this opportunity to work with different levels of stakeholders and to be in a position to make decisions. She concludes, “Working as the secretary in the user committee was the foundation for my growth and success.”