



WOREC

Survivors to Leaders:

***WOREC Holistic Support Model Builds
Economic Autonomy and Leadership***



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Integrated Approach Towards Sustainable Livelihood Program

The Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) was established in 1991 AD to advocate for human rights and social justice. Since its establishment, WOREC has been working on economic empowerment through sustainable livelihood programs. WOREC has adopted an integrated and holistic approach, focusing on transforming survivors into change-makers and leaders. WOREC's sustainable livelihood programs include bio-intensive farming, eco-village development, agriculture, seed money support, entrepreneurship development, skill training, and



the organization of women farmers under Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Campaigns. In 2023, WOREC adopted thematic areas, and these programs now belong to Ecological Justice and Women's Leadership theme. In these sustainable livelihood programs, WOREC focuses not only on economic empowerment and livelihood but also on building the inner strength of survivors. This includes boosting self-confidence and self-esteem through the analysis of their lived experiences within the context of social structures. WOREC provides leadership opportunities, fosters social connections, networks and builds alliances. Throughout this process, WOREC also offers various services to survivors based on their needs, including psychosocial counseling, safe house support, and legal assistance. A rights-based and survivor-centered approach is central to this work, ensuring confidentiality, self-determination, a non-discriminatory environment, and the dignity of survivors.

A few years back, WOREC formed Milan Mahila Samuha in my village. I also heard about WOREC's seed money support program through Milan Mahila Samuha. I also received seed money support and started poultry farming 4 years ago. This helped me to improve my income and invested in health checkups and daily household expenses. I gained experience running a business. I also got to know about the programs of the Agricultural Knowledge Center, local municipality program etc. This helped me to know more about my rights as well. Now, I have become chair of Milan Mahila Samuha.

In the last 7-8 months, our group referred 10 cases of violence against women to WOREC. We refer the cases to WOREC, Judicial Committee, Ward office and police.

In my leadership our group also submitted a proposal for 4 lakh rupees for the capacity development of women migrant worker to Ward office. We couldn't get the amount, but we got the information about the proposal writing and budgetary program of the municipality. WOREC provided technical support on proposal writing. Before, when I spoke alone, my voices were unheard but now people listen to me as I am the president of Milan Mahila Samuha. Now, I have my own identity.



From the fiscal year 2067/68 to 2080/81, WOREC provided seed money support to 5,436 women with the support and coordination of various governmental and non-governmental agencies. WOREC has its own Seed Money Fund Operation Guideline. Based on this guideline, WOREC identifies rights holders in coordination with local women-led organizations, women's groups, and networks. This approach has helped with monitoring and providing guidance to the seed money recipients through local actors.

Afterward, WOREC conducts entrepreneurship and business plan development training to support the women in identifying the businesses they want to run, based on contextual and market analysis. Simultaneously, WOREC engages with women survivors of GBV in various ways, providing counseling, building confidence, and connecting them with different networks. This is not only a formal process, but the nature and approach of engagement with survivors are also considered, creating a safe space to share, build trust, and enhance sisterhood. This multidimensional approach demonstrates not only the economic empowerment process but also strengthens social and psychological resilience.

Analyzing Her Stories:

To analyze the impact of the seed money provided, WOREC recently conducted a case study analysis in which a total of 41 success stories from Kailai, Dang, Mahottari, Dhanusha, Udayapur, Morang have been analyzed. Among the 41 recipients, 41.5% suffered from various forms of economic and social violence, 34% experienced domestic violence, and 22% were in polygamous marriages. Additionally, 7% of women's families were conflict-affected



and had lost family members or suffered from trauma. WOREC not only provided seed money support, but also offered safe house services, psychosocial counseling, and legal advice and assistance as per the survivors' needs. The recipients also received an orientation on women's rights, financial management, savings, leadership building and various capacity building programs. This support is not only enabling them to lead economically sustainable lives but also empowering them to reclaim their identity and live with dignity.

I am a conflict survivor woman; I faced emotional trauma and financial instability. But everything began to change when I joined the WOREC's conflict survivors' women groups. Through WOREC, I received not just emotional support and counseling, but also practical assistance to rebuild my life. I was given 18,000 NPR as seed money to start a small goat farming business. Along with this, I received valuable training on farming, business management, and coping with emotional trauma. Now, I earn 75,000 NPR annually. This income has allowed me to take care of my household needs, cover medical expenses, and live a life of dignity. I also started saving 1,500 NPR every month at a cooperative, and over time, my savings have grown to 55,000 NPR. This sense of financial security has been life-changing.

From all the case studies collected from six districts, it was found that the seed money support had a sustainable impact on the lives of the recipient. Their financial condition has improved and, and the income is used for household expenses like food, health and medicine, and children's



education. Most of the women shared that their money is spent on their and families' health and medicine, as before having financial dependency never allowed them to think about their own health and treatment.

The income is also used to expand the business or invest in other income-generating activities. Since many of the recipients had not received higher education or technical training in

business, this support has changed the societal narrative that women can also contribute to the financial need of their families and be the bread winners for the family. This has supported increasing their intra-household bargaining power within their household and help them build resilience against systemic violence within their family and society. They also shared that they have started saving money in cooperatives and banks. When receiving the seed money support, many did not have bank accounts or financial literacy. Opening a bank account and saving money on cooperatives are also significant changes brought about by this integrated approach. This supported not only to financial sustainability but also to have increased mobility of women in public spaces, strengthened social relationships and boost self-confident.

Lack of strong financial stability often leads to exclusion and social

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isolation. For GBV survivors and economically marginalized it become more functioning due to intersectional discrimination. Among them, 29% experienced a shift in societal perception after improving their financial status.

Previously, they felt marginalized and distrusted by their neighbors when seeking loans and other forms of support. However, after starting their own businesses, they gained recognition in society and felt respected. They shared that they are now valued and actively participate in community decision-making.

Likewise, in this journey of survivors to change maker, some women became vibrant leaders actively working on women human rights

At the age of 15, while I was still in Grade 8, I was forced into marriage due to my family's financial situation. Life became even more challenging after my marriage. My family lived as squatters in a slum area, and our only source of income was daily wage labor in India.

Then, WOREC came into our lives. They formed a women's group in our community, focusing on women's and Dalit rights. This was a turning point for me. Through WOREC, I received seed money and orientations on my legal rights. With their support, I started a small shop with 30,000 NPR in seed money. Today, I earn between 500 to 700 NPR daily from my shop.

I was also elected as chair of the women's group, and now I am recognized as a women's rights activist in my municipality. I also chair a registered local organization where we work on gender-based violence, disaster response, land rights, and Dalit rights. I am proud of who I have become.





and GBV issues by engaging with local women's groups and networks. They are now actively referring GBV cases to the police, local government and WOREC. As these women are creating own path towards their self-identity and empowerment, many of them have gained recognition as women human rights defenders at the community level. Thus, these stories proved that economic empowerment interventions should not only act as a tool for survival but also as a catalyst for social transformation, addressing systemic issues, and challenge existing unequal power structures. This is a powerful example of how financial autonomy, identity and recognition can be achieved through an integrated approach.

Conclusion: A Reflection on the Journey

As feminist slogan, 'personal is political' states, the life story of every woman is a political issue and a result of structural inequality. Global and local policies, social norms and practices shape this experience and determine the marginalization that women face. Socio-economic and gender-based violence are also the results of systemic discrimination. Thus, economic empowerment and women's access to resources can only be achieved through a change in internalized attitudes, social norms and gender transformative programming. The above study analysis also shows the importance of having an analytical understanding of the experience GBV survivors have faced before providing the seed money and designing holistic interventions that can enhance their access to economic, political and internal resources. Likewise, patriarchy exerts control over women's bodily integrity, work, and identity. This limits women's ability to enjoy their economic rights and claim their spaces in economic settings within family and society. WOREC's annual data 'Anbeshi' 2024 also shows that 37% of GBV survivor women are engaged in care work and domestic work without having their labor recognized and economic freedom ensured. This demonstrates that gender-based violence and economic empowerment issues are intersectional and require a holistic approach to address them. Thus, the essence of WOREC livelihood program is that women's control over their bodily decisions, leadership, resources and economic freedom can only be achieved by challenging patriarchal norms and ensuring women's right to dignified and valued economically valued work.

Now, I can communicate with the community and share my experiences. I have also received information about government policies and programs. If there is any violence in the community, I immediately refer the case immediately to appropriate authorities support the survivor and provide information regarding what needs to be done. These days I work as an activist and spread awareness in the society advocating women and girl should not be subject of any kind of violence. The villagers now call me a women's rights activist. I am also a member of Dalit women's group and raised voice for Dalit rights.



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