



# NEPAL

## Hotspot report

August 2024



*Front cover: To build pressure for rehabilitation support, after the declaration of emancipation of Harawa-Charawa, the Freed Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum and Rastriya Dalit Network organised a 4-day march, moving from town to town and holding rallies and media events. The mass mobilisation, with groups coming from different directions, involved 2,000 people and was called the freed Harawa-Charawa Rights Caravan.  
Photo credit: Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its inception in 2014, the Freedom Fund's Nepal hotspot program has worked with communities that are emerging from agricultural bonded labour – a system called Harawa-Charawa, meaning people who plough the land and graze the cattle under the landlords. In 2021, we expanded our hotspot program to include two other major communities in Nepal that were previously in bonded labour – the Kamaiya and Haliya.

After years of struggle to get attention for their rights, Harawa-Charawa communities were finally declared 'free' in 2022, and with the support of our hotspot partners, they are now working towards getting comprehensive rehabilitation packages from national, provincial and local-level governments.

In 2023, our Nepal hotspot program contributed to significant successes for the Harawa-Charawa at national, provincial and local levels. Following long-term, continuous advocacy by our partners, the national government committed in its 2023 annual policy statement to make a number of provisions for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. In Province 2, issues faced by the Harawa-Charawa were formally acknowledged for the first time by the provincial government, which then drafted guidelines to identify Harawa-Charawa and issue ID cards – a first step in accessing rehabilitation support. Also during the year, provincial governments in all our program areas allocated budget for agricultural bonded labourers, and provincial and local-level governments introduced guidelines for the rehabilitation of Harawa-Charawa communities.

Complementing the advocacy work, our hotspot partners worked directly with Haliya, Kamaiya and Harawa-Charawa communities to support their rehabilitation. Achievements during the year included:

- 4,456 agricultural bonded labourers earned a new income or started a micro-enterprise and 246 received vocational skills training
- 8,706 community members gained access to essential government services
- 2,261 children were enrolled in school, 879 received academic support through tuition classes, and 2,310 received scholarships to prevent them from dropping out of school
- 353 community groups were mobilised at the community level.

*Lagindra Sada, General Secretary of National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum from Saptari District, ploughs the field.  
Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*



# OPERATING CONTEXT

Since its inception in 2014, the Freedom Fund's Nepal hotspot program has worked with communities that are emerging from agricultural bonded labour – a system called Harawa-Charawa, meaning people who plough the land and graze the cattle under the landlords. After years of struggle to get attention for their rights, Harawa-Charawa communities were finally declared 'free' in 2022, and they are now working towards getting a comprehensive rehabilitation package from the government so that their journey out of inter-generational bondage can be meaningful and real.

Since 2021, our hotspot program has expanded its support to include two other major communities in Nepal that were previously in bonded labour – the Kamaiya and Haliya – alongside the Harawa-Charawa communities. The program primarily focuses on three provinces in south-east, west and south-west Nepal: provinces 2, 5, and 7.

Developments in the operating context in 2023 included:

## **At national level:**

### **Political climate**

Early in 2023, Nepal faced political uncertainty due to the breakdown of the coalition government, until a new cabinet was formed in March. Under the new coalition, Ranjita Shrestha, who is affiliated to the Kamaiya community, was appointed Minister of Land Management, and she publicly promised to address the issues faced by former bonded labour communities.

### **Revision to the national minimum wage**

The government amended the minimum wage, increasing it from 577 to 668 Nepali rupees (approx. US \$5) per day.

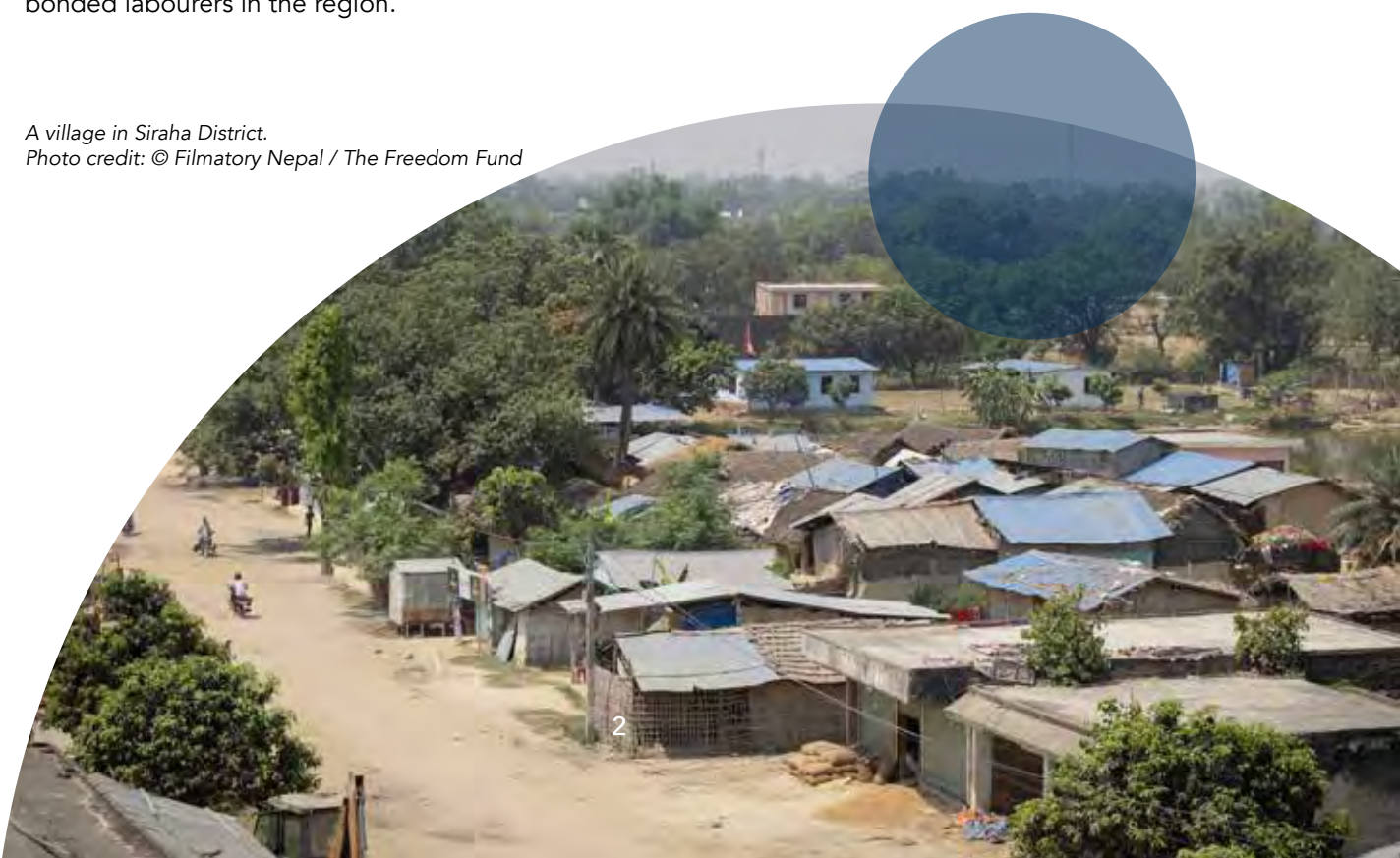
## **At provincial level:**

### **Kamaiya activist becomes Chief Minister in Province 5**

Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, a long-time activist in the Kamaiya movement, became the Chief Minister of Province 5. This was a moment of celebration for former bonded labourers, although the provincial government has yet to develop and deploy guidelines for continuing the practical rehabilitation of bonded labourers in the region.

*A village in Siraha District.*

*Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*



# PROGRESS TOWARDS SYSTEMS CHANGE

In 2023, the program achieved significant successes at federal, provincial and local levels, benefiting agricultural bonded labourers. All levels of government allocated budgets for the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya, Kamaiya, and Kamlari communities in our working areas. (Kamlari is a traditional system where girls are sent to be domestic workers in higher caste households.)

## **Provisions for bonded labourers in the Federal Government's Annual Program**

Following long-term advocacy by hotspot partners, on 19 May 2023 the President presented policies which can significantly improve the lives of former bonded labourers. For example, freed Haliya, Kamaiya, Kamlari, and Harawa-Charawa were added to the government's land distribution scheme along with the landless Dalits. This will assist with land allocation to households within these communities that have remained landless and are still living as squatters in unorganised settlements despite being declared free. A poverty identification card – linked to the national identity card – is also to be introduced, which will enable people in these communities to access social protections such as discounted grain and other food.

## **Issues faced by Harawa-Charawa included for the first time in the program statement of Province 2 government**

The Joint Struggle Committee (a representative body of leaders from the Haliya, Kamaiya, Kamlari, and Harawa-Charawa communities supported by the Freedom Fund) worked closely with the national Harawa-Charawa Network to organise a meeting with Province 2's Chief Minister, Minister for Social Development and Minister of Agriculture and Land Management. Despite this meeting, progress was slow. The Harawa-Charawa Network, with the support of our partners, then organised a 'Harawa-Charawa Rights Caravan' in Province 2, using the provincial budget planning session as a window of opportunity. The caravan was a four-day march converging from two locations, traversing the expanse of Province 2, covering a distance exceeding 100 kilometres. Mayors of towns along the route joined the caravan at different junctures, inaugurating the rallies in their respective areas and pledging their commitment to the betterment of the Harawa-Charawa community. Over 2,000 individuals from the Harawa-Charawa community congregated to display their solidarity. The closing ceremony of the rally was attended by the Social Development Minister of the Madhesh (Province 2) government, who pledged to elevate these concerns to the forefront of the provincial cabinet's agenda. The media played a pivotal role with a number of articles published, including coverage on television news channels. This led to the Province 2 Chief Minister announcing that the provincial government would prioritise the identification of Harawa-Charawa households and distribution of identity cards so that the Harawa-Charawa could benefit from rehabilitation programs and other government schemes. This was a significant achievement as it was the first time that the Province 2 government has accepted the existence of Harawa-Charawa bonded labour in a policy document.

*Mohammad Kasim Lahari, Chalitar Mandal, Rajbati Devi Mandal, Sumitra Devi Khang, Lagindra Sada, Dasan Mandal and Shyam Sundar Sada - officers and members of the National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum - gather as they attend the National Level Meeting of National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum at Saptari, Nepal in May 2023.*  
Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund





*Rajbati Devi Mandal, Treasurer of National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum prepares to cook rice at her house.  
Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*

### **Provincial governments allocate budget for agricultural bonded labours**

After continuous advocacy, three provincial governments allocated a total of US \$816,000 in their budgets for the fiscal year 2023/24 to support skills development, income-generation activities and higher educational scholarships for agricultural bonded labourers. Although the rehabilitation of freed bonded labourers will require much larger investments, these were important commitments. Regular follow-up will be needed to make sure the funds are spent as allocated, and leaders of the movements are in continued conversations with provincial and local level governments about this.

### **Policy changes at local level**

In order for government provisions to reach the communities, actions by local government are needed. In 2023, local advocacy led to many results at the municipal level, including:

- **Minimum wage policy in Dhanauji municipality ward 2.** After prolonged advocacy, Dhanauji municipality ward 2 in south-east Nepal issued a notice announcing the minimum daily wage and stating that anyone violating this rule would face prosecution. Additionally, the ward established a wage monitoring committee to oversee wages in the area and to address any complaints from Harawa-Charawa communities.
- **Dhangadhimai municipality approved guidelines on relief measures for the Harawa-Charawa, as well as a strategy against child marriage.** Our partner DJKYC regularly advocated for these measures with municipal officials and provided input to the guidelines.
- **Freed Haliya Rehabilitation Guideline.** Sayal rural municipality developed and adopted a Freed Haliya Rehabilitation Guideline so that it has a legal base to collect household data of Haliya communities. The municipality will then be able to provide each of the eligible families with Rs. 250,000 (approx. US \$1,900) to purchase land, and Rs. 350,000 (approx. US \$2,600) to build houses or Rs. 150,000 (approx. US \$1,100) to repair houses.
- **Four other municipalities** have now formed committees to develop Haliya rehabilitation guidelines.

# HOTSPOT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

## Headline results

### **4,456 agricultural bonded labourers earned a new income or started a micro-enterprise and 246 received vocational skills training**

During 2023, a total of 4,456 agricultural bonded labourers from the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya, and Kamaiya communities received support for alternative incomes, and 246 individuals (18 men and 228 women) received vocational skills training provided by our partners. Since participants choose the skills themselves, they can pursue occupations of their choice and earn income from alternative jobs. This is critical in the movement out of bonded labour as it offers new livelihood alternatives for those who have been bonded in manual labour for generations.

### **8,706 community members gained access to essential government services**

During the year, 8,706 members of the Harawa-Charawa, Haliya, and Kamaiya communities gained access to essential government services. Our partners assisted them to access entitlements through local government channels, such as nutrition support for children, citizenship certificates, free healthcare, education, employment assistance, roof replacement with zinc sheets, and land ownership certificates. Many communities were unaware of these services, and even those who were aware often hesitated to approach local authorities due to limited literacy levels. Access to these services increases resilience, preventing people being pushed back into conditions of forced labour.

### **2,261 children enrolled in school**

School dropout is a common phenomenon among the children of bonded labourer families. Our partners are supporting these children to continue their education. In 2023, 2,261 children (1,262 girls and 999 boys) were enrolled into school. Our partners, in collaboration with local schools, organised school enrolment campaigns and ran 20 tuition classes providing academic support to 879 students. The partners also provided scholarships to 2,310 children at risk of dropping out from school. These are important safety nets, setting up the next generation of children for meaningful freedom.

*Om Prakash Sah, Bauwa teacher, leads a classroom in Saptari District.  
Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*



### **353 community groups mobilised at the community level**

During the year, a total of 353 community groups, networks and children's groups were active. Among them, 278 groups were from Harawa-Charawa communities and 75 from Haliya and Kamaiya communities. A total of 12,584 members connected with and supported each other. This is a significant increase as there were only 120 such Harawa-Charawa groups before 2021. Among the Harawa-Charawa groups are economic self-help groups, supported by our partners, that meet monthly. Each member contributes between Rs. 50 to 100 each month into their savings schemes. The group then facilitates loans to members who need a loan urgently, using the monies collected.

### **Progress towards hotspot objectives**

During 2023, network leaders and NGO partners concentrated their advocacy efforts on the steps required for securing rehabilitation packages from the government for former bonded labourers. The inclusion of the Harawa-Charawa issue in federal and provincial government plans was a significant achievement, especially as it was followed by the Province 2 government developing guidelines for data collection and the distribution of identity cards to Harawa-Charawa households.

### **Objective 1: A united movement of agricultural bonded labour groups is formed and active at the national level**

In February and September, the National Bonded Labour Joint Struggle Committee (JSC) and Freedom Fund partners met for two-day and three-day meetings to review achievements and undertake in-depth planning for joint advocacy with common goals. Key results of collective engagement with government bodies during 2023 are outlined below.

#### **Delegation at the National Land Commission**

The JSC organised a delegation at the Land Commission in February, where JSC members shared the status of bonded labourers, the urgent need for land distribution, and other issues including the problem of evictions of Harawa-Charawa households. Representatives of the Freedom Fund and NGO partners joined the delegation. Subsequently, the Land Commission issued a public notice to stop displacement of the Harawa-Charawa. This had an immediate impact on the security of the Harawa-Charawa, helping to prevent flash demolitions and evictions.

#### **JSC members visited Prime Minister and submitted a memorandum**

In May, the JSC organised a national-level advocacy event targeting the upcoming programs and budget. The JSC members met the Prime Minister and the Minister for Land Management, discussing the need for rehabilitation of agricultural bonded labourers.

*Rajbati Devi Mandal, Treasurer of National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum from Siraha District, prepares a mixture of hay, cow dung and water to dry in the sun to dry and use as cooking fuel.  
Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*







Community members from Saptari District travel by tractor as they take part in a protest caravan heading towards Janakpur in April 2023 to demand services and rehabilitation for the recently freed Harawa-Charawa. Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund

### **Memorandum submitted to the Province 2 Chief Minister**

In March, the national Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum delivered a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Province 2, encompassing a range of issues. During the event, representatives of the Rights Forum, our partners and the Freedom Fund actively raised the voices and concerns of freed Harawa-Charawa. The following were the demands mentioned in the memorandum:

- Urgently approve a comprehensive rehabilitation plan for Harawa-Charawa, with a package covering land, education, healthcare, jobs, social security, and inclusion.
- Offer extended skills training (6+ months) and provide seed capital and tools.
- Launch a comprehensive poverty alleviation program focusing on the poorest and landless Harawa-Charawa households.
- Issue instructions for local data collection on freed Harawa-Charawa and establish an effective rehabilitation committee.
- Allocate sufficient budget for rehabilitation.

The Province 2 Chief Minister pledged to address these concerns and formulate the necessary policies and plans. The provincial Land Management Ministry then drafted data collection and identity card distribution guidelines – a first step in enabling the Harawa-Charawa to benefit from rehabilitation programs and other government schemes. However, these plans still need to be endorsed by the provincial government.

### **Training and empowerment of Harawa-Charawa youth activists**

During the year, two significant events were organised to train youth activists for advocacy within the joint movement of agricultural bonded labourers. The first meeting in March involved 30 active Harawa-Charawa youths. They discussed engagement in local advocacy, participation in the Harawa-Charawa Rights Caravan, and school enrolment campaigns. The second meeting, in April, involved 23 Harawa-Charawa youths and focused on their regular presence in Harawa-Charawa Network meetings and in delegations engaging local authorities. After these meetings, the trained activists planned and implemented various advocacy efforts. Their participation empowered them to effectively articulate the challenges and concerns of the Harawa-Charawa community in public forums.

### **Harawa-Charawa Network advocacy on the issue of evictions of Harawa-Charawa**

The Harawa-Charawa community have always faced threats of displacement, and cases of eviction have increased since the National Land Commission started distributing land for the landless Dalits and squatters. The Harawa-Charawa Network stepped up its advocacy on the issue. Following representations made by a series of Harawa-Charawa delegations, the Dalit Commission sent letters instructing district officials to stop any displacements until the actions of the National Land Commission were completed. In addition, our partner JDS coordinated with other Freedom Fund partners to organise a province-level interaction in March. Sixty participants, including Harawa-Charawa Network representatives, Dalit leaders, journalists, and politicians from Province 2 including the Home Minister, attended the event.

## Strengthening Kamaiya advocacy in Provinces 5 and 7

Two provincial-level Kamaiya conferences were held, supported by the Freed Kamaiya Society and local partner KMJS, to strengthen the Kamaiya network by establishing provincial level committees in each of the two provinces. These committees will closely collaborate with municipality, district, and national level Kamaiya committees for advocacy. The conferences also educated leaders about the Kamaiya Rehabilitation Guidelines. Rallies were organised in two districts with thousands participating.

### Advocacy at the local level

In south-east Nepal, coordinated by our partner RDN, Harawa-Charawa Network members and partners submitted a memorandum of demands to 32 municipalities of Province 2. Advocacy within local municipalities raised awareness among elected representatives and consequently many municipalities allocated resources for the Harawa-Charawa, including budget provisions.

### Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum registered

The Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum obtained official registration which enables them to operate independently and to further develop their network. To facilitate the development of the Forum's governance arrangements, our partner RDN conducted training covering roles and obligations associated with this new legal status.

### Sharing survivor leadership experience at the Asia Region Anti-Trafficking Conference

The chairperson of RDN and a representative of the Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum (both survivor leaders) presented a panel at the Asia Region Anti-Trafficking Conference in Indonesia, sharing the long journey of the Harawa-Charawa towards freedom, the leadership from the community, and the role that many stakeholders played in building the movement.

## Objective 2: The government changes policies to address agricultural bonded labour and provide support services for survivors

In addition to achievements at all levels of government noted above:

- **The Integrated Forced Labour Bill was submitted to Parliament.** In January 2023, the Ministry of Labour and Employment met to discuss the final draft for the Integrated Forced Labour Act which would comprehensively address forced labour for all groups. In October, the bill was submitted to Parliament with a view to it being passed as law.
- **Federal parliamentarians spoke on the rehabilitation of the Harawa-Charawa.** During a session in the federal Parliament in April, the issue of rehabilitation of the Harawa-Charawa was addressed by several parliamentarians.

*Lagindra Sada, General Secretary of National Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum from Saptari District, during a press meet as part of the caravan heading towards Janakpur from Saptari District.*

*Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*



## **Objective 3: Agricultural bonded labourers have greater resilience as a result of accessing government and NGO support services**

### **Supporting small businesses in Harawa-Charawa communities**

During 2023, four of our partners supported 291 individuals from the Harawa-Charawa community to start businesses such as grocery shops, vegetable selling, fish selling, duck rearing, etc. Plans were developed to provide similar assistance to over 700 families in 2024.

### **Group farming for income generation**

Three of our partners started facilitating group farming for Harawa-Charawa communities, enabling 171 households to participate in vegetable production and fish farming. In addition, our partner DJKYC coordinated with local government so that 68 families were allocated land for cultivation. According to group members, they earned between Rs. 6,000 to 8,000 (approx. US \$45-60) monthly from selling vegetables.

### **Access to vital registration for Harawa-Charawa households, including children**

Our partners have been actively supporting Harawa-Charawa communities to access vital registration documents such as birth certificates. Many children from Harawa-Charawa communities struggle to obtain documentation due to their parents' landlessness and lack of citizenship documents. This issue is critical because without birth registration, these children are unable to enrol in school. To address this, our partners conducted local campaigns to arrange birth registration. Additionally, our partners encouraged community members to register for government services, including old age pensions and nutrition support for young children. The leaders of the Harawa-Charawa Network are involved in local advocacy efforts, educating community members and holding local authorities accountable.

### **Employment Information Centres in two districts successfully launched**

Employment Information Centres were established in collaboration with local authorities, and now play a crucial role in disseminating employment information, coordinating with employers via notice boards and social media platforms. In 2023, these centres served 683 individuals, with 78 securing job opportunities, 112 enrolling in the Prime Minister's employment program (for 100 days' paid work), 375 labourers acquiring labourer identity cards, and 239 youth gaining basic computer skills using centre facilities.

### **Development of self-help groups**

During 2023, four of our local partners worked with a total of 112 women's self-help groups that are now functioning well, collecting savings from their members and providing loans to group members in need. Between all these self-help groups, members have saved Rs. 12,157,980 (approx. US \$90,000). Three of the partners have also registered five women's production cooperatives.

*Activists holding a banner that reads "Harawa-Charawa Rights Journey" take part in the caravan heading towards Janakpur from Dhanusha District in April 2023.  
Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*



## Case study

### **Chandradeep wants to be a Government Officer:**

Chandradeep is the eldest child in his family in Dhanusha district and faces severe poverty as his parents struggle to make ends meet, working as labourers. Living in a small straw hut, he lacks warm clothing. Despite these financial constraints, Chandradeep is determined to attain a government job through diligent studying.

Many children in his village work every day with their families, but Chandradeep is determined to continue his study even if he has to go through the hardships. He is inspired by tuition classes and scholarships provided by our partner, Community Improvement Center (CIC). He initially struggled in school, but due to his commitment and CIC's assistance, he has progressed.

Chandradeep's parents work as herders and are tied to their landlord's property, limiting their job opportunities. Their transition out of bonded labour is incomplete. Chandradeep's mother, Gangia Devi, received business training from CIC, but needs further help to put it into practice. Despite these hardships, Chandradeep remains committed to his dream of securing a government job to lift his family out of poverty.

### **Business training leads to a new income – and new opportunities**

When Fulmati's family received land from the Nepal government as part of the rehabilitation process for Kamaiya communities, it was a start. But with seven members, her family remained financially challenged. The family depended on the wages earned by Fulmati's husband, who has been working in various locations across Nepal and India since he was a child. Fulmati herself did not have access to any paid work opportunities.

However, since the implementation of our partner Action Aid's work in her district, Fulmati's community started to revitalise, and young people started to attend community meetings. Fulmati – who is aged 24 – was one of them, regularly joining the community meetings. In 2023, she got the opportunity to learn about business development when the community committee and the Ward office recommended her for a three-day business training course. She learnt about how to start and run a business, including developing a business plan, and received Rs. 20,000 (approx. US \$150) to start her own mobile snack vending business. She also invested her own money in starting the business.

Fulmati's daily schedule has changed radically. Now, she completes her household chores, sends her son to school, and leaves the home with her cart-shop. As well as selling locally, once a week she goes to a nearby market, where she is able to earn twice her normal daily rate. Since she started her business, she has been covering the household expenses and is not dependent on her husband any more. She says: *"Before, I didn't have any earnings, and I didn't have my own bank account. Since I started my business, I've opened my bank account, and my husband can send money into the account. However, I don't have to ask my husband for money and don't have to wait for him to send it."* She has also expanded her business beyond the cart-shop, by increasing the number of goats that she rears on the family's land.

Fulmati's business has not only helped her with a new income but also empowered her in daily life. She says: *"I'm very happy now. Nowadays I regularly join the community level meetings, where I am able to socialise with people and even join in social work."* Along with other former Kamaiyas, Fulmati joins the interactions with local government to raise issues affecting their communities, including demanding for free, quality education, youth employment, rehabilitation of unregistered Kamaiya families, and more.



*Chandreswori Devi Sada, Member of District Harawa-Charawa Rights Forum from Saptari District, outside her home. Photo credit: © Filmatory Nepal / The Freedom Fund*

# VISION

Our vision is a world free of slavery.

# MISSION

Our mission is to mobilise the knowledge, capital and will needed to end slavery.

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