

# Testimony of Durga Shrestha, a Payee of Setu Nepal

*"I received a new perspective that allowed me to see life in a totally optimistic way. I changed, Irreversibly, Forever. My soul is richer. My heart has long been full of sorrow, now it is filled with hope and determination to live a meaningful life. Through this journey SETU was a milestone and I feel infinite gratitude. "*

*- Durga Shrestha*

SETU Nepal is a non-profit association committed to the well-being of mothers and children affected by AIDS. As a local NGDO partner, SETU aims to make them dignified, independent and free of discrimination in society. As part of the project, SETU organizes five training sessions each year (including four for emancipation and income generation and one for micro - enterprise training), with 14 HIV - positive mothers for each session. All participants have so far expressed with great joy that these formations would have induced positive changes in their lives, which is a major landmark for SETU. They all have their own motivating story and that of Durga Shrestha, told below, is exceptional.

Durga Shrestha from Makwanpur District was a participant in the 2010 Income Generation Training Course, the first year of the NGDO-supported apprenticeship program. She lives with her husband, who is also infected with HIV, and her two sons. The eldest is in seventh ("grade seven") while the younger, also infected with HIV, is supported by SETU to help him succeed in fifth ("grade 5"). After being diagnosed with HIV in 2009, Durga was broken and depressed, but she was able to participate in income-generation training supported by the NGDO. Nostalgic, she says today: *"I did not have the courage to fight against my situation, but my participation in this formation was like a miracle by producing a decisive turning point in my life"*.

Reinvigorated by the training, Durga bought two goats with the small seed money provided during the training. Despite difficult hardships, she was able to increase the number of goats to four, but she eventually had to sell them because of the limited space she had rented. Nevertheless, she continued to be zealous and independent and later opened a tea and snacks stand at the Hetauda bus station. This job was not easy. Equipped with a traveling stand rental (thela) she had to face many obstacles as the competition that also proposed nearby stands but also the bans of the government police to continue his business to the station area. It has continued its business and has continued to make progress. Taking into account her effective use of start-up capital she was selected for entrepreneurship training in 2015 and she was able to expand her commercial stand to offer even more food using the loan she was given. She says: *"The skills and know-how I gained during teaching helped me run my business more systematically, otherwise I could not have done so well."* Thereafter she made profits and after repaying the loan she borrowed money again. Her hard work was worth it and she was awarded the title of Best Entrepreneur in 2015. During the 2016 apprenticeship program she was presented as a successful and exemplary woman to other apprentices. " Now, my daily income is Rs. 2000 and I can save around Rs. 35000 per month. Now the traveling stand belongs to me and I run my business with pride and satisfaction. I even own a lot of land worth 20 lakhs that I

bought with my income and a loan that I will repay without delay. I no longer have to face obstacles to meet my daily needs and my livelihood is now guaranteed.

Durga's inspiring transformation journey from a depressed HIV patient to a well-established, dignified and self-confident woman was an experience marked by moments of joy and concern. She describes her experience by saying, *"Before my apprenticeship, I was frustrated and I did not have the courage to fight, I only accused my husband of being responsible for the disease and cursing life, but after having participated in the income generation training, I saw the light at the end of the tunnel, which guided me to where I am today. I now consider myself a successful woman and my family, who for years was exhausted, is now happy, my husband is supporting me now and we are doing each task together, which has brought back all the joy of living lost. I'm pretty sure of myself to patiently and confidently face every problem that comes up along the way. The courage to live with my head held up is the best gift I have ever received from SETU "*.