

# Stories of change

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## **From Hesitation to Leadership:** *How Women of Mahuwa Village Are Shaping a Climate-Resilient and Regenerative Agriculture Future*

*By Komla Thakur and Binod Shahi*

### Key messages:-

When local women are empowered to lead, even socially conservative and climate-vulnerable communities can turn hesitation into collective strength, adopt regenerative agriculture, and build lasting climate resilience

#### Context

Mahuwa village, situated in Janaknandini Rural Municipality of Dhanusha District, is a predominantly agrarian community where farming remains the main source of livelihood for most households. Over time, however, widespread male out-migration and off-farm employment have significantly altered village life. With many men working away from home, women have assumed primary responsibility for agriculture as well as household food security.

Despite their crucial role in sustaining local farming systems, women's participation and voices have long remained limited in formal agricultural platforms. Deep-rooted social norms, cultural traditions, and limited experience with collective action resulted in women working largely in isolation. When the

Civil Society for Nature-Based Local Agrifood System (CS4FS) project—implemented by Aasman Nepal, Janaki Women Awareness Center, and PAC Nepal, with technical support from Welthungerhilfe (WHH) and financial support from BMZ set out to form inclusive smallholder and landless farmer groups to promote climate-resilient and regenerative agriculture, Mahuwa initially emerged as one of the most challenging communities to engage.

#### The Challenge

Women were already cultivating fields, managing households, and coping with climate uncertainties—but joining a formal group felt risky. Heavy workloads, social hesitation, and doubts about the value of “sitting together in groups” prevented many from stepping forward.

Forming groups among Muslim women posed

additional challenges due to cultural restrictions on women's mobility and participation in mixed-gender or public gatherings. Convincing women to engage in collective action required culturally sensitive facilitation, reassurance of privacy, and repeated trust-building efforts. Without women's participation, the project risked missing those who needed climate-resilient and regenerative agriculture solutions the most.

## A Spark of Local Leadership

[Change began with one woman.](#)

Change began with one woman—but it took support to light the flame. Field staff Komal Thakur first convinced and encouraged Ms. Jahana Khatun, a local resident of Mahuwa village, to sit together and consider forming a farmer group with other women from the Muslim community. Recognizing the potential, Jahana took the initiative, visiting households one by one—listening, explaining, and motivating others to join.

She spoke about practical benefits: access to climate-resilient and regenerative farming knowledge, quality inputs, collective savings, and government services. More importantly, she helped women see themselves as decision-makers, even in the absence of men.

*This project is not only about forming groups. It is about helping women stand on their own feet by learning climate-resilient farming and working collectively.*

*Ms. Jahana Khatun,  
Chairperson- Bismila FG*

*Working with these women taught me that patience, trust, and culturally sensitive support can unlock leadership even in the most hesitant communities. Every small step toward collective action brings big change.*

*Ms. Komal Kumari Thakur,  
JTA, CS4FS Project*

Through patience, trust, and persistence, fear slowly turned into curiosity—and curiosity into confidence.

## Turning Collective Will into Action

What once seemed impossible soon became reality. Women who had never spoken up in public spaces agreed to come together. With continued facilitation and local coordination, the Bismilla Farmers Group was formed in the Muslim settlement of Mahuwa village. Ms. Jahana Khatun now serves as the Chairperson of the group, leading meetings, guiding discussions, and mentoring fellow members. Today, 30 women farmers are active participants, meeting regularly to discuss farming practices, climate-resilient techniques, collective savings, and shared challenges.

“ *Earlier, we used to work alone and hesitated to speak out. Now, through the group, we learn together, save together, and support one another.* ”

*Member, Bismilla Farmers Group* ”

## Early Impact and Change

[The transformation goes beyond group formation:](#)

- Women are increasingly confident in voicing opinions and taking leadership roles

- Awareness and adoption of climate-resilient and regenerative agricultural practices have improved.
- Women are engaging more actively with service providers and local government institutions

Through the project, women have expressed expectations for further improvements in regenerative agriculture practices, such as access to high-quality organic inputs, technical training on soil health management, and demonstration plots for innovative farming methods.

These changes are especially meaningful in a context where male out-migration remains high and women continue to manage farms largely on their own.

## Why This Story Matters

This experience from Mahuwa village demonstrates that gender equality, climate resilience, and livelihood security are deeply interconnected. When women are trusted, supported, and organized, they become powerful agents of change.

*Women understand the Purpose and see practical benefits, change begins from within the community itself.*

Binod Kumar Shahi  
Agriculture/NRM Officer

## Lessons Learned

- Local women leaders are critical to overcoming social and cultural barriers
- Trust-based, culturally sensitive facilitation leads to lasting participation
- Climate-resilient agriculture initiatives are more effective when women lead them

## Conclusion

The story of Mahuwa village is not just about forming a farmers' group—it is about how courage, local leadership, and collective effort can transform hesitation into hope. Empowering women like Ms. Jahana Khatun has shown that meaningful change does not always begin with large investments, but often with one voice willing to step forward.

This model offers valuable lessons for replication in other climate-vulnerable and socially conservative communities across Nepal and beyond.

## Acknowledgements

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