



Samunnat Nepal

A Colourful Journey



Nepal is a beautiful country. Our journey is colourful...we love our country and we want to make it a better place for women to live. To flourish. This is the meaning of Samunnat.

Hamro Nepal (Our Nepal)



Life in Nepal can be hard, especially for women. As well as political problems and poverty, the geography and the culture can make life tough for women. Sometimes women don't know where to find help. They often have to endure society's scorn if they seek help, or try to find safety for themselves and their child. And even then, they may have to travel many days.



Hosiyar! Beware!

In Nepal marriages are usually arranged by a woman's family. In theory, child marriage and bigamy are illegal but occur regularly. Women and girls are vulnerable and risk exploitation. Many face psychological and physical abuse.

Often these things are ignored by police or family who fear changing the system. One divorced daughter damages the marriage prospects of her sisters.

Signs on the highway warn people to avoid being tricked by something that looks like a good marriage or work but will really result in being trafficked for work in the sex industry.

Standing up for their rights and finding a safe place to live is hard. Samunnat Nepal has grown and flourished because of the courage of some Nepali friends, the spirit of the women, and supporters from all over the world. We provide a place for women to learn about their rights, get legal support, counselling and learn how to earn their own income. We have a home where women can empower other women.



In the beginning...

In 2006 some Nepali friends decided they wanted to empower vulnerable women; not to simply rescue them, but to give them skills so they could earn their own income and become independent. Together they started Samunnat Nepal. Since we began, our Board membership has changed and now over half of our Board members are women who have been helped by Samunnat.

Kopila Khadka Basnet, a lawyer, has been with Samunnat from the start. She is a passionate advocate for human rights and works tirelessly to support us.

Many others have supported and encouraged us over the years, both inside and outside Nepal. Yuko and Jonathan helped us enormously in these early years. Past Board members, people who supported us in the establishment phase and people who helped with training are all a valued part of our family and we are so grateful to them. Later we will talk about our Friends of Samunnat and other friends who have made a big difference to where we are today.



Our early days

In the first six years Samunnat Nepal moved seven times which made it hard for women in need to find us! One early office was a garage on the noisy, dusty East-West Highway. Even in our garage/office we trained several income generating activities! Ladies made beads, learnt to sew and received legal assistance. All at once in a garage!

We wanted to be self sufficient and tried many items that we could use for fund raising. We began with 1/2 kg of pote (seed wedding beads) and some fabric to make beaded scarves. We took these to Fair Trade organisations in Kathmandu but were told that we needed something new. Something that was not the same as everyone else!

This was when we learnt about polymer clay from Wendy didi.



Getting down to business

Some women learn sewing skills so they can set up tailoring businesses. Samunnat Nepal loans women sewing machines and helps them to buy their own when their business is established. They sew school uniforms, nighties and kurtha surwals.

Some learn to prepare achar (pickles). They sell their achar door to door. Others have small vegetable stalls. The achar teacher (top photo, L) is very proud that she is a self made woman. As much as possible, we have female teachers and strive to create an environment where we learn about our own strengths and resources and can support one another.

Some women learn about agriculture and farming. After training, and with a loan from the Cooperative, Sita (middle photo, L) bought a cow. She sells milk to earn her living. Cows get really special care in Nepal. Looking after a few of them is a full time job! Sita repaid her loan and bought another cow!



Samunnat's polymer jewellery

Polymer clay was invented 50 years ago but no-one in Nepal had heard of it or knew how to use it. No-one had an oven to cure it. For nearly four years, while she lived in Nepal, Australian artist Wendy Moore stayed with us every second week to teach us about polymer. She still comes over twice a year to spend time with us, working on our skills, new designs and new techniques. We work in hot sticky conditions, with limited electricity and supply problems. But we persist!

Some of our earliest creations were our bahini (little sister) beads. In our town, a picture of the goddess Durga, symbolising strength, was used to advertise cement. She became our inspiration, and the model for the face of our bahini beads. Back in Australia Wendy and her husband Malcolm started Friends of Samunnat (FoS). All the money raised by this volunteer-run charity is sent back to us or is used to buy supplies. We use our money to fund our programs, provide legal support, deliver income training and advocate for human rights in our community.



Becoming artists

Some women have been learning about polymer since Samunnat started so we teach some new women when they come along. About fifteen of us earn an income by making polymer clay jewellery.

We had to learn how to create pieces that were consistently wonderful quality. We had to learn how to repeat the designs that people loved; how to mix colours and remember how we made them!

FoS sells our jewellery to distributors and it is available in shops and galleries. We work together on designs and learn about calculating production costs. We manage our supplies and are learning about reading order forms and packing them. We love to work together and often sing as we work! We create our jewellery and share our stories. Now that we have our building we have much more room to work in but still sometimes all sit together on the floor!





Here is some of our work. We name all of our beads. Some beads are named bhuichalo, which means earthquake, because we were making them when the earthquake came!

Growing and learning

When Samunnat began, most of us had never seen a computer before. We were fascinated when Wendy didi showed us the Samunnat webpage that the artist Cynthia Tinapple helped us to create.

Many of us didnt know much about how our bodies worked. We didn't want our own children to be as ignorant so we learnt so much and have written two books about sex education for parents to use with their own children.. We have community information mornings where we share coffee and cake and sometimes make beads with women in our community. While we are together, we are teaching them about rights, advocacy, ways to empower one another and the fact that we are so much stronger when we work together. We have a computer and an iPad in our office now and, when we have electricity and connection, we use this so much to communicate with the world beyond our eastern town!





Where are we?

You read earlier about our multiple moves around Birtamod, the eastern highway town in Jhapa (Province 1) where we are based. In 2013, Ganesh and Sangita Basnet helped us to buy affordable land so we could build our own home and stop moving around! Cathy (top R) made a beautiful video which highlighted our need for a new home and helped to raise the funds.

Rallied by Cynthia Tinapple and Ron Lehocky, a US paediatrician, artists helped us to build our own home! We now have two buildings that include our polymer studio, offices, kitchen, short term accommodation, a not-for-profit child care centre, the Cooperative and two small shops.





We love our new workshop, our training hall, our office, our Kids Centre and our Cooperative room. We offer short term accommodation for women in need. In the shops next door, ladies have established a tailoring business and a khaja ghar (snack house).

A worldwide family

We have Samunnat family all over the world. We are especially grateful to the international polymer clay community. We would not have our home without them! So many people have encouraged us.



Here are some of our supportive family at Shrinemont in the United States.



We also love when the Colourful Journey tour visits each year. We give these women a polymer clay lesson and teach them about our culture. They learn about mehendi, dancing and our food. They love our jewellery and we encourage them to do their Christmas shopping at Samunnat!

We love learning about their culture too!





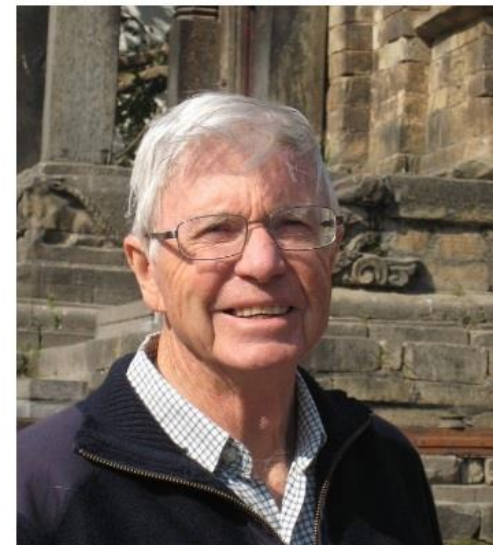
We are very grateful to our distributors Sarah, Rochelle, Sandy, Jenny, Sally, Sacha and others who buy our work from FoS.



We have strong links with supporters in Australia. People such as Rhonda and Geoff, Bert and Leslie (pictured L) and others contribute to our ongoing development



Behind the scenes, the wonderful FoS committee keep things ticking over and we are especially grateful to Les (R) who handles the financial matters and keeps our records.





Wendy and Malcolm Moore have been Samunnat family from our earliest days (even before Wendy had silver hair!). Wendy didi comes twice each year and Malcolm dai (big brother) comes as often as he can. Sarah Bartram has been one of our special didis for many years. It was a wonderful time when she visited us to teach English.



Cynthia Tinapple's visit

Cynthia Tinapple curates the world renowned Polymer Clay Daily blog. She has been a support for so many years and visited us to teach us to make our shisha bracelets. We loved learning from her, showing her what we do and being able to say dhanyabad- thank you.





Meet some of us!



The journey will continue

Over a decade ago, we had never heard of polymer clay. The seven women on the right were the first in Nepal to learn about it. Now they teach others how to create beautiful jewellery and identify themselves as artists. Some are on the board of our large, successful micro-finance Cooperative and others are on the board of Samunnat Nepal. All are committed to improving women's lives in Nepal.





Samunnat Nepal

Women flourishing and growing. More stories than we could
fit in this book. Thank You!

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