

A Second Chance: Raising Healthy Children with USAID's Support

Mina was only 17 when she married Mekhraj Gurung from Lamjung District. A year later, she gave birth to their first child without her husband by her side. Each year, approximately 300,000 Nepali youth leave the country to become migrant laborers abroad, and Mekhraj had joined the bandwagon by traveling to Dubai in search of better employment. Living with her in-laws, Mina assumed the traditional role of a daughter-in-law by taking full responsibility for all the household chores, which continued throughout her pregnancy. During that time, Mina never sought any formal healthcare, did not know where the nearest health post was located and knew next to nothing about the importance of antenatal check-ups, vitamins or vaccines during pregnancy. When Mina fell ill, she consulted local traditional healers for medical advice and gave birth at home with the assistance of local women, a typical practice for women in rural areas. Sadly, Mina's baby died within fifteen days of delivery.

During Mina's second pregnancy, Mekhraj moved from Dubai to Mumbai. In her desire to be near her husband, Mina went to India with her mother-in-law to give birth to their second child. During this time, Mina was more conscientious of her health; she ate more regularly and did fewer household chores in an attempt to avoid her first tragedy. She also chose to deliver in a hospital, where she gave birth to a daughter named Supriya. Mina returned back to Nepal with Supriya but she was still unfamiliar with the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and the proper nutrition needed for infants, Mina started feeding Supriya porridge and other food at the tender age of five months, just after the 'rice-feeding' ceremony – another age-old practice passed down through generations. As a result, Supriya suffered health problems caused by under



nutrition.

Things improved for Mina in July 2013 after she participated in ward-level nutrition education training, conducted by the USAID-funded integrated nutrition project Suaahara. Initially, many of the concepts taught were difficult to accept, such as the need to wash hands thoroughly on a regular basis. Yet after detailed demonstrations by Suaahara field staff, and explanations as to how hand washing and other practices could improve one's health, she slowly started to accept and incorporate them into her daily life. Today, Mina makes a point of washing her hands with soap and water before preparing meals and feeding her children. She also better understands the importance of antenatal check-ups, exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months, nutritious complementary feeding after six months of age and clean drinking water.

The timing of the Suaahara training was perfect, as Mina was pregnant with her third child. Not only was Mina learning about ways to improve Supriya's nutrition, but she was also learning how to take better care of her own health and the health of her future baby. Throughout her pregnancy, Mina made sure to get enough rest, and she attended four antenatal checkups where she received iron tablets and vaccinations against tetanus. She also began to feed Supriya nutritious green vegetables, meat and eggs, all through the support of the Suaahara program and her local Female Community Health Volunteer, Ram Maya Shrestha. Mina happily gave birth to a healthy baby girl child in a hospital with a skilled birth attendant.

Mina's story is not unique for Nepal's women, especially those who come from rural areas and lack adequate knowledge on properly caring for themselves



(Pics) Mina Gurung with her daughter Supriya

or their children.

Given that Nepal has one of the highest rates of under-5 undernutrition in the world, USAID's Suaahara project has helped many women like Mina by providing them with the right knowledge and tools so that their children grow to be healthy and strong. Suaahara is a comprehensive community-focused project dedicated to improving the health and nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and children less than two years of age, thereby directly addressing the vulnerable points of a child's development. This critical period can have devastating consequences on a child's ability to do well in school and eventually become an economically successful adult. Suaahara focuses on improving nutrition; maternal, newborn, and child health; reproductive health/family planning; water, sanitation and hygiene; and home-based gardening of nutritious foods in 20 districts.



Thanks to Suaahara, mothers are now armed with the skills to cultivate green leafy vegetables, ensuring that there's a sustainable source of healthy complementary foods to feed their growing infants. So far, USAID-supported homestead food production activities have benefited over 40,000 families in Nepal.

A REPORT: Nepal's Largest Contraceptive Marketer Launches an Exciting New Condom Called D'zire

Since the launch of the first oral contraceptive pills and condoms in 1978, the Nepal Contraceptive Retail Sales (CRS) Company has established itself as a key driver in the growth of Nepal's private health sector and family planning industry. From the very beginning CRS, with USAID's support, has successfully distributed low-cost family planning products through its innovative and far-reaching social marketing network, which includes its flagship condom brands – Dhaal and Panther.

While CRS has been successful in making itself a national leader in social marketing and franchising, it seeks to boost its existing subsidized product portfolio with profit-making public health products, which will help the company continue building a healthier future for Nepal.

Dhaal and Panther are targeted mainly towards men in the 49 hard-to-reach hilly and mountainous districts, as well as areas with high rates of transactional sexual activity. These quality products are subsidized by USAID, which procures the products and provides them to CRS to distribute and sell at subsidized prices to make them affordable to low-income groups. CRS's new D'zire dotted condoms, on the other hand, are priced at par with other commercial brands of condoms

on the market and meet the United States Food and Drug Administration quality requirements. With the tagline 'Make Each Moment Memorable,' D'zire is marketed and designed to appeal to a more youthful demographic living in the urban and semi-urban areas and will be made available in almost all pharmacies, pan shops, kiosks and grocery stores across the nation.

CRS has transitioned towards greater organizational independence by successfully taking on all of the management responsibility for the design and launch of D'zire. CRS conducted an international-standard tender and quality inspection process to ensure it was procuring high-quality condoms at a competitive price. This was an independently conducted business transaction with limited USAID support. For CRS, this milestone has opened new opportunities for making profitable products to support the more subsidized ones. Mr. Krishna B. Rayamajhi, Managing Director of CRS, highlighted the importance of funding from the United States Government to support CRS's transition towards greater independence, adding, "CRS will use profits generated from the sale of D'zire to make other USAID-subsidized brands more affordable to the buyers."

