

## SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NEPAL

Stories of Young Entrepreneurs Changing the Way Business is Done



















#### **Table of Content**

- 1. Burn But Not Undone; The Story Of Radhako Burn Survivors
- 2. We Found Purpose In Emotional Intelligence: The Story Of My Emotions Matter
- 3. Bnn Felt Handicraft: Because Business Is Not Only About Earning Profit
- 4. Bringing The Tastes From The Kitchen To The Cafe The Story Of The Village Cafe
- 5. Waste Management At Its Best: The Story Of Doko Recyclers
- 6. A Voyage Towards Rural Coffee Farmers; The Story Of Bean Voyage
- 7. From Trafficked Children To Circus Professionals The Story Of Circus Kathmandu
- 8. Connecting Farmers To Consumers- The Story Of Farm To Finger
- 9. Giving Option For The Air Pollution The Story Of Metro Mask

#### **FOREWORD**

Nepal has made tremendous progress in its socio-economic development over the past decades, but still faces many challenges. Where there are challenges, however, there are also opportunities. Social entrepreneurship constitutes a new way of trying to address today's pressing development problems in Nepal through innovative solutions. While it is still a relatively new concept in Nepal, but social entrepreneurship is increasingly gaining ground. In simple terms, social entrepreneurship can be defined as doing business for a social cause. Or in the words of Bill Drayton, the founder of Ashoka, who also coined the term social entrepreneurship: "Social entrepreneurs are the essential corrective force. They are system-changing entrepreneurs. And from deep within they, and therefore their work, are committed to the good of all." Social entrepreneurs have the following characteristics:

- They achieve large scale, systemic and sustainable social change through a new invention, a different approach, a more rigorous application of known technologies or strategies, or a combination of these.
- They focus first and foremost on the social and/or ecological value creation and try to optimize the financial value creation.
- They innovate by finding a new product, a new service, or a new approach to a known social problem.
- They continuously refine and adapt their approach in response to feedback.

In July 2016, we embarked on our own social entrepreneurship journey by establishing Bikas Udhyami. Our organization supports young people to develop innovative and smart solutions that contribute to Nepal's development. One of the key social challenges that we found in Nepal was the lack of access to development data and statistics and quality information in areas such as entrepreneurship. Data, statistics and information are essential for people to make informed decisions regarding policy, development programming, investment decisions and various aspects of their personal and professional lives. Through our different initiatives, we provide people using technology and social media with the data and information they need, and through the provision of related services we generate capital that we reinvest to expand our initiatives.

A critical part of our mission has been to promote social innovation and encourage other young people to become social entrepreneurs. Therefore, from the start, we decided that it was important to document and share the stories, insights and experiences of other young social entrepreneurs in Nepal who are changing the way business is done. For the past one and a half years, we have been conducting interviews and been blogging via our website about young social entrepreneurs who are working in areas ranging from empowering women to become entrepreneurs selling clean energy products to employing differently abled persons as massage therapists. For the first publication, we compiled the first 15 of our blogs and by doing so we hope to inspire others, especially young Nepali, to follow in their footsteps and explore social entrepreneurship. In this second series, we have interviewed 9 more social entrepreneurs and put into collection.

We would like to thank the social entrepreneurs who agreed to share their journeys and insights with us and we wish them best of luck with their very important work. We would also like to thank Suraj Subedi along with Anusha Thapa, Sajani Lama and Dipika Khatiwada for their hard work in conducting all the interview and developing this publication. We hope you will enjoy reading their interviews and will follow us via <a href="www.bikasudhyami.com">www.bikasudhyami.com</a> and <a href="www.facebook.com/bikasudhyami">www.facebook.com/bikasudhyami</a> for more social entrepreneurship stories in days to come!



How it hurts when your skin exposes to fire. It hurts badly no? And it takes time to recover.

Radha Laxmi Shrestha's life changed after that gas explosion. Home got damaged. She lost her mother and survived after staying months in the hospital. Her whole body burnt not to be recovered again.

But the story is different thereafter. The fire burnt her body, not her courage. She went on starting something of her own not only for her but also for other women burn survivors. And now have been the example of what a burned

body can do. There are 19 other burn survivors working with her.

This interview with Radha Laxmi Shrestha, founder of Radhako Burn Survivors' covers her story of pain traveling through determination and reaching to become an example initiative in the society.

When we went to interview them, they welcomed us from the candle smell made of essential oil, one of the products made of their burnt hands. The pleasing smell plays a symphony



in mind. These handmade candles, bangles, beads, earrings, and other gift items handing in the wall pose beautiful smile. We start talking.

#### Radha Ji, can you tell us something about yourself?



I got a fire accident in 2006. Our house was in Kapurdhara. I remember it was a late night. Me and my mother were in the house. She was in the kitchen cooking something. Suddenly the gas cylinder exploded. The only thing I saw first thereafter was the hospital ceiling. Somebody told me I lost my mother. She survived only 3 days. I got discharged after staying 39 nights at the hospital.

I was totally shattered. I could not return back to that shattred home where I spent my childhood. It took my beloved mother. Destiny had another plan for me.

## What did you used to do before the accident?

I was studying but could not complete the inter level study because of the home condition. My

drunkard father wanted a son. Poor mother could not give so. He later married another woman and didn't come back. Mother raised four of us on her own in immense economic crisis.

Before that, I used to work in a guest house run by a Swiss national. I was working there as a manager. Whatever chance I also got there, I went on doing my best. I learned many things. I worked there for 9 years. When everything was about to go well, that happened.

#### Were you not married?

I was unmarried because I wanted to serve my mother. She got into trouble because she could not give birth to a son. I wanted to prove the society that daughter can do what man is capable to do. I wanted to be by her side forever. Another reason why I didn't get married is I saw my father misbehaving with mother. He wanted to put her under his feet. Maybe that was not ok for

me from my married life. I decided to be single. I am not saying all males are wrong but my situation and observation made me think that way.

# After the massive accident, how difficult it was for you to recover and convert your weakness into a strength?

After returning from hospital I was almost blank. The route I have been walking had changed. I had to find the new one. There were some organizations who were working form burn survivors. I



contacted them and visited to meet other burn survivors with me. That gave me feeling that I was not alone. I also had to go to Susma Koirala Hospital at Sankhu for my regular check-up. I also met other survivors who came there for the treatment. We used to talk. Share each other's



pain. Dr. Andreas Settje, a German national was our doctor. He was so worried about our condition.

During that time, I used to think to start an independent initiative that would help survivors like me and that would be self-sustaining. I had a belief that if we can learn skills and that would help us if we go professionally. I shared this concept to Dr. Settje and he was happy enough. He also promised us to manage some money till we set up our business and start earning a profit. That gave us a big boost. Muna Magar, Restha Kc, Sunita Maharjan, Padam Dhimal, Gayatri Tamang and myself, we 6 sat in a meeting and decided to move ahead. This is how Radhako Burn Survivors started in 2017.

#### How much investment do you need to do this? Where do you get the raw material?

We struggle sometimes to pay the rent but other machines don't cost much. It is easy to start from our own home. Candle production needs a small master key to design and put the thread. Packaging is also manageable. For the raw materials, we buy beads from a wholesale shop at Indrachowlk. Then we knit it and make different items. We buy the candle wax from Patan. Everything is available in Nepal.

What kind of products you have now in your store?

We have candles made with multiple flavors and types. We also produce small to big sized candles to be sold as gifts. Another thing we have is gift items made of beads. We make a necklace, bangles, key rings, small bags etc from it. These items too are available in multiple

designs and colors. Candle pricing starts at Rs. 100. We have both scented and non-scented versions can be used for different occasions. Products made of beads also start from Rs. 25 up to Rs. 500. We rate everything at reasonable price. We also prepare Christmas decorations.

### Where did you take the training to do all these things?

We have not taken any formal training from anywhere. We learn from YouTube and discuss together to replicate the learning in our designs. We also use the traditional



skills that we learned from our parents. Now Muna Magar, Sunita Gole and I see the daily operation here. We meet every Saturday and work on the designs. We have now 19 people including me working with us. All of us are burn survivors.

#### How you are running your business? Have you taken any donation?

We first make these goods and went on searching the market. As I said earlier, Dr. Andreas managed us a small donation from Manmaya Maid, e.V German organization to help us grow and built our business. With their support, we are focusing to grow our market. We visit every



trade fairs and festivals possible with our products. We get such information from our own friend circle. For the first time, we went to trade fair organized at Hotel Heritage organized by the Federation of Women Entrepreneurs of Nepal (FWEAN). This was helpful for us to connect to our potential customers. After that organizers like them call us. It is a good opportunity for us to sell our products.

### Who are your customers? How has been your outcome till now?

Now we are targeting only Nepali customers. We want our products to go in the market and make space by themselves. We are working to build the foundation. Till now we have not earned that much profit. But as our primary focus now is to sustain this a bit, so that we can be strong for the supply. I am expecting lots of other women to come with us. We are almost in a position to cover our monthly expenditure on our own. The organization is providing us with the monthly amount for sisters beginning from Rs. 3000 to 11,000. Now we are registered as a business. Hopefully, we could be able to pay to our sisters soon.

#### What has been your greatest impact till now?

The major thing is this place is becoming the space where lots of burn survivors like us come together and work. They now believe that they can do many things despite odd reality. You can see we have a sister who has lost almost all fingers, but she is also making candles. The design that she can carve is wonderful. We have accepted our condition and went on living from there regaining the confidence. We visit the fairs in pride and show/sell whatever we have done. This is different satisfaction.

And with all the appreciation we receive, we now are confident that society will listen back to us.

We now feel that we belong to this society.

## What message do you want to convey to the public?

As you have seen, most of us survived their greatest scare of our life. Some of us have no complete hands. We have to go through lots of hardship to come to this stage and do something. If people like us can do this much with our several limitations.



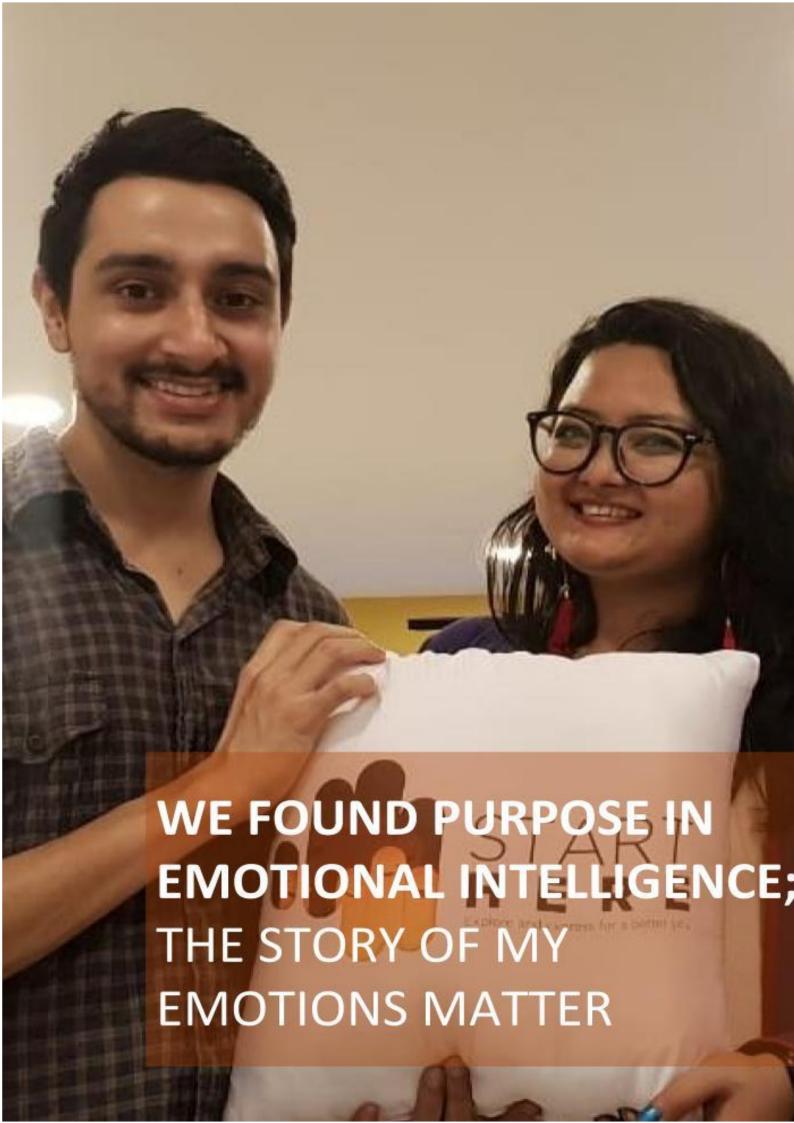
then other people who are able could also do much to serve the society. They should appreciate our effort so that many others who are not able to come out of home could come.

And to the people who do kitchen works, they really should be careful while using electric and gas products. It can do serious damage within a second.

For more information:

Facebook Page: Radhako Burn Survivors

Contact number: +977 9851197855.



Kathmandu city is buzzing. Everyone is a rush. People are busy with going to work, selling things in shops or on the streets, buying groceries, going to school and many other things. In their private lives, people are increasingly spending time on their phones communicating with family and friends via social media. There is limited space to express their inner feelings and share their thoughts with other people face to face when they have something heavy on their head and heart. My Emotions Matter recognizes this situation and creates a safe space where people can feel at ease and share their thoughts to develop their emotional intelligence. They can ask questions to themselves, evaluate their own situation and learn from each other. Sagar Satyal and Bhawana Shrestha, co-founders, sit with Bikas Udhyami and share their journey and the impact of their initiative.

## What was the sparkle that motivated you to start this initiative?

Sagar: When I was a child, I was active, vocal and used to score good grades. I got praise every day, which gave me a load of expectations. I grew up as a 'can do anything' boy, without knowing what that means. In 2015-16, some incidents struck me. I lost some people from my life. I made some wrong decisions and faced money problems. It was one of the lowest points of my life. Then I realized I



was not as strong and capable as people thought. I doubted if I had the qualities as a person to overcome such challenging situations. That was my first reflection on myself. I realized the importance of emotional resilience.

I began a mentorship program at King's College for 3 undergraduates. It was an experiment that turned out to be working well. Soon the number of participants grew. People used to come, talk about life and share different things. We practiced self-awareness and skills development. Bhawana later joined as a mentor. We started talking and found our beliefs and ideas syncing



really well. Hence we pushed forward with starting My Emotions Matter.

Bhawana: I came to Kathmandu with a dream to be a TV journalist. I wanted to cover social issues that would be impactful.

After spending some time in TV, I landed up being a 'Teach For Nepal' fellow and started teaching in a school in Lalitpur. Like Sagar, I too was a good student so I used to think that I

would make a very good teacher. But when I taught, I realized the difference in students' capacity to understand things. Each one is different from each other. One thing that works for one student does not necessarily work for another student. Many of my students were from broken families. Their parents were outside the valley or some of them were living with single

parents. Learning new things under such challenging circumstances was not that easy for them. They used to cry. They were vulnerable. I started listening and talking to them. That conversation was helpful for them and me. I wanted to share my realization with other teachers and was looking for a way. Before joining My Emotions Matter, I had joined an Mphil course and was doing my research on students. I met 200 students studying in various universities in Nepal and asked what kind of teacher they wanted or felt comfortable with. They answered that they were looking for someone who would be emphatic towards them.

## How hard it was to pave the way forward? People say it is difficult to start a business here, especially when the concept behind the business is new.

Bhawana: The registration hassle came first. Registering the English name was difficult, so was persuading the administrative officers that we can pay taxes. They were not so encouraging to

young entrepreneurs like us. Another problem we faced was to establish the concept itself. In Nepal, if someone talks about emotional issues, people dismiss them as mental issues. But what we are doing is neither related to psychology nor to education. We are trying to stand in the middle to provide comfort to address both spectrums. We are focusing on emotional intelligence over the



intelligence quotient (IQ). It is not related to mental health. It took time for us to make people understand these things. We had to create the scope first to gain business. Persuading people was not easy. People saw emotional intelligence as a luxury. They would say people are working fine at their office, so they do not need emotional intelligence.. They felt that granting them vacation was enough.



### Why is emotional intelligence important?

Sagar: Because we are living in an objective world, but living through a subjective experience. Anything that you like, I might not like. We are surrounded by choices that remain within us as individuals. It is very necessary to question our likings and know our values and preferences. We might end up pursuing the career that we never liked. Just

because our father or mother wants us to pursue a certain career or just because our friends tell us so, we might be choosing a certain path. You might end up marrying the person you are not compatible with and you might end up blaming them for the consequences. We fail to see our weaknesses and become more like complainers who are not reflective. In contrast, you could see

your role and what you could have done differently in that situation. We should be able to manage our emotions and if we cannot do that, we suffer in our mental health.

We have the tendency to recognize something at the very last stage. We let the situation go worse by being indifferent at the beginning. People usually stop you from being reactive to your

situation. They don't let you be sad. But that is one way of articulating things. These emotions serve as data points for you to go somewhere and talk to someone. We need to find ways to express our emotions. The same happens in the workplace. Employers and employees should give space to each other so that work goes smoother and is more effective.

Bhawana: We are taught to do or behave always good. Students have different ways of understanding and expression.



We are not taught to express our weaknesses. Those who stand and go forward to speak are seen as good. But those who remain at the back too have their stories to tell. We often fail to articulate that. Conversations with parents, siblings, friends, partners are becoming less and less. People are not communicating the way they used to. These stresses are not expressed through any means. They do not know why they are happy and sad. If the children are not speaking



properly with their parents, how can you expect them to speak with a crowd?

What are the tools you have used to facilitate the sharing of emotions? How have you built the environment?

Both: Our most important value proposition is friendship. When you come to one of our sessions, nobody will judge you or will give you the feeling that there is something wrong with you. We value people freely expressing their thoughts and feelings. And sharing doesn't mean only

focusing on negative emotions. Each session has a pre-decided theme that we communicate beforehand so participants know what to expect from the session. We also practice listening. It is important to listen to yourself and others too. You might come to our session and not share anything, but you can listen to others and that also is useful. It gives you the realization that you are not alone. Listening and speaking are both important.

#### How do people approach you?

Both: We usually work in three segments. For the independent sessions, people approach us through Instagram. Apart from that we also publish and promote event posts on Facebook for upcoming sessions. However, the most powerful way of reaching new audiences is through recommendations. In a city like Kathmandu where everything is so close, referrals do help if the service is authentic. In case of schools, colleges, and organizations, we approach them and persuade them to be our client.

## What about the economic aspects of your business? What are the prospects of other people who are interested in setting up a similar business?

Both: We approach some venue partners and conduct independent sessions. People come and pay for the session. One has to pay Rs. 2500 for a session. In one session, 7-15 people can participate. We chose venues which



provide a peaceful environment to express oneself.

For corporate sessions, the scale of organizations really matters and it also depends on the hours they choose for the session. We did one session with a Business Advantage company and we got many referrals after that. We are planning to conduct another one soon.. However, is not enough to focus on sessions, so we are moving more towards the consulting model these days.

We also run a podcast to enable people to get a sense of what we do before coming with us. We have been doing this for the last 37 weeks every Tuesday. We are also doing a 'Chacha Chhachi



Session' illustration session on Instagram where Chhacha has low emotional intelligence and Chhachi has a higher one. In this

In this session, we outline different situations and show how both of them react differently to each situation.

What about the partnership business in Nepal? How are you handling this?

Sagar: I feel that partnerships fail, because priorities change. It feels like people start of at a similar wavelength, but it carries away quickly. We teach self-reflection; therefore, we try this with our team ourselves in every 3-4 months. We are best friends. Our values are similar and we have this moral duty to keep this authenticity, because we are dealing with sensitive issues. We accept that we are not perfect, but we want to be authentic to set a good example.

Bhawana: Another thing for me is there should be mutual growth along with this self-reflection. We are caring about each other's growth. We share the opportunities equally. We are consciously talking to each other to ensure that our natural jealousy should not hamper our growth. We contribute to each other's growth this way. Since we are transparent about everything, it has given us space to evaluate, bounce back when things are not going well.

### You are in a business where you have to create a scope for yourselves as your area of business is new. How difficult is this at this current scenario?

Both: It is very difficult, but we knew this would be difficult before starting our venture. There

are times when we go down, but I think frustration escalates most when unexpected things happen. We don't know if our model will be financially viable, but when we look back on our journey someday we want to see that our effort was worth it. Living our lives with the values that we advocate



for is really satisfying for us and we are partnering with other likeminded organizations that are happy to be our partners.

#### How about the social impact of your business?

Sagar: Till date, 1780 people have participated in the 126 independent sessions. This is encouraging for the first year. We have 300 plus regular listeners of our podcasts and this is growing. Many of our participants want to give our session to their parents. Some of them have invited as well. It shows that our concept has really helped them. We have some data that we



have collected from our participants in our 10 days program. And we have created an environment in which they now believe that they have their voice as well. They just need to ask the right questions and that really helps. In small ways, they see the value of their life and this is also encouraging. They feel their self-worth.

Bhawana: For me, social impact means a society is really functioning well. To function and function well is different

and we are facilitating the latter through individual efforts. We often interact with different people and not everyone is the same. We help people to find themselves in these spaces and recognize their own worth. We teach them to manage and cope with things in a better way. Hence I think we are slowly helping people to reflect back and question themselves. Our impact can be seen at individual level and at relationship level.

What are the frequent things that you have come across among youths?

Sagar: The most common challenge among youth is overthinking. They think a lot. It doesn't lead to the solution. It is about assuming things, which keep running through their heads. They lack emotional literacy. If people could label their emotions, emotional management would be easier. But unfortunately, we do not know how to name the emotions we have. We don't know how to distinguish between feeling good, bad, depressed, sad etc. Depressed is the most common, but mistakenly used emotion nowadays. We should work more to spread emotional vocabulary.

Bhawana: I live at a girl's hostel. There are young girls who are studying at plus two and bachelor. Many of their boyfriends are abroad. The family is not with them. They have to wait for a long time to share the things that they are experiencing g right now. Carrying a load of emotions every day is hard. Also in Kathmandu, many people are living with their cultural baggage and the city confuses them. That confusion is not solved as well. That gets reflected in their behavior. They are aggressive, some of them are extreme. They should be handling the deeper lying issues themselves as well as realize that their problem is temporary. So we help them in this process in such cases.

They should know that things take time to settle. Things take time to grow. It is very important to work on these things.

# What are your achievements? What things do you think you have achieved?

Sagar: We have a wonderful team of 5 people working together. We multitask. We research. We are a young team and all of our people believe in the idea. So it is really important to find a team that believes you. . Many of our team members had not heard of emotional intelligence before, but now



we have several members who know about it. We are about to go and give a session at the University of Pennsylvania. We are also invited to Malaysia as well. To believe in a concept and expand it internationally is an achievement for us.

Bhawana: There are many people who look up to us. We have done small things but in a meaningful way. We are focusing on the core values of things that are at the root of problems. We are patient enough to be credible, which is critical for sustainability. Achievement for me is when people are referring our sessions to their sister, brother, parents etc. They come continuously. We have earned that. That love is an achievement for me.

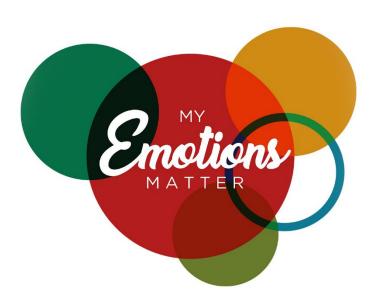
#### In the end, what you want to say for aspiring entrepreneurs?

Sagar: I personally feel that our time is getting more limited every day. We should be able to make good use of our time and do something meaningful. We should try to make this world a better place to live in.

Bhawana: If you are planning to start a business ask yourself what would you be doing if the money was not a consideration? What would you do if you did not need money? Now entrepreneurship is the growing trend among young people in Nepal. Everyone wants to be an

entrepreneur. Everyone says I would rather create a job rather than doing it. I do not have anything bad for them to say, but they need to see themselves if they can really do or not. There are problems immediately after you begin. When you are creating a job for people, you need to give them something in return because they are giving you something. This could be of monetary value or something else. To meet people's expectations is very difficult. Ask yourself, will you have the guts to give the money to them without taking that by yourself at least for the few years? If the answer is yes, you can be an entrepreneur.

To know more about My Emotions Matter, visit: <a href="http://myemotionsmatter.com/">http://myemotionsmatter.com/</a>





Goma Lama, 38, never thought she would become a businesswoman and create employment or 70 plus people. She came from a family that would have let her spend life without doing anything. But she always had the passion for handicrafts and after working in handicraft company named Friend Handicraft for 7 years, she now has her own business that produces Nepali handicraft goods and sells them at the American and European markets. We wanted to learn more about what made her pursue this journey and what advice she has to give after years of success at BNN Felt Handicraft located near Machhapokhari, Balaju.

#### How hard it was to run your business at the beginning?

It was very difficult to pass the first phase like every business. I got my chance, but there were many people who wanted me to fail or stop my business. However, I this never crossed my mind, because I wanted to prove myself. At the early stage of a business, you might not get the reward that you based on your hard work and dedication expect. I was prepared for that, so it didn't hamper me much. However, the doubt whether I would



make it or not was always there. One thing that everyone should be prepared for is that ups and down may come, but we need to be strong and face every challenge that comes our way.

#### Why social entrepreneurship? Why not earning only for yourself?

I think that the fact that Nepal is considered a developing country says it all. Women's development is far behind compared to other areas of development. Many women are still illiterate and devoid of opportunities. Not all can start something on their own. I wanted to do something for them, who have no skills but an eagerness to learn.



This work that we are doing right now can be done by anyone, who has the dedication to learn. They don't need an academic degree. I wanted to encourage them providing them with opportunities and tell them that they should not wait for their husband to do everything for them. I also give them training and also link

them to other opportunities, so that they can explore different horizons. I feel that this is needed, because I have also worked for 7 years.

How many of you are working together? How do you think your effort is creating a social impact?

We are 70 women working with us to date. I want more to come and join me. There are many companies who now trust me and want to work with me. I am optimistic. Many of the women who work with me are the ones who are devoid of opportunities. They now have the courage to trust in their skills. Some of them are in the process to start their own business. That gives me great satisfaction. I also enable them to work from home and earn. With a little earning, they

now look at their expenses differently. Their confidence has increased, because they don't have to ask for money from their husband.

## How is your business doing?

It is satisfactory. We have an annual turnover of 25-30 lakhs. Our main market is abroad. We export goods to Japan, America, and European



countries. They can afford our goods. We focus on colorful, attractive products like bags, purses, shoes, dolls, decoration goods, etc. Everything that we can think of can be made by hands. We take the raw materials to inform the businessmen who import the material from abroad. In the last couple of years, we have sold goods from Nepal to all the major exports which is an important achievement for us. While Nepal is not our major market, people still need to know that we exist. This opens the possibility for us to produce things for the Nepali market as well. We often buy expensive goods for children from abroad, but we should buy more from Nepal.



Hence, for the Nepali market, we have a stall at Chhaya Centre Thamel. Apart from that we also attend several festivals that are happening throughout the year.

How do you see the business environment in Nepal? What do you think of the existing government support to entrepreneurs?

Business fair, because they do not organize themselves properly

from the beginning. And there is no security, in case we fail in what we do. The government should do something to encourage the new aspiring female entrepreneurs, so that we can make products for the Nepali market. The Nepal government should be welcoming in supporting, problem-solving, financing and giving subsidized loans at an appropriate rate. By keeping the large portion of women confined to their house, the country cannot reach prosperity.

#### Lastly, what you want to say to young female entrepreneurs?

What I want to say is don't be confined to your house. You should go out. It might be difficult, but you should try for your future generation. I dream about the stage where no women are unemployed. We should come out of the kitchen and leave our washing machines. I also want to tell men to be that person that your successful wife would be proud of. Be their support system, like my husband did for me. Together with we can make this change. I want other husbands to be proud of their successful wives.



The Village Cafe, one of the ventures of Sabha Nepal, is connecting the foodies of the town with the taste of the traditional kitchen of different ethnic communities in Nepal. It is, on the one hand, breaking the stereotype of traditional food by bringing them to a modern cafe setting, and on the other hand, empowering women from these communities by giving market value of their traditional skills. Sabha Nepal is established in 2009 with the objective to empower home-based workers economically and to strengthen their livelihood. It has a network of more than 3000 home-based workers who have become members and the ownership of the company is also vested upon them. Bikas Udhyami sits with Rabin Amatya, one of the founders of The Village Cafe, and have a conversation on their journey.

#### Can you tell us how The Village Cafe started?

The idea was to respond to the needs of women and uplift their status in society by doing something around their existing skills. In the beginning, we thought handicrafts and textile would

match our motive. But later on, we realized that these skills are not their primary one, rather they do it in their leisure time. The women, in fact, devote most of their time on cooking food and farming. Knowing that, in 2010 we experimented our idea by organizing a food event and invited women participants from the



Newari community. The participants prepared 13 varieties of food that got good feedback. We knew that if we can do enough quality control and branding, we can achieve our objective. Then we went on to do further experimentation by participating in food fairs, food stalls, and commercial ventures. We realized that the combination of traditional cooking skills and farming would be best for the cafe. After eight months of experimentation, we opened our first cafe in 2011 at Pulchowk with a group of traditional skilled women. Now we have 5 franchises inside the Kathmandu Valley.

#### How was the early response from the customer?



The start was a little bit more challenging than now. People were not aware that a modern cafe also can serve delicious traditional food. They used to think that to eat such food, one either has to go to 'Bhatti' or someone's marriage party. As Newari food used to be served with alcohol, some doubted on its taste. Some found it inappropriate to serve it on a daily basis, because people only have it during the cultural gatherings. But those who came to our cafe and taste our food, they

were satisfied. We kept receiving a good responses on the taste as well as our business idea of linking up to traditional hands to serve these foods.

What is your business model? How is this different from others?

We do not care only for the profit of one sector, rather our attention goes on creating a food circle. Apart from selling the food, we also work on food production and cultivation. Our objective is to empower women economically especially home-based workers. Furthermore, we are also preserving the significance of our cultural food. We are preserving our traditional food making skills. We use locally available resources so our grassroots members can be benefited.

#### How do you manage kitchen materials and other stuff for your cafe?

As I said above, our Cafe is based on the farm-to-table concept. The vegetables, dry lentils and other kinds of stuff used in our cafe are directly supplied from the farms of our home-based workers. There are several business units located in a different parts of Nepal which supply the kitchen materials.



#### Why is it important to

brand our cultural products/foods? How it should evolve with changing technologies.

Because branding is everything. The big difference between our products and imported products is branding. They do research so they have a visible brand. They put emphasis not only to deliver, but also to brand their delivery. We have some amazing food, but their branding is not customer-friendly. The brand lives in the memory of the customer hence it should be short, sweet, visible and customer friendly. Through it, we can gain the confidence of the consumer.

In the present context, the food delivery chain plays a very important role that is directly



connected with branding. We also provide delivery services and almost 30% of our business is take away delivery. And partnership with food delivery chains like Foodmandu is more efficient in our case. On the one hand, it expands our market and on the other hand, reduces our effort on delivery services. This kind of collaborations gives a mutual benefit. We are one of the first restaurants in Kathmandu to partner with Foodmandu. It also helps to reach a younger generation.

What were the challenges that you face in the initial stage? What

sorts of challenges do you face now? How do you solve it?

There are always challenges and shortcomings in every business. The customer incoming rate was very low at the beginning. We also faced criticism from people like who would want to eat Newari food daily? Alcoholic drinks are always compulsorily: who will eat Yomari in summer? In spite of criticism, we made Yomari the centre of attention and served them in our café with

greater emphasis. At that time, Yomari was not made in restaurants and cafes. Many people had not heard the name even. The Village Cafe was named as Yomari Cafe before, but we decided to change the name because it was easier for everyone to remember.

As our cafe is run day-to-day by a home-based worker, we had some problems starting with them. Most of the women who were with us were illiterate and the learning curve was steady. We have to teach them about food hygiene,

food standardization, and quality control. So, we hire professionals to train them but it is a time-consuming process. Also in Nepal, people want to work 9-5 only. But we have to work from 6 in the morning and maybe 8 in the evening depending on the timing of our customers. We need to prepare Yomari at 6:00 AM to supply it in Bhatbhateni at 9:00 AM but people don't want to work in



odd hours. When people are sleeping we may have to work so it is one of the challenges for us. Maintaining that discipline was also troublesome at the beginning.

#### What kind of impact is created by this initiative in our society?

Our objective is not just to open a restaurant. We follow the farm-to-table concept that shares the benefit for both ends. We bring potato from Nala, oil, and spices from Khokana to make food in our kitchen which is benefiting the farmers of Nala and Khokana, a place traditionally recognized for these products. We also bring Khuwa, vegetables, dry lentils from various places of Nepal, so our grass root members can benefit. Instead of buying these kitchen materials from



local farmers from India, we wanted the benefit to be shared by everyone. It increases our cost a bit, but this makes a huge difference in the preservation of these precious products.

Now, we have more than 200 direct and 700 indirect beneficiaries working with us. Our community member has got good exposure by participating in various events. Some of them have started their own business as well. Now, Yomari is

well known in other communities also. People love to eat it in every season. There are more than 3500 registered women members with us who are working every day to push this forward with the same intensity as it was before. We have established 335 micro enterprises. Different business units are being created and young entrepreneurs are also coming forward with their own business. Furthermore, being with us longer time has given young people the confidence to have their business in this field. Our members have used the incubation business model. They are able to run a business without an education background also. And now some of the second

generations of the home-based workers are also working with us. They are educated and are ready to take this cafe forward in a more efficient way.

#### How do you see the landscape of Social Entrepreneurship in Nepal? Are you satisfied?

Nowadays, social enterprise is growing rapidly. The young generation is coming up with many innovative ideas. There are also various accelerator programs that are helping these young entrepreneurs to grow. International organizations are also funding innovative and creative ideas. This is a huge plus point for someone who has ideas, but not the money to invest. Due to connectivity through the internet, people get lots of opportunities to learn and explore their ideas. I am happy to see all these things happening, but at the same time there is the tendency to blindly copy the already existing business model. This weakens both the newly established and

the existing one. Some of the initiatives are also challenging for us. They are making us think more creatively to sustain in this growing competitive market. Meanwhile, they are motivating us to ensure quality.

# What is your recommendation for aspiring social entrepreneurs?



If you want to start the normal business it's fine, but if you want to start a social venture then your first priority must not be the profit. As the idea is the most important aspect to start any business, you should focus on bringing your passion into your business idea. And to implement that into action, you need to be hardworking. If you want to be a social entrepreneur, just know that you have opportunities everywhere. It's the era of technology and you really need to explore your ideas and nurture them properly till they grow. It is not necessary to observe business models of Nepal only. You can observe international business models and try to adopt these by making a favourable environment. But you should not copy any idea blindly, you need to make it your own in your context. Idea, proper vision and passion are the key elements for a successful business.

Find out more about The Village Cafe: <a href="http://bit.ly/The-Village-Cafe">http://bit.ly/The-Village-Cafe</a>



Far from the maddening crowd, there is a wide stretch of land in Sano Thimi, Bhaktapur, filled with recyclable waste collected from over 2000 different households and hundreds of institutions. Even though it is teeming with what we generally call waste, there is no foul smell. We are inside Doko Recyclers's Materials Recovery Facility where we see bottles, papers, plastics, wires, electronic waste, and other items being segregated. While we wait to interview one of the co-founders and CEO Kushal Harjani, Bijay, one of the staff members, gives us a tour of the facilities where dry recyclables (paper, plastic, metal, glass, and e-waste) are processed. We then meet Kushal, who leads us towards a stack of used glass bottles and starts telling us about the journey of Doko Recyclers.

#### How did Doko Recyclers start?

Doko Recyclers started when me (Kushal Harjani) and two of my friends (Raghavendra Mahto

and Runit Saria) decided to found a social business that would combine profit with purpose. Having studied and studied abroad, we were accustomed to recycling, segregating waste at source, and conserving resources in general. Having talked to Nepalis who have been abroad, they too realize that our lack of recycling and segregating waste at source is quite problematic not just for the environment but for human health



as well. Knowing that people would support our cause, we were eager to take on this opportunity.

We realized there was already a traditional recycling business in Nepal, running via a strong network of informal scrap dealers - 'kawadiwalas'. They are the real heroes of recycling in Nepal. In fact, if they weren't there, our landfills would be in worse conditions than they are now. This showed us there was already a market for some recyclable materials. We wanted to expand on



the types and amount of dry waste we could recycle so we could capitalize on resources that were otherwise ending up in the landfill.

We also wanted to not only introduce recycling in Nepal, but standardize it to such a point that it is in our legislation and reflected in our behavior. Working in waste is considered a lowly occupation which has led to waste management being neglected. We wanted to teach people that waste management is a field filled with

opportunities for growth and development not just for individuals but for the economy as well. At the end of the day, there is, of course, we desire to see Kathmandu lush green again with a pristine Bagmati gushing through it.

#### What is the vision of your company?

Our vision is to standardize proper waste management and implement it across the country such that 90% of the waste we generate would be recycled instead of ending up in landfills. This

would not only ensure our environment (mainly water, air, and soil quality) would be better, but it would also circle back valuable resources into our economy. We would love to make Nepal's economy a circular one instead of the linear one it is currently. Recycling resources back into the economy, of course, can only happen after segregation of waste. It is also our vision to make the entirety of Nepal understand the importance of recycling and practice segregation of waste at source.

Additionally, almost 60% of our waste is organic and yet at the same time most of it is landing up in our landfills. For this, we have launched our Smart Buckets for home composting. Furthermore, approximately 30% of waste generated is recyclable so if people segregate their organic, their recyclables, and their landfill waste, not only would recyclables be circulated back into the economy, we would also be



able to solve the current waste crisis.

#### How has the journey been till now? What were the initial challenges?

None of the core team members are from a waste management or environment studies background. I have my masters in Development Economics, Raghavendra is an MBA graduate, and Runit is a Computer Engineer. Ashma Basnyat and Pankaj Panjiyar who joined us later are also an Urban Planner and Electrical Engineer respectively. While we bring unique and diverse approaches to our company, since there were no properly established systems or models about



recycling that we could follow, it was difficult for us to learn about waste management in Nepal. Hence, the journey of forming Doko Recyclers was about educating ourselves on waste management and interacting with numerous stakeholders including government experts, private companies and the informal sector.

The challenge for us was that we needed to figure out a way to expand Nepal's understanding of

recycling beyond the basic paper, beer and Coca-Cola bottles, and scrap metal parts. If most people are used to selling dry waste, why not expand the scope to include other important recyclables like plastics, e-waste and encourage separating organic waste? We aim to bring behavior change in our society that will benefit everyone in the value chain and we aim to support this behavior change by being the vessel through which you can recycle efficiently and responsibly.

Another challenge we face is the fact that the government has taken very little initiative to implement policies for scientific waste management. There is currently no standard policy in practice for the management of several types of hazardous waste such as industrial, medical and electronic waste. The government itself does not act as a model for others by continuing to improperly manage waste generated at government offices, including the burning of confidential

waste rather than shredding.

Furthermore, the waste sector in Kathmandu is currently not based on an open market system - traditional syndicates have meant that there has been little improvement in the quality of service, hygiene standards and end disposal methods of waste. The existing recycling industry in Nepal is limited in scope and therefore we often find it difficult to deal with several low value recyclables that otherwise get dumped or landfilled.



Lastly, as a startup, we have been through some tough days in our early stages, especially with building a strong team and continuing to balance our finances. We are now in a much more stable position as a company and are excited to grow to the next stage.

#### How do you operate?

Before finalizing any organizational client, we conduct a waste audit that provides us with information on recycling and possibilities of segregation at the client's premises. After the audit, we make sure necessary infrastructures like different compartment bins are set up to facilitate segregation of waste for the client. After the bins are set up, we conduct awareness workshops



(targeted primarily for cleaning staff) that educate people on how to recycle and segregate waste properly. We then provide regular pick up of dry recyclables for our clients. We charge a monthly membership fee for that, but in return, we also pay our clients for the dry recyclables they collect. The charge is quite nominal. It ranges between 800 to 3000, depending on the size and type of client. We are currently providing services inside the Kathmandu valley but are planning to go to other cities outside the valley as well.

#### As you said that people are not habituated in recycling. How has been their feedback?

We have gotten an overwhelmingly positive and supportive response from all walks of society who are looking for a solution to the waste crisis. Yes, we are not used to recycling so raising awareness has been challenging in terms of encouraging people to segregate waste at source. This is why we conduct educational tours of our Materials Recovery Facility where we educate

students on our waste collection and segregation process. We teach them about recycling, and play recycling games with them to increase their knowledge about waste so as to make them understand how important it is to reduce, reuse, rot and recycle. We have also partnered with several events to help them minimize their landfill waste and to spread the message.

We also provide an impact certificate to our clients. Based on the weight of the collected waste and recyclables, we calculate impact statistics for individual clients that shows converted data like energy, trees, landfill space, water, and oil being conserved by the recycling they have been doing with us. This incentivizes our client's behavioral change and they are happy to know that their effort is actually creating a tangible impact on the environment.

We are constantly providing feedback to our clients and follow up with them if they fail to segregate their waste at source. It is difficult at times to make people understand that segregating waste or recycling should no longer be optional and it should come as second nature to us. We are slowly seeing these changes but like with new idea introduced to the populace, it will take time and effort which we are well aware of and work hard to change people's mentalities towards waste.



#### How do you count on your achievements so far? How you are creating social impact?

As part of our achievements, I would say the first and foremost achievement is the social impact that we have had. We are raising awareness about a long standing issue that many people bemoan about but few actually act on. We have stirred a conversation about waste and are steadily setting industry standards for professional and scientific waste management that has resource and environmental conservation at its core. We are also working with the government



to encourage better implementation of existing policies. We have now over 100 institutional clients including INGOs, hotels, travel agencies, and various schools recycling with us. Our involvement and collaborations are still growing and we are happy to continue teaching the general public how to recycle and segregate at source.. Our efforts have tangible results as well. Our clients are reciprocative to the idea of recycling and we have people reaching out to us to help pick their recyclables up on a daily

basis. Last year alone, we recycled more than 250 tons of waste, which translates into around 1900 trees and a million liters of water.

How are you managing the different types of waste that you collect?

We believe that waste is simply a material that has lost its utility in its present form, but that does not mean it does not have utility in some other form. Our mission is to make people recognize the utility that still exists in recyclable waste and it is paramount that we do not throw away resources. After collecting recyclable waste, we then segregate into different categories and make it ready to use for different recycling industries across Nepal.

There are many organizations that accumulate a huge bundle of confidential papers and documents. Keeping them in mind, we have recently launched professional data destruction and paper shredding services to encourage people to shred and recycle rather than burn these papers. Similarly, we are the first professional company managing electronic and electrical waste. If



electronic and electrical waste is not properly disposed of, the elements in the circuitry leach in the soil poisoning groundwater and posing a risk to human health. We continuously invest in developing technology that will help us scientifically manage waste. For example, we have recently procured a wire stripping machine that separates metal and plastic from the wire. Without these solutions, we would be burning documents and wires releasing toxic fumes into the atmosphere.

#### If there are any wastes which cannot get recycled, how do you deal with them?

Our vision is to be able to utilize all the resources that we collect and find creative solutions for waste that is currently dumped. Let me give you an example - there is no glass recycling industry in Nepal. Most bottles that are currently collected are reused and rebottled, which means only a fraction of domestic bottles get reused and collected in the current recycling industry. We, on the other hand, have collected these bottles and are now moving towards converting them into decorative items through our recently launched upcycling brand - "Tatwa". Upcycling is creatively repurposing an item which would otherwise end up in the landfill.

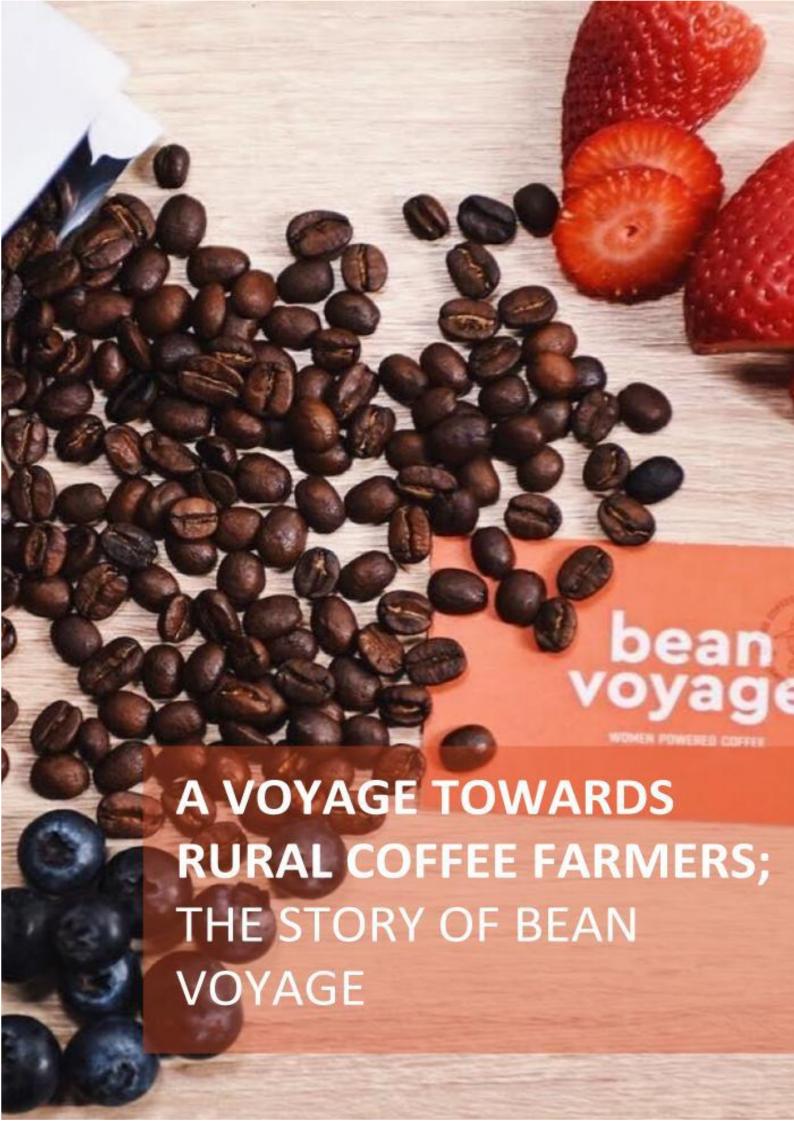
#### Are there any suggestions you want to pass to the aspiring social entrepreneurs?

Where there are problems, there are opportunities. As an entrepreneurship, ones entire effort should be directed towards realizing a problem and brainstorming solutions for them.

One should be level headed and humble enough to self teach and learn about the field they want to work in. It is critical to extensively research the sector that you want to work in. It is necessary to be clear about your passion, vision, and to reach out for various types of resources and funding opportunities. It is also important to be well versed in the financial and legal requirements of running a company.

The last advice I would give is to take a guerilla approach. Apply the MVP (Minimal Viable Product) technique. When you are trying new things, you cannot afford investing a huge amount just to realize that the model is not correct. There are many challenges that startups in Nepal face, which is why it is necessary to fail fast, learn fast and then move ahead. When the going gets tough, always remember the tough gets going.

Find out more about Doko Recyclers: <a href="https://dokorecyclers.com/">https://dokorecyclers.com/</a>



Bean Voyage helps the rural women coffee farmers from different countries who heavily depend on coffee for their livelihood but are not able to make a sustainable living from its production. Started through the effort of two young entrepreneurs, it is not only expanding globally but also reaching to the much-needed people with an impactful way to help them change the way they sell things. Though the business is not directly benefiting Nepali women farmers, Bean Voyage is expecting to collaborate with Nepali coffee producers in the near future. Talking to Bikas Udhyami through email conversation, Abhinav Khanal, co-founder, talks about the story of their entrepreneurship journey. We hope their initiative will be a learning curve for many aspiring social entrepreneurs in Nepal who wants to go global.

## How did Bean Voyage start? Why did you choose coffee as the area?

In December 2014, the concept for Bean Voyage was ideated by Sunghee Tark and myself. While organizing workshops for a women's association in Costa Rica, we met Ericka Mora, a coffee producer from the Santos region. We asked Ericka what coffee meant to her as her life heavily revolves around coffee production. Her answers were "trabajo" (hard work), "dinero" (money), and "forma de vida" (form of life). As coffee lovers who often associated coffee with positive words such as freshness and energy, the we were shocked to learn that coffee producers like Ericka were facing dreadful economic conditions. We later learned that Ericka



was spending \$1.40 to produce a pound of coffee, and the market was paying her \$0.96 per pound of coffee. Upon research, Sunghee and me discovered that these challenges were not unique to Ericka and that there are over 5 million smallholder women around the world who heavily depend on coffee for their livelihood but are not able to make a sustainable living from its production. We had the passion to help improve the conditions for producers like Ericka, which led to the launch of Bean Voyage in September 2016. Till date, Bean Voyage has operated



in Costa Rica and this year they will support 120 smallholder women, and 840 community members from coffee producing regions.

# Why do you think Bean Voyage is different and it could do things that others are not doing or should be doing?

There aren't any organizations that are addressing this problem in a holistic manner. On the one hand, we have non-profit organizations in communities that are only focused on

training programs, mostly exclusive to cooperatives, and on the other hand, we have coffee buyers and roasters, who are only focused on the quality of the coffee. Through the Care Trade Model, we bring together the two elements into one program, so that each element fuels the other - the training program is fueled by the incentive for producers to be able to sell directly

through our platform, whereas, the market program is fueled by the fact that customers are attracted to a transparent and socially responsible source of coffee.

#### What were the early struggles? How did it overcome that?

The early struggles for us were related to balancing the story and the quality of the product that we offered. At first, we focused heavily on telling the powerful stories of the producers that we

worked with but did not put a lot of emphasis on branding and supply chain. We soon realized that consumers only care about your story if they can also taste the excellence in the product that they're purchasing, which meant we had to make changes to our branding, packaging, quality control of products, and even recruit a Q-grader to make sure that the coffee that we were selling were of the highest quality in the market.



## It is working with women and other local communities all over the world, why do you think is that important? How does that help?

As I mentioned earlier, there are nearly 5 million smallholder women involved in coffee production - from picking, harvest, processing, and sorting. But often times, they aren't very involved with marketing and sales due to gender-based discrimination (household duties and other social exclusion). Even if they are able to reach the market, they often earn 39% less than their male counterparts. We've realized that this status-quo needs to change around the world, and started with our attempt to equip them with the knowledge and market networks so they can produce higher quality yields while maximizing profits.



## You are launching a youth fellowship for young coffee professionals, how do you think that would change the global scenario of Coffee Production?

Young people are migrating from rural communities to urban centers around the world, and for a fair reason -- there are very few economic opportunities for youth in rural communities at this moment. The same is true for coffee communities, where young people grow up seeing the potential opportunities in cities or other countries,

and find that they are making a loss from coffee production, so they abandon their farms and move away from coffee production. We're hoping to reverse this trend by training youth from coffee communities on different opportunities within the coffee sector to continue being involved with coffee but perhaps as a barista, or a roaster, or a Q-grader, or even a trader, so they can see the enormous potential that is present within the coffee industry. We're piloting this concept with the name of Care Fellowship and hope to expand it to many countries within the next 2-3 years, including in Nepal.

## Why ensuring the sustainability of coffee communities is important? How about the sustainability of Bean Voyage itself?

This is a great question! As a social enterprise, we need to balance both -- sustainability of the

communities that we support, and sustainability of our business. First, coffee communities make up a significant majority of agriculture in many countries around the world, and even though the demand for coffee is rising exponentially, the price for producers is simply not improving (this year, coffee prices have been record <u>low</u>). If this continues, farmers will continue abandoning coffee production or agriculture in general, and move towards urban centers for opportunities, or stay in their communities with the decreasing standard of living (which is the case for most women, who aren't able to migrate as easily as men). When there is an industry that has such high demand, the fact that the



people who are producing it are living on subsistence levels is not only unfair, but it's inhumane. Our goal is to support their efforts to make their coffee competitive in the market and find them the kind of buyers who are willing to pay them above the commodity market prices.

Having said this, Bean Voyage needs to sustain itself as well. Right now, less than 20% of our



revenue is generated from sales of coffee, and the remaining is generated from philanthropic donations. We plan to significantly tilt this balance in the next 3 years, to make sure we generate 50-60% of our revenue from coffee sales and the remaining from philanthropy.

## What impact do you think Bean Voyage is creating to the community?

This year, we conducted an independent study with the support of <u>One Young</u>

<u>World</u> to calculate our Social Return on Investment, and the result was really

impressive. As of 2018, we are ensuring an SROI of 1:5, which means every dollar that we're investing in our programs is guaranteeing a 5x increase in income for our producers. There's still a long way to go, as we realized through some of our qualitative surveys, where we understood that we need to engage more men from these communities into our programs, and turn them into allies towards gender equality. We also need to sell more of their coffee because even though we're paying them a high price for their coffee, at the end of the day, it also depends on the volume of coffee that we are able to sell.

You as a young Nepali Entrepreneur is now creating an impact in multiple countries around the globe. How do you observe social entrepreneurs in Nepal? From your experience what do you think Nepali entrepreneurs are doing best and what are the areas they can improve more?

I am honestly so excited to learn about the social entrepreneurs in Nepal, doing incredible things in different sectors. From using blockchain technologies to democratize finance, to developing

new methods of doing business to support underserved communities - I have really enjoyed following Nepali social entrepreneurs from afar. I honestly don't think I'm in the position to analyze their successes or failures, but really hope that I will get to collaborate with some of them in the following days.

You were awarded from the Facebook Social Entrepreneurship Award 2018 for your impactful contribution to society through the used of social media. In the context of Nepal where we have almost 78



percent of the mobile users using Facebook, what message do you want to convey to them regarding youths coming into the business?



Nepal is going through an important time in its growth process where we have two powerful factors to our advantage: young human capital and early access to technology. The important step will be to create avenues for these two factors to combine and opportunities for them to maximize their potential. I sincerely hope that most of the 78% of the population is taking advantage of this digital age to build opportunities for themselves, to learn new tools, and to launch their vision at a global level. Perhaps in the past, we have been limited to take our

ideas to a global stage due to red-tapes and bureaucracy, but today, a young person in Nepal is able to run a worldwide company from their bedroom, and that is an incredible opportunity.

To know more about them: <a href="https://beanvoyage.com/">https://beanvoyage.com/</a>



In the time span between 1998-2004 AD, more than 600 Nepali children, mostly below the age of 16, were rescued from different circuses in India. They were taken into a hostel after the rescue. Some of them reintegrated into the society after some years while some thought to start their own business aiming to end this long cycle of child trafficking. Bijaya Limbu, current president and founder of Circus Kathmandu was one of them. They started Circus Kathmandu in 2010 at the time where people used to humiliate them saying 'trafficked child' and it didn't end there. The reintegration to society was never easy. They kept fighting the battle against their society's strength. And they are still moving ahead getting stronger. It was a hard-hitting road but the journey was worth traveling. This conversation between Bikas Udhyami and Bijay explores things in detail.

#### How did Circus Kathmandu start?

We began it as a nonprofit organization in 2010 from the effort of 12 members including myself. All of us were once traffic victims and were sold to Indian circus through an agent. Later we got

rescued by an organization and taken to a hostel in Kathmandu. It was our age to study but we were working in severe conditions there. We were happy with that rescue but the life after that was not easy. We had the desire to study but the survival was also necessary. So we thought to give a chance to the circus skill that we have got. So we started this organization and worked on towards our goal.

People didn't have good views on our profession. They had the misconception that it was not a good thing. But for us, that was an



art. It was our skill that can make us professional. We thought to work in this area so that we could change the mindset and also reduce the changes in trafficking.

In the beginning, we used to organize small performances. That had nice earning but we were not satisfied. Because it was not only about us, we needed to go to the community and make



them aware of trafficking. We wanted to advocate to make our villages trafficking free. We started working towards that. We performed at schools, communities on several social awareness issues. Circus Kathmandu is trying to make people understand that is a form of art like theatre and film and dance. We want to make such a society which welcomes everyone equally. Then only they would earn respect. We want to make them performers who can be proud of their

#### Who are the performers in your team now?

At the hostel, we stayed with children from mixed backgrounds. That got replicated in our team as well. One performer came from the street, and the rest of us are returnees from the circus. We

are also keen to give space to many newcomers with interest and talent. We also organize the workshops named Sapana Project every Saturday. We reach to other children from various sectors and give the training opportunity.

### In the introduction of a movie made on one of your performer's life, 'It is the triumph against all odds' is written. What were those odds your organization went through?

After we were back from there, we didn't have the courage to face society. This was the main struggle. We already were tagged as 'trafficked' that made us hard to adjust back. But with our

effort, we now have space in society. We now can face the situation. And that made us think that we are not alone in this situation. Of course, there are others who are also suffering even today but we are happy to wave a hand to them and say 'hold on friends, the road is difficult but you can reach here.' This gives us great pleasure. Therefore we want to work on this area of awareness. We don't want others to face the situation that we faced. At least now we



are professional performers and we can try to do that.

### What are the issues that you cover in your performances?

In our performing site, we have two sides. One is advocacy where we perform drama using the circus skills. It is basically on issues like child marriage and trafficking. We reach to the districts where the problem is high and perform. We have performed on the districts like Ramichap, Sindhupalchok, etc. On our professional performing side, we prepare the show on certain stories. It has a physical form. We use our skill and make a show for at least 1 hour. We organize the program in ticket twice each year. We also perform in gigs and events. Depending on the



demand, we sometimes create a performance of 4-5 minutes using different faculties like acrobatics. It depends on our agreement with the organizers. We are also collaborating with theatre forms like Forum Theatre that has direct reach to the public.

How hard it is to challenge and change people's mindset? How is this working towards benefiting the entire scenario?

All of our performers are independent now. They are earning from their skills. They now have the confidence to face the society and have a dignified life. In society, where there was a negative feeling towards this, we are able to earn respect from the society. They were judging us wrong because somebody said it is. Now we are proving it is not. Now we feel people are

understanding. This feeling encourages us every day. We feel the discrimination going slowly down. Discrimination happens when people fail to understand your part. We are making them understand that unseen reality.

Through the outreach programs that we do on highly trafficking inflected areas we are spreading the message against any kinds of trafficking. At the beginning of our performance, we share our story about how we got trafficked so that they would think twice on their decisions. It is helping others not to do the same mistake that we did.

#### How many performances do you have each year?

Every day we are growing but this is still not the place we want to be. We have performed in bigger schools like French and British schools. Also, we performed small schools. We are giving workshops and dance classes to these places. In number, we have around 35 shows every year. Including all, it comes above 80. Our pricing differs according to the theme



of the event. If them is social, we become more flexible than the corporate approach. But as I said before, this is not enough. We don't only want to perform at schools rather want to spread such a message where a boy from a small class can dream to be a circus artist.

### What are the things you teach to the children who join your workshops?

First, we share our story so that they would be motivated. Then we work on finding their inner strength and recognize which area of circus they can fit in. After that, the training starts. A lot of things depend on their age and thinking capacity. We give them a creative space. For the smaller



ones, we teach them the skills via entertainment.

### How do you think your initiative is creating a social impact?

First of all, all the traffic survivors who are with us are having a dignified life in the society. They are taking leadership to change the perception of people. Now someone can look at us and get encouraged. We are only 8 now out of 12 now in our team. Four girls got married and

went their home. A few years back, you could not imagine a trafficked girl getting married, having a family and reintegrated into society. This is the hint that, though on a small scale, our effort is changing the social acceptance.

When we share our stories to the community people, their eyes melt. They participate in the Forum Theatre sessions and give their thought on what they would do to stop someone from trafficking. Previously there was the understanding that only women are trafficked. Now we are raising this child trafficking issue and making people cautious towards every approach that

comes for their child. And for the already trafficked persons and their families, we have spread the message of hope.

At that time, all of us are self-sustained now. Despite many limitations, we are climbing the mountain. Our practice materials are expensive. The practice session is too risky for the small industry, despite that we are dedicated to walking long.

## At last any recommendations you want to give to the aspiring young social entrepreneurs?

In your business, many ups and down will come but you should not give up your dream. If you have not started, take time to learn the market and scope of your activities. If you have already started, motivate yourself to make things better. Because like engine, it should keep running.



To know more about them: <a href="https://circuskathmandu.com/">https://circuskathmandu.com/</a>



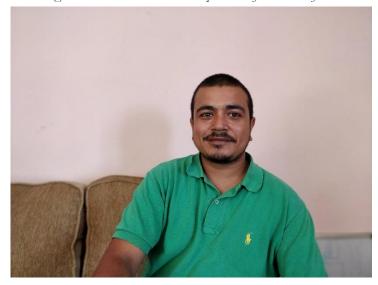


Nepal, despite being a country with huge possibilities of agricultural production is facing a massive trade deficit. The agricultural goods import bill crossed Rs.200 billion in the year 2017. One of the major reasons behind this scenario is the lack of marketing skills in farmers and also the poor road networks. On one hand, farmers don't get enough price for their products and on the other consumers are paying a high amount for the same thing. The middlemen get the maximum profit. This discourages the farmers which eventually pushes the country towards trade deficit. This problem has become a matter of challenge questioning the whole country's economy. Today's agriculture needs modern technology and skilled human resource which can be effectively addressed by the young generation. But the majority of them are attracted to reputed jobs and money-oriented businesses. The minor side covers some initiatives started by youths working to solve the problems. 'Farm to Finger Pvt. Ltd.' is one of them. Deepak Tuladhar, co-founder of the initiative is taking the initiative to connect the products from rural farmers to

urban consumers. In conversation with Bikas Udhyami team, he unfolds his story.

### How did Farm to Finger start?

I and my partner (Jaagriti Shrestha) were in London for 7 and a half years. I had a well-reputed job at a Multinational Company, where I worked to simplify the supply chain model. But I wasn't satisfied with my work. I wanted to achieve something more. I was not happy with the way my life was heading. It was fine but was not enough. Then after my graduation, I started exploring opportunities in Nepal. I



was keenly interested in agriculture. Then I and my partner came back to Nepal. After coming back, we started exploring especially the western part of Nepal and traveled around different districts. I sought opportunities in agriculture and found that the intermediaries were creating a lot of problems for farmers as well as consumers. It was a very general thing everywhere.



Meanwhile, I met an apple farmer in Jumla. He wanted to sell his apples, but he wasn't getting enough money for them. They were selling it at Rs.20 per kg. I did my research and found that Bhatbhateni Super Store was selling it for Rs.250 per kg. So, I made an order with him. I paid him Rs.50 per kg and started selling them around my networks. It went pretty well. Then I felt that it was something I could do on a regular basis. There were lots of products besides apples that could be sold. That's how I saw an opportunity

there. The concept was simple in European countries about Farm to Fork. We use fingers to eat so we named it 'Farm to Finger'. We registered the business and started the operation. That's how Farm to finger started.

### What is the vision of your company?

We focus to simplify the supply chain by working directly with the farmers and connect them with urban consumers. So, Farm to Finger visions itself to be a marketing company which tries to connect the rural farmers with urban consumers.

## What were the challenges you faced while starting the business? Are these challenges with you now?

Network building in the context of farmers was pretty challenging at the beginning. Though we traveled to different villages and met different farmers for around 2 years. The major issue was to convince them to get involved. They trusted intermediaries that they were familiar with. They didn't care even if we pay them more. So, convincing them was really a difficult task. It's still a challenge as we have data of around 5000 farmers, but we haven't been able to work with them all.



The real challenge appeared when road access to Jumla was made by the government. It was a good thing but bad for businesses like us. The road connected more traders to the farmers. Then farmers started getting the amount at which we were selling to our consumers. We slowed down because the apples from Jumla were the primary source of goods for us to sell and we couldn't sell it at the amount we bought them.



As a startup, this is the area we fail to foresee. What I realized was that I saw an opportunity, but I didn't do proper research on that. I had experience but I lack the capability to foresee the impacts that the changing dynamics of Nepal may have on the business. Every year our profit margin started decreasing whereas our investment was on the increasing rate. It was difficult for us to meet the break even. So, now we are in the process of exploring other products.

### What are the products are you

### selling currently?

I still think that the market is ready for anything. So, I decided to work on high-value indigenous products like black rice, brown rice, lentils, etc. There are other products as well like ghee, cheese, seasonal fruits like apples and Junars (Oranges). We are now changing the modality of business and currently are in the process of doing research in other areas. We are planning to do something different. We thought not to sell the products that we are currently selling. Instead, create something different out of it and add value to it. Let's take an example, we were selling

Sisno (Stinging Nettle) powder till then and now we are planning to sell soup made of Sisno and trying to build a network with people who can help us do it.

### How is your business contributing to society?

Farmers are compelled to sell their products at a very low price. Also, when the products reach the consumers, they pay a higher price to purchase the same. This is because normally there are

4-5 intermediaries in between who take the margin.

We work directly with the farmers of the rural community and with the urban consumers. Working this way reduces all the intermediaries in between and we can give more to farmers and sell them at a cheaper price to consumers as well. So, we have made a bigger cut by reducing the number of intermediaries. We have also been able to convince many farmers so besides us they will now trust other people as well and can be able to earn better.



### How is the profit side of the business? How many staffs have you hired?

As our primary motive is to serve farmers and consumers, we have few margins in between. For now, we are learning from the losses and challenges. We haven't been able to generate expected profit. The break-even is near. Currently, there is 3 staff working with us in research and delivery.



## How is your company different from the other supply chain intermediaries?

We work directly with farmers. But what is different about us is we not only go and connect with them but also try to support them. We work closely with them by motivating, suggesting and training them on what they can do.

## How many farmers and consumers are you working with?

We have been able to work with

around 200 farmers. However, we have a network of around 5000 of them. Similarly, we have served about 5000 consumers. We are planning to expand the number in the near future.

### How do you operate?

We build the network with farmers at first. Then we send the order. They send it through the cheapest means of transport. We pick it up and pay the driver. We check the products, refine them and then we circulate it around our consumers. If we have new products, we flow the

information to our consumers. Many of them frequently ask about new products through phone calls and messages and place orders. Then we give them a free home delivery.

### What are your upcoming plans for the company?

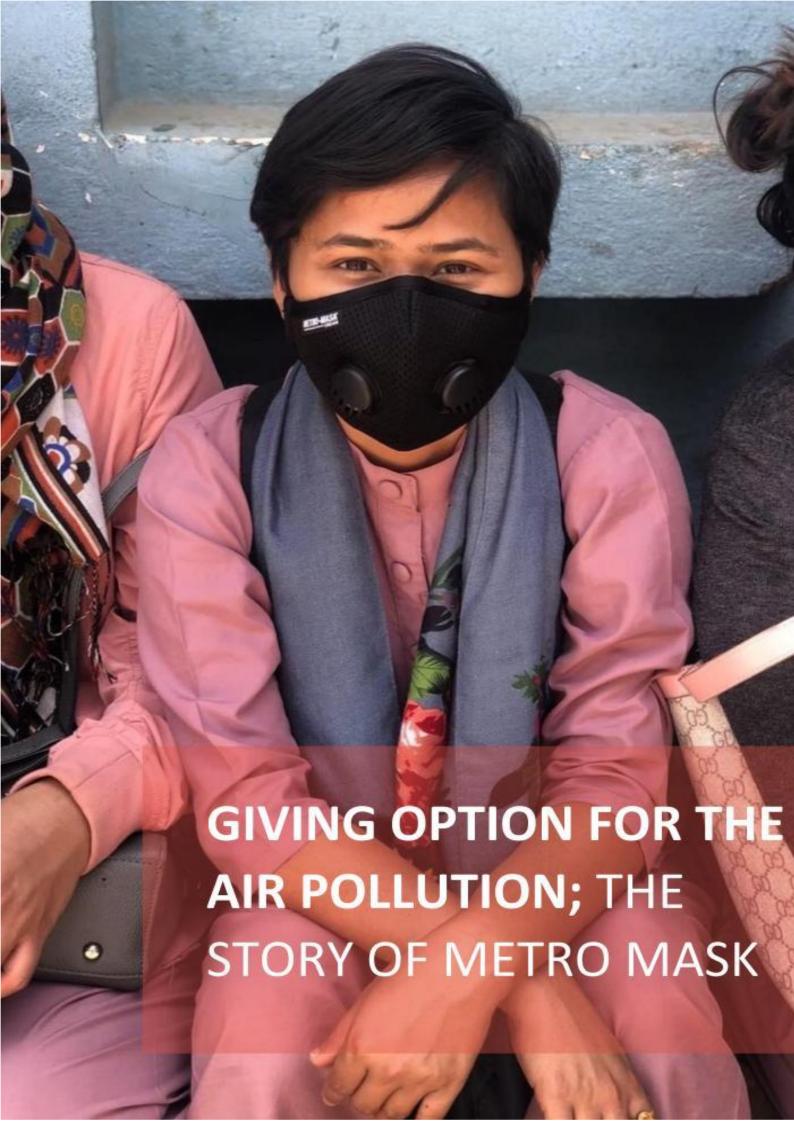
We are trying to initiate innovation in agricultural value-added products and trying to introduce different new products collaborating with the rural farmers. We want the farmers to be the major stakeholders where they will process the products and we will support and facilitate their capacity enhancement. So, we will entirely be focusing on the processing, branding, and marketing of the products in the future.

## Is there anything you want to pass to the young aspiring social entrepreneurs?



First of all, ask yourself if you are ready to be a social entrepreneur or not. Before starting anything try to expand yourself, learn and develop yourself first. Never make a rush risking your time, money and energy. If you start maybe after five years later after learning and researching more then that can be rather sustainable than just rushing haphazardly.

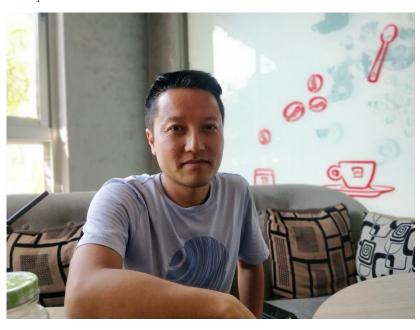
To know more about it: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/farm2finger/">https://www.facebook.com/farm2finger/</a>



Air Pollution has become an integral part of life for the people living in Kathmandu. We all breathe the same polluted air. The increasing air pollution, not only in Kathmandu but also in other major cities of Nepal, is creating an alarming health threat. In that situation, minimizing air pollution could be the best solution. But it takes time, a lot of time. So, the immediate solution can be protecting ourselves. How is that possible? The primary option would be using masks while traveling or walking outdoors. It is really important to use a qualitative mask but there was hardly any option available a few years back. This is the area Tashi Galzen came up to fill himself with his self designed 'Metro Mask'. It gave Nepali people the best option to go for. Bikas Udhyami had a conversation with him about his journey from a fashion merchandising management student to being a successful social entrepreneur in Nepal.

### How was Metro Mask started?

I came back to Nepal after completing my Bachelors in Fashion Merchandising Management in New York. I started working for a clothing store named 'Anta' as a CEO. During my stay there for 3 years, as a person in charge, I had to visit a lot of places. I used to travel on my motorbike to reach different stores located inside Kathmandu valley. Traveling in the bike was really hard due to polluted



air. To make matters worse, I had a dust allergy. I started searching for a good quality mask but could not find anywhere. People were using the simple doctor or cloth mask which I knew would not be enough at this pollution level. The only option left was to import from abroad. Then I thought I might not be the only one searching for a good mask. So I starting thinking of starting my own mask brand. I visited China to know the possibility of this area, its opportunities, and challenges. My self-research gave me the message that there is a huge



potential for this business in Nepal. And I listened to that.

## What were the challenges you faced while starting the business?

When the mask was in the production phase, Nepal got hit by the massive earthquake. Then the months-long blockade made the masks stuck in transit. So, bringing my product to Nepal was the very first challenge for me. (Laugh)

Another challenge came with the durability of the mask. People abroad use these kinds of mask only when they go on cycling or when they travel polluted areas. But in the case of Nepal, it is not so, we have to use a mask on a daily basis on severe pollution. That affected the durability of

the mask. Sun, heat, sweat, and frequent use minimized the life of masks in our early phase. But that also enabled us to search for more durable innovations. And the pricing too was not convenient for most of the needy people, so we came up with another cheaper version with the same quality. So the early challenges were in a way giving us the option to be the best.

### How was the early response? Were people desperate to get these kinds of solution or do you had a hard time to persuade them?

Obviously, I had a hard time persuading them. The mask I made or brought was popular among people living abroad. It was made as per international standards. Before making it, I had researched about masks used all over the world. Hence, I created a mask of a similar type and

quality. But as per Nepali standard, the mask was really expensive. During that time it cost Rs. 3500. From my experience what I found was what works somewhere else does not mean it will work here in Nepal too.

After collecting feedback from people and realizing the price is expensive, we redesigned it addressing the previous problems as well. Now we have different versions available for the different set of customers.

### How do you overcome all these challenges and difficulties?

Since the major problem was price and durability, we searched for other material which will be more efficient, more durable, and more comfortable but a lot cheaper.

So, I went to China to research and used material which is used on trekking bags which are really durable. And we are providing a



mask that cost 3500-4000 abroad at a price of 1500. People are loving it. And those who have used this kind of masks before are sending messages to us saying we are providing a very qualitative mask at a low price.

### Do you want to mention any message that you received?

I receive a lot of messages every day. There is one user who has acne-prone skin. Pollution was making his skin worse and after he used our mask, his skin is getting better. So, the mask is not only being used for breathing purposes but also as an extra protection layer for the face. Even though our mask is a bit costly, customers say it's worth every penny. This gives me great satisfaction.

One of our regular users had a friend who was suffering from cancer and was getting treated. He wants to gift our mask to his friend so that he can protect himself from polluted air. We felt overwhelmed after reading his text. As children, old people and sick people are much more

vulnerable to air pollution, knowing our mask is helping these people in everyday life makes us happier.

### How aware are Nepalese in the context of air pollution?

Before starting Metro Mask, I did some research about market demand and supply. I found that



people mostly use the disposable mask but they don't know if the mask is saving them or not. These masks do nothing to protect from actual harm of the air which is inhaling PM 2.5.

There are two types of particles floating in the air i.e. PM 10, which is visible to the naked eye and it can be filtered by our own natural body system through hairs in the nostrils or even by the throat in form of cough. Another is PM 2.5 which is invisible to the naked eye and can directly reach your lungs. And these regular cotton masks or disposable mask does nothing to protect you from that. Since doctors use masks during surgery or check-up, people think, those masks are really good. But the truth is it is to protect the patient from saliva or

sweat. So, a surgical mask can only protect others from what you have rather than protecting you from air pollution. It's just a false sense of protection.

### How is the air quality of Nepal or let's say major cities of Nepal?

The air quality is very bad and it is getting worse and worse every day. Air quality in Nepal is

among the worst in the world. We were ranked at the bottom among the 180 countries surveyed in terms of air quality in a global study. And it is a leading threat to public health. And to make it worse, people are not fully aware of the dangerous air pollution. Those who are aware are also don't know to what extent it is dangerous. So, it is really serious.

# What do you think the government should do to minimize air pollution? What we as the general public can do from our place to fight this?

The government should bring strict laws and policies for this. They should ban old vehicles, monitor the running ones and should control the quality of oils/fuels used

in vehicles. It is high time to promote electric vehicles in the major cities.

It could take so many years to fully clean the environment. So, the fastest and easiest way someone can do is putting effort to protect ourselves from the increasing air pollution with the use of a proper mask. Then the air pollution awareness should begin from the concerned civil

society. We can promote air awareness through media. Giving information can also be a step toward fighting air pollution. I remember a quote that I heard from an environmentalist, 'Air awareness is the first step in reducing air pollution.'

### How is your business creating an impact on society?

It didn't come to me from the very start. It grew on me. I started with protecting myself first. Only then I thought about protecting others too. And I think change starts from self. So, initially, it was to protect me and my family friends. And only then I started thinking about others.

And now I am not just selling masks, I am also spreading air awareness among people through our social media. It seems that I am marketing my products but that is not the only thing I am heading towards now. Obviously, I want people to buy my masks but I also feel like this condition should end. So I am meeting with concerned authorities, like-minded people and other



stakeholders thinking to do something on reducing the air pollution. There are millions of people who cannot afford my mask and their health is also important. My mask only solves the short term problem. In the long term, it is an environment that should be clean. We are discussing now on how we can help the government to address the issues.

How do you want to expand? What are your future plans?

From here I want to explore more on the areas of air purification. People use AC in their houses, but it does not purify the air. It is used just to cool air. So, I want to

make indoor air purifier. There is a lot of dust and PM 2.5 that enters through windows or while combusting papers or plastics or while using gas stoves. We breathe that from inside the house. I would like to design a product that can purify indoor air.

I would like to focus on environment-friendly products or health products for now. Though I am doing business due to air pollution I will be happy if air quality can

improve and people don't need to use a mask while going out. And I would like to be involved in creating such change for the better society tomorrow. I can do something else if not this business. What matters is the health of people rather than selling my mask. Since there is air quality is really poor I am selling mask as an immediate solution. I am fulfilling this requirement. If the government can solve this, I will be very happy because my children can walk freely without wearing masks. The society as a whole is much much bigger than my business.

Any last words to you want to pass to the young aspiring social entrepreneurs?

There are lots of social issues going on and you can always work on those areas. But you have to be sure that you are doing something you are passionate about or you feel deeply about. For me, it was an air-related issue which inspired me to start Metro Mask. So choose the area that you feel you would do better. You may come across lots of hurdles. Even when I discussed making a mask to people, many doubted. But what if you are doing is really what you want to do, you will always be successful. And don't jump into making or starting something without doing proper market research.

To know more about it: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/metromask/">https://www.facebook.com/metromask/</a>



