



Survivor Stories

Stopping the Traffic: Seema's and Kamala's Stories

Seema and Kamala sought jobs overseas—and were trafficked into slavery. They worked backbreaking hours for no pay and suffered dehumanizing abuse. Finally freed, these courageous women now help save others in Nepal from the same awful fate.

Unsafe, Unprotected, Trapped

In Nepal, poverty forces people to seek work overseas to provide for themselves and their desperate families. Migration across the border is unsafe and uncontrolled, which is how Seema was trafficked and forced into slavery. “The open border with India is just 10 minutes from my house,” Seema says. “This same route has no check post, so traffickers have trafficked many women. I too was tricked and trafficked from this point. I went to Kuwait for foreign employment because my family's financial situation was bad,” Seema says.

“I'd seen a lot of women in my village go abroad. I thought I could earn enough money and do something with it.” Instead, for attempting to access the basic human right to a decent job, Seema was trapped as a domestic slave for more than two years.



Kamala was not even safe from her own impoverished family. “I was tricked,” she says. “I was trafficked by my own aunt, so you don't really know who you can trust.”

She ended up suffering terrible abuse in domestic slavery. “They'd chew meat and spit it on my face,” she says. “They would throw a plate full of rice on me. They would beat me up. They'd make me work from 5 a.m. to later than 1 a.m. the next day. And they didn't pay me.”

Overcoming Stigma, Earning Dignity

As migrants in foreign lands who've been fooled by false contracts and had their passports taken, Nepalis are especially vulnerable. They suffer horrific violence and violations of their most basic human rights. Escape is virtually impossible. With the help of Shakti Samuha, a Free the Slaves front-line partner organization, Seema and Kamala were able to come home. But reintegration into society is fraught and difficult. "Usually women who come back after working abroad receive no support from their families, and society looks down on them," Seema says. "I joined Shakti to get training and develop some skills, so I can live in my family and society with dignity." Kamala also joined Shakti. "I go to meetings whenever I can," she says. "The women at Shakti understand my situation."

Shakti Sumaha is the first survivor-led anti-slavery organization in the world. "They help survivors in a different way," says Neelam Sharma, Nepal Director for Free the Slaves. "In Nepal there is a lot of stigma attached to the survivors of human trafficking, and Shakti especially helps them to rebuild their lives in society and to reintegrate with family."

A New Job: Protecting Others

As slavery survivors, both Seema and Kamala now work with Shakti to protect other women. With help from Shakti, Kamala makes a better life for herself—to sustain her freedom. "Shakti gives me loans with no interest, and I use that money," she says. She also uses her survivor story to reach out and inform others of the risk of human trafficking. "I go around villages telling people not to get tricked into human trafficking," Kamala says. "Members are given posters with illustrations to distribute. I hang them outside shops and public places."

As a member of Shakti, Seema educates her fellow Nepalis to use only government-registered work agencies to find employment. "We've been doing home visits to inform women going abroad," she says. Seema also uses her experience as a slavery survivor to help free other victims. "When women are going abroad, we check to see if they are being trafficked," she says. "Last year we found five women being trafficked at the border and referred them to authorities for help." In Seema words: "I want to continue my work with the aim to free people from human trafficking and slavery. I hope that in the future, no man or woman suffers from trafficking or slavery."



See Their Story

See these two courageous women describe their enslavement while migrating for work—and how they now help protect their fellow Nepalis from falling prey to traffickers. A mini-documentary about them is part of the Free the Slaves [Face to Face with Slavery](#) film series, which features stories of hope and inspiration from survivors and activists working with Free the Slaves front-line programs worldwide.