



## RESTORED HAPPINESS

**“It was the morning of 25 April 2015, the sky was overcast and the day was dreary. Along with my wife Putali, I was working in our kitchen garden and my granddaughter Roshni was preparing our meal. Once the meal was ready, she called us inside to eat but I requested her to bring the meal in the yard. After a few minutes, she served the yummy looking meal. We were just about to have the meal when all of a sudden, the ground started shivering and everything around us collapsed enveloping the surroundings in a cloud of dust. For a moment, I could not comprehend what happened. Our plates of food were filled with dust. We slept on an empty stomach for many days.”** 70 year old Kul Bahadur Majhi recounts his bitter memories of Nepal Earthquake, 2015.

The situation after the earthquake was an extreme struggle for the Majhi family. Their house had collapsed and they were forced to live in a makeshift tent. “It was very hard to stay inside the tent. During the day, it was crazily hot, and once night time came, it used to get very cold. The earthquake had ruined everything”, tears rolled down Kul Bahadur’s eyes while he shared the story trying to look brave.

Four years after the earthquake, they were still homeless and living in a makeshift house made of CGI sheets. Even though Kul Bahadur Majhi’s name was enlisted in the records of the earthquake affected people and he had also received the first tranche of financial support from the Nepal Government, they could not start reconstructing their house. Roshini shared, “All the money we received as the first tranche was spent in my grandparents’ medicine. My grandfather suffered from post-traumatic disorder following difficulty in walking and grandmother is a regular Asthma patient.” She further added, “Almost three months after the earthquake, my grandparents complained of blurry vision. After consulting with the doctor, we found out that they were suffering from cataract problems”.

Because of their serious health problems, they could not go outside the house to find work. And, the social security allowance provided by the Nepal Government to senior citizens was the only source of income. But that was not enough to manage their daily needs. Moreover, their medication was also expensive. Due to this, Roshini unwillingly had to drop out of school 4 years ago while studying in the eighth standard to take care of her grandparents and to work in order to help with the household expenses. The time was not in their favor.

The year 2018, however, brought happiness in their life. In 2018, with financial support of ECHO and ADC, the PRAYAAS-II initiative was implemented in the district through the local partner, Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC). The project aimed to build the resilience of the most at-risk households and communities through 'Building Back Better' reconstruction and restoring livelihood. The field staff of the PRAYAAS-II project came to know the heart-throbbing story of Majhi when they did a household verification survey of the 'most vulnerable list' provided by WDMC members. The project team at Sindhupalchowk also decided to provide reconstruction support. But still, there was a problem, because, the project could only provide reconstruction material support. The Majhi couple's health was too weak to proceed with the construction process and Roshni couldn't do it by herself. The project was not able to provide further aid if the human resources were not managed on time. Kul Bahadur became the subject of discussion in the monthly meetings of the project team where they came up with an innovative idea of engaging the ReFLECT group for the house reconstruction. It was discussed that though the ReFLECT members couldn't provide financial support, they could still contribute their labor to support construction of Kul Bahadur's house. This idea was then proposed in the ReFLECT sessions and to everybody's surprise, there was a unanimous agreement to support the initiative. Majhi's daughter and son-in-law were then requested to manage necessary documents to ensure Kul Bahadur's access to the second tranche.

With continuous labor support of the ReFLECT group and regular follow-up by WDMC members, the house reconstruction was completed in March 2019. Majhi then applied for the third tranche and with WDMC's support, which he received from the NRA. Not only that, but ReFLECT members also referred to Jaldevi Constructions about the old couple's health problem. This construction company had been providing payment for eye surgery for marginalized and impoverished individuals. After several eye screenings in the eye camp conducted by Jaldevi Construction, they were referred to Reiyukai Eiko Masunaga Eye hospital for surgery, which was established by the same construction company. On 31 April 2019, the Majhi couple's surgery was performed successfully. The Jaldevi construction compensated all the medical expenses and the PRAYAAS II initiative covered the lodging and transportation costs. Eyes filled with tears, the Majhi couple shared, "My mother used to say, 'Almighty comes to the earth in different ways to help its devotees' and she was true. This PRAYAAS-II project has been a blessing for us. My wife and I can see and we have a better place for shelter." They had tears in their eyes but this time it only meant happiness.

Sarita Majhi, a local resource person in Sindhupalchowk further added, "In the past few years, I have witnessed many people living outside their home district for a long time returning back and those living jointly split their families just to get the relief package, while some genuinely affected marginalized and vulnerable families could not have access to the much needed relief packages. Because of those incidents in the village, communal harmony and faith were lost. But, today when I see ReFLECT members joining hands to support Majhi family in their tough time, I believe the lost harmony and faith will soon be restored." ▯

Majhi family, who had been taking shelter in the makeshift, now have a better house to live in. They feel that their new house was built to protect them. "Earlier, we had a mud-and-stone house. Now, we have a strong brick and cement house, and the NRA's engineer and project team have assured us that it is earthquake-resistant. This house that you are seeing now, it's not just a residence, it is constructed out of our renewed hopes and dreams." the Majhi family ended the conversation with a smile.