



# Story from the Field

## Tipping Point: Digging up the Roots of Child Marriage to Replant the Future

### Anita's Story

#### *Becoming an Empowered Influencer*

Anita Raidas is filled with an infectious energy and vigor. The 20-year old, who has seen her life transform for the better in front of her eyes, not only hopes to improve her own life, but also the lives of those around her. Married at the young age of 16, Anita says that although she could not stop her own marriage, she will do everything she can to stop her brother and brother-in-law's marriages.

Her brother-in-law is not old enough to marry legally. However, her in-laws are insistent that they get him married. In such a situation where no one was able to influence their decision for the better, Anita stepped up and is the main activist behind stopping her brother-in-law's early marriage.



Anita Raidas at CARE Nepal and DSDC's monthly meeting.

"I told my in-laws that I will not come to their house if they get my brother-in-law married," Anita says. However, she realizes that this way of convincing does not help people change their mind. She notes herself that it was the fear that Anita might not show up after her *gauna* (the giving away of the bride), which is yet to happen, that propelled their decision and not a commitment to end early marriage.

"This", she says, "is very different from how I convince my parents. "My parents treat me with so much respect and are very proud of me and what I have achieved after being associated with the adolescent girl's group under the Aba Mero Palo project (Tipping Point) project."

CARE Nepal has been partnering with the Dalit Social Development Center (DSDC) at Kapilvastu to launch its project to tackle and address the root causes of early marriage entitled Aba Mero Palo (Tipping Point). This project has created an adolescent girl's group, adolescent boys group and a parents group in eight Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the Kapilvastu district. Anita is a part of an adolescent girl's group in Harnampur. She had initially started out as a member of the group and now serves as the

Group Facilitator of the group.

“A few years ago, before the project, the scenario was very different in my family. No one considered women to be a part of the family. We were looked on as mere objects. However, this changed very quickly when I became associated with the Aba Mero Palo project.”

“There was a point in my life, after my marriage had been fixed; where I thought I could do nothing. I was absolutely hopeless,” Anita explains. “But when I started going to the adolescent centers, I got an opportunity to learn about a lot of issues, and the ills of early marriage. Being a part of this group gave me so much strength and hope. I picked up the things that were taught in the project very quickly, and soon I was made a Group Facilitator. I have had such a sense of clarity since being associated with this project.”

Anita also recalls that after becoming associated with the project, her family has started valuing her more than ever before. They appreciate not only the monetary contributions she makes, but also her intellectual contributions. She explains that although those around her wanted to treat her like a bird in a cage, she wanted to soar and fly like a free bird. “My family listens to what I have to say. I feel like I have created a name for myself. Even my mother and father are so proud of me,” she very excitedly shares.

**"There was a point in my life, after my marriage had been fixed; where I thought I could do nothing. I was absolutely hopeless" - Anita Raidas**

It is clear that Anita is a source of inspiration to those around her. Her family and friends look up to her, and listen to the suggestions she has to make. But Anita recalls that she had to morph into this empowered self. She notes that life was not always like this for her, and that it was only after being a part of the Tipping Point Project that people began to give her the respect she deserved. Although her parents held off her *gauna* to date, she says, “my *gauna* would have happened two years ago, but it was the Tipping Point team that convinced my parents to let me become older before sending me to my husband’s house. This is why my father decided to stop my *gauna*.”

Her parents, because of the pressure from Anita’s in-laws, are considering her *gauna*, and she shares that the *gauna* ceremony may take place very soon now. However Anita feels empowered enough to stop her own *gauna* again if she pleases. Although Anita would have ideally liked to postpone her *gauna* for an additional two or three years and study, she says that her in-laws perhaps need her so that she can save the numerous lives that are about to be destroyed through child marriage. Her intention now is to go to her husband’s house and to change her in-laws mindset about child marriage. She feels a need to go there so that she can prevent her underage brother-in-law and sister-in-law’s marriages.

With much conviction, and strength Anita shares, “I want to be the guiding light for everyone, and the reason they open up their eyes to a world filled with opportunities.” And more power to her, and those like her who have committed themselves to becoming active agents of positive change in their societies!

**This story was documented by Ayushma Basnyat, CARE Nepal.**