



Lakshmi, The Smartphone Didi

Lakshmi Soni, a resident of Jakhaura village in Lalitpur, embodies the spirit of women's empowerment through her remarkable journey. Married to Manoj Kumar, a sculptor, Lakshmi is a mother of two, with a son and a daughter. Raised in the village of Rath in Hamirpur district, her maternal home was one of comfort. However, her heart yearned for a teaching career, and alongside her pursuit of education, she dedicated herself to educating others.



Armed with an M.A. degree, Lakshmi entered married life in 2008, facing financial challenges due to her husband's role as the eldest among five brothers and three sisters. With her father-in-law's health declining, their family's sculpting business took a hit, impacting their overall well-being. Driven by a desire to make a difference, Lakshmi expressed her aspirations to her husband, who, along with her mother-in-law, offered their support.

Her journey took a significant turn when she took up a teaching contract at the Government Inter College Jakhaura. In 2018, Lakshmi joined the TARA Akshar+ program, a venture by Sai Jyoti Sanstha and Development Alternatives. Her dedication and sincerity shone through, leading the organisation to entrust her with a role as a "Smartphone Didi" in the WE ADD (Women Empowerment through annihilating gender digital divide) Project, supported by a grant from **Reliance Foundation (RF) under Round 1 of RF & USAID's WomenConnect Challenge** India program. Here, she imparted digital literacy to women, enlightening them about smartphone operations and showcasing how these devices could catalyse their businesses. Not stopping at digital proficiency, Lakshmi initiated a 45-day advanced training program in tailoring and beauty parlors for potential women entrepreneurs in her village. This initiative has led to visible progress as these women enhance their businesses and prospects.

Recognising her potential, Development Alternatives selected Lakshmi for Rural Mobile Journalism training. She underwent online training with Chambal Media Private Limited, gaining practical exposure during her visit to Banda, Madhya Pradesh, working alongside renowned digital media reporters from Khabar Lahariya. Completion of the course paved the way for a one-month journalism internship in Lalitpur district.

At present, Lakshmi finds herself at the heart of women's empowerment as she collaborates with Community Radio Lalit Lokvani Kendra. Her focus remains on amplifying the voices of village women, ensuring their concerns and aspirations resonate across boundaries.

Lakshmi Soni's inspiring journey, fueled by her relentless determination and the support of Development Alternatives, exemplifies the transformative power of women's empowerment, demonstrating that through education, skills, and a resilient spirit, individuals can uplift not only themselves but also their entire community.

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