*Women Light The World*

Three local women have become Solar Mamas, joining the corps of nearly 2,200 from over 90 countries around the world, all of whom have benefited and helped electrify their villages in Humla with Solar power. The first three Solar Mamas are: From Burunse, Chhepa Lahmu Lama, 44; from Torpa, Tsering Pama Lama, 42; and from Bargaun, Laiku Lama, 46. These women are from marginalized communities, but they are quickly thrust into the vanguard of change, creating it on a local level.

"It is unimaginable for me as an illiterate woman," observed Laiku Lama, "to be able to install lighting in my community. And it was even more astonishing to have gone all the way to India for this opportunity, to receive the training that enabled me to help my own people." Laiku Lama concluded, "Thank you to Women Light The World and Barefoot College International, as this could not have happened without them."

While most of the Solar Mamas have no formal education and are functionally illiterate, they excelled in their education at Barefoot College International in Rajasthan India; this training paves the way for them to earn a living, as they spearhead the implementation of solar power in their own villages, and as the villages embrace the "magic" of solar electricity—lighting on demand!

The Solar Mamas from Humla, along with their international classmates, studied for six months, becoming proficient technicians, learning how to install, maintain, and repair these solar systems—in short, mastering the know-how of solar technology. The project was possible as Women Light the World collaborated with Barefoot College International in India and the Embassy Of India Nepal.

Women Light The World and Barefoot College International are not-for-profit organizations based out of USA and India respectively, established to empower women from vulnerable regions, such as Humla, and to help them transform themselves, as they transform their villages by introducing solar power to electrify the homes in their villages. Women Light The World was instrumental in connecting the community and local women candidates for positions as Solar Mamas, sending them to Barefoot College International, so that they could become solar technicians and be the part of Barefoot College International’s Global Initiative.

These women had never even travelled to Kathmandu, but our local Nepali team in conjunction with Barefoot College International, was able to encourage them to be intrepid and they ventured on this journey, seeking a home-away-from home in India, for the six months that they were in school there.

“It was a difficult task, and it became even more challenging because of COVID-19," noted Mary Mahoney the founder and CEO of Women Light The World " The pandemic delayed the project by nearly two years. We wholeheartedly thank UNDP-Nepal for SGP Funding, the Embassy of New Zealand in India, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme of Indian Embassy Nepal, Mega Bank, the Bodhi Tree Foundation Humla, and Responsible Treks for coming together as loyal and supportive partners.” Mary further observed that it was an honor to showcase the diligent work that the Solar Mamas performed, in literally lighting their worlds up.

“It was a long dream of ours to be able to do a project with our closest neighbors and it has been a great example though on smaller scale how India and Nepal can come together and setup an example for the whole world” said Harsh Tiwari from Barefoot College International.

The Handover Ceremony at each village was "electrifying, “and the smiles on the villagers' faces lit up the entire village just as the actual solar power did the same! The ceremony was accented by the solemn beat of a traditional, cultural drum and the hum of Nyinba songs. The ceremonial welcome by Humli was marked by the application of butter on each visitor’s head. Elder Nyinba mothers blessed the entire handover team with a long life, as she wished them success. It was a truly spiritual experience, all the more special in the outdoor environment—with snow-capped mountains in the distance, encircling the village. Most villagers agreed that it felt as if these moments were captured in eternity.

Each household received a solar lantern and four lights, a battery and large and small solar panel. Any future troubleshooting will be handled head on by the local Solar Mama. “UNDP-Nepal works in many rural areas in Nepal and has been responsible for countless successful projects," commented Vijaya Singh, the Policy Advisor, Resilience and Disaster Preparedness and Assistant Resident of the UNDP Nepal, who attended the handover ceremony. "We specifically feel that we have touched a deep nerve among the community—when we see the villagers' smiling faces. We are delighted to be supporters of this program." The project not only uplifts the community of Humla through Solar electrification, but it also sets an example to achieve Sustainable Development goals through rural development.