



Shila's Story

Shila was married at 16. Early marriages in places like Nepal naturally lead to pregnancy at a young age. And when they do, they don't just have one child – they quickly build a family that can support them later in life. The problem is, for girls like Shila, they often fail to recover properly due to short gaps between their pregnancies.

During the birth of her fourth daughter, Shila noticed something very wrong throughout her contractions. She saw and felt her uterus falling out of her vagina. Not only was this incredibly painful, but Shila suffered in silence, unaware that it was treatable.

Despite living with her painful prolapse, Shila and her husband agreed they were missing something – a son. And so, Shila fell pregnant again.

It wasn't until Shila took her son to receive immunisations that her condition was recognised, and she learned something could be done. At the time, the health workers discovered Shila had a third degree prolapse with significant lacerations and bleeding.

Thanks to Open Heart International's Women's Health and Systems Strengthening (WHaSS) project, Shila was able to access life-changing prolapse surgery. Her pain was gone, and her confidence returned.

"I was unable to make a living," Shila says. "It is a matter of great fortune that free surgery has been given to a poor person like me. Thank you for giving me a second life!"

The WHaSS Project in Nepal receives support from the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



OHI Project visit, Nepal
Photo by Megan Kraa

Open Heart International is a partnership of ADRA Australia and Sydney Adventist Hospital, and brings modern surgery, training, community education and equipment to some of the world's most disadvantaged communities. This is achieved by deploying teams of medical professionals to communities, who deliver education and surgery.

Open Heart International's Nepal Women's Health medical project has been collaborating with ADRA on the Women's Health and System Strengthening (WHaSS) project, funded by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The project aims to improve the health of women impacted by pelvic organ prolapse in the disadvantaged and marginalised communities in Nepal. This included women receiving surgery, training health care workers on conservation management, community awareness, cervical cancer screening, and responding to gender-based violence. In the last 12 months, this project reached a total of 5,205 women and men.

While COVID-19 paused Open Heart International medical trips, it did not stop their work. If anything, this period of change has emphasised how important the training component of their work is. Open Heart International is now focusing on how they can strengthen clinical capacity development and health systems in the countries they operate in so the work can continue long after a project trip.