

ENTERPRISING WOMEN NEPAL



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Press For Progress

INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY
2018

WORKING
TOGETHER FOR SOCIO
ECONOMIC
TRANSFORMATION



CONTENT

Congratulatory Message/ Official Message	Pag No.	Features	
• Secretary of Industry	8	• When in Doubt Yoga it out	39
• Secretary of Commerce	9	• Empower through education	41
• Secretary of women children and social welfare	10	• RockStar (MyExperience)	42
• President of FNCSI	11	• Gender Equality and Women Economic Empowerment	44
• President FNCCI	12	• From Dreamer to a Mover and shaker	49
• President CNI	13	• Road To Recovery	52
Organizational Structure about FWEAN		Working Partners of FWEAN	54
About Us	14	FWEAN Sister Organizations	59
• FWEAN Executive Board Members	16	• WEAN multi-purpose cooperative	60
• FWEAN and Founder Members	17	• WEAN Lalitpur	65
• FWEAN Secretariat Staff	18		
FWEAN Activities		Business Development Center	66
• Projects	19	WIN BIZ	67
• Advocacy Activities	23	FWEAN Districts	68
• Networking	24	FWEAN Working Members Details	70
• Trainings	29	WEAN District Chapter Membership	80
• FWEAN 108th International Women's Day Celebration	30		
• 2nd International Women's Trade Expo 2017	31		
• 14th Anniversary Celebration 2017	32		
• 14th Annual General Meeting	33		
• Fund Raising Program	37		
- Film Show			
- Newari Bhoj			
• Participation in International Expo	38		



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FROM DREAMER TO A MOVER AND SHAKER

THE FASCINATING LIFE OF DR. MONA SHRESTHA ADHIKARI

By Prabalta Rijal

“Chasing our dreams when they keep changing is a challenge that changes our lives forever”.

Dr. Mona Shrestha Adhikari is one such person who has followed her dreams which took her to various different directions, yet she was able to conquer them all. She narrates her personal journey as being interesting, challenging and many a times rewarding.

Born in Dharan, a city in Eastern Nepal which is nestled on the foothills of the Mahabharata range, she dreamt of becoming a medical doctor-- “My parents Hira and Sushila used to produce and sell woolen products under the name of ‘Purvanchal Hosiery Udyog’, a company that also provided technical knitting skills to young men and women in the eastern region of the country.”

Shrestha, who was always very determined to achieve her dreams, went off to college to pursue her medical dreams, however, little did she know that she would soon come to realize that her passions lay elsewhere and not in the white coat she had envisioned herself in. During her college days as a science student she realized she had a knack for management and was actually interested in the subject.



Life took a steep turn from there on as she changed course and cruised away from science into management studies. She now dreamt of working in a joint venture, which actually drove her towards her banking career. She worked for nine years at Nepal Investment Bank Ltd. (the then Nepal Indosuez Bank Ltd.). It is while working as a banker that she completed both her bachelors’ degree in management and Masters in Business Administration (MBA). With a smile on her face, she also mentions that it was here that a romance blossomed--“the bank is also where I met the love of my life, my friend, philosopher and guide, Ratnakar who encourages

me to keep on dreaming.”

However, as life started getting monotonous, her dreams shifted towards the development sector, she now began seeing the dire situation women in Nepal were facing due to the societal norms and values, the rampant gender biasness and discrimination towards women, started becoming apparent to her. Once realized this, she again decided to set sail towards a new destination. She soon left her banking career and started working for a non-governmental organization, ‘Forum for Protection of Public Interest,’ as the Coordinator of their Gender Justice project.



Experimenting with cotton in Ethiopia

The perfectionist in her then drove her towards her second master's degree this time in women, gender and development from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands, which she quickly topped up with a PhD from Centre for the Study of Women and Gender at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom.

Her childhood dream had finally come true, she was a doctor, not a medical doctor but an Academician but never-the-less she was a doctor--“Well, this is how I fulfilled mine and my parent's dream of being a doctor even though I took a different route, an academic one”, she adds.

In-between her higher academic journey she also worked with Action Aid Nepal and Sri Lanka on issues related to education, child rights, women's rights, gender equality and contract management. She has also conducted extensive studies and published several of her works on the topics of judicial gender equality, gender and trade and various contemporary socio-economic issues and presented papers in a number of national and international conferences.

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Her forthcoming chapter “Nepalese (new) women workers in the hotel industry: Exploring women's work and respectability,” is being published in a book titled *Rethinking New Womanhood: Practices of Gender, Class, Culture and Religion in South Asia* in 2018 by Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom (UK).

As a senior consultant at the Department for International Development (DFID) Nepal in 2013, she worked closely with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Development in drafting their Ten-Year Strategic Plan and First-Year Action Plan. Working with DFID /

Inspired by many women entrepreneurs working to bring about the much needed socioeconomic transformation, she has set up Enterprise for Management, Economic Reform and Gender Equality (EMERGE), a private limited company in Nepal, which, aims to conduct research, provide capacity building support and set up a knowledge hub in its focus areas of socio-economic development of the country and globally.

Palladium Group was another augmenting experience as she was involved in developing a gender and investment climate strategy for the Economic Policy Incubator project in Nepal. In the same year, she was also provided the opportunity to serve as a member of the Budget Committee of the Ministry of Finance where she contributed innovative ideas and suggestions to the Ministry for the formulation of the national budget for the fiscal year 2013/2014.

Prior to this, she had also provided international consultancy services to organizations like the International Trade Centre (ITC), Geneva within its Women and Trade Program and managed a project in Ethiopia and Mongolia that supported women entrepreneurs in the textile sector to enhance their competitiveness in international trade.

“It was during this time that I began dreaming of being an entrepreneur one day-- a dream, which was perhaps deeply embedded within me since my childhood days.”

"Gosh, time really flies" she recounts, I have more than 25 years of experience working in private sector, national and international non-governmental organizations and international organizations either as a regular staff member or as a consultant. "Each one of these have enriched me with wealth of ideas, inspiration and networks, and more importantly helped me evolve into a more efficient, empathetic and resilient person", she explains.

Even today, she continues to follow her ongoing dream of facilitating to bring positive changes in the lives of women

and girls particularly through socio-economic reforms in both policy and practice.

The depth and breadth of her engagement with the region and the country is reflected by the fact that she serves as a member of the Executive Board of South Asia Watch on Trade Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), a Kathmandu-based regional think tank and as Gender and Trade Advisor of South Asia Regional Trade Facilitation Program (SARTFP), a project of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government and the World Bank.

Additionally, she continues to engage with amazing women entrepreneurs through the South Asian Women and Development Forum (SAWDF), and Federation of Woman Entrepreneurs' Associations of Nepal (FWEAN) and other organizations within and beyond the region.

And although this may sound daunting enough, it has not prevented her from pursuing her academic dream – of conducting studies, writing papers, and contributing chapters – although her dream of publishing a book of her own is yet to be accomplished. Working on policy areas such as conducting a policy study for Water Aid Nepal in order to contribute to Safe and Dignified Menstruation Policy of the Government of Nepal in 2017, was an equally satisfying experience for her.

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Although, she is currently based in Geneva, she remains in touch with the ground realities of South Asia in general and Nepal in particular. More importantly, she is proud of the fact that she has a 'feminist family', and both her children Nilaza and Shreyaza speak Nepali fluently, although they have hardly spent much time in Nepal.

Dr. Adhikari, firmly believes that economic empowerment of girls, women and marginalized groups is central to their livelihood and wellbeing. "The private sector has incredible potential to leverage and harness the role of youth, women and other marginalized groups through the achievement of the globally agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

She goes on to explain that this is why she stays dedicated to the diversity work she undertakes. And whilst chasing her dreams her journey continues.

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