



## Lily's Leaves 2024 - 2027

*Kathmandu valley and Madhesh Province, south Nepal*

### 1. Introduction

Nepal is the tenth most impacted country in the world by climate crisis and Pipal Tree is preparing to help its poorest communities withstand inevitable disasters and become more resilient. With every negative there is a positive and we know that by adapting quickly and implementing pioneering educational, environmental and livelihoods projects we can make those communities stronger, healthier and more prosperous than before.

One of our implementing partners is the social enterprise Lily's Leaves that we helped establish in October 2020 and have been funding on a monthly basis ever since. It has been built around the remarkable energy and passion of local businesswoman and social entrepreneur Lily Katuwal (hence the name of the social enterprise).

Lily's Leaves initial purpose was to provide training and employment to vulnerable young women, including disabled (deaf) women, who would otherwise struggle to find opportunities, source skills training and earn a living. This goal continues to be achieved, however Lily's Leaves is developing its social programme in the intertwining areas of **education**, the **environment** and the **economic and social upliftment of women in the rural south**. Although Lily's Leaves is based in Kathmandu valley, its social programme other focus is Madhesh Province in south Nepal. This is Nepal's most populous Province and also, arguably, its most overlooked. There are huge obstacles to social progress including religious barriers (caste), ethnicity and gender discrimination. Lily seeks to replace obstacle with opportunity.



This document outlines the impact and cost of these programmes as guidance for grant applications and personal donations. In respect of these, Pipal Tree offers an unrivalled return on investment not only in terms of social impact but also in doubling of the value of gifts through matching pledge and co-funding arrangements under **Big Give** funding arrangements in which we have become expert.

## 2. Lily's Leaves core skills training operation

The Lily's Leaves head office, production and training centre is in Lalitpur, Kathmandu valley. Alongside providing core administrative support it offers daily training and employment to up to 15 young women, six of them deaf. The training has historically consisted of tailoring at basic and advanced levels and in silver jewellery manufacture. This training was once offered to young women from Madhesh Province who attended Lily's Leaves residential courses. After they were trained, we were able to set them up as trainers in their home Province, not only reducing our costs but also making training readily accessible to many more women.



A Lily's Leaves training centre in Madhesh Province

The Kathmandu training and production centre is for young women from Kathmandu valley itself. Here they are trained to a very high standard, sufficient to make silver jewellery that is exported to customers overseas and school rucksacks that are distributed 'free' to schools in Madhesh Province (see below). It should be noted that the centre provides training and employment to deaf women, but also integration and self-esteem as they work alongside able-bodied peers. Deaf people in Nepal experience isolation and extreme stigma, known as 'lato' which is the Nepali word for 'stupid'. Our lead silversmith, Bandna, who is deaf, has had the opportunity to disprove this cruel nickname and has become a role model. At an interaction with schoolgirls in south Nepal she motivated them to aim high in life by saying "If I can do it, so can you!"



Bandna Gurung

## 3. Support to education

As its support to education, Lily's Leaves has focussed on two main areas:

- The distribution of material support to marginalised children
- The construction and operation of Community Learning Centres (CLC's)

**Material support** has involved Lily visiting community schools in person for distribution of consignments of school rucksacks and reusable sanitary pads ('dignity pads'). These items benefit children who live in extreme poverty and, of course, especially girls. In the absence of proper sanitation and toilet facilities at a lot of schools, girls' attendances may be reduced when they are having their periods. Or they may drop out of school altogether. Early dropouts often feed into the scourge of child marriage which fuels the cycle of poverty as girls fail to realise their full potential in life. And child marriage carries an increased risk of infant and maternal

mortality. Lily's personal visits present the opportunity for her to speak to girls about menstrual hygiene, but this courageous woman also speaks to classrooms of boys about the taboo subject of menstruation and the need to respect girls' privacy when they are menstruating.

Another beneficiary group to benefit from this material support is Muslim girls. The Muslim community comprises 13% of the population in Madhesh Province and is generally perceived as being at the bottom end of the poverty spectrum, even worse off than the 'untouchable' castes within Hinduism. Rural society in Madhesh Province is very patriarchal and this is extreme within Muslim communities. So, Lily has also visited Madrasas and engaged with Muslim girls, their male siblings and teachers.



Lily distributing school rucksacks at a madrasa

These interactions have caused a stir as it is unheard of for 'outsiders' to help Muslims and there is a longstanding antipathy between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Lily's intervention represents one more example of our breaking down barriers and fostering social integration. Divided communities cannot stand.

*Note: It costs £10 to make one good quality rucksack and £5 for a pack of dignity pads. Obviously this is win-win as their manufacture benefits both the women who make them and the child recipients, while having a key role to play in improving education and breaking down social barriers and taboos.*

The **Community Learning Centre (CLC)** is a model that was developed by our other partner, the Madhesh Province based NGO Mithila Wildlife Trust (MWT), which also works closely with Lily's Leaves in joint school liaison. The CLC is a way of supporting low-caste children in their education through non-formal education that underpins that available in mainstream schools. MWT has been operating this model since 2013 and has demonstrated how CLC's increase attendance and reduce dropout rates at local schools. Essentially, CLC tutors provide children with support with their homework that cannot be offered by illiterate parents. The tutors are college students from the same untouchable caste groups who are paid modest salaries that enable them to complete their own education, while becoming role models for their pupils.

Through Pipal Tree funding, Lily's Leaves constructed its first CLC at Sarlahi District of Madhesh Province in 2024. This involved adding an extra floor onto a government-owned building. Concurrently, Lily's Leaves funded extra tuition support towards young people who were sitting the important Grade 10 Secondary Education Examination (SEE). Future tutors will be drawn from the SEE graduates.



The new CLC in Sarlahi District

*Note: It costs around £15,000 to £20,000 to build a CLC. A tutor salary is £1,300 per annum.*

#### 4. Support to the environment

Because of a combination of factors – urbanisation, poor development, topography and climate change – in 2023 Kathmandu became the world city with the worst Air Quality Index. Lily responded in July by launching its first urban reforestation project. This involved clearing public land alongside the Bishnumati River in

Kathmandu (that had become a community dumping ground) and planting it out using the rapid-growth Miyawaki Method. This intensive approach involves excavating the land to a depth of 1.5m, placing a thick layer of compost, replacing the topsoil and then planting saplings densely (ten per square metre). The site has to be fenced off to exclude grazers. We have been pioneering the Miyawaki Method in Nepal with MWT since December 2021 and the results in Kathmandu valley have been just as dramatic as in the south of the country.



This project has been a testament to the collaboration of Lily's Leaves with the municipal authorities, the Department of Forestry (which provided free saplings), the community and local schools. As a second project, Lily's Leaves has secured the agreement of the authorities to develop another site alongside the river over an area of 1,400m<sup>2</sup>. The land site has been cleared by volunteers, the local authority has agreed to provide some support towards securing the boundary and the Department of Forestry will once again provide saplings.



*Note: There is still a requirement to find £14,000 for the excavation work, the compost, mulching and fencing.*

## 5. Social and economic upliftment of women in the rural south

This aspect of Lily's Leaves work in Madhesh Province has two elements:

- Establishing young women or groups of women in **small tailoring businesses**
- Forming **women's cooperatives** linked to the development and sale of forest products

The first of these has been implemented since 2023, when graduates from the Lily's Leaves training courses were provided with small startup grants sufficient to establish their own workspace with an associated shopfront. Investment has involved buying sewing machines, furniture, equipment and cloth together with covering rental costs for a period of 6-12 months. After this period, with ongoing Lily's Leaves' monitoring and support, the women can be self-sufficient. Income may initially be modest, vary and fluctuate around festivals (when new clothes are in demand) but women end up with earnings that give them choices in life, earnings that are derived from skills rather than manual labour in the fields.

*Note: To set up [Binita](#) (pictured right) in her own shop involved a Lily's Leaves grant of £1,200.*



Binita with a young customer in her own tailoring shop

The women's cooperatives is currently a research and development activity area that is linked to the reforestation and rewilding project work of MWT. Originally, the concept of Lily's Leaves was to develop products from forest-derived items like leaves, natural fibres, mushrooms and essential oils. This intention had to be postponed because of the movement and market restrictions imposed by COVID lockdowns. However, this plan can now be moved forward. Already Lily's Leaves is developing and testing a new sanitary pad that involves the use of bamboo wadding as an absorbent material. Tests elsewhere have suggested that not only is this more eco-friendly, but also more effective.

## 6. Budget summary

For 2024/25 the Lily's Leaves funding needs can be summarised as follows:

Item	Annual budget	Public benefit	Note
Manufacture and distribution of school rucksacks	£65,000	Employment and training for 15 vulnerable young women, 5 of them deaf. Rucksacks issued 'free' to 6,500 children, encouraging school and CLC attendance.	These can be branded according to the wishes of a corporate or institutional funder.
Manufacture and distribution of reusable sanitary pads	£25,000	Employment and training as above. Packs of pads distributed free to 5,000 girls, reducing school dropout rates and undermining child marriage.	Manufacture may be contracted out to satellite production centres in Madhesh Province, creating local employment and reducing costs.
Construction of two CLC's	£40,000	Tuition support to up to 300 low-caste children, provided by six tutors.	May be the subject of a BBC Radio 4 charity appeal in 2025, presented by BBC MasterChef, Santosh Shah.
Urban reforestation in Kathmandu	£30,000	This can improve the quality of life of up to 50,000 people who live within a two-mile radius of two new forests.	Public land with inputs from the municipal authorities and Department of Forestry.
Small business startup funding	£15,000	Benefiting 10-15 young women in Madhesh Province, as an entry point to sustainable self-employment.	
Women's cooperatives	£5,000	n/a	R&D budget for forest products.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£180,000</b>		

## 7. Fundraising

Fundraising will be primarily through Big Give summer appeals (education) and Big Give Christmas appeals (Lily's Leaves). These can accept donations/grants by credit or debit card or by BACS transfer. Through the Big Give all donations automatically double in value through pledges or under co-funding arrangements.

The Summer Appeal: <https://pipaltree.info/kamala>

The Christmas Appeal: <https://pipaltree.info/Christmas2024>

## 8. Conclusion

Pipal Tree is proud to be supporting partners in Nepal that are led by individuals whose entrepreneurial spirit is matched by their passion to provide integration, opportunities and upliftment to marginalised people who have lived lives without hope. The recognition and development of this untapped pool of talent will go a long way towards making Nepal a better place for everyone and to come through the climate crisis stronger than before.



Lt Col (Retd) Philip Holmes OBE  
Founder/CEO Pipal Tree  
22<sup>nd</sup> May 2024