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NEWSLETTER

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A Message from the PCO: Building on Strong Results, Moving Ahead Together

Warm greetings to all Local Governments, WASH Units, and partners of Karnali Province,

It is my honour to address you for the first time as the Chief of the SUSWA Project Coordination Office. Having joined in August, I am honored to participate in this important journey alongside you. We recently completed the performance assessment of 25 Local Governments managing SUSWA. Notably, Sinja Rural Municipality in Jumla scored the highest with 94% of the maximum score—congratulations to Sinja! An important and surprising finding was that Jumla, Mugu, and Humla districts dominated the top ranks, showing stronger institutional practices. Often, mountain areas are associated with weaker governance, but SUSWA has demonstrated that this assumption is not true.

The Supervisory Board of SUSWA has recently approved the Annual Progress Report (APR), confirming the excellent results that were achieved in the last fiscal year. The report demonstrates that, despite numerous challenges, our partnership has achieved strong outcomes and laid a solid foundation for the years ahead.

Among the highlights are:

- Functionality of water supply services was strengthened through the new Maintenance & Repairs Funds and targeted rehabilitation, benefiting tens of thousands of people in rural areas.*
- The Service Support Centre (SSC) model was launched, with SSCs inaugurated in Dolpa and Surkhet—an innovation that is already recognised as key to long-term sustainability.*
- An additional 67 WASH Unit staff were trained and mobilised, bringing the total to 229 people to date.*
- Over 32,000 people gained access to improved sanitation*
- Important progress was made on gender equality and inclusion through gender-responsive budgeting, menstrual dignity campaigns, and disability inclusion workshops.*
- Climate adaptation became more practical, with training, manuals, and awareness events reaching thousands.*

Altogether, over 87,000 people across Karnali now have access to safe, chlorinated water because of our joint efforts.

Looking ahead, the new fiscal year will be SUSWA's most ambitious and best-resourced phase. With your leadership, and the continued partnership of all three tiers of government, we will translate this momentum into even greater results on the ground.

I wish you all strength and inspiration as we work together in this next chapter. It is a privilege to join you in this endeavour.

With appreciation and respect,

Er. Bhola Prasad Thapa

Project Coordination Office Chief

Government of Nepal

www.suswa.org

RESULTS UPDATES

We are excited to share that our **annual progress report** is out! With the introduction of seven new project municipalities/rural municipalities and continued work in the other 21 municipalities/rural municipalities, the third year brought about significant progress and strategic steps towards a sustainable and safe water supply. Please see some highlights of the results below and find the full report on our website.

WASH Acts have been approved in all 28 local governments. A strategic two-day policy dialogue resulted in an action plan endorsed by all participating municipalities, including an agreement to deploy at least one dedicated WASH staff member in each municipality.

The **Service Support Centre (SSC)** was formally launched in Karnali. 480 Water User and Sanitation Committees were provided with capacity building, and 237 of them were connected to the SSC operation and maintenance network.

SUSWA worked on **120 water supply systems** during the year, serving 33,039 people in total.

In this reporting period, a total of 1,310 people received **climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction training**. Manuals regarding grey water management, bio-engineering, and springshed management have been published and shared in the project area.

SUSWA continued to mainstream **Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)** in its activities and is well on track towards the result targets set for the project. The GEDSI Audit generated beneficial learnings to guide activities during the remaining project period.

An additional 32,131 people got access to an **improved toilet**, and an additional 8,055 people to a **basic toilet**.

Highlights from the Municipalities and Rural Municipalities

Photo: Titlana K.C

Commitment to Sustainability Through WASH Conferences: Key Agreements in Hima, Palata, and Darma



Photo: SUSWA

In line with the cost-sharing principle, the agreements define clear responsibilities between the user committees and municipalities, fostering greater ownership and accountability at the local level. Notably, Palata Rural Municipality adopted a 13-point commitment, while Hima and Darma adopted 12-point commitments, outlining action on sustainable scheme operation, multiple use of water, policy development, kitchen garden promotion, WASH facilities in schools, water source conservation, and establishment of emergency funds.

The conferences also honored outstanding vilmaintenance workers and distributed certificates and essential tools to user committees, creating an encouraging environment.

To ensure the sustainability of water supply and sanitation services and strengthen effective maintenance systems at the local level in Karnali, the SUSWA Project facilitated two-day WASH conferences in Hima Rural Municipality (Jumla), Palata Rural Municipality (Kalikot), and Darma Rural Municipality (Salyan) in June 2025. The events brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from 31 (Hima), 27 (Palata), and 52 (Darma) water user and sanitation committees, elected representatives, ward chairs, and trained maintenance workers.

The conferences served as platforms to review the status of water supply schemes, operation and maintenance funds, existing procedures, and mobilisation of local maintenance workers. With SUSWA's technical support, Hima and Palata Rural Municipalities signed Service Support Centre agreements for systematic maintenance and repair with 27 user committees, while Darma signed with 25 user committees.



Photo: SUSWA

Strengthening Local WASH Governance through Service Support Centres

Orientation sessions were conducted with 25 elected representatives and local government staff from Karnali Province to introduce the concept of Water Supply Service Support Centres (SSCs) at the local level. The session highlighted how SSCs can serve as an institutional mechanism within municipalities and rural municipalities to ensure the sustainability of water supply schemes. By providing technical backstopping, regular monitoring, repair and maintenance support, and capacity building for Water Users' Committees and Village Maintenance Workers (VMWs), the SSCs enable local governments to fulfill their responsibility for safe, reliable, and sustainable water services.

The objective of the orientations was to strengthen local government ownership of water service management, help establish a structured system for operation and maintenance support at the grassroots level, build local capacity for preventive maintenance and timely repairs, and help enhance service quality to ensure water schemes remain functional and inclusive.



Photo: Dharmaraj

Steps towards the institutionalisation of WASH Units



Photo: Titlana K.C

SUSWA organised a two-day workshop titled “Guiding Local Governments in Permanently Recruiting WASH Unit Staff, Especially on Rural Water Supply Service Support Centre Operator”, bringing together representatives from 28 local governments, including Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Chairs, and Chief Administrative Officers.

A Common Action Plan with 11 commitments was endorsed during the strategic policy dialogue, including an agreement by all local governments to deploy at least one dedicated WASH staff member in each local government. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between Ministry of Water Resources and Energy Development and seven local governments to support Rural Water Supply Service Support Centers were signed. WASH Acts have been approved by all 28 local governments, marking a major step towards the institutionalisation of WASH Units.



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We were thrilled to welcome Ms. Mari Helminen, Country Director of NIRAS International Consulting Finland, back to Karnali. During her visit to Junichade (Jajarkot) and Bhagwatimai (Dailekh), she met with community groups, municipalities, and WASH Units, gaining first-hand insight into our work. Her visit left the SUSWA team motivated and energised, reinforcing our commitment to strengthening local WASH systems and inspiring new ideas for sustainable community impact.



Transforming Sanitation Supply Chains in Karnali through Vibrant WASH Marts

Photo: Govinda Khatri

“हामी सामानसँग सम्मान पनि बेच्छौं।” – “We sell pride along with products”. With this inspiring slogan, SUSWA and NEST Traders jointly organised an event titled “Improved Sanitation Supply Chain through a Vibrant WASH Mart in Karnali”, creating a unique space for learning and experience-sharing. The programme highlighted how strengthening the sanitation supply chain can ensure accessibility, affordability, and dignity in hygiene solutions for all communities.

This was the first event of its kind in Karnali, bringing together 19 WASH Marts, key WASH sector agencies, representatives from the Ministry of Water Resources and Energy Development, and SUSWA’s Project Coordination Office Chief. The diverse participation made the gathering a vibrant platform where the participants could connect to discuss practical solutions for sustainable sanitation. It also aimed to strengthen inclusive and sustainable sanitation markets, providing local entrepreneurs with the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to improved sanitation across Karnali. NEST, as a leading private sector actor, showcased its commitment to driving positive change through the WASH Mart model.

SUSWA enriched the discussions with valuable insights on system strengthening and capacity building. By linking development and market actors, SUSWA highlighted how collaboration is essential to making sanitation solutions accessible, affordable, and sustainable in the long run. Participants actively engaged in interactive sessions, sharing experiences from WASH marts, importers, and wholesalers, while also exploring innovative technologies and sustainable models for rural and remote areas.

The event concluded with a powerful reminder that sanitation and hygiene are not just products to be sold, but a pathway to dignity, health, and long-term community well-being.

ESTABLISHMENT OF 20 WASH MARTS AND STRENGTHENING SANITATION MARKET



Photo: Bina Bista

So far, SUSWA has supported 20 WASH Marts across Karnali, showcasing sanitation products in 21 market centres and 13 communities to improve access to essential hygiene items. Nearly 4,000 ceramic pans, 2,100 plastic pans, and 5,000 handwashing facilities have been sold, with rising commode sales reported in Jajarkot, Rukum West, and Jumla.

The initiative not only increases the availability of quality sanitation products but also raises awareness about safe hygiene practices among communities. By monitoring sales and engaging suppliers, SUSWA is helping build a sanitation market that ensures communities can access affordable and durable products locally. These efforts are a significant step toward improving hygiene standards, health outcomes, and overall community well-being in Karnali.



SUSWA and LUKE Finland Collaboration: Research to Strengthen Climate-Resilient WASH in Rural Nepal

Illustration from SUSWA's upcoming flipchart

SUSWA has strengthened its contribution to climate-resilient WASH and established a strategic partnership by initiating a research collaboration with the Natural Resources Institute, Finland (LUKE) in spring 2024. Discussions on the collaboration began early in 2024, followed by the signing of a partnership agreement, joint research and data collection plans, over thirty key-informant expert interviews, and the development of a comprehensive household-level questionnaire.

The autumn of 2024 marked the training of SUSWA staff as enumerators for the household survey. Field data was collected from a total of 327 households between August and September 2024. The survey produced a unique and comprehensive dataset on household perceptions of their own climate resilience, a dataset that had never before been collected in Nepal. The recorded expert interviews and questionnaire results were analysed later in the autumn, leading to the publication of two high-quality research papers in well-recognised scientific journals.

The research focused on two main themes: first, observing grassroots-level perceptions of households' climate resilience in rural Karnali; and second, identifying potential leverage points to effectively strengthen climate resilience in western Nepal.

The first paper, "An Approach for Assessing Adequacy and Effectiveness of Local Adaptation Actions," published in *Climatic Change*, analysed households' capacities for coping, adaptive, and transformative measures. Key findings highlighted that local knowledge, assets, and agency were crucial for reactive coping measures, while social organisation and learning played a larger role in preventive actions related to adaptive and transformative measures.

The second paper, "Leverage Points for Resilience: Introducing the Pyramid Framework for Strategic Adaptation Planning and Assessment," published in *Ambio*, identified eleven leverage points for resilience based on Nepali expert interviews. It also introduced a framework for strategic adaptation planning, categorising leverage points according to coping, adaptive, and transformative capacities, as well as across four different system realms.

Overall, this collaboration exemplifies a successful partnership among Finnish agencies working in climate-resilient WASH and demonstrates SUSWA's capacity for comprehensive data collection for scientific purposes. The results provide Nepal with a spectrum of leverage points that agencies can use to promote local climate resilience in rural communities and the Himalayan region more broadly.

SUSWA's First GEDSI Audit in Action

To ensure the systematic integration of GEDSI across WASH interventions, SUSWA developed a GEDSI audit approach in the previous fiscal year and put it into practice during FY 2081/82. A dedicated GEDSI Compliance Monitoring Officer was hired to lead the process and implement the approach in collaboration with project stakeholders.

The audit showed significant progress in applying GEDSI principles. All local governments in the project area had completed gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) coding in the government's accounting software, and most had inclusive participation in WASH events. At the community level, the majority of monitored tap stands were accessible, and most systems had female maintenance workers, although their involvement was still limited. At the institutional level, most toilets followed basic accessibility guidelines, but only 66% were fully disability- and menstruation-friendly. Gaps were identified in the full utilisation of accessibility tools, policy implementation, and the involvement of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities in WASH planning and implementation (OPDs).

To improve GEDSI outcomes, the audit recommends providing more support to local governments for implementing GEDSI policies and involving OPDs in WASH planning. Refresher training is needed to train the Women, Children, and Senior Citizen Section on GRB. At the community and school levels, greater effort should be made to encourage women's active role in decisions and procurement. Accessibility audits should be conducted regularly to assess the current status and ensure that all toilets are accessible and user-friendly. Additionally, menstrual hygiene facilities in schools should be improved. Schools should also be supported to mobilise adolescent groups to promote inclusive and menstrual-friendly WASH environments. SUSWA will work closely with the respective WASH Units to follow up on the GEDSI audit recommendations during the first six months of FY 2082/83.



Photo: Rita Khadka

Celebrating National Sanitation Week with Community Awareness Activities in SUSWA Project Areas



Photo: Nalgad WASH UNIT

From 5–11 June 2025, local governments, schools, sanitation stakeholders, community members, and various partners across Karnali Province came together to celebrate National Sanitation Week. Led by the Government of Nepal, this annual event emphasises the promotion of safe, inclusive, and sustainable sanitation services and behaviors.

This year's slogan, "Inclusivity in Safe Sanitation Services is Our Commitment," highlighted that sanitation is not limited to infrastructure alone but is a collective process involving behavior change, awareness-raising, and the active participation of all.

Within the SUSWA project areas, the week was marked by a variety of activities. Patke (Bangad Kupinde Municipality), Charikola Tol (Darma Rural Municipality), and Layta (Darma Rural Municipality) were declared fully sanitised communities. Community-led initiatives included waste collection, construction of pits for non-biodegradable waste management, and tree planting. Students and youth actively participated through sanitation classes, quiz competitions, and poetry contests, increasing awareness among the younger generation.

Additionally, in a province-level dialogue co-hosted by the Federation of Drinking Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN) Karnali and SUSWA, mayors, deputy mayors, engineers, and WASH champions discussed local achievements and future priorities, strengthening collaboration and commitment to sustainable sanitation in the region.



From Training to Transformation: Menstrual Hygiene Management in Mugu

Photo: Titlana K.C

In many parts of Karnali, menstruation is surrounded by myths and restrictions. Practices like Chaupadi, where women are forced to stay away from home during their periods, still exist in some communities. But in the remote valleys of Mugu Pulu, things are different.

Mengdi lama explains that in her community, there is no Chaupadi. “We don’t stay outside, we can touch others, eat normal food, and even enter temples during our periods; there is no such restriction in our culture,” she says. “Menstruation is natural. Taking care of yourself is important, and nothing bad will happen if you do.” Her words are simple but powerful, challenging long-held myths and inspiring other women to think differently about their bodies.

Her journey to change menstrual hygiene began with a simple question: Can women in our village make their own sanitary pads? Before attending SUSWA’s Dignified Menstruation Management and Sanitary Pad making training, she didn’t even know it was possible. “I thought sanitary pads were something you buy from the market, something we cannot afford or reach,” she recalls. Her curiosity drove her to join the training, which was more than just learning; it was life-changing. Before in Pulu, women struggled to stay clean during their menstruation. Cleaning yourself in freezing water was almost impossible in the harsh winters of Mugu. “It was torture,” she remembers, shivering as she recounts the early mornings spent washing in icy water. Even though everyone knew hygiene was important, the lack of access to water and extreme cold made it very difficult to follow proper menstrual practices.

Mengdi learned to make eco-friendly, safe, and affordable sanitary pads from locally available materials. She practiced tirelessly at home, starting with old cloth and gradually mastering the technique. But the training was more than just pad-making. She learned why menstrual hygiene is crucial for women’s health, understanding that using clean pads and changing them regularly prevents infections, rashes, and other complications. She realized that pads must be changed every few hours, as prolonged use can cause discomfort and irritation, and that proper washing, drying, and hand hygiene are essential, even in harsh winter conditions.

Empowered by her new knowledge and skills, Mengdi began making pads for herself and soon started sharing her expertise with other women in the community. The pads she produced were durable, comfortable, and environmentally friendly, providing a solution in areas where proper waste disposal is difficult. Her efforts didn’t stop at production—she also taught other women both the craft of making pads and the importance of menstrual hygiene. Today, most women in her community prefer using these homemade pads. “We are grateful to SUSWA for bringing this training to us. It was also surprising and encouraging to see men openly talking about menstruation, it made a big difference for all of us,” she says.

This is Mengdi’s story, and her journey reminds us all: empowerment starts with curiosity, grows with learning, and multiplies when shared.



VOICES FROM THE GROUND



"In our remote village of Mangri, school sanitation and menstrual hygiene were once major challenges. With support from SUSWA, we established our first self-sustaining school sanitation fund, which allows us to regularly purchase essential supplies like soap, towels, and toilet cleaners. The most encouraging part is that teachers, parents, and students now work together to maintain clean toilets and practice proper hygiene. SUSWA's awareness programmes have truly changed our mindset, and this collective effort has created a lasting culture of sanitation and menstrual hygiene. I hope our initiative inspires other schools to strengthen community-led sanitation and hygiene awareness."

– Sonam Chhirang Lama, Chairperson, Shree Budha Model Secondary School, Mangri, Mugu

Water Quality Testing Training

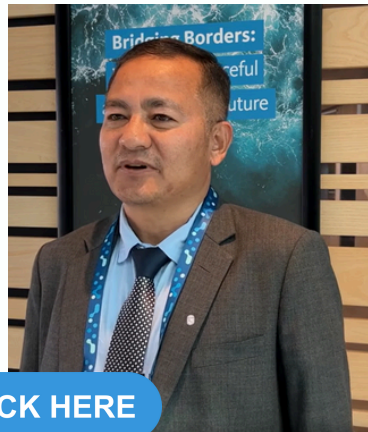
Water quality testing is one of the critical capacities of local governments and technical support staff who maintain water supply systems. Having skilled personnel and the required technical equipment in all municipalities and rural municipalities ensures that water quality can be tested even in the remotest locations, with necessary measures taken to keep water safe.



SUSWA organised a three-day training in August 2025 to strengthen the technical capacities of local governments to ensure safer and more sustainable water services across Karnali. Participants gained knowledge on the National Drinking Water Quality Standards, the steps and processes of water quality testing and monitoring, and practical guidance on how to conduct testing effectively.

Special thanks go to Ms. Sanju Lamichhane, Senior Divisional Engineer and Section Chief of the Quality Improvement and Service Surveillance Section, as well as SUSWA's focal person for the Department of Water and Sewerage Management, who joined the sessions to share her expertise on Nepal's National Drinking Water Quality Standards and contextualized the steps and processes within the national water quality surveillance mechanism.

[CLICK HERE](#)



INSIGHT
A career chat with SUSWA's Technical Specialist Narayan Singh Khawas on multiple uses of water services

[CLICK HERE](#)

Photo / video: RWSN



CLICK HERE!

IS YOUR SCHOOL MHM-FRIENDLY?

Jumla's own Man Bahadur Kunwar, an influencer and an National MHM Goodwill Ambassador, Rekha Joshi bring humour and truth to the topic to break the period stigma. Watch this video and join the movement, one laugh, one voice at a time.





Thank you for reading!

We appreciate your time and interest. Stay connected with us for more news, stories, and updates from the field.



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