



## FIRST PERSON Living Positively with HIV/AIDS

### An HIV-positive widow is reaching out to help others



Photo: USAID/Shanta Gurung

An HIV/AIDS peer educator discusses HIV prevention with rickshaw pullers waiting for passengers in Nepal near the border with India.

***“My health status does not let me take up strenuous physical work. Yet, I do not like to stay idle. I have found a purpose that makes me move on in life. I hope I will be able to continue to be of service to my community,” said Goma, an HIV-positive widow. In collaboration with the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, USAID is working to help people like Goma battle the discrimination and stigma associated with the disease.***

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After marrying, Goma accompanied her husband to Mumbai, India. A year later, they had a baby boy and life was filled with joy. They returned to Nepal to join their families. But back home, Goma’s husband developed a fever and gradually became weak. Doctors found that he was HIV positive. Goma also tested HIV positive. The news that they both “have AIDS” spread quickly and was followed rapidly by another rumor: that HIV/AIDS spreads through a single touch. Even their families refused to see them. Six months later, Goma’s husband died. Even on his deathbed, his family refused to give him water to drink. Goma became depressed and sometimes considered suicide, but knew it could not come to that: she had a little baby to take care of.

Outreach workers at a local USAID-supported organization that works on AIDS prevention and care found Goma. They were determined to help erase the stigma of the disease and help her lead a normal life. Approaching Goma’s family, the outreach workers provided them and others in her community with an orientation on HIV/AIDS and the debilitating affects of discrimination. It was a turning point in Goma’s life — she dedicated herself to winning this struggle.

In 2002, the organization asked her to join its staff as a peer educator. Having seen the difference it made her in own life, Goma jumped at the chance to help. Finding courage, identity and purpose in life, Goma began to help others living with HIV/AIDS by conducting awareness education and counseling and distributing educational materials. Her efforts have been successful: she is now admired and accepted by her community, and her family, once indifferent to her anguish, today treat her with respect. Goma is recognized as a local leader and advocate for HIV-positive people and against the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS. Since 2004, she has been president of a forum for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Today, Goma is happy. Her son is 10 years old and goes to school regularly. And she no longer contemplates suicide, not only because she is a mother, but also because she has found her purpose in life.