

Personal Statement, September 2022
Dawa Sherpa
Women Advocacy Project (WAP), Harare, Zimbabwe

Dear JJCF Board Members,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your contribution towards my fellowship this summer. In the midst of economic challenges and rising prices, your financial support was so valuable for me during my stay in Harare, Zimbabwe. It's been a few weeks since I returned to the U.S., and I am still processing how challenging the Zimbabwean economy is and concerned about where it is headed.

I spent my summer as a peace fellow for Women Advocacy Project (WAP) in Harare, Zimbabwe. This organization focuses on the economic empowerment of girls and young women from vulnerable communities of Harare. The primary focus of WAP is to provide income-generating opportunities for its beneficiaries in order to assist young girls with their education fees and for single mothers to provide for their children. WAP currently supports its beneficiaries through a liquid dish soap making and selling project. Currently, this project is benefiting around 60 plus girls. By giving financial independence and empowerment, WAP hopes to abolish the practice of early marriage in its communities.

Spending this summer working with WAP has been the most rewarding work I have done so far. Although it was full of challenges at a personal and professional level, these obstacles turned into opportunities for me to recognize the areas where I could grow more. My primary goal for the summer was to help WAP be a self-sustaining project. This goal was crucial for WAP since their funding was running out soon, and they had to be prepared to run the project on their own if no further funding was received soon. Regardless of the funding situation, WAP understood that being self-reliant was crucial for the project's longevity. Therefore, most of my summer went into utilizing my business background to help WAP project become a long-term business. Some of the important areas I focused on are cutting the cost of production, production efficiency, increasing sustainability, making the project process more user-friendly, financial organization and management, and facilitating basic infrastructures such as water, transport, and electricity at the project center. In addition, one unexpected but an important task I accomplished this summer was securing a vehicle donation for WAP to assist them with their transportation needs. Another big job for the summer was to collect preliminary data for the education fund that will be launched next year by WAP and Advocacy Project. This fund will assist WAP beneficiaries in completing their secondary-level education.

Overall, I am very thankful for the opportunity to work with WAP this summer. WAP's project for women's education and empowerment resonates with me personally, and being able to contribute towards its goals was a true honor for me. Growing up in Nepal, where gender biases stem from our patriarchal culture, I understood that the only way I could achieve my dreams and lead the life I desire is through education. Therefore, I am passionate about advocating for women's education and financial freedom. I believe that education is a human right that cannot be conditioned to what gender we are born as.

Lastly, I know I will take all the learnings from this summer on to my next projects whether it will be in the states or abroad. In addition, I hope one day like WAP, I will be able to create an education and entrepreneurship project for women in marginal communities of Nepal.

Once again, thank you so much for your help this summer. I am truly grateful.

Sincerely,

Dawa Sherpa