



### **Namaste.**

I made a lot of incredible memories while participating in a 10 day Veterinary Study Tour with Heifer Project International in Nepal. The most special memories, surprisingly, were not seeing the amazing and breath-taking Himalayan beauties, Everest and Annapurna, or even riding an Asian elephant in the pristine Chitwan Park Preserve and finding a one-horned rhinoceros and her calf. The most significant memories were those I have

of sitting and listening to women born to a difficult world of poverty and gender inequity, who found the strength and courage to overcome tremendous obstacles and create a better, more fulfilling life for themselves and their families. With the help of Heifer and its partners, and with the help of others in their communities, these women have made a future for themselves, their children, their husbands and their fellow sisters. They shared their stories of what family pressures, cultural differences, and their understandable fears nearly denied them.

With grace, honesty and emotion these women explained that before the Heifer trainings they were unable to show their faces in public; unable to read or understand how to manage money; unable to provide even the basic health and nutritional needs of their families. But with the gift of a goat or a water buffalo, these women could stand alone, with their beautiful faces shining, and introduce themselves in the presence of 150 men, women and children of their community and speak of what they had learned and achieved: the ability to provide proper nutrition for their family; to understand why it was important to feed their girl children as much as their boy children and to educate them equally as well; to be allowed access to a loan that allowed them to start a small-goods store and earn additional income; to understand that a gift could be respect and kindness, a scoop of rice, a cup of tea, or help with chores while another's family mourns the loss of a loved one; to give a gift and expect nothing in return; that to change the world, they must first change themselves. I found the most profound stories were those told about how before their trainings, these women had a tremendous amount of work to be done with no resources and virtually no support from anyone. They worked alone, always with too much to do. After Heifer, they gained significant things like sanitation, functional literacy, knowledge about caring for their livestock, and community banking. But they spoke also of gaining a sisterhood, and how much strength they have in their sisters - sisters for life.

These women had taken tiny bits of education and help, and they had flourished. They were not at all stupid; far from it, they were bright, motivated, and incredibly capable. After hearing their stories, I felt such admiration and respect for them. I felt grateful, humbled and amazed by their stories. I felt hope. Hope that many, many more families would overcome in the way that these women had.

I am so grateful to have learned about the Twelve Cornerstones. As an integral part of the Heifer training, these principles create a foundation of sustainable development that helps individuals move out of poverty, end their hunger, educate their children, and in doing so, spread hope and dignity one family, one community, at a time. It offers these women and their families a future. It is something that to see first hand, you can never, ever be the same as before. In your heart, you are changed. **Namaste**, and peace to you.