

Power to Empowerment Changes Stories



The stories of change in positions of rural women



A member of



Power to Empowerment, Change Stories

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Foreword

It is our pleasure to share with you the 'The stories of change in positions of rural women' that captures some of the major positive changes we have brought into the lives of the poor and marginalized people in Nepal.

We have been documenting success stories, good practices, and lessons learnt, and sharing them widely. We have presented the stories of the most marginalized women living in the rural and remote areas in this collection.

This booklet documents how the POWER project has contributed to overcome the social stigma and discrimination so that rural women can live a dignified life.

The stories of change, progress are only the representatives from mainly Western part of Nepal. The book also witnesses the changes brought in the lives and current socio-economic and political position of the rural women.

ADRA Nepal, Caritas Nepal, INF Nepal and LWF Nepal work in close collaboration and coordination with local partners, the government agencies at the local, provincial and federal levels. This success is the combined result of the cooperation among the supporting partners, communities, government agencies and the implementing partner organizations. The consortium members would like to express gratitude to the Government of Nepal and supporting agencies including Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), ALWS Australia, ADRA Australia, Caritas Australia and INF Australia.

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Table of Content

POWER to Empowerment	5
Capacity Building for Elected Women	9
Promoting Governance at Community Group	10
Empowering Elected Representatives	12
Adolescents Fighting against Early Child Marriage	13
Mobilizing Community against Gender Based Violence	14
Women Human Rights Defender in Action	16
Livestock Supports Sustained Livelihood	17
Defending Women Rights	19
Women Pressing to Ban Alcohol	20
Empowering Elected Representatives	21
GESI Approach Towards Reducing Polygamy and Violence	23
Community Women Strengthening Economy	24
People Living with Disability Can Be a Game Changer	26
People Living with Disability Raising Awareness	27
Being Dalit Women: A Struggle for Status	28
Mayor Initiates Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting	30
Defending Rights of Women at the Cost of Personal Safety	31
Empowerment, Inclusion and Gender Equality through Cooperatives	32
Women Rights Defender	34
Enhancing Capacity of Elderly Women	36
Change in Perception: GESI promoted by Male Members in the community	38
Age Does Not Prevent Determination	39
Women Unit in Search of Partnership	40
Community Celebrates Women's Day	42

Power to Empowerment

National Context

For centuries, women in Nepal have lived in isolation and exclusion, being deprived of rights. The political change of 1990 was a milestone for women's liberation from exclusion and discrimination to becoming relatively free. Promulgation of the Constitution in 2015 has led to three tiers of government, Local, Provincial and Federal. The Constitution seeks to ensure equal participation of all communities, including women, Dalits, indigenous people and people from the backward areas, in all three tiers.

In 2017, Nepali people elected a total of 35,041 representatives to serve in 753 local level units across the country. Of the elected representatives, 14,352 or 40.96% were women (Election Commission 2017). The Local Level Election Act requires two of the members elected in each ward to be women, with one of the two women representing a Dalit community.

Of the total 330 seats up for grab in the Provincial Legislatures, 194 went to women, who were elected in seven provincial assemblies. Altogether 112 of 334 members of the Federal Parliament, which includes the House of Representatives and the National Assembly, are women. The 275-member Lower House has 90 women and the 59-member Upper House has 22 women. (Election Commission 2017)

Although the share of women's presence in the local governments is over 40 percent, which includes the representation of Dalits, indigenous and marginalized communities, the Rural Municipalities and Municipalities of Province 1, Province 5, Karnali and Sudurpaschim are in need of a massive investment in the social sector in order to uplift the women, people with disability, Dalits, Janajati and economically backward people.

New Civil Code Act, Domestic Violence Act, Sexual Harassment at Workplace and Equal Property Rights are some of the instruments built of late to protect women. Some gender biased acts are in the process of amendment.

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy is in the initial stage of implementation at the local level. Similar is the case with the local level community based organizations. Despite their commitments, local levels are yet to start the implementation due to a lack of capacity.

Considering the importance of GESI, Nepal government has adopted a national policy of gender mainstreaming in all aspects of development. Gender Responsive Budget Committee (GRBC) has been working at the Ministry of Finance since 2013.

The government follows Gender Responsive Budget Formulation Guidelines 2069 in preparing the budget. The joint secretary of the Ministry of Finance chairs the Gender Responsive Budget Committee.

Based on the principles of equity, equality and justice, incorporation of the gender concept in the budgetary process has introduced a new approach in development planning. Similarly, the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MWCS) has formulated policies to tackle Gender Based Violence (GBV) and ensure Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) at the national, provincial and municipal levels.

Awareness programs on GBV and GESI have been developed and implemented in all levels by the MWCS. Gender Focal Points have been established in all the levels to create a gender sensitive environment in the workplace. The National Planning Commission has been developing and executing women-focused and women sensitive plans and programs.

Due to the lack of capacity and resources, however, the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) policies are yet to be fully operational. Unlike its predecessors, the Local Governance Operation Act 2074 does not have a provision to compel the local governments to allocate a specified percentage of budget targeting women. There is no minimum threshold in the allocation of women focused budget by local governments in the new federal structure. The Village Development Committees of the past used to have the threshold.

The local, provincial and national elections have changed the political landscape for Nepali women, Dalits and other marginalized groups. The new laws and policies have established GESI. Yet the issues of Gender Based Violence, Child Marriage and discrimination on the basis of caste are still prevalent.

Rationale of the Project

Although Nepal has implemented a number of progressive policies aimed to create a gender friendly and inclusive environment, the country continues to be a very patriarchal society. Patriarchy still hurts the lives and forward momentum of Nepali women in several sectors.

Development Advocate Nepal, a quarterly journal of UNDP 2019, has shown some grim scenarios in this context. According to the report, the adult female literacy rate in Nepal is just 49 per cent while that for Nepali men is 72 per cent. Although the constitution and laws protect women, 28 per cent of Nepali women are reported to have faced sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in some stage of their life.

The Journal reports that out of seven provinces, Karnali, Sudurpaschim and Province-5 have a worse scenario in terms of the percentage of ownership of property by women, literacy, maternal mortality and violence against women. In Province 5, only 17.97 percent of women hold property with the percentage being 6.21 for Karnali and 6.08 in Sudurpachim.

Despite a certain level of progress, gender inequality is deep rooted and some people are comfortable not to change, especially those who benefit from it. (UNDP's Development Advocate Journal March 2019).

Nepal is already three years into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the world, and ensure women empowerment, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. SDGs also recognize good governance and strong accountable institutions as crucial to building lasting peace prosperity.

As POWER subproject promotes core ideas of equality, equity, inclusion, gender empowerment, governance in community and promotion of private sector, it will contribute Nepal's efforts to achieve Social Development Goals, particularly gender parity by 2030.

Objectives of Project

Promotion of Women's Empowerment and Rights Targeting Rural Women (POWER), a sub-project, has been implemented in 500 community structures, Groups (women and adolescents), Cooperatives, CBOs and Self-help groups from 10 districts of four provinces of Nepal selected on the basis of their Human Development Index (HDI) by four organizations.

Although each of the four organizations has a different modality of implementing programs to overcome the suffering of women from discrimination, exclusion and violence, they have been implementing POWER Project together. Their common mission is to achieve Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) at all levels, involving local communities, elected local bodies and elected representatives and improve their governance.

Another objective of POWER is to promote gender, women's empowerment and inclusion at all levels. The project also aims to encourage all the concerned institutions to develop and effectively implement Gender and Social Inclusion Policy (GESI). Yet another objective of the project is building the capacity of elected representatives and Community Based Organizations and generating awareness among women in Gender Based Violence (GBV).

The project also aims to reduce the gap in access to financial resources, sensitize people on GESI, enhance capacity of elected representatives of local governments, empower community women leaders and improve the governance at all levels. Use of Gender Analysis Tools for the intervention is another important part of the project.

Implementation Approach

In the context of the capacity building requirements of elected representatives, mainstreaming GESI and improving governance level, the sub-project intervenes through orientation, training, advocacy and launching of public programs at community levels and local government levels.

All four partners will apply gender analysis tools to find out where the need for intervention lies and what kind of intervention.

Experiences have shown that the involvement of civil society organizations through communities and close collaboration and coordination with the elected local governments is necessary in implementing GBV, women empowerment programs and GESI.

These joint efforts can reduce the gap in access to financial resources, sensitization on GESI, enhance capacity of elected representatives of local governments and community women leader and improve the governance. The recent interventions have produced certain results in raising awareness and internalizing GESI at all levels.

Funded by Australian Government- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), ADRA-Nepal, CARITAS-Nepal, INF-Nepal and LWF-Nepal have been implementing POWER as a sub project of their ongoing projects within GOAL, NLRP, WEAL and NDP respectively.

Change Stories

Capacity Building for Elected Women

The new Federal Constitution of Nepal has made mandatory provision for women to participate in the government affairs at local, provincial and federal level. Nationwide, more than the fourteen thousand women have been elected at Local Government. However, the majority of elected women representatives has inadequate knowledge and skills about the process, laws and regulations. A survey conducted by The Asia Foundation states 12 percent of women representatives are illiterate and another 22 percent were just literate (*Nepal's Locally Elected Women Representatives: Exploratory Study of Needs and Capacity: 2018*). This has been one of the challenges for the women candidates for amplifying their voices to influence on decision making process.

Jhampu Jaisi, 31, an elected member of ward number 7 of Kanakasundari RM of Jumla District, Karnali Province, took part in the first Municipal Council meeting without limited knowledge about her rights and duties. The municipality is situated in a remote, rugged land in the northern part of Jumla District, bordering with Mugu and Kalikot, some 700 kilometer



away from capital city Kathmandu. Kankasundari RM passed the first budget with small allocation under the title of women, children, elderly, Dalits and people living with disability in FY 2017/18. Majority of the municipal plans and budget were proposed by elected male members of RM, female members like Jaisi, who used to spend majority of her time to the farm or in the household chores, had endorsed the budget without questioning and proposing amendments.

Attending orientation program organized under the Promotion of Women's Empowerment and Rights (POWER) by INF, a sub-project within Women's Empowerment and Livelihood (WEAL) Project, Jaisi has learnt about constitutional provisions, laws, regulations and process of participatory planning and budgeting. Jaisi having full knowledge about her legal rights and status is attending the forthcoming budget council planned for the last week of June 2019. "The orientation program on planning and budgeting of the local governments has enhanced my knowledge, skills, role and responsibilities to table new proposals and amendments in the Council" says Jaisi.

Ms. Jaisi further says, "I am in a position to debate and defend my proposals strongly, male counterparts cannot override their ruling this time. I can proudly say, that we will present our case for a gender friendly budget."

"We have realized that elected women representatives require more capacity building programs on proposal writing, legal rights and responsibilities," says Shakuntala Subedi, Gender officer of INF-Nepal, who looks after POWER Project from Nepalgunj office.

Promoting Governance at Community Group

Dhansara Badi, 62, a single woman lives in a remote village called 'Room Bestaj' of Bhagbatimai RM, ward number 2, in Dailekh District. Being the Chair of Pragatishil Krishi Pashupalan Samuha, she expressed a few words and took her seat in front of the group to start the meeting. In the presence of twenty women, Pratikchya Sunar, 21, member secretary, presented the agenda and proposal with consent from the chair.

It was not the first meeting of this kind. For the last four years, the 11th of very month on Nepali calendar, the twenty members of Pragatishil Krishi Pashupalan Samuha gather to discuss their plans, agenda and issues. The group provides loans to its members at low interest rates to implement livelihood related activities including vegetables production and livestock raising.

Since the last eight months when the POWER project has started, the group has initiated discussing issues of child marriage, domestic violence, exclusion, discrimination and mainstreaming gender and social inclusion approach.

“Along with providing loan to the members for productive livelihoods options, we also discuss and implement plans on the issue of domestic violence, discriminations, exclusion, sanitation and other issue as well,” says Dhansara Badi.

“As the group provides loan at low interest rate for growing vegetables, rearing goat and livestock, poultry, it opens enormous employment opportunities for low income excluded and marginalized woman,” expresses Dhansara Badi who herself had a bitter experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

The group also organized programs like folk song competition (dohari), quiz contest against violence against women, early child marriage and Chaupadi in two programs like 16 days campaign on Violence against Women and International Women’s Day.

The RM chairperson Dan Bahadur Thapa says, “ I get inspiration from a Dalit woman group that has been able to successfully conduct the meetings and take decisions following the basic governance rules.”



The group members are not only organizing campaigns against gender based violence but also coordinating with rural municipality to leverage resources for empowering women at local level.

“We have been making intervention in the community through advocacy and training. Although the project has just started, POWER helps internalize GESI components among the members of community,” says Radha Malla, GESI Technical Advisor of CBO to POWER Project.

Empowering Elected Representatives

Being an elected representative or position alone does not guarantee the empowerment of indigenous people and women. Experiences of Hari Kala Saru Magar, 43, indigenous woman and elected member of Birendranagar Municipality, ward number 14, have shown that elected members need orientations and training to equip with existing laws and regulations and process of participation to defend their proposals and plans. Discriminated and deprived for centuries, only a few elected women know legal and other rights. Women are more disadvantaged than elected men.

Unknown about her role, responsibilities and rights, Saru Magar would tender her signature in all the documents without questioning, “I was a



mere spectator for over year. I attended three rural municipal assemblies and 30 meetings of the ward committee; I just did what the other senior colleagues told me to do,” she shares.

Even the chair of ward and other male members rarely bothered to tell her about the legal rights of elected members. Saru Magar got an opportunity to make herself able to enhance knowledge through orientation on GESI and legal act organized by Caritas Nepal targeting elected representative women. “This was my first ever experiences. I had never participated in such kind of activities. Among 41 elected members, 29 were female. The program was facilitated by advocates, trainers from community police and experts from Abaz NGO,” she says, “This was an opportunity for me to learn and broaden my perspective. I learned about the process, law and regulations and be updated on the current policies.”

Adolescents Fighting against Early Child Marriage

Samjhna Gorathoki, 16, born in a family of marginalized farmer, lives in Ghauda Tole, Belbas, wards number 6 of Swargadwari Municipality of Pyuthan District. Recently she appeared for class 11 board exam from Amar Secondary school. She is the chairperson of Adolescents Group, leading 13 members. Her active participation and energetic vibes helped her to be chosen as the leader of the group.

She says, “It is a matter of pride and challenges to lead the group and raise awareness campaign against child marriage, violence against women and caste based discrimination.” She has been able to acquire skill to identify the problems and address them through Results Oriented Leadership Development Program (ROLDP) organized by ADRA-Nepal in close collaboration with local partners Rupantaran and Fulbari Integrated Rural Development Organization-Nepal (FIRDO-Nepal) and ward office.

The adolescents were asked to prepare a project and setting priority on Child Right, Early Child Marriage, and Child Violence. She did not know about the concept of GESI and its policy before. For them gender meant women and inclusion meant mainstreaming of Dalits.

Almost 40 percent of the population in ward number 6 are adolescents, their participations and involvement is necessary to implement GESI friendly activities to raise awareness against child marriage and GBVs.



“Early child marriage, is one of the leading cause for violence against women and polygamy, has declined over the times, it continues to be in practice in the areas,” says Reshma K.C, Assistant Women Development Inspector of Swargadwari Municipality, “Formation of this kind of adolescent group will contribute a lot to minimize early child marriage.”

“Apart from organizing various programs among the adolescent youth, our priority is to make our community free of early child marriage. There is lack of awareness, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, patriarchal and conservative approach to address such issues,” says Gorathoki.

“POWER Project is now piloted in 5 wards of Swargadwari Municipality of Pyuthan in the first year out of 18 wards of 6 different municipalities and Rural Municipalities under which ADRA-Nepal in collaboration of its local partners Rupantaran and FIRDO-Nepal running Good Governance and Livelihood (GOAL) Project,” says Purna Shrestha, project officer ADRA Nepal.

Mobilizing Community against Gender Based Violence

Jun Devi Pyakurel, 22, a resident of Baidarbada, has completed a course as an auxiliary nurse-midwife; she has decided to work as a community mobilizer following her long-cherished dream to work in her own community, in ward no. 7 of Kanakasundari RM under the POWER sub-project.

“Working in the project for the last seven months, I find the project is on the side of the poor and oppressed women of the region. I have been

working with the elected women leaders of local level, community groups, and victims of gender-based violence. I am also launching advocacy campaigns against gender discriminations, the gender inequality and exclusions of all kinds,” says Pyakurel,.

Working with the local team leader Pramila Mahat, Pyakurel has been visiting the communities and groups organizing various programs related to women empowerment. “My own experiences in the last eight months have shown that the some of our programs have enhanced the capacity of women to understand different aspects of gender based violence, discriminations, exclusion and gender inequality,” she says.

Pyakurel found the level of interest and engagement of women exciting while conducting advocacy campaign in the area of raising awareness level against gender discriminations, Gender Based Violence (GBV), Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and systematically claim their rights and entitlements provisioned in the constitution.

“As Junu Pyakurel is from our community, I find very comfortable to work with her. She understands our problems, difficulties and our need. I have been consulting with her on major issues,” says Jhampu Jaisi, a ward member.

Although INF has been working for long in the village through the community group to improve livelihood of women, POWER is the first advocacy sub-project implemented focusing on the women rights, gender based violence and gender discrimination.



“I have already launched a couple of advocacy campaigns including 16 days campaign for Violence against Women and International Women’s Day, organizing speech contest, quiz contest and street drama, aiming to raise the awareness against discrimination and empowerment,” she shared .

“As the result of awareness campaigns, women have started to talk openly against violence and exclusion and girls have started to go to school using sanitary pad. And, women have started to sleep inside house during their period instead of living in the shed (*Chhaupadi*),” she says

Women Human Rights Defender in Action

Nirmala Khadka, 27, a resident of Katti Village of Bhagbati RM, ward number 5, never realized that she had to be involved in several incidents relating to violence against women, child marriage, discriminations and exclusion.

From early morning to late evening, Khadka, a married living in an extended family of five, needs to alert herself to prevent child marriage, bringing girls back from Chaupadi shed, violence against women and caste and gender based discrimination.

“I have been working as a Women Human Rights Defender (WHRD) since last eight months. I am engaged in organizing group meetings where we mostly discuss on social problems. I have found that many women who are the victims of violence, live in silence,” says Khadka.



She further express, “There are laws to prevent caste based discrimination, child marriage and violence against women, but hardly anybody knows about them. What I have been doing now is raising awareness among the people and elected representatives about the existing laws and policies. Despite of the long hour walk to cover the area, I am constantly counseling women, third gender, people living with disability, single women, Dalits and marginalized community, men and adolescents.”

She experienced that, male members of her community have misconception about the gender and they hold the view that gender is just about women. “This perception of men also needs to change to end the violence, child marriage and discrimination,” she shares. Having lived in silence for years, recently a third gender person came to consult Khadka about the legal and other provisions to safeguard the status.

“I briefed him about the rights and status of third gender in society and encouraged him to reveal his gender. This is the first case of third gender in our area and may be many other will come out in public,” says Khadka.

Dan Bahadur Thapa, Chairperson of Bhagbati Mai RM shares, “We are working together to address the issues related to domestic violence, child marriage among others in the rural municipality.”

Livestock Supports Sustained Livelihood

Tulsi Resi Magar, 35, a resident of Gadhi of Birendranagar Municipality ward number 14, experienced many ups and downs in the last three years. However, she was able to change her fate with hard work and dedication.

Started goat rearing with collective loan of Rs. 180,000 from cooperative for group of 15, Tulsi Resi Magar received Rs.150,000 in a year selling the goats from collective farm in two years.

With the money she earned, she purchased a male and 3 she-goats and two buffalos, within six months Magar’s goats gave birth to four female kids. “Now I have four goats and two buffalo,” declares Saru Magar, a mother of two children. Selling 15 liters milk a day at the price of Rs. 50 per liter her monthly income increased to Rs. 23,000 from milk and almost Rs. 10,000 from vegetables and poultry.

“I am selling the vegetables at varying prices. The price of per kilo of cauliflower is Rs. 60; cabbage is Rs. 80 and tomato is Rs. 100. I have already sold vegetables worth Rs.10,000,” says Magar.



Regardless of her disadvantaged background, she has now amassed over Rs. 200,000 of sellable produce. Proving to be a successful farmer, Saru Magar is inspiring other poor from her neighborhood.

As her business is taking up, POWER sub-project comes with a Gender Equality and Social Inclusive and empowerment program supporting to develop marketing strategy, plans and systematic way to conduct the business in a gender-friendly manner.

“Unlike in the past, we maintain transaction register where I have been writing income and expenditure and our investment and profit. This is the major things I have learned recently. The training also sensitizes my husband who is showing more willingness to share workload,” says Resi Magar.

Although she had married at the age of 16, Resi Magar never faced domestic violence. “Of course, I worked much longer than my husband but I don’t have any complain over it,” proudly shares Magar.

Not only took part actively in the last two campaigns launched by the cooperative, Magar was also declared winner in speech contest where she put emphasis on women empowerment and gender issues organized on the occasion of International Women’s Day.

Defending Women Rights

Whether it is an early in the morning or late in the night, Gauri Barapate, 35, a woman right activist is always prepared to rush whenever she get call from the victims facing violence . Barapate, a resident of Sari Tole, ward number 5 of Swargdwari Municipality, have been continuously counseling women to raise voice against violence, discriminations and exclusion when faced at home and outside. As her mission continues, women, who prefer to live in silent tolerating ill treatment, have slowly started to speak breaking century's old taboo.

“I know many of our women have been facing violence at home but only a small number are speaking openly in the community” says Barapate, who had encountered many traumas of helpless women requiring support in her childhood. Visualized from her childhood to work to rescue women from pain, she has accepted the proposal to be a woman activist.

“This is my early dream to be an activist to protect women. With support from my family, I have decided to take this responsibility,” she further says.

Apart from taking care of mentally disorder brother-in-law, elderly mother-in-law and two children, she has to take care of all household works. Barapate visits house-to-house in her areas to discuss the issue of early child marriage, violence against women, exclusion on the basis of caste and gender.



Member of Suryamukhi Udhyami Mahila Samuha, Barapate, whose husband is now in Saudi Arabia, knows pains and the suffering of women in the area where women has to work for 13-14 hours a day. In the last eight months, she has convinced many women to come out publicly against the violence.

Till date five cases related to violence against women have been settled by her. Out of five, 2 cases were referred to judicial committee of Swargadwari Municipality and one to municipal level women network.

Although Barapate has not received any direct threat from male, she feels insecure, however she is committed to continue to work whatever the circumstances come across her journey.

Her works is getting easier as she has been working in a close coordination with elected representative of municipality, women network, community and FIRDO-Nepal. "I have been receiving regular support from ward chair and members, community and FIRDO-Nepal to settle things," said Barapate, who is also member of Gender Based Violence Control Network.

Women Pressing to Ban Alcohol

After the series of protest by women at different levels, the consumption of alcohol has reduced in Village of Kanakasundari RM, ward number 6 of Jumla district.

Majority of Dalits from Kulalbada have hand to mouth problems with their own food stuffs just enough for less than three months. As over use of alcohol created problems, a group of women from a Dalit community of Kulalbada Village of Kanakasundari RM, ward no 6, organized a protest in front of RM Office demanding the village be declared alcohol free on May 3. However, it is yet ban.

Led by fifty years old Shantu Kulal, a Dalit woman activist, many women joining the demonstration were the victims of domestic violence at one or the other time.

"Enough is enough. How long can we live under the threat of physical violence from our husbands, who come home, carrying sticks in their hand every day, instead carrying rice or food to feed the family," says Kulal. "We have decided to raise the voice publicly. If our chairperson and ward chair do not address our demand, we will organize more demonstrations. This is just a beginning, not an end."



“In the past, all the women, including myself, helplessly watched and listened to the pains of their colleagues. No one dared to intervene,” says Kulal, who married at the age of 14.

The group has also taken numbers of decisions to stop misuse of alcohols at their locality. For now, the women group announced fine up to Rs. 200 to those who enter their village consuming alcohol for the first time and Rs.500 for the second time.

“With their request, I am planning to table a proposal to make village alcohol free,” says Sunchari Shahi, ward member.

“Our recent experiences have shown that advocacy courses are very important to raise voices against domestic violence. Taking elected representatives and local police on board, we will help them to make program sustainable,” says Batuli Nepal, INF Group leader.

Empowering Elected Representatives

Bhagbatimai RM of Dailekh District of Karnali Province has shown a way how collaboration between the local NGOs, INGOs and elected local Government representatives can make a difference in implementing activities aiming to end all kinds of discriminations and improving Gender Equality and Social Inclusion at community level.

Chairperson of Bhagbatimai RM Dan Bahadur Thapa has been one of the key advocates of women empowerment and gender based discrimination in his village.



With his own initiatives, out of 14 elected woman and Dalit members, 12 have already attended the capacity development initiatives.

Elected under a mandatory legal provision in a reserved seat for women and Dalits at the local levels, most of the elected women do not have proper understanding about their roles and responsibilities.

“I have seen high level of confidence among the women elected representatives. I am happy to say that CBO/Federations and RM has close working relations and coordination” says Thapa.

CBO/Federations Dailekh has already studied the status of women using the gender analysis tools, “Our study has revealed that there was lack of knowledge among the women elected members about their roles and responsibilities. Thus, we have focused our program to train the elected representative,” says Tanka Sunar, Coordinator CBO/Federations Dailekh.

Chairperson of RM assures to work in coordination with CBOs to empower people from excluded groups, involving them in planning, designing, selection and implementation. “This is our project and we also are equally responsible for its success and failure,” says chairperson Thapa.

GESI Approach Towards Reducing Polygamy and Violence

Economic empowerment backed by awareness campaign against gender rights is a key to alleviate violence, exclusion and discrimination against women, poor and marginalized communities. This is what Nanda Neupane, 30, mother of two, of Bayalkada ward number 14 of Birendranagar Municipality in Surkhet District has to share.

Women in Bayalkada, are still living under the shadow of discrimination, physical and mental violence and poverty.

With the unity of women and economic upliftment, things are changing now. Established with the support from Caritas Nepal, Bayalkada Navajyoti Saving and Credit Cooperatives is the source of livelihood of woman like Neupane.

Established to promote saving for future security and independence along with provision of small loan to women, the cooperative has set its working areas in the social sector empowering women and rescuing them from the suffering of exclusion, discrimination and violence.

“I got Rs. 40,000 loan at a low interest rate; brought a buffalo from it. In just a matter of three years, I was able to buy one buffalo and a cow. I am growing vegetables in my 5 kattha of land as well. With this, I am earning Rs.25,000 a month,” says Neupane, share member of the cooperative while talking about the impact of cooperative.



Married at the age of 16, she gave birth to two children in the period of 3 years. She took all hardship: mother in the early age and taking lonely responsibility of household affairs as a fate. Her difficult journey began after her husband married thrice: second and third wife in a matter of four years.

Under a social and family pressure, Neupane did not take any legal actions. She also transferred the land ownership to her husband to settle divorce with second and third wife. “I regret the decision I had made at that time as I feel now I should have taken legal action,” she reveals.

Even though she has completed high school level education, Neupane was powerless in front of her family. She was not able to stand for herself because she lacked confident and was financially independent. She gave another chance to her husband hoping he would change his behavior. Her husband wanted to learn Korean language, so he went to Kathmandu. She would send him money somehow but his unchanged behavior disappointed her. One thing she was happy in her miserable life was being a member in the cooperative. Her advantage was her saving amount which is around Rs.100,000. “Now I am the master and bread winner,” says Neupane.

Involving in orientation and advocacy campaigns was a life changer for her, Neupane regrets not taking any legal actions against her husband but she proudly speaks, “It is never too late to change one’s life. My past was a lesson for me to build a better future. I did not take any legal actions but I took initiation to disconnect myself with him. I heard about the property being probate. I will be fighting for my rights this time.”

“We are receiving more and more complaints from women about the violence and exclusions seeking the legal remedy. Neupane has also applied in the ward to secure the ownership of property from her husband,” says Harikala Saru Magar, elected member of ward.

Community Women Strengthening Economy

After holding intense discussions, the meeting of Ghauda Tole Woman Agriculture Group has chosen the name of group members who requires loan for next month. Chaired by Chandra Budhathoki, the meeting also discussed the issues of gender equality and social inclusion, the status of child marriage and exclusion in the areas.

Taking a register book in her hand, member secretary Bashanta Budhathoki noted the decisions in minute and read aloud. After reading note, each member signed in the register.

“Our group is inclusive with representation from all the communities including the members from Dalits and indigenous. We have zero tolerance to our group members if anyone breaches the code of conduct of violence against women, early child marriage and discriminations,” says Chandra Budhathoki chairperson.

“After the implementation of POWER, we are incorporating GESI Policy in our group. All members have signed written commitments to disclose if they have been involved in violence against women, child marriage, exclusion and discrimination on the basis of caste, gender and physical,” says Ganga Pariyar, a member representing Dalit community.

Working closely with ward office, the group is also preparing a proposal to tap certain budget from ward office. The group has Rs.110,000 as its group saving; the group has provision to provide loan up to Rs. 40,000 to women without any collateral if anyone wants to run productive livelihood activities.

“With higher interest rates outside, the group has been helping women to improve livelihood investing in vegetable production and livestock and poultry. Many women are rearing goat, cow and buffalo,” explains Chandra Budhathoki, Chairperson of the group.

“Apart from lending the money, the group has been helping to uplift the life of people empowering through women,” says Mayor of Swargadwari Municipality Netra Bahadur Rokaya Chhetri.



People Living with Disability Can Be a Game Changer

The story of Jaggi Prasad Acharya (43) can be an example of how people living with disability can be a game changer in empowering women and bringing equality and inclusion. Chairperson of Ward 6 of Kanakasundari RM, Acharya announced that his ward's priority areas are people living with disability, marginalized, Dalit, women and indigenous communities.

“Educating children is a key to end gender based violence and promote gender equity, social inclusion and empowerment of women. Thus, I have convinced my ward members to allocate almost 80 percent of our budget in education sector,” says Acharya.

As he himself represents people living with disability, he understands the difficulties of marginalized, women, Dalits and indigenous people. “Since participating in the training program targeted to the local elected women representatives, our women members are more organized and more aware of their rights and duties as elected representatives now. As earlier projects focused more on empowerment of women through livelihood, POWER sub-project gives added value focusing on GESI and advocacy to generate awareness. As elected chairperson, I can say that POWER is a very important project and we are ready to work in collaboration and partnership,” says Acharya.

He has been planning to implement GESI Policy to turn his ward into a place with zero child marriage, zero violence against women and zero



discrimination in five years' time period. "The support of NGOs like INF and private sector is crucial, As INF regularly informs us about program and the ward has been sending its representatives in all the meetings. Given our regular interactions and involvement, we own POWER project with better coordination with ward, INF has been launching the program through 11 groups," he added.

People Living with Disability Raising Awareness

As a person living with disability, Bhagiram Mijar, 40, had never imagined that he would have economically sustained life and he could lead a campaign against exclusion, discrimination of his own community as well as people living with disability.

He started his journey from hopelessness, following his first wife's elopement with another man. Mijar, who was roaming in the district headquarter of Dailkeh from one to other corner for survival, found a great respite to revive after his meeting with CBO/Federations in 2016.

After receiving a livelihood support provided by LWF-Nepal under its Nepal Development Program, Mijar has never turned back.

Living with a newly married wife and two children from first wife, Mijar, a resident of Katti Village of Bhagbatimai RM ward number 5, is now earning Rs.15,000 to Rs.20,000 monthly selling shoes.

Grown up in a cobbler family, Mijar has gone through all kinds of exclusions, deprivation and caste based discrimination. He suffered discrimination for being Dalit and disable. With economic empowerment, Mijar is now championing the cause of people living with disability, inclusion at social, political and economic level.

Member of Community Based Organization of Katti, Mijar is also the coordinator of Disabled People's Organization of Katti.

"I have come to realize that people like me have to do something for people living with all disabilities and raise their issue. With some other people with disability, I presented a proposal in RM seeking certain amount of money to expand livelihood programs for people with disability," says Mijar, "During the Disability day, we have organized a program to raise awareness about the disability."

"Mijar has been taking initiative to defend the rights of people with disability. His initiatives are exemplary in our municipality," says Pabitra Nepali Badi, Executive Member of Bhagbatimai RM ward number 2.



Being Dalit Women: A Struggle for Status

Political power through elections and making mandatory provision for women involvement in political set up alone cannot guarantee empowerment and inclusion of Dalits and other marginalized community. Pabitra Sunar, 33, an elected member from Dalit community is an example.

Elected in the last local level elections on a Dalit category of Birendranagar Municipality ward number 14, she still faces two folds discriminations as a woman and Dalit.

In absence know how about laws and regulations, she attended the meeting as silent spectator casting her vote as per the wishes of majority male members. She even faced discrimination and exclusion.

“Although I am an elected member at the local level as all others; other ‘high caste’ and male members have treated me as a Dalit. There is even discrimination in the order of name in official function at ward level where my name is usually called at the end,” said Sunar.

Receiving orientation class and participating in the advocacy organized by Caritas-Nepal have helped Sunar to be very sensitive regarding her legal rights, gender and caste based discrimination, gender sensitive budget and even use of gender friendly language. She says, “I held several rounds

of discussions with executive chair of the ward and mayor and argued with them to develop criteria for the forth coming budgets. I am proposing to have gender friendly budget in the ward and municipality.” She believes that gender and social inclusion sector needs to be given priority and budget should be allocated in the specific sector for the empowerment of the vulnerable people.

Being clear about her roles and responsibility as an elected member representing Dalit and women, she expresses with a smile, “My confidence level has grown stronger. I am clear about my legal responsibility. I keep myself updated on the laws and regulation so that I can argue with the evidence whenever necessary. I am proud to work for my community and women but the motive behind my assignment is to prevent and stop discrimination.”

Confidently Sunar says, “I am very much focused about the fourth coming budget and allocating budget especially for GESI. We need to go for a long struggle to establish our equal rights in society and I am prepared for this. Given the present scenario, POWER needs to continue its advocacy and orientation program focusing on women.” Suffering from double discrimination and exclusion as Dalit and women, Sunar wants to bring change in the people’s thinking.



Mayor Initiates Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting

If anyone visits the Office of Mayor of Swargadwari Municipality at Bhingri, Pyuthan District of Province 5, he/she can see different settings. Instead of hanging a photo of construction of road or bridge or scenery, Mayor Netra Bahadur Rokaya Chhetri, a popular politician, chooses to hang a poster of Commitment of Swargdwari Municipality in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion signed by all the executive members.

Having worked closely with the civil society organizations like Rupantaran, FIRDO and ADRA-Nepal, sixty-two years old politician Mayor Chhetri seems to be influenced by importance of addressing social and gender agenda.

While the pressure is growing over local governments to allocate more budgets to physical development and infrastructures, mayor of Swargadwari Municipality Rokaya Chhetri's gives priority to social sector including gender, health and education.

"I have posted GESI commitments in front of me to remind myself, ward members and common visitors its importance in overall development. Many representatives at the ward level want more budgets for physical infrastructures like roads and bridges. But, I have been emphasizing health, gender, inclusion and education, which are equally important," says Mayor Rokaya Chhetri, "Nothing can be change without eliminating



gender based violence, child marriage and gender and caste based discrimination are pre-requisite for the development.”

Durga Regmi, advisor of Trishakti Women Saving and Credit Cooperatives and manager of Emergency Safe House said that they have been receiving a good support from municipality in a campaign to root out sexual violence, rape, child marriage, polygamy, dowry system.

“We have been implementing POWER as a part of GOAL project launching various programs including advocacy, training and orientation on GESI in collaboration with municipality and groups,” said Nirmala Acharya, General Secretary of FIRDO-Nepal.

As Municipality does not have necessary expertise and resources, Mayor Rokaya Chhetri has been taking organizations like ADRA-Nepal, Rupantaran and FIRDO-Nepal to on board as partners in the women empowerment and implementation of GESI policy and commitment.

Defending Rights of Women at the Cost of Personal Safety

Whenever incidences of domestic violence or overuse of alcohol, early child marriage and incidents of social discrimination occurs, people come knocking at the door step of Banchu Sarki, 30, a resident of Dante Okhar village of Kankasundari RM ward number 6. As a gender focal person and human right defender, Sarki follows the people without worrying about her personal security.



Mother of two sons and a daughter, Sarki's daily household chores begins early in the morning and ends late at night. Despite her busy schedule she is always ready to help the ones who is in need.

"In the last seven months following several campaigns, I have prevented six early child marriages, settled dozens of domestic violence related incidents," she proudly says.

"Before being aware of rights, I was hesitant to visit the house where the incident of domestic violence occurred. Helplessly, I would be obliged to watch the injustice committed by males. We felt awkward to attend the social and political functions. No one dared to speak in front of their husbands, even while facing abuse and torture. But things have changed now" says Sarki.

"When something goes wrong, people inform rights defender like Sarki before elected representatives like us. Municipality is also working in coordination with them to provide necessary support to act against domestic violence and other social issues in the locality," says ward chair Jaggi Acharya.

Although there used to be high disparities in daily wages between men and women in the agriculture work, wages gap is gradually narrowing down due to the efforts taken by human rights defenders.

"In a community meeting last month, we decided not to work until we are paid equally. We also submitted our decision to ward and municipality. Although wage is unequal, women's wage has increased slightly," says Sarki.

Empowerment, Inclusion and Gender Equality through Cooperatives

Every day is hectic for Durga Thapa, 32, vice chairperson of Krishi Guru Mahadev Sahakari Sanstha of Pagnath; ward number 1 of Bhagbatimai RM of Dailekh district.

As a loan coordinator, Thapa, mother of three, has to closely observe members activities and socio economic status and use and misuse of the loan.

With 167 members with eighty percent women, the cooperative has shown how a cooperative can empower women politically and economically and work to end violence against women and discrimination.

Providing loan to the women for collective vegetable farming, goat rearing, poultry, micro-entrepreneurs including groceries, tea stalls, the



cooperative focuses primarily on job creation through the promotion of labor-intensive farming incorporating a pro-poor, inclusive and gender-responsive approach in carrying out its work. Most of the beneficiaries of the cooperative are women who are now skilled at using banks and financial institutions for transaction.

After implementation of POWER Project, the cooperatives members including vice chairperson Thapa attended couple of capacity building trainings and conducted some campaigns on gender equality and women empowerment.

The cooperative has already implemented GESI Policy at group and cooperative level with a zero tolerance against domestic violence, exclusions and discriminations.

“We have learned more new tools to make cooperative transparent and accountable, exclusive, gender sensitive,” said Vice Chair Thapa. “We have already issued notice to our members alerting them that they have to watchful on issue of violence against women, child marriage, Chaupadi, cast based and gender based discrimination.”

With the notice, the group members have prevented two possible child marriages and have destroyed two Chaupadi sheds. Similarly, two men were brought before RM Judicial Committee for their involvement in physical abuse of their wives.

“As we have already announced that there is zero tolerance on violence against women and children within the organization and among our members, everyone has started to monitor the situation closely,” says Thapa.

Recently registered with RM, the cooperative is now legal entity as well. “We have to hold general meeting annually and present financial transaction report and audit report for approval. Following approval from board, we need to table it before RM,” said Thapa.

Women Rights Defender

From dawn to dusk, Jarmaya Batha, 37, of Birendranagar Municipality usually receives mobile call and reaches the venue responding the call from women and children in need. Batha herself being a victim of domestic violence is always ready to provide all kinds of services and support she can for the victims. Awareness level is very low in this area; early child marriage, exclusion and violence against women still continue here. While caste and gender discrimination, polygamy, and misuse of alcohols still prevails.

Working as a women human rights defender with Baylkada Navajyoti Saving and Credit Cooperative, a local implementing partner of Caritas-Nepal, Batha’s areas of work has expanded following the implementation of POWER. Focused on empowering women through GESI approach, POWER Project has unique package to reduce discriminations and uplift status of vulnerable groups.

“Women have started to be more open about their suffering and painful experiences of violence, discrimination and exclusion in family and society. In the last eight months, we have already launched 3 local level campaigns on Teej festival, 16 days Violence against Women and International Women’s Day. These have supported in generating awareness about Gender Equality and Social Inclusion issue and take action against it,” says Batha.

Organizing street dramas, quiz contest and speech contest have been a useful tool to spread awareness in the locality. Participated by large numbers of women, men, Dalits, adolescents, people living with disability, these



programs have enhanced the understanding of women on GESI. Batha says, “In the last two months, I was called by two women from Bayalkada who were the victims of domestic violence committed by their husbands.”

She is now giving legal counseling to Sudha Chalise, 27, who is beaten and harassed by her husband; he is an alcoholic, “Suffering violence from her intoxicating husband, Sudha has just recently agreed to speak her pain,” says Batha, who is also member of Municipal Level GESI alliance

In her mission to defend the rights of women, Batha has been working closely with elected members of municipality, municipal women unit and police. She is discussing the matter personally as well as through cooperatives and group.

“Quietly facing violence at home for years from my own husband, I felt relief after disclosing my entire silent pain and hard suffering to Batha Didi recently,” expresses Chalise, a mother of two children and now a part time school teacher. “Batha Didi inspired me to come to the public and take necessary legal process.”

Working as a women human rights defender, Batha has to take the issue depending upon the level of violence, and harassment. Many cases ended in compromises and reconciliation at group level and ward level.

“I am not only counseling women but also men informing them about legal system and ways of prosecution and punishment. I am also discussing the issue of workload in family and issue of exclusion and discrimination because men are physically assaulting their wives in petty issue. Last week, husband beat her wife on the ground that she used more salt on vegetables,” she says.

Apart from raising the campaigns, Batha is also briefing prosecution process to violence against women and counseling women how to prepare plan and proposal to tap the budget from ward and municipality for sustainable livelihood programs.

Enhancing Capacity of Elderly Women

Yemi Devi Kalathoki, 65, a single women from Ghauda Tole, Belbas ward number 6 of Swargadwari Municipality, has seen major transformation in recent years. “There still prevail exclusion, gender based violence and discriminations but they are in a number. The life hasn’t come easy yet for all but there are promising signs of a better future for all,” says Kalathoki.

Kalathoki had seen child marriage, discrimination on the basis of cast and gender and disability were as norms in her village. “I myself married at the age of 11 and my two daughters were married at the age of 15 and 16. There were restrictions for Dalit to enter even our compound. Physical assaults against women were normal,” narrates Kalathoki.

Things have changed now. Kalathoki’s three granddaughters have already crossed the age 21 years but they are still unmarried. “My father asked my mother to prepare me for bride at 11. Even, my husband did not take my consent deciding the groom for our two girls. Women were rarely given any role in household affairs. However, my granddaughters are defying family proposals for marriage,” said Kalathoki.

Actively taking part in women empowerment programs and awareness raising campaigns organized by Ghauda Tole Woman Agriculture Group, Kalathoki has learned many things joining the meetings and sitting in a group.

Organized under the POWER sub-project, sixty-two years old Kalathoki also took part in folk song program, street drama and quiz contest during Teej festival and International Women’s day.

Kalathoki struggled hard to stay a dignified life when she got married to a man from Brahmin community having nine family members. Half of



her life completed giving birth to children, raise them and carrying out household chores.

“I came to realize how I wasted most important economically active part of my life living under discrimination and violent. Although I had never faced physical violence, I always felt mental pressure,” she reveals.

Once a dependent housewife, sixty-two-year-old Kalathoki, who lives in her extended family, has been now taking the role as elderly advocate of change.

“There are many new components in POWER sub-project which will ultimately empower women and internalize GESI even among elderly person like Kalathoki,” said Hira Thapa, Gender Associate of FIRDONepal who has been visiting different groups, conducting the orientation programs and facilitating the project.

Change in Perception: GESI Promoted by Male Members in the Community

There is a saying, ‘if we change our perception we change reality’; this is the same case for many men in Kankasundari RM believes that is to give priority to gender equality and protect women. Tularam Kami, 40, of ward number 6 of Kankasundari RM is one of them to raise his voice against women problem and build a safer environment for women.

In January, he received a letter to attend GESI training. Thinking why he should attend in women’s program, he thought for several days whether or not to join but finally decided to attend. The training completely changed the way he thought.

“What I can say now is that GESI is also a respect to male and equal treatment for all. It is against all kinds of exclusion including Dalit, people living with disability, marginalized and poor community,” explained Kami, a person who dropped out at primary school education.

A gold smith of the market, Kami now-a-days not only sells gold ornaments but also talks with about the importance of gender equality if he finds time with his client. “I have even started to share household chores with



my wife. If she is cooking food, I don't hesitate to fetch the water and feed fodders to cattle," he says.

"Now, some of my neighbors have started to share household chores with their spouses. Although it is just a small and unnoticed event, sharing work with the spouse is like a revolution in our community," says Sarki who started challenging the patriarchal mindset.

As he started to share household chores with his wife, Sarki felt the change of household environment. Father of three children Sarki, has realized that her children were also behaving differently.

With my last hour intervention, my neighbor even canceled the marriage of her 14-year daughter last month. "I told my neighbor that early child marriage is not only an illegal but it is also harmful to reproductive health," shares Sarki.

"Under the POWER sub-Project, INF has already started involving male counterparts into the programs like Sarki. This experiment of bringing male and female together is bringing positive results," said Samjhana Shahi, CHD section Head.

Age Does Not Prevent Determination

Although the village lies under Narayan Municipality of Dailekh district, it takes almost four hours on foot to reach Jufia village, ward number 11. If one takes a Bollero Jeep, it takes one and half hours to cross serpentine hilly road from municipal headquarter, Dailekh.

Leaving in the remote parts of Narayan Municipality has not changed the spirit of seventy-year old Mandira Malla, elected executive chair of ward number 11. She continues to work for women empowerment, gender equality and to end all kind of exclusions.

As the sun sets at the western corner of the hill, darkness gradually rises with stars shining at the sky, a group of women are waiting Malla, who come with a stick as safety tool on her hand to attend a program. As this is the time for harvesting wheat and preparing the land for paddy, the male and female of the villages have a little time left to attend any meeting during the day and Malla is not an exception.

With her strong voice, Malla, a mother of four grown up children, seeks the progress of group and situation of the village. In a sequence, all the women and couple of men presented their points before her. Following



the presentation, Malla asked if there any incidents of discrimination, exploitation, exclusion and violence.

Under the leadership of Malla, Jufal, though is one of the most remote villages of Narayan Municipality, has set an example to make itself a gender and socially inclusive place with no incidents of domestic violence and discrimination in the last one year.

“I have learned laws, regulations, policies on gender equality, social inclusion, caste based discrimination, people living with disability and domestic violence. Even my orientation has changed towards gender. We have started inviting more male and people living with disability in our programs,” says Malla.

Although municipality has allocated Rs. 4.8 million budgets for ward, there is very negligible budget for women empowerment, advocacy, gender inclusion, people living with disability and capacity building. According to her there is just Rs. 50,000 budgets for targeted sector and Rs. 150,000 for women, children, disability, Dalits and Janjatis.

“I am planning to organize a meeting of elected women, Dalits and other likeminded member before the budget session to press to increase more budgets for gender equality and social inclusion sector,” said Malla. Before leaving the meeting almost at 8.00 with buzz of crickets, she said that there will be dawn tomorrow morning.

Women Unit in Search of Partnership

Despite gradual changes in status of the women, they are still facing discriminations, exclusion and violence in Swargadwari Municipality, about 500 kilometers west of capital city Kathmandu. Although municipality, wards, community groups and cooperatives have been promoting GESI in their programs, the women's woes have not ended here.

Reshma KC, 55, who has been working as an Assistant Women Development Inspector for almost three decades, is now in charge of women and gender section. "Government has cut the budget and reduce the size of office causing difficulties to implement our activities. Under such circumstances, GOAL Project, has filled this gaps. Working in a close coordination with ADRA-Nepal, Rupantaran and FIRDO-Nepal, women unit has been jointly launching awareness program against violence against women, children, exclusions and gender based discrimination," says KC.

After closure of Women and Child Development Department, there is a just small unit in the Municipality to look at elderly, women, children and issue of people living with disability. "Our municipality has allocated Rs. 500,000 to organize programs for elderly, women, children and people with disability," she says, "It is a like a peanut."

"Federal and provincial government have cut the budget handing over all this responsibility to local level, there will be a big gap," says Mayor Rokaya Chhetri.



“There are growing incidences of child marriage in the municipal area. We had stopped the seven set of early child marriage last year and handed over the children to concerned family members. We have also settled three cases of violence through counseling,” said Hira Thapa, Gender Associates of FIRDO-Nepal.

As there are high rates of unemployment, illiteracy and lack of awareness about their rights, women are too afraid of speaking up against discrimination, domestic violence and exclusion.

“Since last eight months, many programs were implemented in the area but the problems related to violence against women are yet to be fully resolved. Our focus is entirely on the economically and socially disadvantaged and discriminated women,” describes KC, “After the implementation of livelihood programs, the economic status of women has changed giving more voice to the women. However, women still need awareness raising program.”

“Given the current state of transition with incapacitated elected representative and low budget to GESI from federal and province, we have more expectation from civil-society organizations. We hope the GOAL and Power sub-project will go for few more years in our region,” said Mayor Rokaya Chhetri.

Community Celebrates Women's Day

Having never celebrated in the past, people of Maharajgunj RM including ward chair and community see celebrating international women day was something special.

“We never celebrated Women's Day in our community before. We used to think, celebrating these events are the traits of well-educated and ‘upper class’ community. Contrary to that, now, we have had the celebrations with the participation of people from different sections. We finally realized, Women's Day celebration is certainly for all of us to be aware and work on issues.”

This statement was the voice of Yogendra Kumar K.C., Chairperson of ward number 8, Maharajgunj Municipality in Kapilvastu district. He was making the above remarks during his public speech amidst the women's day function organized in the ward on 8 March.

Different categories of people, from women to men, from ward level government representatives to community people, from teachers to health volunteers, from gender focal persons to representatives of police office, among others, shared their opinions through the public speech on this



day on gender equality, gender violence, gender discrimination, women's participation, among others and they were committed to ensuring women's right on their ground.

The Chairperson, Abdul Sahamad, a Muslim, of ward number 7, while celebrating the day in his ward says that participation of the people from all level of stakeholders has certainly helped aware people who still don't have the right knowledge that women should be emphasized in the participation and decision making level, and they are to be treated fairly as are men. "We have had events which gave opportunity to all to sit together, with men and women, with different people, and hear their views on Gender aspects or on empowering the women," expresses Abdul.

Similar was the view of chairperson from ward number 4 where they organized the event to mark the day. "We would be lifting our head and feel proud that we celebrated 109th International Women's Day with grand community participation. The mobilization of gender focal person for the sensitization in the community to mark this celebration was an outstanding approach for the ward to see," says Sushil Kumar Chaudhary, chairperson, who appreciated 12 female and child health volunteers (FCHV) from across the community in the program for their generous work.

"We discussed regularly and rigorously in the self-help group as members we were to arrange event," says Kamalawoti Kori, a SHG member from Sonbarsa ward number, a village in Maharajgunj Municipality.

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