

A BRIEF REPORT OF WORKSHOP IN GORKHA: Constitutional Assembly and Peace Building

On the 24th and 25th of August WHR held a workshop in Gorkha. This was the first time that the central office has launched a program in Gorkha.



More than hundred single women (widows) from 19 different Village Development Committees (VDC's) & 1 municipality of Gorkha and representatives from various organizations and political parties participated in the workshop.

24th of August

Host Sarita Bhattarai



Sarita Bhattarai, General Secretary of Gorkha Single Women group, was the host of the program and welcomed everybody. After this the chief guest Ram Mani Bhattarai, who's the LDO of the district of Gorkha, lit a candle to start the program.

Ram Mani Bhattarai, LDO , Gorkha



The session of speeches was started by Kamala Lamichhene who was responsible for the coordination of the single women in the district of Gorkha. During her speech she spoke about the pain single women have to deal with after the death of their husbands. That is



why single women should organize themselves into groups in order to express and share their pain. Then she addressed the need to organize into groups due to political reasons too. Single women are used as instruments by politicians in order to achieve their goals.

She pointed out the fact that the single women groups are inclusive and non-discriminatory. She ended her speech by emphasizing the social, economic, political and religious problems the single women are facing.



WHR central office advisor Laxmi Shah then spoke about the formation of WHR and its reason of existence as well as its main goals. She talked about the discrimination single women are facing from the society and that the central office of WHR is ready to do whatever it takes to support the single women in Gorkha. She pointed out the important for male sensitization about the issue of single women. Single women groups should be formed in order to address whatever problem single women are facing.



After that, Samira Poudel, the representative from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), the organization which provided the funds for this two days program, welcomed all the participants and guests and introduced them to the FES. FES is a international organization and has branches in 100 countries. This particular two day program is focused on the issue of the Peace Process & Constituent Assembly.

Next, the representative from the Human rights and Peace society, Thaneshwor Dawadi, mentioned that all community members are focused on the Constituent Assembly elections and that the rights of each and every citizen should be secured in the constitution. He claimed that this program will provide the single women with the knowledge of their rights.



Nextly, the chairperson of WHR, Lily Thapa, talked about the caste hierarchy of the society in Nepal and the importance of forming inclusive groups, where everybody is equal and one's caste, religion etc. doesn't matter. A campaign against the discrimination amongst women should be run. The development of women is only addressed in theory, not in practice. Single women are in this situation because they are not organized in groups and are thus weak. The constitution doesn't give a priority to the issue of women.



Political parties only keep single women in their agenda in order to get votes. Single women are discriminated from home to government level. She also shared that in the past,



After this, the representative of the UML, Bandana Pandey, addressed the need to change the awareness level of women. If women change themselves and their understanding then they can change the world. The individual has to change first. Struggle is needed in order to achieve change.

The society should not be separated into caste and religion and development should address everybody. Politics are needed to lead the nation. Women should be united and participate in politics. Among women rights single women rights should have a special status since they are the most discriminated.

Next, the representative of the UML, Prem Gurung, said that justice and respect is needed in order to achieve change. Gender, language and caste discrimination is caused by the feudalist society. UML committed to support the single women of Gorkha.



Nextly, the Nepali Congress representative, Ravi Kala Khanal, mentioned that the time has come for all people from different castes, religions and languages to claim their rights and responsibilities. The citizens are the ones who make the constitution this time and they have to secure the women's rights. Political parties play an important role at this time. NGO's and political parties should organize and pull on the same string in order to achieve satisfactory outcomes. The discrimination between sons and daughters needs to be stopped. If single women organize into groups, then their voices can be heard throughout the society. The government assured 33% of the seats in the Ministry to women.



The chief guest LDO, Ram Mani Bhattarai claimed that everybody should have a feeling of ownership concerning the coming constitution; otherwise the country will go in

the wrong direction. If single women feel discriminated then the government should do something about it.

After lunch WHR showed a film about single women called "Single woman".



In the closing session of the first day the single women group president of Gorkha, Purna Maya Wonta, said that feudalism is the root of all kinds of problems. Single women were said to be witches and many other negative things. Purna committed to take legal steps against people who discriminate single women. A single woman shares the feelings of another single woman and since single women are mistreated by the society, they should get together and move forward. Gorkha should also experience the "red movement campaign": the single women of Gorkha will gather together and go around town and the municipality wearing red in order to break the cultural stigma that single women aren't allowed to wear red, but must wear white.

She pointed out the fact that there are women having great jobs and achieving great things. The word impossible doesn't mean anything. A woman can achieve whatever she wants.

25th of August

The session was started with the recapitulation of the previous day.

The single women committed to form groups in the following twenty VDC's:

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|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Hyalchok | 11. Fujel |
| 2. Hasapur | 12. Pangyuung |
| 3. Bungakot | 13. Makai sing |
| 4. Namjung | 14. Deurali |
| 5. Nareshor | 15. Shorpani |
| 6. Finam | 16. Ghairunga |
| 7. Khopalang | 17. Mannu |
| 8. Bhirkot | 18. Gakhu |
| 9. Chopraka | 19. Aaruaakhang |
| 10. Aappipal | 20. Kona |

They committed to having groups in all 68 VDC's of Gorkha in one year and try to get land from government to build Chahhari, rehabilitation cum empowerment center.

During the session D.S.P Gita, the head police officer of the district of Gorkha, promised to help the single women if they meet any difficulties.

Lily Thapa informed about the rules regarding the formation of the single women groups: at least 15 single women need to be member and 5 among them must be literate. There is no restriction concerning age.

She also briefed about the importance of groups in the community which can work as a pressure group against violence against single women.

The resource person, Advocate Thaneshwor Dawadi, informed the women about the constitution: It's a country's main law and contains the code of conduct of a country. Its laws protect the citizens. He than gave some historic details about Nepal and its previous constitutions.



He then talked about the 12 points agreement between the Maoists and the other political parties.

Then he talked about the coming Constituent Assembly elections. He explained that the people who are elected into the Constituent Assembly are the ones who will write the new constitution according to the will of the people. The new constitution should help in establishing peace in the country, in reuniting all geographical regions of Nepal and in ending the autocratic monarchy. 497 candidates are voted into the Constituent Assembly from three different systems: 240 candidates are elected according to the "first past the post system". One candidate per constituency gets voted. The second system is the "proportional representation system". The citizens vote for a party. The more

votes a party gets, the more of its candidates get into the Constituent Assembly. The third system is the "nomination system". Seventeen people who contributed to the country in the past are nominated by the Council of Ministers. A provision has been made according to which at least 50% of the Constituent Assembly representatives should be women.

He then talked about the procedure of the constitution making.

After this the group discussed on the need of future program for single women in Gorkha which is as follows:

S.N	activities	place	responsible person
1	formation of groups in 19 VDC's through workshops	VDC	group members
2	formation of groups in one municipality	Gorkha	selected social mobilizers
3	Identify & train social mobilizers and mobilize for weekly classes in all VDCs	Gorkha	central office
4	Start saving and credit program through micro credit system	19 VDC's and 1 municipality	Executive body of District committee
5	Formation & Registration of single women district committee in municipality involving each one member of VDCs	Gorkha	group members
6	establishment of single women group office in a rented place	DDC	District committee
7	recruitment of few staff equipments	DDC	District committee
8	establishment of single women entrepreneur group (SWEG) for income generating activities		Single women entrepreneur group in Gorkha
9	establishment of the district saving and credit program	Gorkha	group members
10	construction of CHAHARI for rehabilitation and counseling centre for immediate relief	Gorkha	group members in coordination of external donors

At the closing all participants were highly motivated and expressed their commitment to work together and form strong groups in order to change the status of single women in Gorkha.

After this the session was ended.

Gorkha case study

Shanta Pariyar

Shanta is 25 years old and has a seven and a four years old daughter. She got married when she was fifteen and her husband died due to an illness almost five years ago while she was pregnant.

She lives alone with her younger daughter. To make a living she cultivates other people's land and it's hard to get food sometimes. Shanta's husband was also working in the field and they were poor already before he died.

Shanta and her husband had left the house of his parents already before his death and so she didn't return afterwards. Her parents-in-law don't support her and the children, they don't care about them. Her mother is dead and her father is very old and can't support her. She has three brothers who try to support her by giving her money and clothes. But their means are also very limited and it is hard for them to help her. Her older daughter lives with one of her brothers and he is sending her to school.

Her husband has five brothers who either work as tailors or in the field. They don't support her at all. The community treats her more or less okay. Her parents-in-law never cursed at her or treated her badly.

When she got married she didn't know what marriage was all about, she was too young to understand. Her husband got ill one and a half year after their marriage already.

Shanta doesn't want to get married again, she just wants to raise her children and take care of them.

When Shantas' husband died she didn't realize what happened. She was unconscious of what happened for one year and a half. After his death her brothers provided her with a little money and clothes.

It is hard for Shanta to live alone because it is still not accepted by the society, but she doesn't listen to what they say and like that life goes on and she is okay. She just wants her children to be educated.



Parbati Debkota (Child widow)

Parbati is 34 years old and got married when she was twelve years old. Her husband died nine months after their wedding and she has no children. She doesn't know what happened to him. He was seventeen years old.

Fifteen days after her husband's death her parents took her back home. She is a teacher now. She did a bachelor degree in educational studies after her husband's death.

When her husband died she was so young that she didn't understand what this meant for her future life. She didn't feel the sorrow and was neither happy nor unhappy. But still she wasn't able to go school for four months.

Parbati doesn't regret anything and she doesn't want to complain because she still has two hands and legs and is thus able to do everything. The only regret she has in her life is that she have to remain as child widow all her life which actually was not her fault.

Her father has always supported her. That is why she is where she is today. Her father sent her back to school when her husband died. The community didn't approve of that and they were putting pressure on her father to stop sending her to school. Parbati felt very bad and offered her father to stop school, but he insisted and so she stayed.

Once she got the opportunity to teach at the boarding school of her village. She was very happy about it because she enjoyed living with the children and she had a nice salary. But the principal tried to convince her that she has to get remarried. They were arguing all the time until she left. She doesn't want to get remarried; she wants to live her life alone.

Now she lives with her parents again but she is independent and earns her own money. But life is hard anyway and there isn't enough money. But half of her life has passed already and she has always been struggling so she can as well struggle for the other half. She wants to spend the rest of her life like this. She earns some money and was able to help to pay for her brothers' education and so she is okay with the situation. But her parents aren't in a good condition.

Parbati always adapts to the situation. When she's in the village she dresses in light colors and never in red. When she is at school she wears whatever she wants to wear.

It's a plus point that she got widowed at a very early age because like this she didn't realize what widowhood meant.



Nirmala Pariyar

Nirmala is 24 years old. She got married with fourteen and her husband died when she was twenty. He was a policeman and was killed by the Maoists. She lives alone with her sons who are nine and four years old. Nirmala and her husband lived on their own already before his death.

To make a living she works in the field and has animals. Her sons go to the village school and she is working very hard for this.



Nirmala gets some support from her parent's family. They give her some clothes and food sometimes. Her in-laws don't support her.

The society didn't treat her well after her husband died. She had to struggle and do everything on her own.

For Nirmala it is still very hard to deal with the death of her husband.