

## Seminar Report

### on “Role of Women in Nation Building”

#### Background:

A number of interaction programmes have been organised by Media Advocacy Group (MAG) targeting its different stakeholders on national issues such as democracy, state building, peace and empowerment of women. Through these interaction programmes, MAG has been able to sensitize its stakeholders and receive remarkable support from them in this endeavour. This current interaction programme was organised as its continuous process to augment the positive change of attitude toward women rights with support of civic media and media professionals on state-building. Media plays an important role as source of information and knowledge enlisting active participation of citizens in public affairs and decisions affecting them. MAG believes it to be one of the effective agents for bringing the social change and the rational construction of the state and defining the rights and duties of the state and citizens. The interaction programme was organised with the support of FES In Butwal, Rupandehi district on June 9, 2012.

#### Objective of the Programme

- To share views, ideas and thoughts between/among prominent media professionals, representative from district offices, local communities, and civil society organizations in relation to nation building and women rights issues.
- To encourage greater prioritization of recognizing women's contribution in nation building and peace process.

#### Participation

Over 80 participants representing various media, both print and electronic, government organisation, district offices, organisation working on women issues and civil society organizations participated in the programme.

All the participants actively participated throughout the programme, shared their views and opinion and highly appreciated the work of MAG towards creating gender balanced society through media intervention.

## Proceeding of the Programme

### Opening Remarks

The programme was formally opened by **Ms Amrita Anmol** who delivered opening speech to the assembled guests and participants. Offering greetings to all, Ms Anmol informed that the programme is a joint initiation of MAG and FES. She expressed her happiness and gratitude to the organising team for selecting Butwal to conduct the programme and providing opportunity to people of Butwal to participate in such essential issue. The programme went ahead with an introduction session of guest speakers. Ms Anmol then asked **Ms Babita Basnet, President of MAG** for welcome remarks and enlighten on objective of the programme.

### Welcome Remarks and Object Highlights

Offering warm greetings to all the distinguished guests and participants of the programme, **Ms Babita Basnet, President of MAG** welcomed all in the programme. Ms Basnet expressed her happiness to organise the programme in Butwal city where there are maximum number of media professionals actively working through various media. She started her remarks with brief introduction of MAG. She informed that MAG is an organization working on media advocacy for social transformation. It is a non-governmental organization established in the year 2008 by members who have expertise in the field of media, advocacy and management. She informed that MAG has been conducting similar programme related to media and women since its inception. She shared that media plays a very important role in pressuring on various matters and generating awareness among people on numerous issues. Media initiations have helped the issues to be mainstreamed thereby generating mass awareness and putting pressure on the policy makers. She added that in this journey of MAG, the team of MAG is happy to have joint collaboration with FES.

Ms Basnet shared that with the passage of time, the political scenario of the country has also changed. In all the strata of political transformation of the country women have played vital role. Also acknowledging the media she shared that Nepalese media has been playing very active role in terms of mainstreaming any issue whether it is a political issue or women related issue. Highlighting the objective of the programme she expressed that the gathering has been organised with an aim to share views, opinions and generate ideas regarding how media can escort the nation in positive way concerning women issue. Since all media professionals have their own space in media, the programme basically seeks to have valuable input and suggestion from the invited media professionals concerning present role of media in mainstreaming women's contribution in state building. Specifically, the programme is being organised in a framework with various forms of media including both print and electronic to know from them the current situation of media in portraying women, the various roles they play in society and way forward for mainstreaming the issue. She finally concluded her remarks stating that she is

very glad to begin such intellectual discussion on the topic raised from Butwal city.

### Remarks from Guest Speakers

#### Dr Devraj Dahal, Head FES

The head of FES began his remarks by stating brief introduction of FES. He informed that Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or FES was founded in 1925 as a political legacy of Germany's first democratically elected president, Friedrich Ebert, who died in that year. Ebert was a Social Democrat of humble origins and had risen to hold the highest office in his country despite considerable opposition from his political adversaries. His own personal experience led him to propose the establishment of a foundation with a threefold aim:

- furthering a democratic, pluralistic political culture by means of political education for all classes of society,
- facilitating access to higher education for gifted young people by providing scholarships,
- Contributing to international understanding and co-operation wherever possible to avert a fresh outbreak of war and conflict.

He informed that FES Nepal is currently working on activities and issues pertaining to civic education, workers rights and duties, social justice and peace building. This reflects the basic values of FES namely, social democracy, social justice, solidarity and peace where peace-building is a very important theme for Nepal at this transitional period to bring Nepalese society to justice and reconciliation.

The speaker furthered his remarks by highlighting difference between state building and nation building. In this regard, he said that nation building is achieved through consent and an social contract where citizens exchange part of their liberty for security and that ultimately forms a law. On the other hand, state building is achieved through legitimate monopoly on power, tax, loyalty of people and international recognition. If the state is weak in these four factors, the nation itself becomes weak. The weak state further means that it is the non-state actors that holds power control and such state cannot protect and promote their human rights. He referred three terms “state autonomy” from the dominant classes of society, “embedded in the life of the people,” “capacity to undertake impersonal projects” and “sovereign” in relations to other states in foreign affairs.

Looking at the current situation of the country, the speaker said that few decades ago, Nepal was one of the seventeen independent countries. But today, the confrontational politics has exposed the country to fragility. The implementation status of law and policy is so poor that the country is undergoing a serious social unravelling. As an agent of change, media can intervene in this concern and work to transform diverse people into equal citizens attached to nationality. The negative forces are being active presently and now it is utmost to have peaceful

management of such wars and for the purpose, we need to go through the history of other developed nations that were once in the situation where Nepal is at present.

Concerning the topic of discussion, Dr Dahal said that women should intervene through three different areas including education, knowledge and enlightenment, policy regime and social transformation. Enlightenment means being consciously self directed that would ultimately lead to freedom, get courage and make a distinction between right and wrong. Women can really play effective role in policy development in regard to economic, political, social and other national issues if systemic policy and political measures are steered to gender equality. He added that the countries with gender equality have always remained stronger nations giving examples of developed countries like Germany, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden. He furthered that politics too should be gender friendly because it is a public sphere for opinion and will formation. Rather politics should be made accountable in which both the male and female actors need to play equally important role in the co-determination of decision making. He informed that Nepalese law looks beautiful on papers but the sad part is difficulty in implementation of those laws as they do not seem to be based on public reason. Moreover, from civil perspective, there seems to be lack of learning from society. Finally, he remarked that women's inclusive participation is very important especially in national security sector, formal economy, foreign policy, legislature and social service. This is essential to bolster state-society coherence and come out of post-conflict condition. He concluded his remarks by thanking participants for accepting the invitation and participating in the programme.

#### **Mr Kashi Raj Dahal, Constituent Expert/Chief of Administrative Court**

Mr Kashi Raj Dahal started his remarks by thanking the organiser for allowing him to be a part of such intellectual discussion among the professionals of Butwal. Supporting the statement of previous speaker Dr Dev Raj Dahal, he remarked that knowledge is in fact the most important factor for our everyday decision-making, entertaining choices, and empowerment. Addressing the present status of constitution making process, he shared that there is no tradition of sacrifice in CA at all. He expressed that there is still a possibility of forming constitution with availability of consensus among the CA members and major party leaders but there is no unity among them that had led to the collapse of CA. He then requested all the major political party leaders through the media for common agreement and end the issues undergoing discussion since long time. He requested them for getting out of their own self motives. He said that there is no other alternative except going for an agreement. There are landmark debates on the question of gender equality from their role in family to state-building which need to be consolidated in the future for the rational formulation of laws and policies, reduce direct and structural violence and support peace building activities.

#### **Mr Bal Krishna Chapagain**

Thanking the organiser for conducting the programme in Butwal, Mr Chapagain said that it is an opportunity to him and his friends of Butwal to participate in the programme and share views, learning and experiences. Focusing on constitution, he said that firstly we too must think of

what role we as citizens have played in case of dissolution of CA. Supporting Mr Kashi Raj Dahal, he said that due to lack of mutual agreement between the major parties, CA has been a failure.

He added there have been series of discussion related to mutual agreement but so far only the game of mathematic was played by the parties. However, the blame should not only be given to leaders but we ourselves too are to be blamed for the current situation of CA. The major question today is how to lead the country. The country is really in a weak status that would ultimately result in Nepal as flexible nation. However, being an optimistic, we can find space for transformation too in which there lies important role of both men and women.

### **Paper Presentation**

#### **Ms Babita Basnet, President, MAG**

Initiating her presentation, Ms Basnet said the support of the media is considered to be very essential in strengthening the response to national issue and addressing national development challenges posed by gender biasness. As an influential advocate of social change the media needs to play a positive role to prevent violence against women prevailing in society. She informed that her paper analyses the role of women in nation building in Nepal in order to understand the issue better and to identify existing gaps and challenges and way forward related to it.

The speaker shared that despite of special laws and policies in regard to women, there still lies the gap of equity. It is now the time to realize contribution of women in nation building. She added that as far as women issues are concerned they are not perceived positively or given priority. Women's contributions are ignored. The paper presented incorporated information on difference between state building and nation building with short definition of state and nation. It also had information on causes behind unsuccessful state, important aspects related to state and nation building, nation building in context to Nepal, ten years long armed conflict, nation building and women participation. In addition to all these, Ms Basnet enlightened on other issues in relation to women such as women and migration, women in entertainment sector, dalit and marginalised women, citizenship issue and others. The speaker highlighted on few topics raised after the beginning of peace process that includes state restructuring, federal state, Madhesh as a separate Region, and geographical and ethnic issues. She remarked that all

these topics have overshadowed the subject regarding women participation and their issue. She finally concluded that the most important factor above all include Participation and Role.

*For details, the paper presented by Ms Basnet is attached as annex. Please find it.*

### **Mr Kashi Raj Dahal, Constituent Expert/Chief of Administrative Court**

Mr Kashi Raj Dahal presented paper on " Peace and Constitution: Women and Nation Building". The speaker initiated the presentation by sharing the case of few developed countries from West in regard to constitution making as reference for participants. He then moved into the key topic of discussion. He said issue of nation building is not written in constitution nor it is about culture. The realities in relation to nation building vary from country to country. Yet another reality is that there still exists discrimination in human life in some way or the other. In such situation, nation building cannot be attained without transformation. He furthers that nation building is concerned with citizen identity. But the problem is we have not transformed ourselves into citizen yet. He expressed that at present every individual is divided and ruled by his own political ideologies. They are self centered and self oriented. There is lack of love and feeling towards nation which is the foremost factor for nation building. Besides, he shared that when talking about rights; one should not forget or ignore the right of citizenship.

Mr Dahal remarked that the country is in a fragile state presently. He informed the participants about the erosion of monopoly in state authority, increment of violence, erosion in policy supremacy and failure to carry out the objective of 'good governance'. He added that the political groups have not established the democracy founded on gender and social equity. The speaker enlightened that co-working culture among all the stake holders is indispensable for the institutionalization of welfare state, constitutional stability, development, democracy and peace. Moreover, the state should work to achieve the goal of good governance. Besides, the line agency of the government should be pro-active for the effectual enforcement of state policy, law and rule. Citizen of the nation should realize the presence of their government through the services which directly concern their day to day life.

During the presentation, the speaker spoke on scope of constitution, modalities of drafting constitution, main agenda of women empowerment and ways to accomplish these objectives. He remarked that as the constitution is the fundamental law of the nation, it affects the entire human activities. Therefore, the representation of all the stake holders is unavoidable while documenting it. In this pretext, women who occupy more than 50% of the total population should have opportunity to play the constructive role making their involvement in this effort. He added that the present dissolution of constitution too is the result of inability to incorporate public interest in the process of developing it.

Speaking about the role of women in nation building, Mr Dahal remarked in international scenario too, that the participation of women in nation building is not encouraging. Although the international laws related to women rights have provided various laws such as education

right, health right, economic right, social right, right against violence , confidentiality right, food and nutrition related t right, property right, right on land and productive sources and many other rights, they have not been implemented in practice.

In regard to nation building, the speaker said that nation building is based on factors including economic development of nations, degree of protection of internal affairs of nation, strength of national infrastructure, relationship between nation and its citizen. He emphasized that in this concern, national identity has great role to play. In absence of national identity, there is lack of feeling of patriotism and in absence of patriotism feeling, there is no nation building. Similarly, he stated that there must be capacity to fight against external interventions to ensure nation building. Likewise, the laws formed must be practiced effectively too. Moreover, the nation should be economically sound enough.

Seeing most of the participants of the programme from media background, the speaker remarked that in nation building process, media plays vital role. Media is in fact the most powerful tool. However the role of media should be transformed with the passage of time and need. Media should be able to act as bridge between general public and policy maker.

The speaker informed that presently, every sector of the country is influenced by politics whether it is education, economy, development or women. Once, there is political stability, things would be much better. However, due to lack of vision, the present politics of the country is unclear about where it is heading. There is no vision identification at present which tends to be the biggest hindrance in progress and development.

Finally, Mr Dahal stated that for the development of entire nation, there must be end to gender discrimination along with timely social development. The active participation of women plays important role in transforming society and nation building. After the end of conflict, the role of women and their participation is even more important in nation building. The active participation of women would lead to development of peaceful and just society. For overall development of women in the country, focus must be given on factors like education, gender friendly laws, strong political commitment for women development, mainstreaming of women issues, empowerment, increment of women participation and creation of effective environment for development. For sustainable peace and strong nation building, it is important to transform the traditional role of women as "Ambassador of Social Peace and Warrior of Nation Building" and formulate policies, planning and programmes according to it. Likewise, it is equally important that women establish themselves as active and able actors of society in nation building process.

### **Open Floor discussion**

Following remarks from the presenters, the participants shared their views and suggestions during open floor discussion. Appreciating the paper presented and overall programme, the participants expressed various queries to the guest speakers so that their concern reaches the

right authority. The issues raised included:

- Economic factors are ignored by political parties in their plans and programmes
- Gender discriminatory rules at the work place
- Lack of women's equal participation in decision making position
- Recognition of women's contribution in the new constitution
- Women friendly government policies and programmes
- Gender discrimination in various human right issues -citizenship issue, property rights issue, etc
- Discrimination within women themselves
- Lack of transparency in gender budget defined by Nepal Government
- Status of truth reconciliation committee
- Cause behind dissolution of CA

The participants who shared their views during the programme include:

Suman Adhikari, Laxmi Koirala, Sabi Biswokarma, Suman Panthi, Dinesh from Image Channel, Manu Khadka, Kalpana Bhatta, Janaki Neupane, Reema BC, Govinda Khanal, Bimala Panthi, Bhagwati Pandey, Maya Gautam and Amrita Anmol, Kantipur TV

The response to queries raised during the programme was given by Mr Kashi Raj Dahal, Constituent Expert, Dr Dev Raj Dahal, Head FES and Ms Babita Basnet, President, MAG.

### **Suggestions/ Recommendations**

- Gender friendly policy at work place
- Special provision to make government offices women friendly
- Address women 's contribution in the New Constitution making it gender-neutral
- In house civic education training for women media persons working at district level so that they know the art and science of post-conflict civic reporting and analysis of events, trends,
- Reform existing gender discriminatory laws to foster the citizenship equality of men and women.
- Prioritize dalit and deprived group of women so they know the concept of gender and



citizenship equality.

- Replicate similar programme in other districts as well inviting more women as they lack equal opportunities.
- Ensure that the target beneficiary groups get the service while formulating any plans and programmes
- Media campaign for mass civic awareness on women constitutional and human rights issues and duties as well.
- Establish monitoring mechanism to ensure implementation of policies and laws on women issues
- Capacity enhancement programme for women politicians as well as male politicians on leadership accountability
- Ensure and enhance women's active participation in every sector

### **Closing Remarks**

#### **Advocate Mahendra Pandey, Nepal Bar Association**

Offering greetings to all the participants, the speaker said that it really takes time to transform any situation. Lots of exercises have been done so far to strengthen the situation. Presently, the nation is in transitional phase with increased social change as a positive sign.

#### **Mr Chandra Bhatta, FES**

Following the speaker, Mr Bhatta said that Rule can sustain only if citizens have patience. Therefore, a ruler must ensure the patience of his citizens. Regarding gender discrimination, Mr Bhatta informed that women were not discriminated in ancient periods. In fact, they were given equal amount of space as their male counterparts. But, with the passage of time, things are changing and situation becoming worse. But the programmes like today are the tools to manage such problems, generate awareness and bring change.

### **Vote of Thanks**

#### **Ms Babita Basnet, President, MAG**

Finally, Ms Basnet thanked all the participants for accepting the invitation and attending the programme as well as providing suggestions and recommendations. She thanked all of them for their active presence. She thanked the partner organization FES for its assistance in conducting the programme. She expressed a gratitude to all other organizations and individuals working on

women issues. She then announced the closing of the programme.

### **Media coverage**

The workshop was highly appreciated by all and there was huge media coverage. All the local television channels of Rupandehi including Radio Lumbini covered the brief news on the programme. Also the local radio and FMs including Radio Lumbini, Rupandehi FM, Siddhartha FM, Radio Mukti, Jagaran FM, Radio Namaste and Tinau FM gave brief news on the programme. Apart from the electronic media, the local national daily newspapers including Rajdhai, Ghatana Ra Bichar and Dainik Patra have covered the news of the programme. The paper clippings of the coverage are attached in the annex. It is expected that the media will further write and produce more features, case studies and programmes in both print and electronic media.