
An Interaction Programme on Role of Women in State Building

A Programme Report

(April, 2013)

Gorkha | April 10, 2013

Implemented by:

Media Advocacy Group (MAG)

Supported by:

FES Nepal

Background:

A number of interaction programmes have been organised by Media Advocacy Group (MAG) targeting its different stakeholders. 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 right issues with support from professionals from different fields.

The interaction programme was organised with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in Gorkha, Gorkha district on April 10, 2013.

Objectives of the Programme

- To share views, ideas and thoughts between/among representatives of political party, prominent media professionals, government officials, 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

Altogether 81 participants representing various media, both print and electronic, government district offices, police, and representatives from the political party 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 program.

Programme Proceeding

Welcome Remarks:

Extending her warm greetings Ms. Babita Basnet, President of MAG welcomed all the distinguished guests and participants in the programme. Ms Basnet expressed her joy to organise the programme in Gorkha especially because the foundation stone of nation building was started from Gorkha during the time of unification. Ms Basnet briefly introduced MAG and informed that MAG is an NGO 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 extended her appreciation on behalf of MAG to FES for counting MAG as their partner for this program.

Relating to the current political scenario of the country Ms Basnet said that women should come in front line for the upcoming election. In order to make women's voice heard, women representation is must in politics. She stressed on the need of nationwide campaign to increase participation and motivation of women in nation building. Highlighting the objectives of the programme she expressed that the interaction programme has been organised with an aim to have deeper interface and come to up with recommendations to enhance and increase the role of women in nation building. Concluding her remarks she expressed her excitement to be a part of diverse participants of the programme are from different walk of lives.

Remarks from Guest Speakers

Mr Kashi Raj Dahal, Constituent Expert/President of Administrative Court

Mr Kashi Raj Dahal in his remarks thanked the organiser for making him the part of this program. In his remarks Mr. Dahal emphasized that constitution is key for good governance. He briefly highlighted about the three most important issues of good governance: accountability, effectiveness and fairness. Addressing the current context, he stressed on the need of professionalism and morale by saying that politics is done with high morale and other professional work are to be done with high professionalism.

Mr Chandra Dev Bhatta, FES Representative

Mr. Chandra Dev Bhatta welcomed the participants and gave a brief introduction of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). He informed that FES was founded in 1925 as a political legacy of Germany's first democratically elected president, Friedrich Ebert. He informed that FES Nepal is currently working on activities and issues pertaining to democratization, conflict transformation 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.

In his remarks he said for any nation equality, independence, peace and security are most important factors for development and progress. Mr. Bhatta added, in Nepal, so far we have talked much about democracy alone while at present time we have to talk about economic democracy. He empathized that to address any issue first and foremost important aspect is one's civic knowledge. Thus, FES through its civic educational programs is trying to decrease the existing gap which is between rights and

responsibilities as this gap has become the hindrance for the smooth development of the country.

Mr. Kailash Bahadur Shrestha, FNJ President, Gorkha Chapter

Mr Shrestha in his remarks stressed that women have an equal role to play for nation building. He said it is true that women are not in such position as yet because of many barriers posed by the society. However, everyone from their side should play a role to encourage women to join in the process of nation building.

Mr. Thaneshwor Dawadi, Bar Association

Mr Dawadi in his remarks shared his dissatisfaction towards the current political situation and the politicians. He said that the political parties are more concerned about them individually and are least concerned about nation building. This has brought growth and development of the country to stand still.

Mr. Narayan Adhikari, CPN-Maoist

Mr Adhikari expressed that the minimum of 50 percent of women participation is must in all sector. He added that there are policies, rules and regulations to address the current issues related to women and others in general. However, all these are sadly limited to the papers. Thus our rules and regulations and policies lack implementation. He added that even though policies exists and are not implemented, self realization is the key for transformation. He said that it is important to bring change in attitude and behaviour of people. He further thanked the organizers and extended his gratitude by saying that the program like civic education will help everyone to grow personally.

Mr. Biswesoeer Kattle, CPN-UML

Mr Kattle in his remarks said that the economy is very crucial for nation's development. A country should recognize and acknowledge the contributors of the economy. Adding he said, women are the biggest contributors of our economy. Sadly, their contributions are not accounted. Therefore, it is important that the state evaluates and recognizes the women's economic contribution. He said, by doing so overall status of women will improve. In context of nation building he said that it is an emotional feeling and one develops such feeling from within. One must have an attitude of contribution for nation building.

Ms. Lalita Adhikar, Nepali Congress

Ms Adhikari in her remarks said that we have to accept that there is low representation of women in all sectors. From women's participation to women's role representation their involvement is low. Thus there is a need to increase women's participation which needs serious and dedicated efforts. She shared that the situation of women has improved over time but it is still not up to the standards. Citing example from Gorkha she informed that the suicide rate in Gorkha is the highest in the country which is the reflection of unhappiness among the people for whatsoever reasons.

Mr. Kamal Raj Dhakal, Chief District Officer

Mr. Dhakal sharing his personal experience in his remarks said that there is lack of awareness among

everyone about many issues. In his remarks he talked about the formation of the government and said there are two processes: selection and election. Through election there will be increase in accountability and responsibilities while through selection none can be achieved. Thus, it is very important that local elections are conducted. Likewise, he also shared that there is existing women friendly laws and policies. He added that it is unfortunate that they are not being implemented.

Mr. Shiddha Bahadur Thapa, District Judge

Explaining the topographic features of the country Mr. Thapa said that the large populations of women are still residing in the rural settings of the country. They do not have access to many basic needs and information including access to resources and services. Moreover they are totally unaware about world and the changing context. Even in such situation the cases filed to seek divorce are increasing. He added that to the large extend the contributors for the increasing divorce is gender based violence.

Paper Presentations

1. “Role of women in State Building” - Ms Babita Basnet, President, MAG

Ms. Basnet started her session by explaining broadly the meaning of state building and nation building. Firstly he explained about state building and explained briefly about the symptoms of a failure state. Secondly she explained about the nation building and gave historical perspective of state building in Nepal. She briefly explained the context before the unification done by Prithivi Narayan Shah.

Explaining about the visionary efforts made by Prithivi Narayan Shah of combining the diversity within a single state during the time of unification she then talked about a decade long people’s war initiated by Maoist. She gave examples of loss of lives, internally displaced people, loss of physical infrastructure like school, hospitals and so forth while explaining the conflict period.

Stating that every country have to pass through phase of construction after the destruction caused during the period of war. She then linked the session with role of women in state building. She explained that after People’s Movement II, the house of parliament passed bill which said the government bodies must have 33 percent of women representation. This bill was highly appreciated and welcomed from all the sectors and it also received massive media coverage. Relating to Beijing conference she explained the participants about the 12 issues that are related to women. Some of such issues were women and poverty, money and economy, women and health, education for women and training, women in decision making, girl child and so forth. In addition to these she added some other important issues such as citizenship, Dalit and disadvantaged group of women, women in entertainment sector, women and foreign employment which needs to e considered during the process of state building.

Ms Basnet in this section of her session talked briefly about the other issues that were raised during the peace process. The raise of these issues got more attention and thus the focus on women’s issues was diverted. The issues raised were: restructuring the state, federal state, inter ethnic and regional issues, independent state, *ek madesh ek pradesh* (unified madesh). Drawing conclusion from this portion she said state is common for all irrespective of gender ethnicity, language and so forth. She

added focus should not be diverted from women as there are numerous things to address. Thus, two most important issues are a. participation and b. role of women.

Ms. Basnet gave the current national status of women's participation in different sectors of government services. She explained that the population of women is more than half the total population but status of women is comparatively backward than that of men. Women have historically been the victims of discriminatory culture in terms of behaviour, laws, beliefs added by patriarchal beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, women do not have access and control over any kind resources which has pushed them from their own homes, society and even state. As gender based discriminations are in existence basic and human rights of women are in very critical state. At present context many initiatives are taken for women's participation and empowerment nationally and internationally. In such background, it is important to understand the situation of women's, their participation. Based on these policies, laws and special provisions are to be designed that will enable women's participation.

Towards the end of the session Ms Basnet shared about the existing constitutional provisions for women in different sectors. She briefly explained the provisions in the following:

- Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2063
- Election Act for Constituent Assembly Election, 2063
- Civil Servant Act, 2064
- Nepal Army Act, 2063
- Land Reform Act, 2021
- Foreign Employment Act, 2064
- Nepal Police Directives, 2064 (12th Amendment)
- Armed Police Force Directives, 20n64 (4th Amendment)

Ending her session she informed the participants about the organizations which are actively involved in women's empowerment and participation. The names of some organizations were; National Women Commission, Women Development Department, Social welfare Council, I/NGOs and so forth. She also informed the participants that since 2064/065 the government of Nepal has started making the gender friendly budget. At the end she briefly gave the overview on the present status of women in security and justice in Nepal.

2. “ Nation Building, Democracy and Women’s Right”- Mr Kashi Raj Dahal, Constituent Expert/Chief of Administrative Court

Mr Dahal began his session by explaining briefly about the importance of nation building. He said each country has its own identify. Symbols are used to symbolize the identity like: national flag, anthem, language and so forth. During the nation building process he said that it is important to ensure that there is equal participation and representation from all communities and sectors. Giving the context of the present situation of the country he said, the situation of the country is very fragile.

For lasting peace he said, signing peace agreements is not the end. He said, for lasting peace country has to have its constitution, restructured physical infrastructure and economy, new and fresh elected government. It is unfortunate that the constitution drafting was not completed in the given time period and said that it was not because of the time limitations. It was mostly because of the lack of political will, visionary leaders; unclear political perspectives are just to name some. At present there is a need to develop patriotic feeling among all the citizens irrespective of caste, ethnicity, religion, geography.

Mr. Dhakal explained briefly about the participants about democracy. Explaining democracy he said peoples’ participation, equality, end of autocratic rule, basic rights etc are to be ensured for meaningful democracy. Further he briefly explained the composition and some basic principles that make a democratic nation. He briefly explained nine of such principles. Those principles were: Sovereignty, supremacy of constitution, human rights, rule of law, free, fair and regular election, pluralism and competitive multi party democracy, independent judiciary, press freedom and constitutional guarantee of independent bodies to make government accountable and responsible.

In this section of his session, Mr. Dhakal highlighted about inclusive democracy and women’s representation. He explained that inclusive democracy ensures that everyone is a part of state building. Only if the state building process is inclusive, democracy will be established. He said, we all are aware that women lag far behind than men while we are well aware that women and men can equally competent in all sectors. Explaining further he said, if we compare the amount of work done by women and men, women do much more work than that of men. Unfortunately, their work is not accounted. He emphasised that through any ways either by providing women with special provision or quota it is important that we make the equal representation of women and men.

Mr. Dahal gave the global perspective on women’s voting rights. Citing the global examples he said women’s representation is very low and is not close to the men’s representation. Thus, special provisions and quota system is to be introduced. For women’s overall development and to increase women’s participation he said economic rights, special provision for disable and single women, gender friendly budget are few initiatives that can taken. Some of the principles that are followed to increase women’s representation includes: set the fix number of women candidates for the election. This provision should be legally institutionalized by ensuring it through the constitution. Lastly, taking the inclusive principle in account political parties should also institutionalize fix number of women’s representation in their party. to increase women’s candidacy they should have special provision for women.

Towards the end of the session, he briefly explained about the relationship between constitution and women’s rights. Making participants understand by using the quotes of sociologist he said till the time gender differences will be in existence the difference between women and men will always take place. Women will be pushed behind from exercising her rights. To address the problem he shared about the

views of women lawyers and activists who are of the view that equality of results which also addresses the issues of equality, dignity and non-exploitation is said to be one of the way forward to address this issue. He said it is crucial but very important to change the male dominated society into co-equal society during the nation building process. Status, equality rule for benefit, non- discrimination, inclusion, special protection, positive discrimination and reservation are some the principles that can be used to decrease the existing differences. Explaining further he said, patriarchy is everywhere all around the global and is one of the major contributors of unequal exercise of rights. Religion, culture, traditional beliefs are other some. Therefore, from the lesson learnt from the history modern state should be able to reduce these differences. Talking about Nepal he said, 33 percent representation of women is now ensured through constitution which is a good achievement.

Talking about the present context, he said gender based violence is increasing at present days. Torture, abduction, fresh trade, rape are some of the forms of violence against women which are in raise these days. He briefly talked about violence against women and its prevention. He said, she is a women and that is the reason why she becomes the victim of violence. Giving teh example of traditional practices like dowry, chaupadadi (menstruation), witchcraft are still practised which makes women the victims of violence. He informed that Nepal has signed many international treaties but at the implementation level there are not much done. If actions are taken seriously then violence against women will for surely decrease. At the end he said to end the gender based violence, government, civil society should make a collaborative effort. All the officers from all the section of the government, security sector should be well aware about the existing policies. Adding to it he said media can play an effective and vital role in this issue.

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:

Following the presentation, the participants shared their concern from their related field of work. The participants overwhelmingly appreciated the papers presented and congratulated the organisers for the success of the program.

Underlying issues that stops women from participation is overlooked

- “We talk about role of women in state building but we tend to forget issues which do not allow women to participate. One of such issue is the issue of citizenship. Though there is a legal provision to obtain citizenship from mothers name but we all are aware that it is not in practice. This is the circumstances of our nation where laws are there but not implemented. As a result women are suffering”.
- Every one of us agrees that women’s role is crucial for state building. However, we don’t look into the underlying issues. Firstly our patriarchal society limits women from participation to decision making. Likewise the rate of domestic violence is leading to suicides. So, we have to

take these into consideration while thinking about role of women in state building process.

Need to think ways to increase participation and make equal participation

- we all know that women's role is important. At the same time we have to think how we can increase and ensure participation.
- Everything has process and it's good that we go step by step in process. Sadly, the political situation of the country is not stable so everything is stuck there and so are the issues of women.
- it is noteworthy that comparatively women's participation has increased over time but we still have to talk about increasing women's participation. At present context we have to work towards making it equal participation of women and men so that their voice are equally heard and appropriate actions are taken accordingly.

Urgency of local election

- it is sad that we do not have local election from last 15 years. As a result young generation is totally unaware about it. They are clueless regarding the process of election. This also needs to be taken into consideration for state building. Similarly, local election should be held as this will bring many women into the structure.

State should provide basic facilities to civil servants for effective service delivery

- We women do not have women barrack. They are in duty for 24 hours; providing service but their basic needs are not addressed. (Police officer women)

Addressing the local traditional practices

- The issue of polygamy should not be over looked as it is still in existence. However, with the changing time there is an increasing trend where male are also complaining about violence. So both women and men's concern should be taken into consideration for state building.
- Polyandry practice is still prevalent in some parts of Gorkha. The common mistake we make is through assumption. We assume that polyandry is no more in practice but the reality is that they are prevalent. The existing practice should not be forgotten as concerns of these practices are to be taken during the state building process.

The participants who shared their views during the programme include:

- Samjhana Devkota, Inter party women Alliance

- Indra Kumari Devkota Basnet, lecturer- Gorkha Campus
- Kamala Lamichanee, Women Activist
- Anupama Khanal, Media Person
- Hari Maya Mahato, Nepal Police
- Chandra Gurung, Women Activist
- Karuna Rai, Museum Director
- Sanu Maya Basnet, CPN-UML
- Nanu Maya Thapamagar, Local Politician
- Sushila Thapa, Local Politician
- Bhim Lal Shrestha, Journalist
- Shiva Apriya, Journalist

Recommendations

- Design programs at local level understanding the social and cultural practices which will enable women for meaningful participation.
- More concentration should be given to the whole idea of how to encourage women for participation rather than just increasing their participation.
- Publicity of existing gender friendly policies.
- Increase awareness among all (government service and civil society including general public)
- Create conducive environment to firmly implement the existing policies and develop check and balance mechanism.
- Civic educational programs are must to change the personal attitude of people. So that personal attitude and policy goes hand in hand for fruitful change.
- Nationwide campaign to ensure 33 percent representation of women in forthcoming election.
- Programs including civic education should not be concentrated in district headquarters only.
- Need for an orientation program informing about the availability of budget allocation for women at the district level.
- Increase coverage of local issues and practices.



CDO Mr. Kamal Raj Dhakal addressing the participants



Participants of the program



Mr. Kashi Raj Dahal responding to the queries



Participants of the program