



Building Active Citizens

A story of struggle by village women under the My Rights, My Voice programme to attain their rights and reach positions of leadership, and the progress made through their own efforts



OXFAM

**My Rights, My Voice
Oxfam, Nepal**



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A few words that need to be said

Since the past two years, Oxfam has been running the 'My Rights, My Voice' (MRMV) programme with the focus on three Village Development Committees (VDCs) each in the hill district of Dailekh, in Surkhet in the inner terai and in the terai district of Banke. This programme, which works for the most part to facilitate access to health care by people living in remote areas, and among them the children, youths and young mothers in particular, has of late been helping foster their involvement in other areas also.

The programme, which works for the involvement of youths and young women in community discussion classes (CDCs) based on the REFLECT method, and for familiarising them with their rights and duties, has been giving importance to transparency and accountability in equal measure. Similarly, facilitators of CDCs instruct the women about the significance of access to the forests and to local decision making structures such as schools, healthcare centres and drinking water facilities, and about what they can do with regard to such things. Apart from that, the women, in the course of all this, also get to know about their rights and about the processes involved in securing those rights.

The youths and young women who have made their way into the decision-making process through their involvement in such discussion classes have already managed to do some incredible things. Their habit of stepping forward to assume the leadership of any task at hand and not quitting until they have made it bear fruit – one runs into instances of people looking upon this as change that is nothing short of miraculous. The women have even gained some renown for the reforms they have brought about in the village, for doing away with anomalies, and for the interest they have shown in development and construction work. Also noteworthy is the progress made by school going children who have sat on the child health committees, and by those who have undergone various trainings.

Included in this book are these initiatives that the mostly illiterate women of the villages have taken up following their participation in discussion classes, and the results they have attained. The book brings to us the lesson of empowerment. It also brings to us the learning that if one has initiative any task is possible no matter how difficult it was thought to be. Not only that, it teaches that if one goes about doing things with the right intentions and right thinking even the males will step aside and hand over their leadership roles. In brief, this book is a good example of to what extent even an ordinary programme can activate people and how far even one active citizen can contribute towards changing the face of society.

Oxfam
My Rights, My Voice programme

Summary

Hints of a rainbow

Astonished by the uncomprehending
who sinks his fangs and says I shall eat and have clothing to wear
I alone shall enjoy life and leisure
I shall laugh and make merry while others who are weak simply perish...
the funeral pyre convulses in a laughter of its own

These lines penned by poet laureate Lekhnath Poudel in his epic about the young mediator have set laughing not just funeral pyres but also the participants of the discussion class that runs in Mahadevpuri VDC - 5, Banke. And they came to the conclusion that it was not enough for themselves alone to be living in happiness. They were not happy with the ill treatment meted out to Ritu Nepali, a participant of their class, by her husband and his second wife, Parbati Bista. All of the participants therefore came together and sorted things out in Ritu's household. Thanks to this, Ritu has now been spared any further torment. It would be difficult perhaps to find anywhere else so much importance being given to one's **rights and duties**.

It says in the Mahabharata epic that an honest person is the noblest of the Almighty's creations. Perhaps it is out of this realisation that the women of Piladi VDC, Dailekh, are now engaged in a campaign to become the most outstanding creations of that Almighty. This band of sisters, who have taken on the task of building a road for the whole village, is now resolved not just to do a good job with the road but also to present a model of transparency by broadcasting their financial accounts over FM radio once the construction is done with. They know very well that financial **transparency and accountability** is indispensable if they are to prove themselves an honest lot.

Once the Tirkhule Community Forest in Piladi, Dailekh came under their leadership, the women here set about extending the acreage of the forest. They saw to its proper conservation. Poaching was halted. In the course of all this they had to put up with some litigation. They found themselves toing and froing to the district headquarters. They put up with warnings and threats from many. But the women did not waver. They put up ably with come what may. The community forest has now become quite extensive, and has been turned into a resource that is sufficient for all the villagers. The forests of Piladi VDC are testimony to Maxim Gorky's saying that 'the joy of struggle is the ultimate joy'. This is only a representative example of the **change brought about by young women** after they took on leadership roles in community decision making structures.

There is plenty of free time but no source of income. As this gap between leisure and income widened, the women of Bajajpur VDC in Banke were reminded of Rousseau's famous saying that 'a weakened body leads to a weakened mind'. They then burst into such energy and zeal that through sheer toil and sweat they transformed into fertility and greenery a strip of river bank that even the wayward Rapti had bypassed as unworthy. That empty piece of land now teems with vegetation, and the purses of all the women are filling up as a result. This **change in attitude and behaviour** of the women here has now become a topic of interest and inquiry for women elsewhere also.

Womenfolk in Kanchanpur VDC -8, Banke have done something exemplary. They secured justice for a participant of their class who had had to put up with demeaning treatment just because she was poor and belonged to the Dalit or downtrodden community. Not only that, they also provided her some financial help out of funds that they had accumulated a few rupees at a time. The aim was to help her raise goats as a supplementary livelihood. From the same funds they have also issued loans to people for putting in toilets at their respective households. For these reasons nobody in the village now needs to feel looked down upon just because she or he is poor or a Dalit. The village is living testimony to John Ruskin's saying that 'patience is the seed of all strength and splendour'. It has taught us how **empowerment** is the remedy for all problems.

There is a discussion class that has been named Moonstar, at Dandaparajul VDC - 9, Dailekh district. This class is characterised by an air of brightness, just as its name would suggest. It was after she started to participate in the class that a woman of the only Bishwakarma family in the village began to be referred to with the honorific suffix of "jee" at the end of her name Durga. Earlier, she used to be addressed with a mixture of familiarity and condescension as Durge. She earned this **identity and popularity** through her active involvement in social reform, through competence in her work and a spirit of courtesy towards one and all. Perhaps the gods themselves would have been happy with the proper behaviour shown by village society towards women, and that too women from the Dalit community. As the renowned sage Manu said, where woman is worshipped there the gods too are happy.

The village wished to upgrade the local lower secondary school to secondary level. There was a need to find the money. The school had to be made more disciplined and the learning and teaching activities there raised to a new height. In view of all this, the womenfolk at Balapur in Mahadevpuri VDC -8, Banke decided that they needed to take over the leadership of the school management committee. It was no easy matter for **women** to reach the **decision-making levels**. And so, at the time of the school management committee election, the women did no other work during the day, they burned the midnight oil, they did not relapse into any lethargy, and they never let off talking to the guardians of the school children. They toiled away night and day. And that is how they managed to lock up the chairpersonship. They understood well the saying of Vedbyas that those who would attain to wellbeing and progress must eschew the six failings of sleep, fear, anger, envy, sloth and laziness.

The My Rights, My Voice programme has now turned into a rainbow of the seven colours of change, to wit, transparency and accountability, empowerment, women in decision-making, rights and responsibilities, change in attitude and behaviour, identity and popularity, and the changes after women took on leadership roles in community level decision making structures. The light from this rainbow is now far-reaching and bespeaks an entire village that is turning brighter

That is why the head teacher, the health post in-charge, the VDC secretary, journalists, government officials, health workers and the indigenous leaders are all full of suggestions to further enhance this brightness and extend its reach still further. Just as Shakespeare said to one and all – be great in what you do just as you are great in thought. Walk the talk, and let your talk match your work.

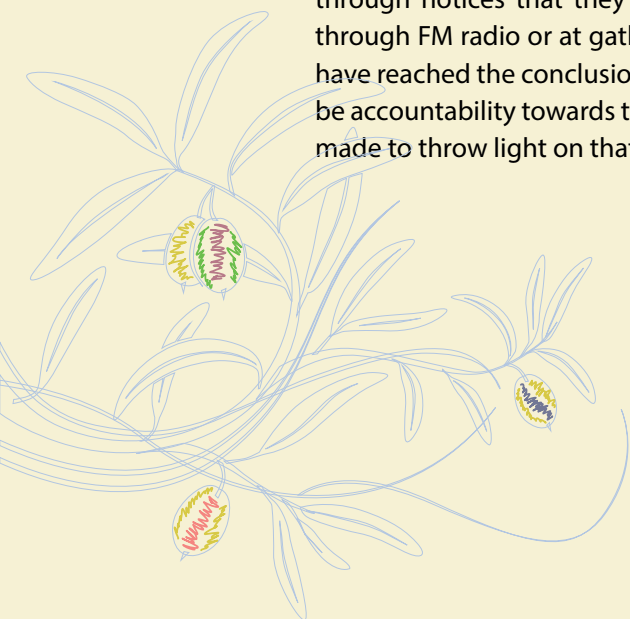


SECTION 1

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency means furnishing all particulars about any given task, such as how it was done, who did it, why it was done, how much money and materials were brought to bear and from where, how much was spent and how much remained. Given such transparency, there will be no need for anyone to harbour any suspicions. Much of the development and construction work that has taken place in the village of late has given rise to plenty of suspicion about corruption precisely because this kind of information has not been provided.

The women who have made their way into positions in various decision making structures through their participation in the discussion class and have thereby come to assume responsibility for development and construction activities, have said they are to make public all the particulars once a given task is complete, with a view to maintaining the transparency. Even before starting their work some have made public their commitment through notices that they put up in public while others have done so through FM radio or at gatherings that were called for the purpose. They have reached the conclusion that such commitment is a must if there is to be accountability towards the end-users. In this section an attempt will be made to throw light on that commitment.





We'll broadcast our accounts over FM

Dailekh District Development Committee budgeted 6 hundred thousand rupees for building a road from Piladi VDC Ward No. 1 to Ward No. 9. According to government regulations, a users' committee has to be formed and the relevant procedures followed to secure such funds. All the villagers duly got together to form the users' committee. But they could not reach any agreement. They could not form the committee and the main hurdle was that the local leaders of the Maoists and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party would not budge from their respective claims to the chairmanship of the committee.

On one hand funds meant for the village could not be put to proper use because of the dispute and on the other there was fear that the funding would lapse as the fiscal year was about to end. That was when the women brought up the

matter at their respective discussion classes and thrashed it out. They decided that they themselves should assume the leadership of the users' committee and see to it that its work got done. Soon after, they called a village gathering for 9 March 2014. Everyone turned up. And the women proposed that they would take up the committee leadership that the menfolk could not decide on, and they would also see the work through.

The menfolk, who for four months had failed to form a committee, surrendered to the women's proposal. The women formed the Bhimchula-Puliya Road Construction Users' Committee with Khagisara Rokaya as its convener, and with one member -- that also a woman -- from each ward. A follow-up committee comprising three of them was also formed. Says Treasurer of the Committee [Tirtha Rana](#), the plan was to expedite the work on the road so that by the time of the Dasain-Tihar festivals, it could be used by





motor vehicles. But there were delays. 'Be that as it may, we will now show that we are capable of doing it.'

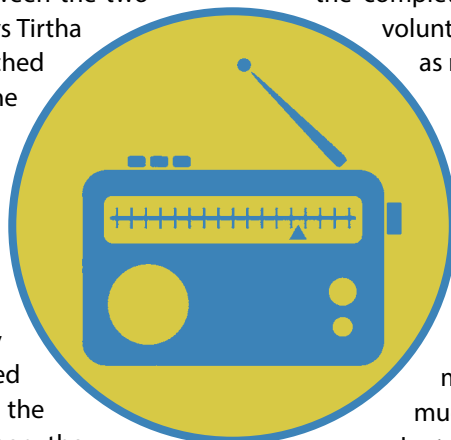
And there is a reason why the women had to wait so long. The men were trying to

strike a deal among themselves as far as possible. When they could not do so, they fell out among themselves. The women were never informed of what was going on. It was only when they started asking why it was taking so long to form the users' committee that the differences between the two parties came to light, says Tirtha – after that they reached the conclusion that the leadership should now be taken up by the women, under the coordination of the discussion classes. At the time the committee was constituted many of the women showed interest in sitting on the committee but later when the matter was decided through consensus, there was no room left for further dispute.

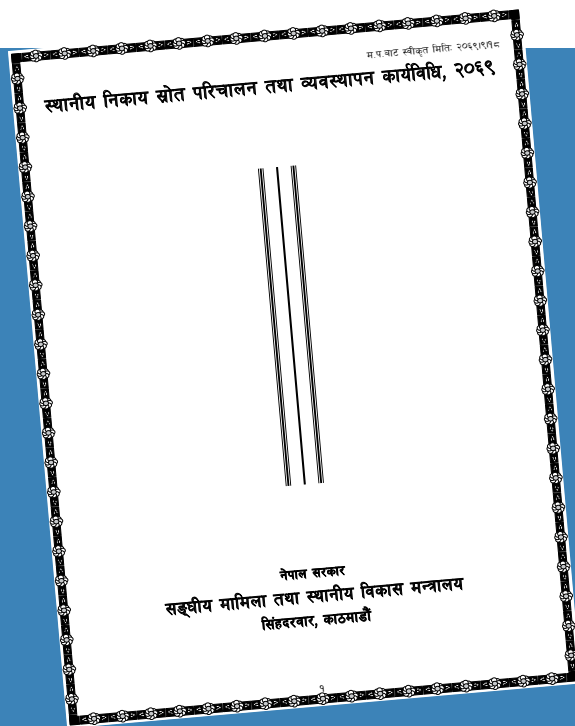
It was in view of the possibility of such differences that the women had sought seven days' time for constituting the committee, but the men tried to throw a spanner in the works by insisting that it should be constituted within one day, says Tirtha. That is why the women had to reach an agreement and form the committee within a day to demonstrate to the men that they could in fact do it. "They couldn't do it themselves even in four months and yet they insist that we should form the committee in

a day...where is the justice in that?," added Tirtha. We nevertheless did it within the time they specified as we needed to show them what we could do.

On the very day they constituted the users' committee, they decided that the next meeting would be held on March 13 and that they would go to district headquarters on the 17th of March to get things started. They announced this to one and all. The committee also thought that using a bulldozer to improve the road would be too costly, and also harmful to the environment. So the work should be done by hand. The women here are now determined to see to the completion of the road, through voluntary labour if need be, so as not to exceed the budget.



The chairperson of the users' committee that had built a road in the village did not even bother to disclose the accounts. So nobody knows how much money was received, how much was spent, how much voluntary labour was contributed, how much was saved or how much was incurred in debts. This issue keeps cropping up even now at almost every public encounter. The work that the women are doing will not be like that and there will be transparency, claims Tirtha. She has said in the presence of everyone that once the road is completed all the accounts will be made public over FM radio.



Accounts made public following ultimatum

The biggest community forest in Lekhapharsa VDC, Surkhet is to be found in Ward No. 7. The forest authorities there have funds amounting to about Rs 3.6 million. On the one hand there is so much money and on the other they never call any meeting. Neither is this money invested nor can one tell what has happened to it and whether or not it has been misused. This was the state of affairs for two years. The matter cropped up at the Janachetana community discussion class.

In the course of the discussions there, it was decided that a memorandum would be submitted to the forest committee to either call a meeting or make its accounts public. Sure enough, a memorandum was submitted on September 2, 2013. As they were

worried that a meeting might still not take place, they also served an ultimatum to call the meeting within 25 days and make the accounts transparent. After that the forest committee called a meeting for the 24th the month. The meeting continued for three days. And on the October 1st, a public audit was carried out and the accounts made public at last.

This was the first time that such an audit had taken place at the forest committee office itself. Then a village gathering was called again to repeat the exercise. Says [Sita Nepali](#), who was among those leading this activity, the audit showed that the chairperson had misappropriated some of the money. He had added one (1) in front of the figure 41 to take allowances for 141 days. After this matter was made public in the presence of everyone, he was made to cough up the missing



money. The audit also showed that loans totaling one million rupees had been incurred. So a loan recovery committee was formed. The loans had been issued many years back and they had not been

able to recover them. According to Sita, the previous committee has yet to submit all the documented accounts. Also at the initiative of discussion class participants, a sum of 100 thousand rupees was made available from the forest committee funds for hiring a teacher for Shanti Sirjana Primary School.

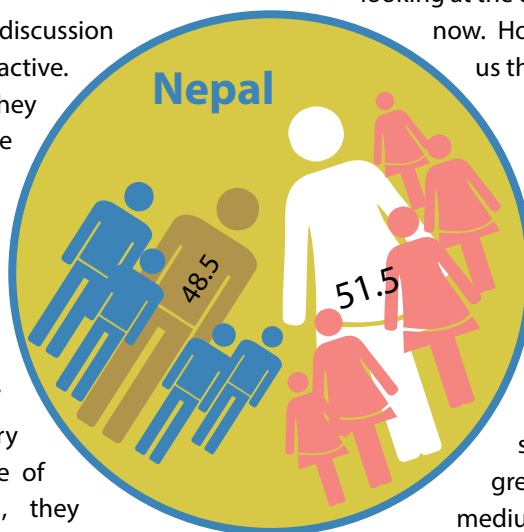
The participants of this discussion class are extremely active.

According to Sita, they worked together with the Interdependent Society, a local NGO, and made arrangements for uterine surgery for two women. They also helped to get ring pressure implants for 27 women after the necessary check-ups. In the course of door-to-door campaign, they came across a couple with sexual infections and sent them to Mehlkuna VDC accompanied by a volunteer to seek further treatment.

A lot of other things were also done at Sita's initiative. When she attended the VDC council as the representative of the Ward Citizen Forum (WCF), she found out that funds earmarked for designated classes

would be ploughed into development and construction activities. Thereafter, through her initiative, such funds were set aside for the targeted groups themselves. Included in this was a separate budget for women also.

There were others things also that she learnt there. One of these was that it would be easy to get a budget allocation only if one came armed with a concrete programme. Prior to this, funds meant for certain classes were diverted elsewhere on the ground that they had not come up with any such concrete programme. They are now already thinking of going to the coming council meeting only with a concrete programme in hand. Says she – that is why we have already started looking at the directives right from now. How can they refuse us this time?



Sita is also a member of the VDC-level monitoring committee. A third-year graduate level college student, she has learnt a great deal through the medium of the discussion class. She has come to the

conclusion that discussion class has helped make her more practical and mature. And that is how she has also come to focus on income generation. She is thinking about procuring a stretcher with the sum of 13 thousand rupees collected through bhailo caroling during the recent Tihar festival. This can be taken as a sign of maturity and a sense of responsibility.



Canal construction entrusted to women

The VDC allocated a sum of 50 thousand rupees for the construction of a canal at Tallo Bhumle in Dasarathpur VDC - 5, Surkhet. A gathering was summoned to form a construction committee. Many women came to the gathering. The menfolk were fewer in number. And the men who did come went away after a while. Under the circumstances, those who were observing things closely started wondering aloud what the menfolk would do on the committee if they were not even prepared to attend a gathering for a short while. And, so [Bishnu Khatri](#) was elected chairperson of the committee, with support from men as well. She is also a facilitator at the Hariyali CDC.

The women are dominant on the seven-member committee. There are

two men but only as members. The men themselves had insisted on constituting a women-dominated committee on the ground that women would not incur needless expenses and would get more done for less. So it was that such a committee was constituted. The committee was also kept small and tidy as a larger body would be harder to convene and would find it more difficult to take any decisions, says Bishnu.

The committee has already prepared a plan to get work started on the canal and see to its completion on time. Says Bishnu – we will carry the cement ourselves, take upon ourselves the work of the helpers, we will not pay for work that can be done through voluntary labour, we will see to the water; that is how we can carry out construction work of high quality and do it on the cheap. She feels that if money can





be saved through this approach, there will be something left over for other work.

Once this old canal is repaired and properly managed, it will provide irrigation for some 35 households.

The women claim that once proper irrigation is available in this area where cash crops such as pulses, peas and gram are cultivated, the economic condition of the locals will improve.

Bishnu's plan is not just to restore the canal but also to maintain transparent accounts and present a model for others. The women have already taken these things up at their discussion class. The previous year a canal had been constructed at Aanpghari. Nobody knows how it was built, at what cost and by whom. Neither has anyone submitted any accounts of the expenditure. This discussion class has been thinking in terms of calling a village gathering to make public the accounts pertaining to their canal so that there need be no occasion later for any backbiting.

Says Bishnu – people in the village are beginning to say that construction of the canal should take place soon. They are eager to plant their potato crop. The potato yield here is good and one does not have to go elsewhere in search of a market. Businessmen come house to house to collect the crop. There is a vegetable collection point also. So the vegetable cultivation is going to flourish once the irrigation is seen to. This is bound to help boost the local economy.

Bishnu is also a member of the women's network. Apart from that she is a ward-level treasurer for the drinking water committee. She is also Coordinator of the WCF and is known as a lead woman in social work. She herself says that the discussions that take place at CDC and the conclusions reached there have been of help to her in every activity that she undertakes.

Bishnu also has responsibility for the drinking water accounts of 81 households. This committee, which raises 40 rupees per household per month, has its own plumber on hand. It is Bishnu who sends out letters to those who do not pay up and even visits them at home to remind them. If they still do not pay, she goes about cutting off their taps.

An elderly Dalit finds treatment

Tek Bahadur Pariyar, an elderly Dalit of the village, suffered damage to his eye from a splinter while hewing wood. With his son away in India and the daughter-in-law having gone off and married someone else, there was nobody to see to his treatment. His plight was brought up by participants during discussion class. After that all the participants worked together to raise some donations. A sum of 11 hundred Nepalese rupees raised in this fashion was used to get him treatment for his eye. The elderly man is now profuse in his gratitude whenever he meets any participant of the discussion class.

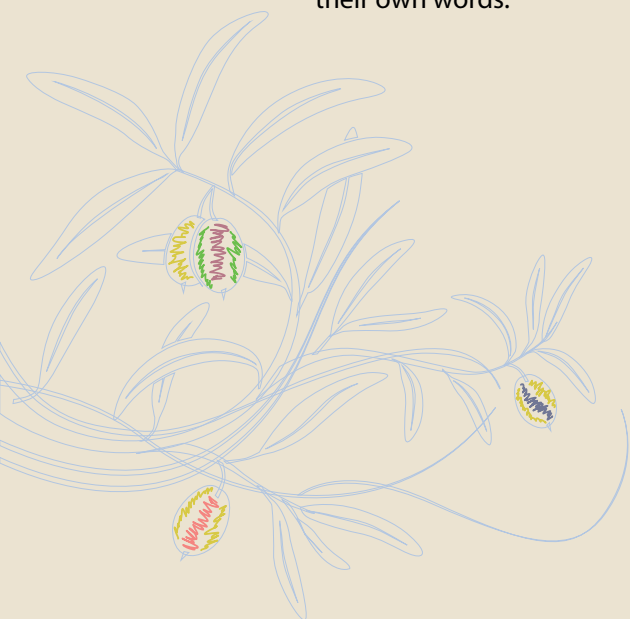


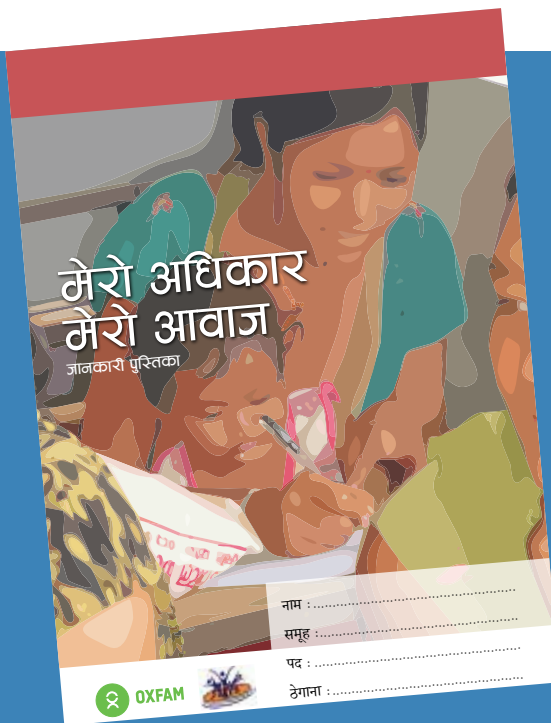
SECTION 2

Empowerment

If somebody wishes to do anything, s/he needs the power. Without power nothing can be done. That is why empowerment is the first tool for getting anything done. As long as a person is not strong in himself, neither will anyone hear what s/he says nor will that person have the courage to say it in the first place. If a person who is feeble or destitute does try to do something or the other, it will be hard for her/him to make his efforts bear any fruit.

After attending discussion class, many women have spoken of a new feeling of awareness. Many of them have found that the knowledge they learnt in discussion class is more practical than their academic learning. And some of them claim that, armed as they are now with their rights and their knowledge, nobody can hold them back. They point out that they have found a sense of direction for pressing on forward. This section deals with the gains made by village women towards empowerment, and in their own words.





Information booklet turns into *swasthani*

When [Kamala Kumari BK](#) of Awalparajul VDC - 7, Dailekh started going to the Bikasshil Community Discussion Class that the women in the village jointly started, she was accused of 'slacking off on her work'. That also was not by just anybody but by members of her own household. But she did not stop going to the class. Rather, she started to explain to them about what she was doing.

And lo and behold, about a month after such accusations were made, her mother-in-law also started to attend the CDC on a regular basis, along with her, the daughter-in-law. Not only that, some 15-20 days later, the younger sister-in-law also started accompanying the mother-in-law and older sister-in-law to the discussion class. When three women from the same house started going there, who

was to be accused of slacking off on work? And now the three women get along so well that they discuss among themselves and tackle each and every problem that comes along. Kamala finds that such discussions are particularly useful during their monthly periods and when they have to face other problems.

What Kamala finds even more astounding is the change that has come about in the father-in-law. With the illiterate mother-in-law going to discussion class and learning something, the father-in-law too has started turning the pages of the alphabet primer these days. She has become more knowledgeable than him of course, but he too has shown growing awareness. And that is how come one now finds him wanting to learn something more.

What is behind this sudden change in the family members who once raised accusing





fingers against cheating on work? In Kamala Kumari's own words, 'I did not find it necessary to take their accusations seriously. I also started gradually to tell them about the things I learnt at discussion

class. I would read out to them all in the evenings from books such as *An Everest of Courage*, the information booklet, and *Women's Empowerment*, which were provided at discussion class. In the beginning, they did not pay much attention but in course of time, they started showing greater interest. In a way, these books became for our household just like the *Swasthani Brata* stories that are recited of evenings'. She would also show her parents-in-law and explain to them the pictures in the books. This was of tremendous help in bringing about change in their thinking.

This is why it goes without saying that Kamala these days attends the discussion classes without any qualms at all, and it is also why she is able to involve herself in development and construction work with similar zeal. She has come to realise that provided there is a helpful atmosphere at home, it is easier to go about securing one's rights and to take up social work. Not only that, practically all the members of her household these days come and sit in discussion class when they can find the time. They listen to the discussions and they are also an inspiration for one to press on.

It takes two hours to get to the health post from where Kamala Kumari lives. That is why she and other participants in discussion class have asked the forest committee for

a stretcher for carrying the sick. They have constructed a wayside rest stop at Bhawani Primary School in their village. They raised donations to pay the mason eight hundred rupees and volunteered the rest of the work themselves. Work is on-going to clean out the water pipes and taps from the source of the water to the village. They went all the way from the health centre, via the VDC, all way to the Department of Health in Kathmandu to demand the setting up of a birthing centre at the health post. Kamala Kumari considers the discussion class and the reading material available there the main inspiration for her becoming so active. It was from there that she was able to get a three-day advocacy training.



If only there had been discussion classes in our time...

We also talk during discussion class about how

marriage should not take place too early and one should not give birth at a young age. Similarly, we have learnt a lot about women's reproductive problems. Nevertheless, my son got married to a 14-year-old. Whatever has happened has happened but I have been explaining to them why they should not have children too soon. Had there been someone to advise us about such matters, we would not have had four children. Had there been discussion classes in our time, one wonders what sorts of things we would have learnt right back then.

Dhani BK

Participant, Bikasshil Community Discussion Class
Awalparajul, Dailekh



An Everest of Courage gave us the courage

Pangkot is a remote village in Dandaparajul VDC -1, Dailekh. It takes an hour and a half to reach from there to the VDC office and two hours to reach the health post. There was no proper road access from the village to the VDC office or the health post. In this village which did not even have electricity, everyone felt that they were lagging behind in many things.

The question why they had fallen behind so much cropped up one day during discussions among the participants of Saraswati Community Discussion Class in the village. This discussion went on for a few days. And then a decision was reached to bring everyone together and take the initiative to build a road before doing anything else. They soon found themselves visiting the VDC office. The VDC provided two hundred thousand rupees. This was hardly enough for

building the road. So we contributed 50 thousand Nepalese rupees from the funds accumulated by the group. Some donations were also raised.

Facilitator of the discussion class [Rabina Shahi](#) said earlier on – we the women took the leadership to bring in a bulldozer and build the road. Seeing how active we were, all the menfolk in the village also lent a helping hand. The VDC and the political parties also extended whatever help they could. Building this road required expenditures totaling 950 thousand Nepalese rupees. Some of the money has yet to be paid. But we are actively engaged in a campaign to pay off that money, and to make the road even better.

After becoming a participant in the discussion class, I had an opportunity to undergo some training also. I received a training on REFLECT method-based facilitations skills. Training



was also provided in producing wall magazines. There were refresher trainings as well. These trainings brought about a good deal of change in me also. It was particularly after reading *An Everest of Courage* made available at the

discussion class by the programme that I too felt the courage to do something in society. The book mentions the good and great things done by womenfolk like ourselves in our own neighbouring VDCs.

Trainings and discussions have led to in-depth thinking about the problems of women and also generated knowledge about how these can be resolved. And there has likewise been a greater interest in seeking out and making proper use of the resources available locally and the budget funds that are released for the village. That is how we have now started to take an interest in resin, a substance that used to be taken from our village since years ago.

As a matter of fact, resin has been taken away from here since long ago. But that had never been of any concern to us. Now, however, we have taken to discussing questions such as who is taking the resin from our forests and why, of what benefit has that been to us, is it right and proper that we should benefit in this way, is the resin being taken away legally or not, and is the company involved genuine or not? We have also started to think how we can derive the utmost benefit from this resource of our village. And so we have put a halt to the resin outflow.

We feel that training can be of immense benefit. Once the four of us went through

advocacy training we felt that we could and should now do something. So, acting solely on the basis of plays staged by the Forum Theatre group that we saw in the village, we put together a play of our own titled 'Woman's Plight'. Basanti Chand wrote the play and we all worked together to produce it. I played the role of a nurse. Staged at the local community and at schools, the play has received requests from many places to do an encore. The play deals with issues such as the plight of daughters, the troubles born of alcohol, problems arising out of economic constraints, and the like, and it has turned out to be a good means of raising awareness. For this reason, it came in for a lot of praise. And that has encouraged us to go forth and do something.

It was through discussions at the discussion class that we have now made Debu Gurung chairperson of Hariyali Laligurans Community Forest Users Committee – says Rabina joyfully.

A girl-child recovered

During the month of October last, the 14-year-old daughter of Chanda BK of our own village went missing. A great deal of search led to nowhere. Later on it was learnt from someone on the phone that she was in India. We then went along with Chanda to the district police office in Dailekh. We traced the phone call and finally found the missing girl. She was rescued through the efforts of Maiti Nepal, a local NGO. However, it was our discussion class that had become the venue for issuing directions as to where and how to go about with the search. She is now at home and she also has a role in the play, 'Woman's Plight' that we have produced.



Awareness more important than wealth

'We womenfolk should no longer remain confined to the kitchen. We should get into the village-level decision-making structure. Once there, we should stake a claim to the leadership. At every place we should make our participation felt on par with the males. The country can make headway only if the women take the initiative because the women outnumber the men in this country...' – these words from an ordinary village woman caught the attention of all the participants in the Women's Day function held at Dasharathpur VDC, Surkhet on 8 March 2014. Even those who did not know her felt compelled to ask around who she was.

Indeed, as [Chitramaya Budha](#) herself, who had never before spoken at a

function, found this speech astonishing, there was no question of its not taking the other participants by surprise. But she paid no attention to the fact that she was making a speech in front of a huge audience for the first time. She then presented in a continuous stream of the rights of women and their problems. After inquiries by many, it finally emerged that she was a participant of CDC in Ward No. 9 of neighbouring Lekhapharsa VDC.

That she mustered the courage to speak as a representative of women in the entire VDC was in itself a big thing. On top of that she neither faltered nor fumbled even in the presence of so many people. Whatever she spoke, she spoke truly. She won a round of applause and was able to leave a good many astonished. Says Chitramaya – As soon as I finished my speech, the women





of Dasharathpur were asking me how I was able to speak so well and also encouraged me, saying that that was indeed how it should be done.

How then did such change come about in someone like Chitramaya, who hardly ever stepped outside the house? She answered thus in response to questions from everyone – Once I started going to the CDC within the village I learnt a great many things. I learnt about government services/facilities. I learnt all the procedures, such as where to go, what to avail oneself of and how. Similarly, I also got to know about health services. And I likewise gathered information about women's rights and the steps that have to be taken to enjoy such rights. Because of this, I found myself capable of stating my case in any given situation.

She did in fact know some things about women's rights before also. But her information was not extensive. Now that she knows everything, she has even begun to inquire how she can sit on the WCF, a community level decision making structure. She is resolved that even if she herself does not join the WCF someone or the other from the CDC should do so. She has likewise reached the conclusion that the participation of women in other decision making structures in the village should be gradually stepped up. There is a great deal of maturity in Chitramaya's

view that people should get involved and occupy posts as suits their capabilities.

Chitramaya, who has had schooling up to class 9, says awareness is more important than wealth. She says - given the awareness, wealth will materialise of its own accord. That is why she now talks to everyone about the need to attend discussion classes. She advises women not just in her village but also in her parental village to go to discussion class. She has gotten her own sister-in-law at her parental home and her own mother to attend CDC. She says that from time to time she runs into the participants of other discussion classes and gets into discussions with them, and in that fashion she has learnt many new things.

She also informs her husband about the things she learns in CDC. And she speaks of how it has been of benefit to everyone, from their own family to society at large, when they go outside. That is how she has been able to persuade one and all, starting with her husband who is away in India to the members of her parental family. At home she has to look after the goats and her two children as well as mind the shop. But she still manages to regularly participate in various programmes. Explaining how she manages to see to all this, she says that on the days that she has to attend any programme she cuts the grass, does all the cooking and finishes the other chores, all in the morning. She does not skip any chore. If you know how to manage things, you will not get held back from going anywhere. It's just a matter of knowing the knack.



Academic studies remain incomplete

I had never even touched a camera but all of a sudden I had an opportunity to undergo training in video documentary making. While this left me happy on one hand, I also felt some trepidation on the other. My mind was full of misgivings about what I would do, how to do it, whether or not I would be able to complete it, would I get scolded. But regardless of all this misgiving and fear, I decided to go for the training.

For [Niruta Gaha](#), a participant of the CDC at Lekhparsa VDC- 9, Surkhet, the training was both an opportunity and a challenge. For someone who had no idea how to do recordings, what a tripod was or how to present problems through the medium of video, the training turned out to be

effective. She now knows about all these things, albeit to a greater or lesser extent.

And so in the course of the training, she, along with three others, made a documentary titled 'Journey Towards Light'. The documentary depicts the problems faced by health posts that do not have solar lighting. While making the documentary they carried out some shooting at the health posts at Lekhparsa, Ramghat and Dasharathpur VDCs. There was solar lighting at Lekhparsa health post but not at the others. Niruta's documentary compared the benefits of having solar lighting with the disadvantages of not having it.

Says Niruta – we captured scenes of how difficult it was to carry out birthing at night, and to put in the stitches, in the





absence of solar lighting. We showed how working in the dim light damaged the umbilical cord and there was infection for two months, and how the woman had to be taken to a medical

facility, again because of the poor lighting. Such problems did not occur at health posts that had solar lighting. For that reason, almost everyone who saw the documentary thanked me.

The 15-minute documentary has been shown at Ramghat VDC but not anywhere else. She spoke of her plan to show it now in her own village and elsewhere. Talking about the reaction of those who saw the documentary, she said – they pointed out that only the problems of those affected had been covered and suggested including what the other stakeholders had to say. There were also those who said they saw how the lack of solar caused a lot of problems and they would now strive to have the facility installed at their own village health post too. This has encouraged me to continue in this field.

After receiving the feedback from this documentary, I feel that I should also involve myself with the other problems in society. For instance, I feel that since child marriage is still widespread in our society,

making a documentary about it will have a good impact. However, I do not myself have the necessary equipment. When the circumstances are conducive and I can get hold of the equipment I will definitely make such a documentary. I have this resolve.

Niruta, who is a second-year graduate level student, says that she too has learnt a great deal from the discussion classes. Apart from the documentaries, she has also learnt how to save and acquired a lot of knowhow concerning health care. That is why she also started tagging along to discussion class where in the beginning mother used to go and now even sister-in-law has joined in, she says. Not only that, all of us including mother, sister-in-law, auntie and myself participated in women's day, which occurs on one day out of the 365, and observed it in gala fashion, says Niruta.

Niruta, who has come to the conclusion that academic learning alone is not practical, says the curriculum they were taught was itself unsuitable. She says that the book used at discussion class has taught her more than the textbooks in school and college. My father was a mason who worked on house constructions. 'Perhaps because he overheard what we talked about, he also encourages us all to go to discussion class and various trainings and other programmes, and that has given me added inspiration' – says an enthusiastic Niruta.



The discussion class is power itself

A function was held in the month of November 2013 to constitute a Ward Citizen Forum. Those who wanted to stake a claim to the post of coordinator were asked to raise their hands. But none of the males raised his hand. The women in the discussion class then proposed a name – that of **Nanjita Dhakal**. With everyone proposing her, there was no question of her refusing. The 11-member forum was then given full shape with the addition of six women.

Nanjita, who is also facilitator of the Akriti CDC at Dasharathpur VDC - 6, Surkhet, has since then been greatly preoccupied with the problems of the village, with the processes of development and construction, the budget released to the VDC and with

whether or not this is properly used. Not only that, she also considers it her duty to tackle the anomalies in the village.

At present, she is so taken up with development and construction that she simply cannot keep herself away from such matters. On January 9, 2014, the village council meeting was underway. As there were a lot of people inside, everyone was asked to go outside. Nanjita, however, said she would not herself utter a word and stayed on inside to observe the proceedings. But she did not go outside. Because she needed to know all about the procedures at the council and she was also curious about any decision taken concerning women.

Thanks to the interest she took in development and construction, Nanjita





was able to set out a proposal for the repair of the Tande-Jhikreni road in her ward and also secure a budget of 50 thousand rupees from the VDC. And now a users' committee has also been formed for the construction of this road. The Treasurer of the Committee is Gaumaya Khadka, a participant of the discussion class. According to Nanjita, the latter had chosen to become the treasurer because menfolk were liable to lapse into irregularities once there is money at hand. There was also talk of constituting the committee with women alone but men were included as it was thought that it would be better for the women and men to be working together, says Nanjita.

For building this road, a budget has to be lined up and other processes also followed through. And for doing so a rule has been laid down under which menfolk can spend only as much as the women do and

nothing more. Nanjita says that such a rule was necessary as the men will have some beer and then deduct the cost of that also from the budget. They feel that such an arrangement will help with economization and get more work done with less money.

The amount of money asked for building the road was in fact 250 thousand Nepalese rupees but only 50 thousand came through. However, the women were not to be put off and they made a pledge to complete the road, using the money for the difficult portions of the work and leaving the easier parts to volunteers. 'We will at the very least make the road useable for stretcher bearers', Nanjita pledged – because the existing pathway is difficult even for two people carrying a sick person. If someone stumbles, it will mean falling off the cliff. That is also why making this road more negotiable has become a matter of huge pride for us.

The road construction users committee, which has held two meetings, has already initiated the construction work. Nanjita is now thinking about taking up a project for properly managing the Jhikreni-Tandi canal once the road is completed. Apart from that she also has a plan to build a temple. Also this time round at the VDC council meeting, she sought budget funding for training women in the making of spices so as to improve their economic condition. However, it could not be included. But she is thinking of trying again. 'I have full confidence about success in all these things', says Nanjita and explains the reason for her confidence thus – all the women at CDC are fully behind me.





Kamala remedies father-in-law's notoriety

The father-in-law is a teacher. It is a good household. They have land also. **Kamala Giri**, who married into the family in 2000 against the background of this good reputation, felt as though the sky had fallen when she came to learn that her mother-in-law and father-in-law were both given to drinking in excess. The father-in-law was already a known drunkard. As they quarreled all the time under the influence of alcohol, her husband also became fed up and headed towards India. Unable to live with the family, Kamala likewise moved out. With the parents-in-law ordering their children not to talk to her, there was no point in their continuing to live together.

Says Kamala of Dasharathpur VDC - 3, Surkhet – drinking killed my mother-

in-law. The brother-in-law also started following in her footsteps. Because of this, his wife went off and married someone else. After that the responsibility for looking after brother-in-law, his son and the father-in-law all fell on Kamala's shoulders. Back at her parental home also there were 11 brothers and sisters. She ponders – under the circumstances how could I abandon that house? How could I continue with my learning?

Nevertheless, out of a wish to console her mind, she started going to the Jagriti community discussion class, which was being run right in the village. Listening in at the discussions that took place there, she would feel amazed. She started to read the books provided in the class. This gave her newer information and newer ideas. 'It was then that I began to feel I had finally come to the right place', says





Kamala, adding – a mind which used to be weighed down with tensions and concerns had come into new knowledge and began to feel that one should pull oneself up and do something.

Before long, Kamala, who has had to put up with a lot on account of others' drinking, joined hands with the other women at discussion class and launched a campaign in the village against alcohol. She committed herself to remedying the ill repute of her alcoholic father-in-law Harishchandra Giri and putting an end to alcohol use. But when she launched into this campaign, the people in the village challenged her directly to 'first show that she can get her own father-in-law to stop his drinking'. Some also mocked her, saying she was the daughter-in-law of none other than a drunk and was undoubtedly herself given to drink. This caused her even greater dismay. But it also gave her added motivation to bring about an end to alcohol use.

Quite apart from her campaign against alcohol, Kamala is also just as active in the movement for securing the rights of women. On the 7th March 2014, they had planned to observe Women's Day. As part of that, she persuaded everyone about the significance of the day and

took them in a rally to the functions held to mark the occasion. There were 62 women participating in the rally. This was a historic success for the entire ward and for Kamala as well. Because this was the first time that so many women had come out to observe Women's Day in her ward.

Kamala is also on the monitoring committee for the community forest in the village. What are the things she has managed to do? Going into details, she says – while carrying out inquiries out of a suspicion that irregularities had taken place, it emerged that the secretary owed 150 thousand rupees. We then put pressure on him. He has said that he will clear the debt by the end of the month of March. We have kept up the pressure, telling him that it would not be enough for him to just pay the amount due, as he would have to give up his post as well.

And that was not all. We had all agreed to line up Bindu Bohara for the post of secretary of the Community Forest Users Group (CFUG). But some of the menfolk discouraged her, saying irregularities had taken place there and she could become entangled. But we nevertheless did not give up our claim to the posts of secretary and chairperson – she says. While we were going about doing all this, some individuals threatened to 'cut down the sal trees in the forest and not spare Kamala's virtue either'. Says Kamala – but such threats make no difference to me because nothing will get done if one gives in to fear.



Gone are the days of being looked down upon

I am from a poor family. On top of that it was a Dalit family. For these reasons everyone used to look down upon us. Things got so bad that a complaint was filed with the police even over a minor transaction. They gave us a lot of trouble. If we went anywhere they would shout at us not to touch anything. We would feel it was better not to have come at all as far as possible. We used to be badly put off by the treatment meted out to us. We felt extremely sad, wondering why we had to be poor or Dalit. But no matter how much trouble we had to put up with or how much anxiety we felt, what alternative was there in the end. We just learnt to live with it. This was a few years ago.

But now [Bipana Kasera's](#) entire daily routine has changed. Once Bipana, who lives in Kachanapur VDC - 8, Banke started going to the CDC being run in the village, she learnt a great deal about women's rights. She learnt that

no one could discriminate against Dalits or anyone else, and that there were sanctions in place in case such discrimination took place. While participating in various programmes she received suggestions from many other women who had faced the same kind of difficulties as herself. Says Bipana – after that my situation started to change gradually.

Bipana says the main thing is that there are many other women now who would care about her and so nobody can subject her to demeaning treatment. And she goes to discussion class regularly. She says that she always likes to go there because lots of discussions take place about women like herself. She also says that she now feels even more grateful to the women in discussion class as these individuals had even taken the initiative to amicably settle a case that had already ended up at the police station. 'Whether you call it my support, my strength or whatever, it is the women at discussion class' – she sets great store by that discussion class.



Bipana, who points to that as the main reason why she is no longer looked down upon these days, goes on to say – be careful about telling the class anything, or telling it to do anything; people are now afraid lest all the women jump

to their feet and come marching over. And in fact, the CDC women regularly extend a helping hand to Bipana, just as they do to others, whenever she faces any problems at home. They also proffer advice on a range of things. For these reasons, Bipana has decided to look upon her class as a source of strength.

Her husband has gone abroad to make some money. That is why she now understands the importance of savings. Bipana, who puts 20 rupees a month into her savings, has taken a loan of five thousand rupees from a fund that has been built up by all the women acting together. She has used the money to raise nanny goats. She now has six goats. Although this animal husbandry does not tide over all her expenses, it has been a good supplement. She only has a nominal amount of land for cultivation and lives with her mother-in-law and one child. She also has a cow. The mother-in-law helps with the cow and goats, and this has made her life a little easier.

One day at discussion class the importance of cleanliness came up. Everyone came to realise that a filthy environment gives rise to problems of health. They then reached a decision that they would take steps to keep the households and the neighbourhood clean. But Bipana ran into a problem because there was no toilet at her house. So she said frankly that it would be a problem implementing the decision of the class.

Where there is a will there is a way. After hearing about Bipana's problem, they agreed to extend her a loan of 10 thousand rupees from the funds saved by the discussion class so that she could build her toilet. Not only that, the women also extended other kinds of help. Bipana now pays back 400 rupees a month in principal and interest on the loan she took for buying her goats and she has also assured them that she will pay back the loan for the toilet construction in one lump sum. She says there has not been any problem because she consults her husband, who is abroad, and her mother-in-law, who is at home, before she undertakes anything. 'I will pay back the loan for toilet construction in one lump sum once my husband sends the money' – she said.

Her husband does send a little bit of money now also but it is just enough to keep paying back the loan of 90 thousand that he incurred when he went abroad. The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are hopeful that once that loan is paid back they will be able to save a little and their household finances will improve. That is why they decided to see to their urgent needs even if it meant borrowing a little from their group. Bipana's husband is fully supportive of this decision.

Bipana, who is only 17, got married just two years ago. She was in class nine at the time but after getting married she discontinued her schooling. She now has a seven-month-old baby. Although she has to give her priority now to household matters, she says that once her child grows up she will return to her studies. Says she – after coming to discussion class I have learnt many things about health, hygiene, rights, savings, and the like. Apart from that I have also come to understand the importance of schooling. That is why I have been thinking of completing my schooling, albeit a bit late in life.



I'll build a good bridge and show them

Tulsi Khatri knows well by now from attending CDC for so long that one should get involved in the development and construction work that takes place in the village, that such work will be carried out properly and will be long-lasting if the women take the leadership, and that women should get onto committees concerning forests, schools, health posts, drinking water and the like and put in an exemplary performance. And she was in search of a suitable opportunity. So when the VDC was about to provide a budget for building a bridge over the Paruwa rivulet in the village, she took keen interest.

That is why she found herself attending a gathering that was called for forming a Paruwa Bridge

Construction Users' Committee. She staked a claim to the post of chairperson of the committee. But with everyone asking for the chairpersonship to be set aside for someone from the backward Tharu community, she reluctantly agreed to settle for secretary. Says Tulasi – 'In point of fact I am the only woman on the seven-member committee but I am nevertheless going to put in exemplary work as far as possible. I will not let anyone do anything that shouldn't be done'.

Tulsi, who is a participant of the CDC at Rajapur in Kachanapur VDC -9, Banke, says that the 600 thousand rupees provided by the VDC for building the bridge is not enough and they are thinking of contributing voluntary labour equivalent to another 300 thousand. The committee has already discussed about the voluntary



labour and about how to mobilise further resources if that also is not enough. The work of identifying the likely sources is also going on, she said.

The meeting discusses the materials needed for the bridge-building and they also turn to her for advice, says Tulasi. Everyone pays attention to her suggestions, and when she is about to attend a meeting of the bridge committee, she also consults her colleagues at the discussion class. She puts forth her ideas as per the discussions that take place in that class. 'At the end of the day, it was on the suggestions of colleagues here that I went into the committee' - says Tulasi.

As the bridge was going to be built within the community forest in the village, a bridge construction users' committee

was also constituted at a general meeting of the community forest. Otherwise, the door could have been left open for the participation of other women also in the bridge committee, says she. But although she is the sole woman, she is resolved to do her utmost and build a good bridge for all to see.

This community forest makes a good income from sand and gravel. And she is going about coordinating with the forest committee to initiate a training programme in tailoring for her colleagues at discussion class. The forest committee chairperson has said that scissors and sewing machines will be provided. A sum of 20 thousand rupees has been provided by the VDC's programme targeted on women. Tulsi says they are now all set to initiate the training and opines that this will help the women in taking up gainful employment. Tulsi and four others from the discussion class had gone to the forest committee with a request for such assistance.

Tulsi, who is 32, has had schooling only up to class six. She does some farming also. But she has not stopped going to the discussion class. The reason is that the CDC has encouraged her and many others like her to sit in on various entities and take up leadership. That is why she does not feel that her position is weak even though she is the only woman on the seven-member committee. And she never fails to voice her commitment in front of everyone to put in good work and win hearts all round.





We built our own house

We made the bricks ourselves. We also brought the timber ourselves. We put up the walls. We were assisted in all this work not just by the participants of the CDC but also by all the women and men in the village. As a result, we have now built a house of its own for our discussion class. There is no longer any need to rent space in someone else's premises. After some time, we will be holding our class in our own premises – says a pleased Bajari Chaudhari of Kachanapuri VDC - 6, Banke district.

What makes her happy more than anything else is the help extended in this work by everybody in the village. Says she – everyone extended whatever help they could in building this house. The Social Reform Club

in the village made a contribution that can never be forgotten. They brought two large boulders. They helped with the timber also. They also extended voluntary labour in the actual construction. The other villagers also helped generously.

Everyone has been commending the class run by womenfolk from within the village and they have also been extending their help. While the discussion class will now onwards no doubt take place in this house, Bajari feels that it will also make it easier for other entities to hold their meetings or organise other programmes. She says all the participants in the discussion class were eager to see the house go up, saying 'it is for ourselves'. The interesting thing about the construction of the house is that the women were able to do all the necessary work themselves. Although





some of the men did help out, the women did all the main work from building the roof to putting up the walls, and they have taken this as a great achievement. Says Bajari – this has proved that we

women are capable of anything.

Bajari Chaudhari, 35, who only knows how to write her own name, has been a participant of the discussion classes right from the beginning. She says that she felt like getting something done after learning a great many things from the discussions that take place in class, the books provided there, and the wall magazines pasted up in the village. She says – although I cannot read for myself, I ask others to read things out aloud for me. I get others to read out the wall magazines also and I take it all in. This also has aroused in me the feeling that I must do something.

Kanchanpur (Banke)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	157	702	322	380
2	326	1629	806	823
3	80	480	241	239
4	106	768	377	391
5	212	1157	526	631
6	204	1234	714	620
7	245	1096	487	553
8	210	1040	487	553
9	163	752	334	418
Total	1703	8858	4240	4618

Poverty rate : 25.26

Kachanapur (Banke)



4240



4618



Brother-in-law asks forgiveness

I have no husband. That is why my brother-in-law has twice tried to rape me. One day at 3 am he came where

I was sleeping. I went screaming for help to the participants of the discussion class. Thirty-five of them gathered immediately and surrounded his house. He asked for forgiveness, saying he would not do that sort of thing again. The second time also a similar attempt was made. After that, at the initiative of the discussion class, he was imposed a fine of 15 hundred rupees and made to sign a paper saying, "I will not do such a thing again, and if I do I am prepared to go wherever I am taken". And that sort of thing has not happened again. Had there been no discussion class...!

Amrita Chaudhari

Kachanapur-6, Banke



Providing for future: pension fund

The women of every CDC put some money into savings on a monthly basis. Similarly, various groups have also initiated savings since many years back. This sort of thing is not at all new in the villages. But the pension fund initiated by the participants of the discussion class at Suryalalpur in Baijapur VDC -7, Banke has become a topic of conversation everywhere.

Reason – 19 out of the 25 participants in the CDC have gotten together to start a pension savings scheme. They put savings ranging from 50 to 500 rupees into the scheme. Many of them save 100 rupees a month. The money deposited in the pension scheme cannot be withdrawn for 15 years, but after that twice the amount that has been deposited will be paid

back, says [Jeet Kumari Chaudhari](#), one of the active participants of the scheme.

The scheme has been initiated with future needs in mind, says Jeet Kumari, according to whom the needs of the present will get taken care of somehow or other. The funds thus saved are all given out in loans and this will add to the income, she says. Under a rule brought in by the women, the participants of their own discussion class are charged an interest of 24 percent on loans but outsiders are charged 60 percent. "This percentage is low compared to the money lenders here who charge up to 100 percent, and that is why the outsiders who come to us for loans are numerous," says Jeet Kumari, adding that the money lenders are now complaining about busy-body women bringing down an established rate of interest.





Apart from this they have also opened group accounts as well as individual accounts. Jeet

Kumari says that with an individual account one can deposit and withdraw as much as one wishes. Similarly,

with a group account a specified amount is deposited and loans are taken out when required and interest paid as per the regulations. Thanks to these three kinds of savings schemes, the women not only have a range of choices for making savings and taking out their money when they need it to meet their expenses, but can also provide something for the future.

Women at the discussion class like Jeet Kumari now operate their group account themselves but send the money for the other two accounts to the Women's Welfare Forum (WWF). Jeet Kumari also says that they plan to open their own cooperative and that all their accounts will then be shifted to the cooperative. They already have 54 thousand rupees in savings and they say they will be coordinating with the participants of discussion classes in all the wards of the VDC for setting up the cooperative.

The concept of the pension savings scheme was adopted so that families and womenfolk are not left in the lurch by husbands who spend their money on drink and don't bother to save anything, say

those planning the scheme. The women here, who cut babiyo grass that is plentiful in the forests during winter and make rope from it, earn a good income from selling the rope, and they have money to save. They save money from other sources also in the same fund these days, rather than squander it away.

Jeet Kumari says with satisfaction that the WWF, which has its office at Binauna VDC, Banke ranks their group second in terms of discipline, turnover, transactions and the like. Involved in it are many groups in Kachanapur, Baijapur and Mahadevipuri. She claims that they would have been number one, had their group had its own uniform. Those who have savings say that transactions are easy because from time to time the staff come over themselves from the office which is an hour's distance to collect the savings and provide other services.

The women, who have been putting their savings into various accounts, have also been pushing forward with income generating activities with loans taken from those accounts. Many of them take out loans to buy sewing machines. And they are carrying on smoothly with that business. Says Jeet Kumari – the main reason why we have started making such savings is the leaking pot analysis method, one of the participatory rural appraisal tools that we were taught and made to exercise in the discussion class. We were thus motivated to save while earning.



Becoming director just by looking on

Binod Kaur of Baijapur VDC - 2, Banke was a student of class nine at Saraswati Higher Secondary School located in the same village. The children's health committee constituted at the school came up with a proposal to provide training on forum/interactive theatre to some of the members. Discussions were held on who should be included. Binod expressed a wish to be included. No sooner said than done. He was selected along with two others for the training. Upon being selected Binod's happiness knew no bounds because 'this was a dream of his since a long time back even though he had never gotten to see plays or receive training.'

There were many who went for such forum theatre training. Some of them even managed to put on plays. Some have taken up acting roles. Some others

have been lost sight of. Yet others have been confined to being spectators. Binod, however, was able in the midst of all these to establish a separate identity for himself. No sooner had he participated in some plays after completing a 10-day training than the talent latent in him came bursting out. He continued in this field without a break. Thinking about plays, making plays, acting in plays, watching plays, writing scripts, choosing roles – his mind was full of such things alone.

It was because of such commitment and concern on his part that the Freed Kamalari Development Forum (FKDF) urged him to prepare a play against violence against women (VAW). And without further ado he prepared a play for the FKDF. This play directed by Binod has already been shown by FKDF in various places and is in the process of being shown in other places as well. Fifteen freed Kamalari are themselves playing various





roles in the play and showcasing their problems to put across a message against VAW.

No sooner had the directing of this play been done with than Janashakti Secondary

School in the same village came forward with a request to do a play focused on human rights. Binod gladly accepted this work also. In this play he covered topics such as the harm done by drug abuse, the downside of child marriage, the problems caused by human trafficking, and the like. He also included material concerning what should be paid attention to so as not to ruin one's schooling. This was greatly liked by students. 'That is why I was commended by our teachers also' – says Binod grinning.

Right now (18 April 2014), Binod is working on another play, this one at the behest of an organisation working for the rights of children. He has also received a proposal to do a play for a committee constituted within the school by INSEC, a local NGO, once this play covering child marriage, human rights, human trafficking and the like is ready.

Binod, who finds coming upon him the responsibility of directing one play after another, is said to give his ear to whoever is the first to approach him. Says he – 'I then work on a script based on the issues raised by them. I then show them the script. Once that is finalised I select the actors. Only then does the work of putting on the play commence.' He also says that while producing a play, he ponders the subject matter and holds discussions with the school and the community before choosing the roles. Binod

says he has been able to make progress in this field thanks to his habit of carefully studying any incident that takes place in society, and his inclination towards getting to the root of the problem and pondering how it can be put paid to. The forum theatre training has helped him turn these inclinations of his to good account, he says joyfully. He also feels that a four-day refresher training he attended in Nepalgunj has helped him overcome shortcomings and given him added knowledge about forum theatre.

He feels that while drama enthuse the mind, it is not an easy undertaking. Because sometimes it takes hours to get someone to say even something ordinary, let alone to get him to laugh or cry. 'When the person is alone he can say anything but if there are three or four other people around the words simply refuse to come out' – he has had plenty of experience of the difficulties that arise at such times. Be that as it may, he had already come to the conclusion earlier on that drama also can be of great help in minimizing the aberrations that obtain in the village. That is why he wishes to embrace this field well into the future.

In the same context he has come to the conclusion that he should engage himself in an organised fashion to give continuity to the work of doing away with the aberrations widespread in society through the medium of forum theatre. And so he has initiated the process of forming a club for this very purpose. He plans to bring into this club those who are of similar mind, who have a spirit of social service and are also interested in drama. He wishes to use the club for staging the plays that he has written/directed and projecting the skills he has learnt not only among village audiences but also in the various districts and district headquarters.



SECTION 3

Women in Decision-making

It is one of the objectives of the My Rights, My Voice programme to ensure participation of women in the decision-making process on equal terms with men. This helps build an equitable and inclusive society. As per this objective of the programme, the women of the community discussion class have been participating in various decision-making processes.

In this process, they have been taking a lead in various activities such as constructing a women's building, taking initiatives to provide justice to the victims of injustice, and deciding to use the budgets meant for them in various social activities. They have also been working toward identifying their necessities and the ways to meet them. This section dwells on the various decision-making processes women are involved in and their decisions.





Outreach clinic gets a new name

There was a building in Piladi VDC - 1 of Dailekh district, which passers-by referred to as a charity rest house. As it always remained open cattle often entered the building. It neither had doors nor windows. Neither was it fit for anyone to live there. This unattended edifice belonged to outreach clinic. Though it was a clinic by designation, all its services were provided from a nearby private home. The clinic provided iron pills and weighed children. It provided no other services. When the owner of the house did not allow the clinic to move out of his premises, it nearly stopped offering its services.

Bimala BC says, "When a discussion class started in this village, the participants decided to bring this abandoned

building into use. The CDC would receive Rs 450 per month to rent a room for the discussion class. The women used this money to clean out the building and put in doors and windows. The next month, they used the rent money to buy straw mats. Then they bought a table, a stretcher, etc. Once the building was suitable for use, a vaccine center was opened in it. It started providing its services to wards no. 1, 2 and 3 since September 27.

According to Bimala, the public health office has provided the center nothing except a signboard. The meetings of the various local committees are also held in the building. Someone is sent to fetch the keys if there is any meeting to be held. Bimala says she feels happy that the building has come into everyone's use. She also says they have been trying to get funds to put in a





toilet in the building. "We have also dug a pit to dispose of the syringes and bottles used by the clinic," says Bimala.

The women not only brought the building into use but

have also bought a box to keep things as well as mats, tables, etc. Bimala BC, who has been playing a lead role in all these activities, says all their activities have been effective as they have been working in close coordination with the Outreach Clinic Management Committee (OCMC) and the Aama Samuha or mothers' group. Bimala further says that their activities have met with success as Sabitri BC, the chairperson of the OCMC, is also a participant of the Nawajyoti CDC.

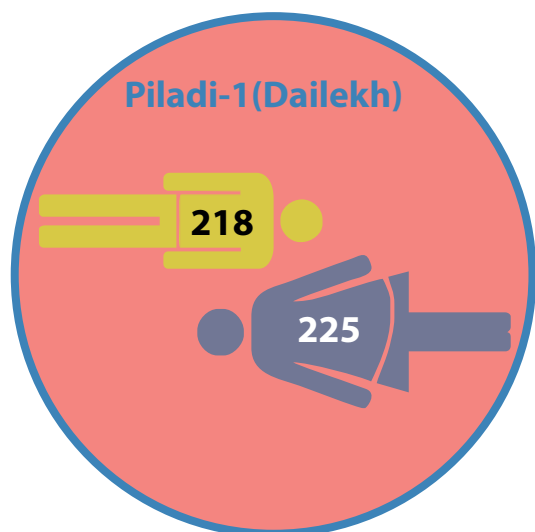
Currently, both the discussion class and outreach clinic are run in this building. As per this arrangement, vaccination camps

are organised on the 11th of every month, the meetings of the mothers' group on the 20th and outreach clinic on the 21st. Apart from this, the meetings of other local committees are also held in the building. After the women brought this building into use, outreach clinic has acquired a new name. Bimala says, "No one understands when they are asked the way to outreach clinic as people refer to this building as Mahila Ghar (or women's building)."

Piladi (Dailekh)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	77	443	218	225
2	44	297	146	151
3	57	328	175	153
4	55	316	161	155
5	69	415	208	207
6	62	375	178	197
7	40	326	162	164
8	55	354	178	176
9	45	261	126	135
Total	504	3115	1552	1563

Poverty rate : 19.39





Discussion class provides justice

'I stayed at home, while my husband worked in India. He had taken a second wife in India. He used to come home but kept his second wife in Surkhet. When I learnt about this I didn't know what to do. I couldn't think of anything I could do. I thought about my children's future and felt bad. But there was nothing that I thought I could do.

home also came to the police station. My in-laws agreed to deposit Rs 100,000 and also to give me my husband's share of their family property. They have already given me the money, while they are in the process of registering a plot of land in my name. He shouldn't have taken a second wife. But I got justice anyway and I attribute this to the CDC.'

I then brought the matter up before the participants of the Jiwanjyoti Community Discussion Class, which I used to visit regularly. On the advice of other participants of the class, I registered a complaint at Dharampokhari Police Station. But my husband's family helped him get away. When the police went looking for him, my in-laws were called to the police station. People from my maternal

This is one reason why [Lalita BC](#), who is a participant of the CDC at Piladi VDC-2, Dailekh, has come to the conclusion that she has done good by joining the CDC. She felt huge moral support when the participants of the discussion class assured her that they would be taking any step required to get her justice. "I was not afraid of my in-laws, of society or the police as I had the backing of so many participants in discussion class. I was sure of getting justice," she says.





She is confident that her father-in-law will register the promised plot of land in her name. She says her father-in-law is an honest man and she is confident that the CDC participants

would exert pressure if he broke his promise. Hence, though her husband no longer stays with her, she is confident that she will be able to raise and educate her children as she has the backing and support of the discussion class and its participants.

Lalita has her own troubles, but as a participant of the CDC she is actively involved in bringing about reforms in her village. While they have launched an anti-liquor campaign in there under her leadership and seized the vessels used for liquor making, they have also collected fines from drunks creating a nuisance in public. They have collected Rs 27,000 from the sale of the liquor utensils and the fines imposed on drunks. They have decided to give away Rs 10,000 for putting in a waiting room at the village health post, and Rs 6,000 to provide gas cylinders to the health post. They have invested the remaining amount.

There is no need to describe how clever Lalita and other participants of the CDC have become. This year the village council meeting was held on January 6. At the meeting, the women submitted a memorandum demanding the declaration of the village as a liquor-free zone. When the meeting concluded, the women demanded

such a declaration, but officials said the declaration would be made the next day. The women, however, did not relent and demanded that either the declaration be made the same day or the council meeting continued till the next day. It was then that the officials made the declaration the same day.

After a drunk gentleman created nuisance

On January 6, 2014, the village council meeting of Piladi was in progress. Participants from all the discussion classes in the village demanded that the village be declared a liquor-free zone. Then a gentleman from Ward No. 9 in the VDC, who was drunk, sat next to a woman and started shouting. The women took him to the health post and locked him up in the toilet. The women say that this has sent a strong message to other drunkards who create a nuisance in public.

When a shopkeeper tried to be clever

Police had been deployed to maintain law and order during the village council meeting. At the same time a shopkeeper was trying to spirit away the liquor in his shop. The women saw what was going on and informed the police. They demanded action against the shopkeeper. The police seized the liquor and fined shopkeeper Man Bahadur Khadka Rs 4,000 for selling liquor and another Rs 2,000 for using a student to smuggle it away.



Amazing emotional attachment with CDC shelter

The women of Amuwa village in Mahadevpuri VDC - 8, Banke became very worried when the thatched-roof house that they had built so painstakingly for the CDC started leaking. As the rainy season was approaching, they feared that the house might collapse during heavy rainfall. They raised this issue in the discussion class.

They decided that they would all go out and fetch straw and repair the leaking roof. But where would they bring the straw from? There was no straw in the community forest in the village. Even the nearby forests did not yield any straw. But they came up with an idea at the discussion class that they would demand the straw from Banke National Park.

Thankfully, the national park agreed to their demand. Yet the park was far away and straw was not available in the fringes of the forest. The women, however, decided that they would bring the straw at any cost. They therefore reached Thuria, which is at a distance of 20 kilometers from their village. The women could find straw only after making their way deep into the forest. "It took one entire day to cut the grass and another full day to carry it away," said [Ram Kali Tharu](#), who led these efforts. "We ferried it by buffalo cart as it would otherwise have taken us several days," she said.

The women made the bricks themselves and brought bamboo and wood from their own houses to build the house in one and a half months. They now feel an emotional attachment to the house as they put in their labour and sweat to build it. It was out of



concern for the house that the women were willing to go to a lot of trouble. "It was not easy for us to build this house. It took an entire month just to make bricks," recalls Ramkali Tharu.

Seeing the difficulties faced by these Tharu women in building the house, the Durga Bhawani CFUG provided the wooden beams and a plot of land required for the structure. Then every household in the Tharu village also contributed some labour for the construction. The discussion class participants say that earlier they used to conduct their class out in the open fields, but now they have no problem with space as they have their own house. To make it look attractive they have not only erected a fence but also planted flowers.

On 14 March 2014, family members of each of the CDC participants contributed their labour for thatching the roof. They had made it mandatory for each participant to bring one male and one female member of their family to repair the house. "Now we don't need to worry for the next three or four years," said Ramkali.



Everyone should support good work

I work for the Armed Police Force. The village women were thatching the roof of the women's house.

So I have come to help them. I know how to replace bamboos and do the thatching. Our own mothers, sisters and wives sit in this building to attend discussion class. Hence, I have come to help them all, including our neighbours

Through the CDC, women have learnt to speak, they have understood their rights and they have carried out various social service activities. My wife also regularly attends the discussion class. So it is not only me but my brother also has come to help them. Everyone should support good work. Otherwise, how can there be a society that is good?

Shree Ram Chaudhary

Amuwa, Mahadevpuri VDC-8, Banke



Commitment to upgrading primary school

Every woman had her face covered in vermilion powder. No one was recognizable. The women were playing on the *madal* drum themselves. And everyone seemed so preoccupied that they did not have time to speak to one another. The women sang and danced, and the revelry continued throughout the day. All the villagers, including the elderly and the children, were enjoying themselves. They were singing:

*How long should we remain suppressed
Now men and women should be equal*

The women were celebrating as Sashila Kumari Khatri had been elected chairperson of the school management committee (SMC) at Janashakti Primary School. Out of the

total of 135 votes cast, she had secured 87 votes. Her rival Lokendra Bahadur Bista had secured only 47 votes. This was the reason why all the women were celebrating. Not only this. [Bal Kumari Dahal](#) and Amrita Devkota, both from the CDC, were also elected, unopposed, as members of the SMC. Bal Kumari says, "Words cannot express our happiness. This is the first time women have been elected to the SMC since the school was established in 1993."

Sashila was not elected so easily as the SMC chairperson. Bal Kumari of Balapur, Mahadevpuri VDC-6, Banke says, "During discussion class we had brought up the idea of assuming leadership of the school management committee. We planned to send a woman chairperson and as many women members as possible onto the committee. This is a culmination of





our long-running struggle." She says she took the women candidates to every household in the village to canvass the votes as they had learnt that the rival candidates had already influenced

the voters. "Otherwise, the voters would not have elected us," she says, adding that it was no easy victory. "We had also come to learn that the male contenders had distributed money to the voters."

The election process for the school management committee had begun on July 28, 2013. The actual voting was finalised on March 5, and it was put out that the committee would be formed in consensus. But there was no consensus even by that date. There were two male contenders and one woman candidate for the post of chairperson. Finally, when Sashila and Lokendra both refused to withdraw their candidacy, the election was held on March 14.

The men had tried everything, from trying to persuade the women to threatening them. "Who will look after the cattle? The District Education Office is far away, and who will go all the way there?", the men said to the women. They even said the women would wreck their homes if they had to be away frequently on committee business. Bal Kumari says, "But we decided not to turn back. As we had properly

convinced Sashila, there was no question of her withdrawing her candidacy. This was an issue concerning not only Sashila but all the women.

Now all the women, ranging from Sashila who has passed the SLC to Bal Kumari who has passed class 8, want to upgrade the primary school to secondary level. Bal Kumari says that they would make utmost efforts to upgrade the school to secondary level as it takes the children in the village one hour to walk to the secondary school in neighbouring Perani village. She says the women would move ahead in consultation with educated members of society.

The women also say that the next task of the school management committee would be to look into the financial transactions. Bal Kumari says, "We have heard that the school is facing a loss of Rs 300,000. The school shouldn't have in loss as it is a government school. We will look into the transactions and find out the truth."

She also says that the committee would be making efforts to improve the quality of the education provided. No sooner were the women elected to the new SMC than the committee fixed a date for a meeting to discuss the steps to be taken to upgrade the school to secondary level, hold an election for the Teacher-Parent Association (TPA), study the financial transactions and improve the quality of the education. The meeting has been called for March 18. "We are now taking steps to ensure that women are elected to the TPA as well."



Motorable road as well as skill

"There was a road but it was too narrow. Vehicles could not pass through the road. If we had to ferry in goods, we had to carry it to the village. It was also difficult for us to carry patients to the health post. This was the problem faced by the participants of the community discussion class of Tikapur of Kachnapur VDC -7 in Banke district. The women of the discussion class therefore decided to widen and upgrade the road."

Naina Thapa, who took the lead in the road expansion work, says, "Once we decided that we would expand and upgrade the village road we invited all the respected members of society and held a discussion in this regard. As per our decision, we went to the VDC office. The VDC office for

its part agreed to provide us a support of Rs 100,000. We took the money, but this amount was not enough. Many of us contributed our labour. Everyone in the village helped out."

"We have already expanded a two-kilometer section of the road," says Naina. "While some people have helped us by removing the stones, others have helped by felling the trees along the road. We have been able to expand the road thanks to support from the villagers. The road has now been graveled also and it is always kept clean."

"Earlier, some of the villagers had refused to cooperate, saying they would not give their land for the road. But when 80 percent of the villagers supported our initiative, the remaining 20 percent also fell in line,"





says Naina. Later, even those who had opposed the move supported them. "After all, the road is for everyone. How could they not help us?"

Naina says they have also decided to take sewing training as they feel that they too should do something to generate income. She says the books provided by the discussion class made them aware about the good work done by women in other places. "That is why we felt we too should be doing something. We want to use the Rs 20,000 provided by the VDC to give skill-based training to women."

Naina and other participants of the CDC are now learning all the basics of sewing from Gita Wali, chairperson of the women's network in the VDC. The 51 women involved in this training have formed five groups, each comprising 10

women. Naina says they would be able to generate income by sewing clothes during the next three months. The Siddha Saikumari community forest has provided them four sewing machines, and they are also been using two machines in the village. They have been repairing the machines with money raised from among themselves. They would be returning the machines provided by the community forest once their training is complete.

Following the start of the discussion class, Naina and other women in the class have done several good things in the village. Citing a human resource crunch, the outreach clinic in the village had remained closed for almost three months. The women of the discussion class therefore went in a delegation to the health post to demand resumption of its services. The health post has now reopened after continuous pressure by the women. Naina, who is also the chairperson of the disaster management committee in the village, says they have gained knowledge of various things after joining the CDC, and she adds that this is their biggest achievement.

She gives credit to the discussion class for the sewing training, the resumption of services at the outreach clinic and the other good work in the village.





A world within a play

When the forum theatre training in Birendranagar of Surkhet was about to conclude, **Jhuma Chapagain** made this proposal to training facilitator Yuvaraj Ghimire: "We have gained a lot of knowledge about development and performance of forum theatre during the 10-day training. We also produced a play. So it would be better if we perform the play in Birendranagar, the district headquarter, before we leave."

The proposal was an attractive one. So, there was no reason why Facilitator Ghimire would refuse. He accepted it, saying it was very good. They agreed to enact the play, but there was still one problem – which play would they choose? The three groups of 30 participants had produced three plays. Everyone had seen the plays

staged by participants from Dasharathpur, Ramghat and Lekhparsa VDCs. Hence, they held extensive discussions over which play to enact. They finally concluded that they would enact the play put together by Lekhparsa VDC as it was the best among them. Jhuma was more than happy as she also belonged to the Lekhparsa group and she had been in the lead role in this play. Jhuma's group was very excited as their play was finally chosen by the training facilitator.

The play 'Junkiri ko Katha' (the story of a fire-fly) was shown at Birendranagar chowk. The audience was spellbound by Jhuma and her group. The play was based on the problems faced by service seekers at the health post, which did not have the necessary medical equipment. They also saw how polygamy causes difficulties. The





villagers likewise saw what happens when teachers neglect their duties towards their school. Everyone said, "What a brilliant play!"

This further motivated Jhuma and her group. That is why she went on to show the play in ward nos. 1, 2 and 3 of her VDC and that too over three consecutive days even though she was at the time injured in the foot. Her husband, who is a teacher, was out of the village. Her two sons were in the house. She informed her husband by phone about the play and asked her sons to eat properly while she was away staging the play. Even the locals had expressed surprise when they saw her limping.

Why so much passion for drama? Jhuma says, "First, we have to bring our training into use. Secondly, it is necessary for us to show such plays to the villagers to educate them about the importance of education and health and to eliminate social ills such as child marriage and polygamy. Hence, I did not care about my own problem." Jhuma and her team performed the play in all the nine wards of their VDC.

Her play aims at showing the problems in the village and their solutions. She says

her play was effective as she had worked hard during the training. "Our training was no less arduous than in the police and the army. We rehearsed and made the sounds of various animals and birds. The training taught us how to make our acting convincing and effective."

Jhuma was speechless when she was first chosen by her discussion class for the forum theatre training. Because she says she had thought play was for children. But later she learnt that this was only a misconception as she saw even 60-year-old women from Dasharathpur VDC participating in the training. "This removed all my misconceptions and encouraged me," Jhuma says, adding, "We did not feel shy though the students participating with us were a little shy. The training facilitators were surprised by our enthusiasm." Jhuma says the CDC helped them shed their inhibitions.

Jhuma also took a four-day refresher training on forum theatre in Nepalgunj. Her group also performed another play in Nepalgunj. At the end, one woman from each of the three VDCs was to speak after their play. Participants from Lekhparsa proposed Jhuma's name for this. In the course of her speech, she said it would have been better if the programme also provided skill-based training in livelihood so that the women could go on showing their plays against social ills. She said, "We want to show all that we have learnt to as many people as possible. You have to create an environment for this."



4

SECTION

Rights and Duties

Human beings are entitled to certain rights by birth. In order that these rights are not infringed upon, there are various national and international instruments and systems to speak up for their protection. Likewise with the various treaties and conventions, and the laws safeguard the rights of women. But while exercising these rights, a majority of people neglect their duties, although they all have equal responsibilities towards their family, society and the state.

Through their participation in the community discussion class and in the My Rights, My Voice (MRMV) programme, men and women have acknowledged this fact and have learnt to exercise their rights while at the same time fulfilling their duties. In this process, they have made utmost efforts to do away with social ills, help the victims of injustice and educate the people on issues concerning health and education through their door-to-door campaigns. This section covers these initiatives in detail.





Increased activism of children

There is a school in Awalparajul VDC of Dailekh district – Sita Jana Sahayog High School. Students at this school have formed a children health committee (CHC). The committee has 15 members. Various programmes are held in this school at their initiative. Other students also participate in these programmes and gain knowledge about various health and education-related issues. At the same time the children also entertain themselves.

Mina BC is one such member of the CHC. She eagerly participates in all the activities of the committee. The CHC organises extracurricular activities in the school every Friday. These activities include debates, poetry recitation and essay writing

competitions. Most of these activities are related to health issues. Why? Mina says, “As the students in our school have a limited knowledge of health issues, it is important to provide them such knowledge. So we organise mostly activities that focus on health issues.”

According to Mina, the participants in these programmes are told that they should visit the health post if they have any health-related problems. They are also made aware about the services offered by the health posts, the free medicines, the need to wash one’s hands before eating, why one should not wear dirty clothes and how they might catch a disease if they play in the dirt. She says it is not only the students who know nothing about health issues, she herself has learnt a lot through these programmes.





Mina says she learns about these issues from the teachers and she then imparts this knowledge to others through the MRMV programme. "Teachers impart to us knowledge about various issues," says

16-year-old Mina, who studies in class 10. She says it would have been a lot better had she learnt about these issues herself. She says she feels very happy to be able to impart the knowledge she gains from the teachers to the other students.

A majority of students want to participate in the programmes organised by the committee. On the one hand, they gain knowledge about various health and education issues, while on the other, those winning in these competitions can take home prizes. These prizes generally include soap, toothpaste and other items of daily use. MRMV programme regularly gives away prizes to the winners of these competitions.

Mina says the teachers also cooperate with the committee in organising such programmes. She says, "Teachers also impart to us knowledge about various

issues, help organise competitions and judge the winners of competitions. They help us make our programmes better organised and more effective. This helps us to spread awareness." She also attributes the success of their programmes to the teachers.



Knowledge gained about adolescent girls' problems and solutions

I study in Shikhar Higher Secondary School of Ramghat VDC, Surkhet district. A CHC has been formed in our school. I am also a member of this committee. We hold meetings and organise various programmes. Through these meetings and programmes I have mainly gained knowledge about adolescent girls' problems and the ways to solve them. We have gained a lot of health-related information through the programmes organised by the committee. I also gained knowledge about the services offered by the health post in our village.

Devi Shahi Thakuri

Class-8
Shikhar Higher Secondary School, Ramghat
Surkhet



Alcohol abuse: a growing concern

Lalit Bahadur Nepali is a facilitator at Pragatisheel Community Discussion Class at Lekhparsa VDC - 6, Surkhet. During one of these discussions, participants raised the issue of a drunken husband's misbehaviour towards his wife, who was also one of the participants of the CDC. During discussions on the issue, it was further revealed that the man in question also misbehaved with his neighbours when he was drunk.

It was not tolerable for the participants that someone like a teacher, who is responsible for showing the way for others, should consume alcohol and misbehave toward his wife and neighbours. So, the participants held discussions at length on ways to solve

this problem. They concluded that they should discuss the issue with the village stakeholders. A huge gathering was called to discuss the problem and find a solution.

"The gathering passed a proposal to form a ward committee for liquor control and also to formulate a code of conduct. The chairperson of the Youth Health Committee (YHC) was made the chairperson of the ward committee also and the member-secretary was named the CDC facilitator," says Lalit Bahadur. 'This proposal by the ward committee for liquor control was forwarded to the Village Council. I had also gone to the Village Council, representing the persons with disability. It was decided there that a committee comprising police personnel and respected members of the village would be formed.'





Lalit, who says he is now surprised by the level of awareness among participants of the discussion class, claims that the training for agriculture assistants in his village was also coordinated by

the CDC participants. After a three-month long training for agriculture assistants almost everyone in the village has taken up vegetable farming. While this has created employment opportunities, it has also helped empower the locals financially. Whether it is any training, development activity or programmes conducted by other organisations, it is the participants of the CDC who have taken the lead. According to Lalit, this is the biggest achievement of the discussion class.

Not only this, the participants of the CDC have also been paying attention to ensure the sustainability of their programmes. They have also been discussing the establishment of a cooperative to give continuity to their programmes and to strengthen the campaign on their rights. 'We are mulling the formation of

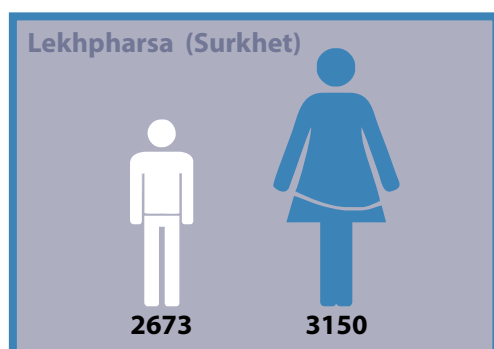
a cooperative to deposit our savings. In this respect, we will move ahead in coordination with all the groups of the VDC', says Lalit.

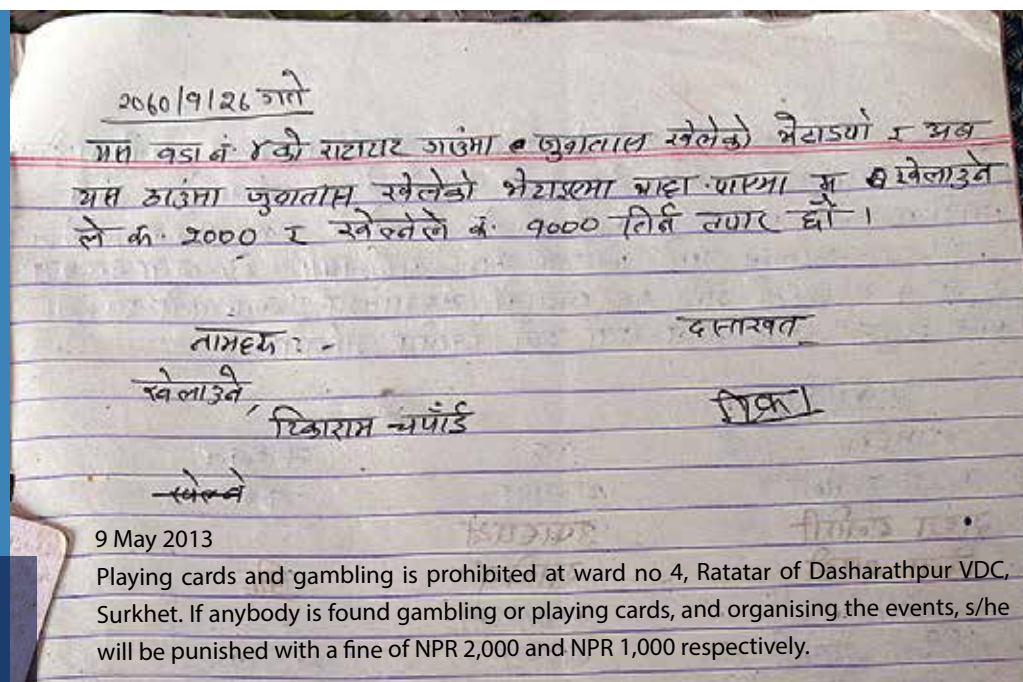
Participants of the discussion class had demanded cooking gas cylinder for the village health post. The participants demanded gas cylinders mainly for sterilizing medical tools used for postpartum and other purposes. But the villagers were against the idea. When the proposal was forwarded to the Village Council, explaining the necessity of a gas cylinder at the health post, the proposal was duly passed. A gas cylinder will now be provided to the health post soon. Lalit says that if there is a will along with the active involvement of the villagers, a lot of problems can be solved by the villagers themselves.

Lekhpharsa (Surkhhet)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	69	333	175	158
2	20	102	52	50
3	46	214	114	100
4	72	323	137	186
5	88	379	172	207
6	302	1286	560	726
7	213	943	445	498
8	277	1281	588	693
9	214	962	430	532
Total	1301	5823	2673	3150

Poverty rate: **25.26**





When they ignored our warnings...

'We have made various efforts to fight the social ills in the village. In the course of this, we time and again urged the villagers not to play cards or gamble. But they continued playing cards. They did not heed our requests. One day we warned them against playing cards. But they kept on with the gambling. The second time we found them playing cards we fined them. But they remained undeterred still. The third time we took away the money they had wagered.'

Anita Nepali, a participant of the Nawajyoti CDC located in Dasharathpur VDC - 4 of Surkhet district, says - All 25 participants of the discussion class went to the spot where some of the villagers were playing cards. They all fled when they saw us. We have warned them that

they would be fined Rs 2,000 each if we found them playing cards or gambling again. After this incident at the Ratar tole or neighbourhood in the village in the last week of December, no incident of gambling has taken place there. Nobody plays cards or gambles anymore. Even if they do they do not do so publicly.

The participants of the discussion class have kept with them the cards that they seized from the gambles. Kept along with the cards is their written commitment not to play cards and to pay a fine if they are ever found playing cards again. Anita says the cards and their written commitment have been kept in the discussion class so that nobody would dare to play or gamble in the village ever again.

Though Anita has only studied up to the seventh grade and she got married



when she was still underage, looking at the way she talks and her deep understanding of things, she appears very mature for someone her age. It appears she has gone through a lot

of hardship and seen much. She says - It is the discussion class that made us more responsible towards our families and society. If we do not improve our society ourselves, who will? This is what I learnt from the discussion class.

This is the lesson that has been inspiring Anita to persuade other women in the discussion class to actively involve themselves in bringing about change in the village. This is why they have launched an anti-liquor campaign. The village squares where drunken commotions were all too common in the evenings now remain peaceful. Anita says -Though it is our mission to control alcohol consumption, we have issued a notice allowing the sale and consumption of alcohol from 6 pm to 8 pm, as it would be difficult for people to quit drinking entirely all at once.

They have also asked the liquor shop owners not to sell alcohol if possible and to sell only during the stipulated hours. Anita says participants of the discussion class have even received death threats after they launched their anti-liquor campaign. 'Several of them threatened to send goons after us,' she said. But without caring about such threats, the participants, on the advice of the elderly and respected and educated

members of society, continued with the campaign. Anita says the campaign has been effective thanks to support from a majority of the villagers.

Anita, 17, who appears so mature, regrets not having been able to participate in the discussion class much earlier. She thinks she would not have married when she was still underage had she joined the class much earlier. She feels bad that she was not aware a pregnant woman should not carry heavy loads and should visit the health post immediately if there are any problems. Anita, who now stays with her husband and in-laws, is determined to continue her studies, which she had quit halfway. The discussion class made her aware that she should continue with her studies.

Thanks to Shambhunarayan

After we launched the anti-liquor campaign, imposing restrictions on the consumption and sale of alcohol, we received various threats. As it was a question of one's life, some of the campaigners did feel discouraged. But we continued our campaign undeterred. We took the issue to respected members of society and discussed it with them. Most of them appreciated our initiative and expressed commitment to support us.

Shambhunarayan, who is a village leader, vowed to not only support us in our campaign but also to do all he could to fight the problems and obstacles along the way. This boosted our confidence. Shambhunarayan has been helping us not only in our anti-liquor campaign but in all our good work aimed at the welfare of society. His support has given us the inspiration to take all kinds of challenges in our stride.



Thrashed for 'making women clever'

Yamuna Kshetri of Dashrathpur VDC - 8, Surkhet district is a facilitator of Gamkhola-based Community Discussion Class. She is also the secretary of the SMC of Janak Nepal Rastriya Secondary School.

On September 29, 2013 a programme on child development was being held in the school. The programme was being held with support from the MRMV that has been running the CDC. As facilitator it was Yamuna's duty to manage the programme. Hence, she went about making preparations to make the event a success.

When the programme was about to begin, she learnt that the chairperson of the SMC had not at all been

informed about it. Meanwhile, Tarjan Oli, chairperson of the SMC of Laligurans Primary School at Ramghat, had already been called onto the dais. She enquired with the school principal why the school management committee chairperson had not been informed about the programme, but received no response.

And as it was a programme concerning child development, children themselves should have been involved in all the activities of the programme. But even the role of MC (master of ceremony) of the programme was taken by the teachers. Yamuna expressed her dissatisfaction at this and suggested that the programme would be much more effective if the children were given with the MC role. Her suggestion was not well-received by the school.





She likewise protested against discrimination in the distribution of snacks among the participants. This also was not taken well by the school. Then some of the teachers started hurling questions at her - Who are you to

poke your nose into everything? Why should we do as you say? And they did it in an insulting manner! She faced such insults although as a facilitator it is her duty to do what she did. She tried to explain this but nobody wanted to listen to her. Yamuna felt extremely put off. This not only troubled her during the day but also gave her sleepless nights.

The next day, Yamuna was facilitating the discussion class in her village. Someone then asked her to step outside to talk about some important matter. She said she would do so after the class was over. But she was forced to halt her class midway. The entire family of Tarjan Oli then thrashed her. 'Why did you speak against Tarjan yesterday? Is that your father's school? Who are you?' they asked, and then thrashed her. 'Everyone seemed to enjoy this. My husband is abroad and the participants of the discussion class were also frightened. I had nothing to say and they beat me black and blue,' said Yamuna bursting into tears.

After discussing the matter in the CDC, Yamuna reported the incident to police. Both the parties were called in by the police. Yamuna was surprised when she saw that Tarjan's family had submitted a newspaper that said 12 participants of the discussion class lead by Yamuna had beaten up Tarjan's wife. Tarjan had gotten the fake news item published in the newspaper.

Tarjan's wife also came to the police post and pretended to be writhing in pain. 'We were surprised and infuriated to see the charade. We reported the actual incident to the police. As the participants of the discussion class were by my side, the police didn't buy the allegations leveled against us by Tarjan's family. Tarjan also summoned the political leaders from the district to put pressure on the police. But we refused to relent until the police punished Tarjan for his actions.'

Says Yamuna - the police pressed us to reconcile. But we stuck to our guns. In the final negotiations, it was agreed that Tarjan would pay Rs 25,000 for my treatment expenses. Perhaps the political leaders Tarjan had summoned guessed what had actually happened. So they stepped aside. Although I was beaten up, I succeeded in making Tarjan pay for his actions. Meanwhile, the school also has felt that it had wronged me. These incidents will always remain with me as my achievements and as lessons of life. However it appears on the surface, they had beaten me for "making women clever".



Concerned over health post building

'In almost all the village development committees the health post has its own building. But the health post in our village does not have a building of its own. One never knows when the health post would have to be moved as the place belongs to someone else. How can a health post without an address provide effective treatment to patients? This was a hot issue at Nawajyoti CDC in Ramghat VDC. All of us were of the view that something had to be done.'

Ratna BK, treasurer of the YHC, says - We went everywhere seeking support to build the health post. We went to the VDC office and the district health office, but to no avail. We even went to the Department of Health and the Ministry of Health in Kathmandu. We

have presented our demand everywhere and we received assurances from all. Let's hope the health post will get its own building soon.

The VDC office, which had allocated only Rs 21,000 for the health sector last year, has allocated Rs 34,600 this year after active lobbying by the YHC members and the participants of the CDC. Apart from that, the VDC office has also allocated Rs 200,000 for the health post, says Ratna, adding - 'We need a piece of registered land for constructing the health post building, but the health post does not own any land.'

Therefore, the health post officials, the participants of the CDC and the villagers have agreed to purchase land for the purpose, she says. Thanks to the active



involvement of all, the health post now has a new bed. Participants of the discussion class had organised a gathering to apprise the villagers of the problems and they also submitted a memorandum for making this arrangement at the health post. Ratna says all this has helped equip the health post with the necessary medical tools and equipment.

Aside from the health sector, Ratna and other participants of the discussion class have also launched a campaign against social ills prevalent in the village. They have issued a notice against the playing of cards and have fined villagers not heeding their warning. Ratna says, 'Once we seized the playing cards from them. One of them tried to pick a fight and questioned me why I was trying to act as a leader. But we refused to give up. Now the villagers, if they are playing cards, flee at the very sight of the participants.'



Participants of the CDC have also been extending financial support to women who are weak. The participants had raised Rs 4,000 playing the bhailo during the Tihar festival. They gave away the rice they had collected in the bhailo to Kalawati Shahi, a poor woman in the village. They have decided to spend the money they raised on providing skill development training for the CDC participants on making nylon footstools. 'We have also been planning to do something to help the women in the village earn their own livelihood. So we are thinking about undergoing vocational training. This will empower the women financially so that they would not have to depend on others every time they need some money', says Ratna.

Nobody is allowed to smoke in Ratna's CDC. And not even outside the CDC. Durga BK, one of the participants, used to smoke. But she now has quit the habit.

Ratna is also secretary of the Bhagwati CFUG. On her own initiative, she has been trying to recover the sum of Rs 40,000 misappropriated by some of its members. While she has already recovered around Rs 5,000 - Rs 6,000 from some of them, she has made the others give a written commitment to pay the remaining amounts. She says she succeeded in doing this due to support from other participants of the discussion class. The CDC participants, in coordination with the chairperson of the CFUG, have also been regularly monitoring the forest.



Stretcher bought with *bhailo* money

The *bhailo* programme that began at 11 in the evening continued till 1 am. Not only did the participants enjoy playing *bhailo*, they also raised Rs 12,000. As we received such good support from the villagers, we are now excited about doing something for society. There is nothing we cannot do if we take the initiative, says [Ratna Sunar](#), who led the *bhailo* programme.

There was no stretcher for carrying patients from the village. It was very difficult to carry the patients to the nearest health post a half-an-hour walk from the village. Hence, the participants of the CDC decided to raise money playing *bhailo* in order to buy a stretcher. Ratna, a participant of the CDC of Ramghat VDC- 2, says, 'we were planning to buy one stretcher,

but as we have collected enough money we decided to buy a pair of them.'

The participants of the *bhailo* programme also went on a picnic with the money they had raised. The participants, who save Rs 5 a month, also plan to invest their savings in social causes. 'Let's see what we can do,' says Ratna.

'At first the families of the participants were reluctant to allow them to play *bhailo* as they were concerned as to who would attend to the guests visiting during the Tihar festival. But we explained things to our husbands and in-laws. We cut the grass early in the morning and completed all the household chores before dawn. So there was no reason why our in-laws would stop us from participating in the *bhailo*. In order that our participants would not have things





left to do, we had made arrangements for completing all our work the day before the *Bhailo* was organised', says Ratna.

She claims that their *Bhailo* programme was the most remarkable as they sang and performed in a different style. Their songs were based on themes such as discrimination against daughters-in-law and the need to provide adequate care to pregnant women. Many villagers appreciated the way they performed. That is why all the villagers donated to us whole-heartedly, says Ratna, disclosing the secret behind the collection of such a huge amount of money in a single day.

The discussion class was also able to secure first position in a cultural programme held on the occasion of International Women's Day. Ratna and her friends are happy that they were able to beat six other participant groups and take home the prizes. They sang songs with themes such as women's rights, women's leadership and health awareness, and they played the madal (drum) themselves. She says the participants did everything themselves to prove that women are capable of doing anything. Their team had three singers and a dancer. Manisha BK played the madal for their performance.

The participants of the CDC have been carrying out various activities to raise funds. They sing and dance at weddings and religious ceremonies in order to collect funds. Ratna says - we sing and dance wherever we are invited and deposit Rs 500-700 they give us in our fund. As we all have red dresses for such functions, people like our performance.

Ratna also says that the CDC has helped them develop leadership qualities. She is also the chairperson of Deuti Ginger Farmers Group and the chairperson of the irrigation consumers group. She has collected Rs 40,000 from 28 consumer households. She says she now plans to begin work on her irrigation project. Because of participants like Ratna, the entire discussion class has earned a good repute among the villagers.

Ramghat (Surkhet)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	146	617	268	349
2	154	745	340	405
3	130	593	247	346
4	257	1099	491	608
5	177	742	339	403
6	206	1008	469	539
7	150	739	331	408
8	239	709	311	398
9	139	709	311	398
Total	1598	7288	3235	4053

Poverty rate: **27.66**



Another name of social service

Indra Sharma is the chairperson of the YHC in Mahadevpuri VDC- 5, Banke district. Indra, who is an intermediate graduate, not only encourages the other participants of the CDC to do social work, but is also actively involved in social activities herself. They have brought about many changes in their village through their mutual efforts.

Ritu Nepali and her husband's second wife Parvati Bista of the same village often fought with each other. Both are participants of the discussion class. But if one came to the discussion class, the other stayed home. They kept fighting at home also. Ritu was left helpless when both her husband and Parvati started misbehaving

towards her. Her husband even set himself on fire when tension in the home became too much.

The participants of the CDC at first tried their best to reconcile them. They also discussed what could be done to resolve the problem. And as decided by the CDC, they collected straw from the forest and built a separate small house for Ritu. Indra says - now Ritu lives separately in that small house.

As long as there is no peace in society and everyone is not treated equally, the development we aspire for is not possible. Neither will women get to enjoy their rights. Acknowledging this fact, Ratna and other CDC participants like her have taken the initiative to tackle this problem. She



says it is only after they solve the small problems that they can pave the way for a bright future.

Dhruva Thakuri of the same village has a son and a daughter from

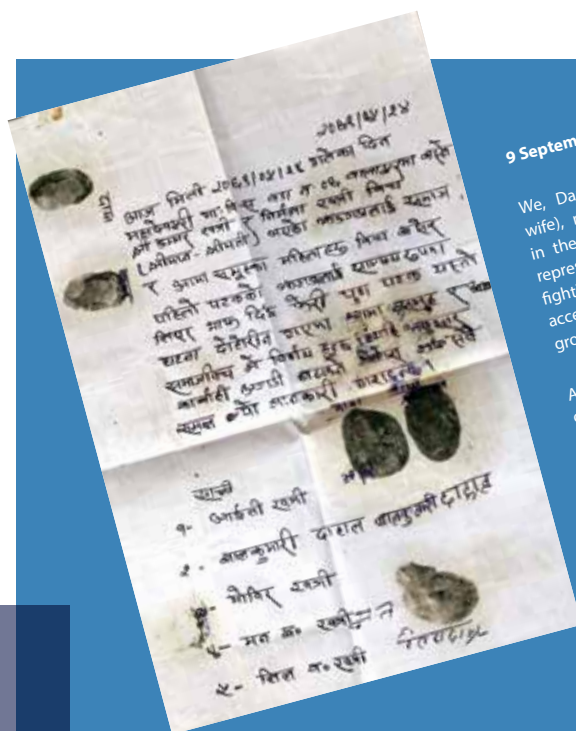
his first wife. He then took a second wife. He had a daughter from his second wife also. His first wife then went with another man. Dhruva has now taken a third wife. Since then he has started mistreating his second wife. He did not even let her stay in the house. She is sheltering in the houses of others.

"We dwelt on this problem in our discussion class. We then called a gathering of the villagers. We got Ritu's marriage with Dhruva registered and also registered her daughter's birth. We have also imposed a restriction on the sale of Dhruva's lands. An alimony case is currently under way. Let's see if Ritu gets justice," says Indra. Dhruva's

citizenship certificate was required for registering his marriage with Ritu. Initially, Dhruva refused to furnish his citizenship certificate. But when the women in the village piled pressure on him, he relented.

Fifteen days after their mother died, the father also passed away. The financial condition of the household was very weak. The participants of the discussion class said it was the duty of one and all to help those in difficulty. At the same time, a meeting of facilitators was also under way. The discussion class collected donations from the facilitators and from two community forests, and gave Rs 10,000 to the bereaved family. This proved to be of great help the family.

She also says that they distributed Rs 30,000, allocated by the village development committee, to the destitute for goat rearing. The amount was distributed after selecting the impoverished households from each ward of the village. She says this has helped a lot in improving their livelihoods.



9 September 2012

We, Dambar Khatri and Nirmala Khatri (husband and wife), residents of Mahadevpuri VDC -6, Balapur agree, in the presence of women's group and the community representatives, that we will not indulge in any sort of fighting in the future. If we fight again, we are ready to accept whatever decision will be made for us by the women group and the community.

As this is the first time the couple quarrelled with each other, the women's group and the community didn't take more severe action than warning them not to quarrel and create a commotion again in the society.

Witnesses

Aiti Khatri
Bal Kumari Dahal
Mobir Khatri
Man Bahadur Khatri
Dil Bhadur Khatri

Parties in fight
Dambar Khatri
Nirmala Khatri

Where alcohol is prohibited

Alcohol was freely sold and consumed in Balapur village of Mahadevpuri VDC - 6, Banke. But this has now become a thing of the past because alcohol is now neither allowed here for sale nor consumed. "We don't know if anyone consumes alcohol and silently goes to bed, but consuming alcohol is completely forbidden in the village," says [Aaiti Khatri](#), 58.

Aaiti and her friends launched the anti-liquor campaign as drunken brawls, people under the influence thrashing their wives and drunkards selling off sundry items just to buy a drink had become commonplace in the village. After debating the matter, the CDC formed an anti-liquor committee headed by Aaiti. The committee has

been so active that drunkards do not even come near the committee members. Even if someone does drink, he goes off into the forest and returns to the village only after sobering up. After the drunkards return home, jackals howl in the forest.

"If anyone does not heed my warning, I will even beat them," says Aaiti, who adds that she is not afraid of anyone. They have even thrashed two drunkards and dragged them to the police post. They also helped a woman, who had been beaten up by her husband, get justice. After the husband of one of the participants of their CDC refused to quit his drinking and kept on physically abusing her, they thrashed him in return and took him to the police post. After this incident, the husband has quit drinking and their relations have also improved.





Aaiti also recalls an interesting incident in which a villager who thrashed his wife after drinking left home and fled to India. The women had surrounded his house. The man feared their punishment. They

have also fixed a fine for those engaged in brewing and consuming liquor. As the rule is implemented strictly, they have not collected a huge amount of money in fines, but they have collected a few hundred rupees nonetheless. They had fixed a fine of Rs 150 for people caught drinking for the first time, Rs 250 for second-time offenders and Rs 500 for third-time offenders. Aaiti and her friends plan to use the money to purchase a stretcher for the health post.

Aaitis had also seized 10 liquor brewing vessels. They returned the vessels to the liquor brewers after a year, on condition that they would not use the vessels again for

brewing alcohol. While some of them have exchanged the vessels for cooking utensils others have been using them for storing grain. This kind of work done by Aaiti and her friends has won appreciation from the villagers. Aaiti says, women of Tiklipur of Kachnapur have also approached them to launch a similar campaign in their village.

Aaiti's work has also inspired other women in the village. Aaiti is known among the villagers as a socially active woman as she participates in all the social activities. She is able to do so as her husband helps her with the household chores. Participants of the CDC say Aaiti's active involvement in social activities has also boosted their morale.

On the issue of the sale and consumption of liquor, Aaiti is unyielding as are the other participants of her discussion class. They are strictly against alcohol sale and consumption. They say alcohol ruins the entire village although the government issues licenses for brewing the stuff. Hence at a function organised to mark International Women's Day, the participants of the programme gave out this message to the villagers through a song:

*How much liquor is sold in zero bazaar
Once they enter the liquor joints, they drink
thousands' worth
A drunkard's wife elopes with another
What kind of government is it that licenses
society's ills*





Planting trees to save settlement

Moranga Khola located a certain distance away slowly started approaching our settlement. The river started eroding our village and it seemed it would soon engulf entire Narayanpur village. The villagers had been continuing with their discussions on how to deal with the menace. They became terrified whenever there was heavy rainfall. Participants of the CDC took the issue seriously and concluded that a solution had to be sought.

After a protracted debate at the discussion class in Narayanpur of Bajapur VDC 6, Banke, the participants concluded that trees needed to be planted immediately to stop the river from drawing closer to the village. It would have taken millions of rupees

to build a stone wall. So that was out of the question. 'We therefore decided to take the initiative,' says [Sabita Chaudhary](#).

They then gathered information about where they could fetch saplings from. They sent in an application after learning that an organisation called Rara Human and Environmental Resource Development Initiatives (RHERI) supplied saplings. They collected saplings of sisham, mango, kalapati and ryegrass. It was then decided that each participant would plant 45 saplings. Apart from this, the other villagers also planted a lot of saplings. The participants said it became a lot more convenient as the organisation supplying the saplings ferried them itself to the village on a tractor. They say they were successful in this mission as they demanded the





saplings collectively. Sabita says this event also taught them to work in a group and showed them the importance of the discussion class. From now onwards we will apply the same

formula for all village activities, says Sabita.

As some of the saplings have died, Sabita says the CDC has decided to plant new saplings in their place. They have also started researching into why some of the saplings died. They are asking technicians whether it is the soil or diseased plants

that caused the saplings to die. Once we find out the reason, we will do whatever is necessary.

Participants of the discussion class have made it a rule among themselves to water the plants by turns. They have also asked the villagers to take care of the saplings so that children do not destroy them and cattle do not eat them. They have also asked the villagers to take care of the saplings by turns. Hence, a woman from the village guards the plantation area every day.

They have imposed a fine on those who destroy the saplings or make their cattle graze on them. A household is fined Rs 500 if their cattle eat the plants. The villagers fear having to pay the fine and so do not even take their cattle near where the saplings are planted, according to Sabita. So far no one has had to pay fines for destroying the saplings.





Women made contractor and the police buckle

The villagers still feel terrified when a policeman comes to the village. Many of them even go into hiding. They are reluctant to go if they are asked to visit the police station and make excuses. But the women of the discussion class in Suryalampur of Baijapur VDC -7, Banke threw an open challenge to take them to the police station, taking even the police by surprise.

It so happened that a culvert was being built in the village. In the process of building the culvert, tractors were used on the village road to carry aggregate to the construction site. As the days went by, the village road became badly damaged. Chuckholes started appearing on the road. The road was so damaged that it became difficult for the villagers to move from one place to another in the evenings. Children

and the elderly bore the biggest brunt of this. The road became muddy in the rainy season and dusty in the dry season.

While everyone in the village faced the problem, no one mustered the courage to speak to the contractor. Then one day the issue was raised in community discussion class. The participants decided that they would stop the tractor from ferrying aggregate until the contractor repaired the road. The participants were led by [Surya Raut](#). But they received warnings while doing this. The contractor who was building the culvert also issued threats. Even the police took the contractor's side and threatened the villagers that they would be put behind bars if they obstructed the contractor's work.

At first, Surya asked the contractor not to use the road until it was repaired. Then



they placed logs on the road to obstruct the movement of the tractors. The contractor called the police. The police urged the villagers not to obstruct the work, saying, any obstruction would

incur a huge loss to the contractor. But Surya and the other participants of CDC argued that they would not allow the contractor to damage the village road. The women also asked the police “not to sell themselves to the contractor”, says Surya.

The police warned the women, saying they would be taken to the police station if they did not lift the obstruction. As all the women were ready to go to the police station, the police buckled under the pressure. The police then heard that the villagers and asked the contractor to gravel the village road. “The contractor, who had been challenging us, also surrendered, seeing that the village women were not afraid of the police,” Surya says, adding, “We had done the right thing. That is why we succeeded.”

Thanks to the women’s struggle, the 500-meter road section from Ashok Chowk to the forest is now graveled. At first the contractor had said he would gravel the road only if the villagers were ready to pay revenue and purchase fuel for the tractor. But the villagers refused. “Finally we agreed to load aggregate onto the tractor and the contractor was ready to do the remaining work,” Surya said, relating the success story.



We did not spare them

There was damage to the crops when electricity cables were being laid in the village. The participants of the CDC expressed

concern over the matter on July 17, 2013. We then obstructed the cable laying. Finally, the project in-charge visited us. He asked us to allow them to lay two cables and said they would compensate us while laying the third cable. But the in-charge did not visit us while the third cable was being laid. So we stopped the machine being used for laying cables. We also staged a sit-in for the entire day. Only then did the contractor call the in-charge. We made them pay Rs 12,476 in compensation for the crops damaged by the project.

We were not aware that we could seek compensation for damage caused by such projects. We asked the workers what people in other places did when their crops were damaged. They told us not to mention their names but suggested to us that we could get compensation if we exerted enough pressure. This gave us the idea of demanding compensation.

Tika Kumari Chaudhary

Mahadevpuri-6, Banke



SECTION 5

Change in Attitude and Behaviour

There are various kinds of people in society. While some are shy, some are reserved, some others create scenes after drinking, some always level allegations against their wives, and there are those who have one or the other kind of behavioral weakness. And because of them, others too suffer. After joining discussion class, not only the participants but even people not directly affiliated with the class have become transformed. And our society is transforming into a peaceful one.

So how did the participants of the discussion class deal with this social malaise? How did they transform themselves and others? What difference has this transformation made? What kind of challenges did they face in the process and how did they deal with them? The participants have attempted to answer these questions in this section.





We have knowledge above all

Dil Bahadur Bhatta, 29, is a resident of Dandaparajul VDC, Dailekh. He would blush at the mere sight of women, let alone have a conversation with them. Bhatta is now the facilitator of the Sahansheel Community Discussion Class being run under MRMV programme in the participation of women only. "I was selected from among 10 contenders for the post, although all the other contenders were women," says Bhatta.

Now he tells women not to feel shy and to speak out openly whatever they feel. He teaches them that only when you speak up can you secure your rights and not lag behind. The women were not at ease when speaking about adolescent issues

in particular. Bhatta himself felt awkward discussing such issues. But times have changed now. "We have no problems, everyone understands that one is free to speak about their concerns, no matter what," says Bhatta.

At first, people had opposed Bhatta's selection as the facilitator, saying he used his connections to grab the position. Some of them even tried to obstruct the discussion class. But with growing participation in the CDC, the participants learnt many things. The impact of this knowledge spread across the village. Seeing this change, even Bhatta's detractors started seeing the discussion class in a positive light. Even those who obstructed the class earlier started supporting it. That is why Bhatta is a happy man now.





Bhatta himself is surprised by his transformation. He says five days of REFLECT method based facilitation skills training, four days of wall magazine development training and 15 days

of video documentary training brought the sea change. He says the training made him capable of identifying issues, raising them effectively and speaking for one's rights. Moreover, An Everest of Courage, the information booklet provided by the MRMV programme to the CDC also provided adequate information about these issues.

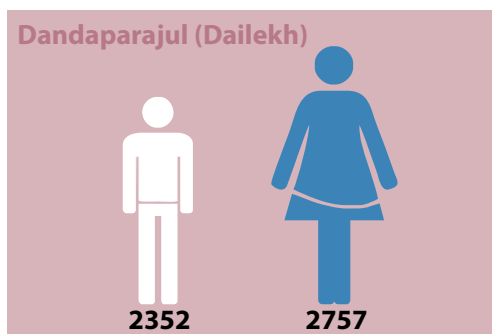
One would expect the women participants of Bhatta's discussion class to be even more shy. But before one even shoots the question, he says, "That is a thing of the past. Times have changed now. The changes I have undergone can also be seen among the participants of my class. Now the participants themselves take class, saying, 'I have learnt a new thing today. So I will take the class today.' This is a big achievement for me."

Bhatta, who does not own enough farmland, has a father, a mother and a brother in his family. But even after the programme is over, he wants to continue his social service. Hence, he is looking for a sector where his service would make a difference. Asked if he is confident that he would be able to get a similar job later, he says, "Why not? I may have nothing, but I do have the knowledge that MRMV has given me."

Dandaparajul (Dailekh)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	94	446	212	234
2	60	283	133	150
3	91	444	200	244
4	121	737	346	391
5	116	581	269	312
6	90	437	201	236
7	248	1199	548	651
8	73	381	172	209
9	108	601	271	330
Total	1001	5109	2352	2757

Poverty rate: **28.01**





Books educated my husband

"There was no tradition among women in our village of playing *deusi bhailo* during Tihar festival. If women participated in a *deusi* or *bhailo* programme, people ridiculed them. In such a situation, it was unimaginable for women to participate in *deusi/ bhailo*," recalls [Sabita Sharma](#). But the participants of the Sandesh Community Discussion Class of Ramghat VDC - 4, Surkhet have made this possible. During the last Tihar festival, Sabita and other participants of CDC visited every household playing *deusi* and *bhailo*. People said mean things about them. Some even ridiculed them. But the participants played it anyway. They also earned Rs 3,000. Sabita, who is also treasurer of the YHC in her ward, says, "Playing *bhailo*

is not in itself a big deal. But proving that even we are capable of doing something in society is an achievement. And we proved this. More than playing *bhailo* and earning a few thousand rupees, it was an achievement for the participants of discussion class to remove the barriers that society places against daughters-in-law."

The participants of the discussion class discussed that women should not confine themselves to the home but also engage themselves in income generating and social activities. And they decided to play *bhailo*. Though they took the decision among themselves, it was not easy for them to actually implement the decision. Hence, the participants decided to convince their husbands about it. And they did convince them. Sabita says, "Our



husbands agreed to help us with our household chores and allow us to play *bhailo*. It was mainly the book provided by the discussion class that helped us convince our husbands. After

reading the book the husbands thought they should not obstruct their wives as they were doing something good.

As the women started receiving support from their families, Sabita along with other participants have carried out various social works. At CDC they reconciled a couple who were heading for the police station following a quarrel. Earlier, the same couple who had refused to come to the discussion class started praising Sabita and other participants for their work. Sabita says that she feels happy to be showered with praise and that it gives them inspiration to continue their work.

Sabita, who has studied up to seventh grade, is also a member of the Ward Citizen Forum. She also regularly visits the school where her daughter is enrolled, to monitor the school. She says she does not have to be a member of any group to monitor the school. She also believes

that the quality of schools would improve if everyone starts thinking the way she does. She has now also made up her mind to become a member of the school management committee. She also visits the reconciliation center in her village frequently as she wants to know a lot about it.

Fines collected used for buying seeds

Drunken brawls used to be a common sight in our village. We called a gathering of the villagers and asked them not to drink liquor and engage in such brawls. But they did not heed our warnings. Then with help from the local administration and the police, we visited every liquor shop and threw out the liquor bottles. But we still have not been able to control alcohol abuse. We imposed a fine of Rs 300 on those found drinking for the first time, Rs 600 on second-time offenders and Rs 900 on third-time offenders. Though this has controlled alcohol abuse to some extent, we have not been able to fully banish it.

We have collected Rs 2,100 so far. We have been lending this money at concessional rates to buy vegetable seeds. We have made it a rule to use for a good cause all the money collected in fines.

Man Kumari BK

Pragatisheel Community Discussion Class,
Ramghat VDC-9, Surkhet



Like Gamey's wife

'Those who saw me for the first time would have mistaken me for a mute. And why wouldn't they? I spoke with nobody. I didn't want to go near people. I feared that they would do something to me if I spoke to them. I had passed the school leaving certificate (SLC) exams. But education did nothing to change me.

Now I am a completely different person. I am working as facilitator for the community discussion class in my village. I used to feel shy but now I teach women not to feel shy and to speak up for their rights. Not only CDC, I also run various other programmes now. I used to never walk outside the home, but now I am going to Nepalgunj, the district headquarter, where I will be staying

in a hotel for 4-5 days to undergo some training.' **Khagisara Pun**, facilitator for the discussion class at Kachnapur VDC - 9, Banke relates this story of her transformation to whoever she meets these days. She says she is even invited by the VDC office and other organisations to attend their programmes. So the villagers have not only been asking their women to seek her company, but they also tell them to follow in her footsteps.

And why wouldn't they do so? After participating in the discussion class run by Khagisara, women in the village have started saving the money they would otherwise have spent on buying cigarettes. The women have quit smoking. Khagisara organises debate competitions, spoon race and musical chair competition to entertain as well as to impart knowledge.





The participation in these events is good as she offers prizes such as soaps, comb, purses, spoons and nail cutters.

At Khagisara's initiative various social works have

been carried out in the village. Once, a man set fire to all his clothes after an altercation with his wife. Khagisara went to see this couple after she learnt about this incident. Police also reached the scene, but the women of the discussion class told the police that they would resolve the dispute themselves and turned the police back. Then they took the couple to their discussion class. After 4-5 hours of discussion, the class reconciled them. Arjun BK agreed not to drink and his wife Bhima agreed not to pick any argument with her husband. Now both of them are on good terms. Bhima has also given birth to a daughter.

Khagisara, who had passed the SLC, says she had quit her studies as she had lost the

courage to continue any further. She says she would now continue her studies as discussion class has given her the courage to study on. It is with this courage that she runs the CDC even when she has to carry along her six-month old daughter with her. She says she even went to Nepalgunj with her six-month-old. Because if she missed this opportunity, she would also lose an opportunity to learn something, she says.

"I have read thoroughly all the books provided by MRMV. They are informative. I impart the knowledge gained through these books to the other participants of discussion class. They say the letters in the book are too small for them to read and understand. So, I read it out to them. While reading out, I also gain some knowledge.

Her husband works for the Armed Police Force. Though people know her as Gamey's wife, she feels that they should know her by her own name. "I have transformed a lot in such a short span of time. How should I not be known by my own name in the next one and a half years?" she asks with confidence.



Interest in income generating activities

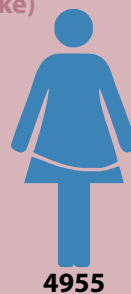
"Unless women are financially empowered, they cannot fight for their rights. One has to be capable of fighting for one's rights. Hence, with a view to engaging in income generating activities, we have been working to start community vegetable farming," says [Sumitra Tharu](#) of Amuwa village in Mahadevpuri VDC - 8, Banke district. "We have already begun work in this connection."

They decided to engage in income generating activities as they had to ask for money from the family even to make regular deposits for the discussion class. She says they started vegetable farming as per their decision in the CDC. All the

participants of the class are engaged in the community vegetable farming.

Sumitra says Banke UNESCO Club provided them support for starting the community vegetable farming. The club had asked them to approach them if they wanted to start the farming. This issue was raised in discussion class. The discussion class itself comprised a group. So they invited the club members to the village. When the club agreed on the idea,

Mahavedpuri (Banke)





they were given a two-day training in vegetable farming.

The women have leased five kattha of land at an annual rent of Rs 5,000. The club has provided the water and a motor pump to irrigate the land. It has also agreed to provide them seeds. So the women are now ready to launch their vegetable farming. Sumitra says, "We will now plant vegetables like cauliflower, bitter gourd, pumpkin, ladyfingers and chillies." As all these are seasonal vegetables, they expect it will yield them a good profit.

Though Sumitra says they used to plant vegetables earlier also, this is the first time they have started commercial vegetable

farming. She says there are both literate and illiterate women in her group, so the vegetable farming has also become a means for women with little knowledge to earn a livelihood.

Sumitra herself is studying in class 12. As everyone participates willingly in all their activities, anything they do, and not just vegetable farming, ends up successfully.

Mahavedpuri (Banke)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	130	713	347	366
2	22	1117	520	597
3	85	474	227	247
4	162	893	429	464
5	312	1608	789	819
6	258	1226	551	675
7	441	1794	782	1012
8	234	1106	493	613
9	56	315	153	162
Total	1903	9246	4291	4955

Poverty rate: 18.17





No more idling

On the one hand they were idle and they had no money in their pockets on the other. Whether it was to purchase stationery items for their children or to buy salt or other basic necessities, they had to depend on others. 'How much longer should we keep on asking? And for how long would they keep on giving it to us?' Troubled with these thoughts, the participants of the CDC of Baijapur VDC - 6, Banke district decided to do something to generate income.

But what would they do? After extensive discussions, they came up with an idea – start vegetable farming. And where would they start the farming? They had a plan for that also – on the banks of the Rapti River. As there were many of them who

wanted to engage in vegetable farming, they required a large plot of land. But who would have such a huge plot of land to spare? So the participants decided to start vegetable farming on the banks of the Rapti. Everyone agreed to this, as it would be easy to irrigate the land. The land had been left unattended, so there was no need to fear any obstructions. All this created a favorable situation for the villagers to start vegetable farming.

All this arrangement for vegetable farming on the banks of the Rapti River was made by facilitator of the c CDC in the village, [Ganga Tharu](#). She was able to facilitate matters for the villagers as she had taken a three-month training in off-season vegetable farming. She says, "I proposed to the villagers to start vegetable farming as I thought it would be better to start with





something we are familiar with. And all the villagers agreed with me.”

In the first year of the vegetable farming they made a profit of Rs 100,000. Now they have again planted

bitter gourd, bottle gourd, pumpkin, cucumber, watermelon and fruits. They have also gained some knowledge of the kind of vegetables that grow well on the river bank and the kind of care the vegetables need.

These women who now take care of the vegetable farm used to spend their time gossiping idly. They now explain to others about their vegetable farming. Ganga says, “Now we don’t have any time to idle. They sell most of the vegetables they produce and distribute some among themselves. “We get a taste of different vegetables and at the same time also earn some money,” adds Ganga.

Baijapur (Banke)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	228	1411	643	768
2	169	1111	530	581
3	311	2014	992	1022
4	251	1508	705	803
5	159	967	467	500
6	188	1529	713	816
7	256	1391	646	745
8	132	892	434	458
9	212	1407	623	784
Total	1906	12230	5753	6477

Poverty rate: **33.01**



Collection center encouraged us

Earlier, we used to eat all the vegetables we produced as there was no market for our

produce. The nearest bazaar, Agaiya, is too small for all our vegetables. But a vegetable collection center has opened in the village now. No matter how much vegetable we produce, it buys them all. So I try to plant as many vegetables as I can. This has helped me a lot in getting rid of my financial problems. The collection center opened at the joint initiative of GIZ and the participants of the discussion class buys all the vegetables produced in the village. It has also made arrangements for us to take our vegetables to Kohalpur, a local bazaar. Some of the vegetable traders even come up to the village to buy vegetables. Most of these on the committee that runs the collection center are participants of the discussion class – Nil Kumari, Ram Kumari, Sita. This has further motivated the young women engaged in vegetable farming.

Prema Chaudhary

Participant, Community Discussion Class
Baijapur VDC-1, Banke



SECTION 6

Identity and Popularity

In Nepali society, women have not been able to establish their identity, except in a few rare cases. It is still common for women to be known after the name of their husband, father-in-law or a son. But this is changing gradually. The women have girded up their loins to establish their own identity. Several of them have even succeeded and have gained some popularity.

In becoming a part of various organisations and through their active social role, some of these women have started establishing their own identity in the village, for instance as a 'mentor' or a "doctor". Moreover, no derogatory suffixes are added to their names now. People now refer to them as so-and-so "jee". This is the greatest proof that women are gradually acquiring their own identity and gaining popularity. Did this change happen without any struggle? What did the women do to bring about this change? How did they win people's hearts? This section deals with all their exploits.





Mentor sister

Chandra BC had always been known among the villagers as a woman leader. That is why she had also become chairperson of the Deep Jyoti Savings Group. She used to go to the VDC office and ask the officials to do something for women. And when they would not listen to her, she would fight with them. She would attend all manner of programmes even if she was not invited and would request those concerned to think about bringing programmes that would be helpful to women.

Chandra of Awalparajul VDC, Dailekh is equally active these days, though the situation has changed. So how are things different now? Chandra says, "I used to fight then and I am still

fighting. But then I used to fight alone, while now I have the support of hundreds of women. Now I do not feel alone. Hence, the demands raised by women have been getting priority."

How? Chandra says, "Now we are organised. The community discussion class in our village has united us. It gave us the knowledge that if we stand together, it would add the strength to make our voices heard in the right places. Everyone now understands this fact. And so all women in the village now stand united. We feel stronger in the fight for our rights. We have created an environment for people to hear our voices."

As she is a little older than other women and has been working for women's rights





for a long time now, she is known to the villagers as a “mentor sister.” She asks women in the village to participate in all social programmes. She also gives them advice on the issues that women need to

raise at such programmes and what the women need to do if they are not heard.

In February 2013, a programme was being held to form a network of women in the village. So she asked some of the participants of her discussion class to attend the programme as she herself was unable to attend. She advised them not to allow them to form the group if the women in their ward were not given an important position. And just as she had advised, the women fought for some important positions. The participants of the CDC that Chandra had sent opposed any network that did not have their representation, that too in an important position. Finally, they succeeded in securing the treasurer’s position for their ward.

Apart from this, Chandra and other participants of her discussion class had frequently been asking the health post in-charge to provide information regarding pneumonia to the female community health volunteers (FCHV). Now all the FCHVs have received training and the medical instruments needed to diagnose disease.

Chandra’s advice is sought not only by

women; her suggestions are also useful in the health sector, development activities and awareness programmes. That is why the mentor’s title given to her seems well-deserved. Her advice is often practical and well thought-out. For example, she had suggested that women who give birth to more than two children be deprived of allowances that the VDC office gives to new mothers. She had given this advice so that women would not have more than two children.

She also advises women to stand united, speak for their rights and to work together. While giving this advice to women, she cites examples of the achievements women have made by doing things collectively. Ram Bahadur Nepali had been cutting a tree to make firewood for his wife who had just given birth to a child. But Chandra and the other women warned him not to fell trees indiscriminately. Chandra and the other women of her CDC told him, “You do not attend the meetings of the Aama Samuha (mothers group) or participate in the discussion class. On what grounds can you demand facilities?”

She was right in her argument because it was Nepali’s fourth child. Chandra wanted to say that if his wife had attended the Aama Samuha’s meeting, she would not have thought of having a fourth child. Chandra and other participants of her class did not like it that they kept on destroying public property after having one child after another. Hence, they have asked everyone to coordinate with Aama Samuha, the discussion class or other entities concerned before doing anything.



Students start producing plays

MRMV programme has been organising various programmes at Sita Jana Sahayog Higher Secondary School of Awalparajul VDC, Dailekh. The school had received a notice to send some of its students for drama training. A discussion was held to select students interested in taking part in the training. They were told that three students from the school would be allowed to participate.

Tirtha Bahadur Budha of class 10 became curious when he heard about the notice. He had never seen a play, let alone perform in one. What would the play be like? How would one perform in plays? He was also excited about the prospect of acquiring some knowledge and learning new skills. So he told the discussion class that he

too was interested in the training. After a long discussion, it was decided that three students from the school would participate in the training and Tirtha was one of them.

Tirtha Bahadur along with his two friends reached Dailekh Bazaar to participate in the training organised by MRMV. They took the 10-day training. "At first, we I felt bored but later we found the training interesting," says Tirtha, adding, "I gained knowledge about dialogue delivery, posture, body language, eye contact and the role of gestures in effective communications. This was a big achievement for me."

After the training, Tirtha and his friends from school staged a play. The name of the play was Cheli. With its cast of 11, it was aimed at informing people about the services provided by the village health post. The play





also gave a message about problems that polygamy invites. It likewise gave the message that violence against women is a punishable offence.

Tirtha and his friends staged the 40-minute play at their own school. Later they also performed it in all the nine wards of the VDC. "Perhaps, the play made an impact. People from elsewhere have also been asking us to perform in their villages. They have been lauding our work wherever they meet us. They have also been asking us if we could show them the play again. This has further encouraged us to stage plays with a social message.

Tirtha claims that incidents of VAW and polygamy have come down in the village after they started spreading awareness through drama. He says drama has helped make the villagers aware through the characters in it, be it in the role of their teacher or through the plight of Man Bahadur Nepali, who took a second wife. He said this aspect of his play has made him happier than anything else.

His group also has separate costumes for drama performance. This helps make their drama still more effective. He has

taken an additional four-day refresher training in Nepalgunj. He also performed in a 10-minute drama during the training, which was appreciated by all. Now he feels so positive that he plans to undergo further training if there are opportunities in this area. He says drama could play a vital role in reducing incidents of VAW women in the villages.

He also plans to stage the play in various places after he completes his SLC examinations. He plans to write other plays too. He has discussed the issue with his friends. "Everyone is excited about enacting plays and producing more of them." "We will move ahead managing our time," says Tirtha, adding, "There is a need to enact plays in our village as this can have a significant role in reducing violence against women."

Awalparajul (Dailekh)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	94	527	371	256
2	91	551	266	285
3	94	492	224	268
4	76	409	184	225
5	130	764	368	396
6	80	408	176	232
7	58	330	174	156
8	59	307	159	148
9	84	425	117	208
Total	766	4213	2039	2174

Poverty rate: **32.95**



Women's rights in songs

On March 5, Dhansara Thapa, Krishna Thapa and Sita Thapa sang songs about the uselessness of life without education at Sita Jana Sahayog Higher Secondary School in Awalparajul VDC on the occasion of Women's Day. Not only did they sing songs, Junu Thapa, Sima Thapa, Pabitra Thapa and Tulasi Thapa danced along with the music. These women from Gothpanda Community Discussion Class of Dandaparajul VDC even succeeded in winning the competition participated by 10 different groups.

"We were thrilled when the song we had prepared for Women's Day secured the first position," says the lead vocalist of the group, [Dhansara Thapa](#). "All of us prepared the song. First we won the ward level competition. This

encouraged us. When we secured first position at the VDC level we felt that we had prepared well.

"We could have done better as we had only one day to practice. We could not manage to find the time as we also have to do our household chores," says Dhansara, adding, "But we realised that we can put in a good performance." All their songs were based on the theme of women's rights. Dhansara explains the reason for choosing the theme thus: "The times when mothers-in-law dominated their daughters-in-law are gone. Neither is there any point in singing love songs. We are past that age now. Hence, we spoke about women's rights even in our songs. Our discussion class is a forum where we speak about women's rights. So it is natural for us to choose this as a theme for our songs".





She says other groups had chosen the themes of health and education rights. But she says they won the first prize as their melody, dancing, presentation and overall performance were better. Dhansara

says she is happy that they were able to spread awareness about women's rights through their songs. They also won prizes for securing first position – seven shawls, 26 bars of soap, 6 mirrors, 6 combs, etc.

Dhansara, who is an active participant of her CDC, is not only good at signing but also equally active in other activities. She is the chairperson of the Teachers-Parent Association (TPA) of Saraswati Secondary School in the same village. She regularly visits the school to monitor whether the teachers are teaching properly and observe the school environment and the students' conduct. The teachers also ask her to visit the school regularly.

But when students become addicted to drugs, there is little the school can do. The school principal, Man Bahadur Thapa, invited Dhansara to give her advice to the

students, and she did so. Dhansara says, "I will not give up. I have been visiting the school regularly to see if students have heeded my advice. I had visited the school on February 20, 2014 also and was happy to learn that drug abuse was under control. It has become easier for me to fulfil my responsibilities after reading the book on the duties of the chairperson of the TPA. The book was provided by the discussion class.

A stranger was like a tiger to me

I am not educated and I don't know much. When a stranger visited the village, I felt as if there was a tiger in the neighborhood. I would go and hide even at the sight of a stranger. Now I don't fear strangers. I feel a human being can do no harm after all! If anyone asks me something, I tell them all I know. I feel now that I too could have done something had I gone to school. Knowing about one's rights is not enough, we also need to know about our duties equally well. After I stated going to the discussion class, I no longer feel fear anyone anymore.

Purna Thapa

Participant, Community Discussion Class
Dandaparajul-8, Dailekh



Durga becomes Durgajee

She has a three-year-old child at home. Her husband works as a laborer in India, while she also has to look after the farm. She owns seven goats and a pair of oxen. Still, **Durga BK** does not want to miss any social function. She does not miss any programme whether or not she is invited. When she has to attend any function, she calls her mother to look after her child and cattle from a village which is a day's walk from her own.

Durga BK, former member of the community discussion class of Dandaparajul VDC-9 of Dailekh district, is now the facilitator for her CDC and treasurer of the CFUG. Apart from that she is also the chairperson of the vegetables committee and member of the women's network.

She is also a member of Highlands Poverty Alleviation Committee and is equally active in other social activities. Hence she spends most of her time attending meeting and programmes.

"I am affiliated with various groups, but it is the CDC that inspired me to join all groups and gave me knowledge about the role to play as an individual," says Durga. This is the reason why despite various obstructions, she succeeded in joining the committee. Due to her active involvement in these groups, she has received various offers ranging from joining the SMC to working as a volunteer. But she does not want to join all the committees. She says she wants to join only a selected few committees and do something worthwhile in the field of women's rights.





Her house is the only Dalit household in Latali village which is dominated by people of the Malla and Khatri castes. Despite this, she is invited to all the programmes organised by the

VDC, the school,

the women's network, the vegetable committees and the CFUG. "Earlier, nobody cared about me, now everybody invites me," says Durga, adding, "Those who called me Durga now call me Durgajee."

And why wouldn't these groups invite her to their programmes? After the previous facilitator left the discussion class, everybody proposed Durga as the new facilitator. She was chosen for the position as she was regular and active in the discussion class. Last year, the road linking Latali with Ghodabas was obstructed by landslide. It was on her initiative that the participants of the discussion class cleared the obstruction. Males in the village also helped them repair a 200-meter section of this road. The villagers have made arrangements for volunteers. They have started the process for starting child education in the schools. They have made the VDC release Rs 60,000 in funds to

build a women's building. A nine-member women's committee has already been formed for the purpose. They have also decided to ask for additional funds from the VDC and the forest users committee. For all these reasons, it has become a compulsion for the villagers to seek Durga's participation in all the groups.

Durga and other participants of the class also plan to start a clinic and child education center in the building. She has meanwhile continued her visits to the forest officials to gain knowledge about the role of a treasurer of the forest committee. "Villagers have high expectations of me. Our forest committee does not have a good reputation. So I am also looking into the financial details," she says. "If I am able to do something, not only the participants of the discussion class but all the women in the village would be able to hold their heads high."

Everyone is born and then dies. But Durga is determined to do something while she lives. That is why everyone participates in the activities that Durga leads. She says she has received the support of all the villagers as she has been doing all this for the betterment of the village. She says this is why villagers seek her advice before doing something.



People call me 'doctor'

On January 25, 2014, participants of Laxmi Tole CDC of Piladi VDC - 4, Dailekh district carried out a door-to-door campaign. They also distributed a booklet on health information to each of the households they visited. They asked villagers to visit the health center if they faced any health complications. They also told them about medicines that the health-post provided free of cost. This door-to-door campaign was led by [Tara Adhikari](#).

They also urged the villagers not to ask for free medicines if they did not need it. "Perhaps the villagers liked our programme, a lot of elderly people also came along with us," says Tara. We had also carried a white banner

with us to take down the signatures of the villagers. "Many villagers opposed our campaign but the same people later helped us also."

MRMV programme has provided us a first aid kit to be kept handy during every discussion class. The first aid kit has 13 different kinds of medicines. Of these, nine types of medicines are different from those available at the health post. The same programme provided one-day training on how to effectively use first-aid kit to the facilitators of the discussion classes. So people who do not get medicines at the health post come to the discussion class. "Not only do villagers come to the CDC for medicines, but they also call us doctors because we provide them medicines," says Tara.





Tara and the other participants of the discussion class are popular in the village not only because they provide medicines to villagers but also because they raised Rs 5,500 by organising *deusi* and *bhailo* programmes in a village where it was a taboo for women to participate in anything of the sort. Several of the villagers even ridiculed them for this. Some of them scolded them and called them robbers. Some men in the village even came to beat them up. But it is surprising that even when the men scolded them for playing *deusi* and *bhailo*, the mothers, wives and daughters-in-law of these same men happily gave them money.

All the women had decided in the CDC to do all their household chores before the *bhailo* programme so that they would not have to face resistance from family members. Though they had done all their chores, some were still reprimanded for no reason at all, says Tara. Tara says being

scolded at home is not a big deal as it was still a big achievement for them to participate in *bhailo* and raise funds in a village that did not allow women to get involved in such activities.

With the money they raised they have bought a stretcher to carry patients. The same people who scolded them for organising *bhailo* have also been using the stretcher. Tara is still happy to see all this. She says there is also another reason they decided to buy stretcher. They had demanded a stretcher from the CFUG. When the CFUG turned a deaf ear, they decided to raise funds and buy the stretcher themselves.

On the Women's Day, Tara and other participants of her discussion class took everyone by surprise. They took out a singing and dancing procession from their houses to the VDC to celebrate the day. They also secured third position in the cultural programme organised on the occasion. This became a historic event for them. "These proved to be incidents in our life that will always encourage us to move ahead," says Tara.



Changed outlook on women

Gangaram Gyawali had built a temple in the village. Gangaram often told the villagers to clean up the temple premises and asked the males to help him build a place where they could sing devotional songs (bhajan kirtan). But no one took him seriously. After he had lost all hope, he decided to ask the participants of the discussion class about this. The women cleaned the place up and made out a place for people to sing devotional songs. Since then, Gangaram Gyawali's attitude toward women has changed completely. And gradually the other villagers also are seeing women differently.

Man Kumari Gyawali, chairperson of the Shaktishali CDC of Dasharathpur

VDC - 7, Surkhet, who took the initiative to clean and decorate the temple, says, "People look at us differently. Perhaps we did something the men couldn't do. The villagers now count us also as people who can do something. This has further encouraged us to carry on with our activities."

The CDC has also taken on the responsibility of conserving Simale community forest. The forest, which has yet to be registered, was previously looked after by the mothers' group. But it is the women of the discussion class who are now looking after it. Man Kumari says they were given this responsibility as they showed an interest in conserving the forest. She says this responsibility is also an opportunity for them.





The participants of the CDC have likewise been cleaning the water spouts and carrying out door-to-door campaign to aware the people about cleanliness and health issues.

They have also distributed information booklets and urged the villagers to read them. They have also suggested to women suffering from uterine prolapse, whom they meet in the course of their door-to-door campaign, to visit a proper medical center for treatment.

Another important work carried out under the leadership of Man Kumari is data collection. She has collected details such as the number of households in her ward, the number of people working in foreign countries, number of those in the family who drink alcohol, the number of employed in the family, etc. They have also collected details of the person with disability and submitted the data to the VDC to solicit support. This has not only helped one to better understand the situation of the village but will also help the VDC provide its facilities and service accordingly, says Man Kumari.

The village health post has an x-ray machine, but it is dysfunctional. That is why Man Kumari and other participants of her CDC have submitted a memorandum to the VDC office, the health post and the public health office demanding repair of the x-ray machine, appointment of necessary staff at the health post, installation of a solar panel and procurement of an ambulance for the health post. They have also submitted carbon copies of the memorandum to local political leaders. Man Kumari says, "We have also urged the local leaders to in turn hand the memorandum to the lawmaker who represents our constituency in parliament."

Mankumari, who is also chairperson of the Pragatisheel Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Group, says, "If someone goes to the health post and starts inquiring about things, staffers there ask if he has been sent by WAM (a local NGO that is implementing the MRMV programme in Surkhet district). We find this very encouraging."



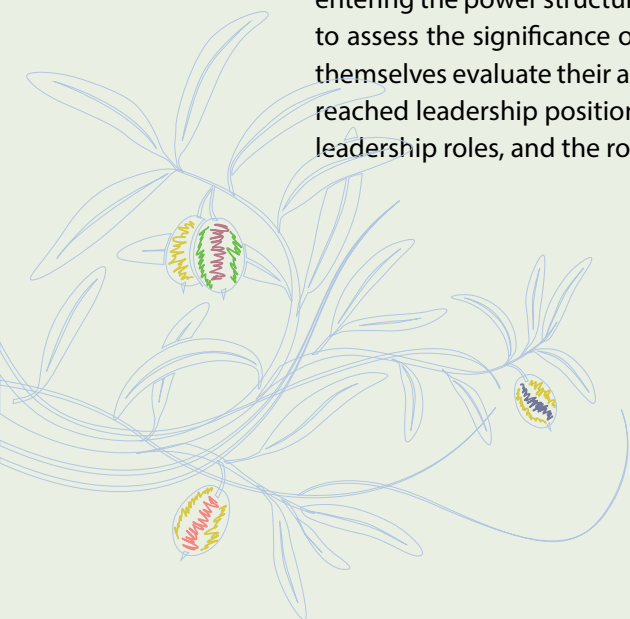
7

SECTION

Changes Brought about by Young Women

My Rights, My Voice programme has focused on promoting women's leadership in decision making. It has supported them to get elected to various decision making structures including School Management Committee, Teacher-Parent Association, Ward Citizen Forum, Community Forest Users Group and Health Facility Organisation Management Committee. As a result, women are more in demand in leadership roles as they are more economical, honest and diligent. Against the backdrop of most leadership positions being held by males, it has been considered necessary to place more women in leadership positions so as to balance the power relations in different structures and organisations and make them more gender friendly.

With the support of MRMV programme, many women have secured leadership positions. But is representation in the organisational power structure the ultimate achievement? What kind of roles did they play after entering the power structure? Were their voices heard? We will not be able to assess the significance of their inclusion unless we know how women themselves evaluate their achievements. In this section, women who have reached leadership positions share their struggles in the effort to assume leadership roles, and the roles they have played.





Conspiracy to obstruct women from taking leadership roles

Tika Karki of Awalparajul VDC, Dailekh holds various positions: treasurer of the women's network, member of the Health Facility Organisation Monitoring Committee (HFOMC), member of the TPA, coordinator at the WCF, member of mothers group (Aama Samuha), member of the Poverty Alleviation Committee, member of Deep Jyoti Saving and Credit Cooperative and treasurer of YHC, just to name a few. Only two years back, she was just a member of the Aama Samuha and the cooperative.

She went to the savings cooperative regularly to deposit her savings. The mothers' group used to hold discussions on health issues, but only occasionally. She realised the true importance of membership of a group only after joining the community

discussion class. Since joining the discussion class, it has become an obsession with her to join new groups, speak up and raise a voice for women.

What is the reason behind this? Says Tika, "Unless the women have representation in the power structure, decisions will not be taken in their favour. And unless decisions are taken in favour of women, we cannot gain our rights. This is the most important thing I learnt from my discussion class. Hence, the power centers have become of interest to us."

Initially, the CDC participants found it difficult even to convince her to hold the position of treasurer of YHC. While the other participants of discussion class were for appointing her as treasurer, Tika herself was completely against the idea. It was later disclosed that she had refused





the post fearing she would have to travel to Kathmandu by bus. "I am prone to motion sickness," she says. She agreed to hold the position only after other participants convinced her that she would not have

to travel to Kathmandu. After assuming the treasurer's position, she started joining other groups as well.

Tika, 35, has also become more clever after learning many things in discussion class. She has started enquiring about the total deposits and profit and loss at the cooperative where she puts her savings. She has also requested the cooperatives officials to explain to depositors about dividends and shares. She has been enquiring with officials as to why the cooperative has not had its accounts audited by the end of the fiscal year. "The cooperative says it has lost Rs 45,000. We want to know where the money disappeared. We will not keep quiet until we recover the amount," says Tika. Her remarks show the self-confidence she has gained through participation in the discussion class.

Tika got married at the age of 14 and her husband works as a laborer in India. Hence, the responsibility of looking after their small farm and their three children has fallen on her shoulders. Despite her personal responsibilities, Tika does not miss any programme. She knows the dates for her meetings by heart – poverty alleviation on the 5th, YHC on the 9th, mothers' group on the 14th, women's network on the 15th, HFOMC on the 29th, and the cooperative on the last Saturday of the month. Apart

from all this, she also pays a monitoring visit to the local school. She likewise attends other meetings and functions that happen to take place in between.

Tika, who has undertaken training on local level planning process, never went to school. But she has been assuming a leadership role in all the development activities in the village. It was on her initiative that funds were sought from the VDC office to build an outreach clinic in the village. Villagers from Ward Nos. 9, 3 and 1 have been receiving medical services from the clinic. The VDC office wanted to hand over to her the money for the construction of the clinic, but Tika declined. She agreed to keep the money only when the villagers told her that she should do so. When she eventually took the money, she counted it and found that the VDC office had given her only Rs 59,000 though it had promised them Rs 60,000. She demanded the missing amount. The VDC officials had given her Rs 1,000 less to see what she would do. She was subsequently praised by all the villagers.

She has become so clever now that everyone has been taken by surprise. On December 20, 2013, at the meeting of the village council Tika said half of the amount allocated for the target groups would be used to construct a road. Everyone agreed to this. Tika was also asked to sign the agreement. But she argued that the money allocated for the target groups should be spent for their welfare. Thus, the VDC did not succeed in its plan to divert the money into road construction. This has boosted Tika's confidence. She says, "They always hatch plots to block women from taking leadership roles, but we are determined to secure good positions for ourselves."



Community Discussion Class bigger than intermediate class

The health post is quite far away from the village. So, the villagers faced difficulties whenever someone fell ill in the village. The road to the health post was also in a very poor condition. The only stretcher provided by the Red Cross had broken down. We couldn't figure out what to do. It was a big problem, and was raised in the community discussion class. The participants in the CDC concluded that a stretcher had to be bought any way possible, and they decided to seek funds from the VDC office and the CFUG. They didn't say no but neither did they give us the money. They kept on making excuses.

The participants of the CDC, who were disappointed with the attitude of the VDC and CFUG officials, once

again discussed what could be done to solve the problem. In the course of the discussion, they decided that they would not seek funds from either the VDC or the community forest but would purchase the stretcher themselves. The participants then withdrew their own savings and bought a stretcher for Rs 2,200. They spent Rs 1,000 just to transport the stretcher from Nepalgunj to their village. The CDC participants are allowed to use the stretcher on a payment of Rs 10, while outsiders are required to pay Rs 20 every time they use it. But in any case the stretcher has made it very convenient for the villagers to carry their sick to the health post. [Indra Neupane](#), who took the initiative for purchasing the stretcher, says, "Now we have no difficulty carrying our sick from the village to the health post in Dungeshwar, which is a three-hour walk from the village."



The participants, who have become more highly motivated after purchasing the stretcher, have also constructed a building for the community discussion class.

They had planned

to construct a one-room structure with a sum of Rs 75,000 that they had received from the VDC Council for women focused programme but they later decided to construct a two-room structure. The participants are still Rs 25,000 in debt. But they are not worried. Why?

"We owe money to workers who constructed the building. They are our brethren from the same village. They have told us to pay them their wages whenever we have the money. It was because of their help that we could carry out the construction," says Indra.

For a long time, we ran our CDC in a local school. We faced various problems as we could not conduct the classes during school hours and conducting them only during the holidays was not enough. But now we conduct the meetings of the discussion class, the women's network and the poverty alleviation, goat rearing and CFUG in the new building. This has made things easier for all. The women have also constructed a motor road linking their building to the primary school and the main road. "We brought the budget and constructed the road on

our own initiative," says Indra, adding, "In the past we didn't know about our rights, but we know now. Though I have passed intermediate level schooling, I had to join the discussion class to learn about our rights. I undertook the trainings and we were allowed to speak up. I also learnt a lot by reading. People used to talk about a WCF and similar other entities. Now I know what these are."

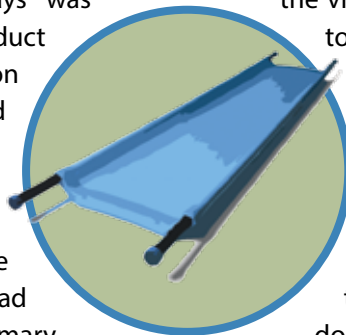
"In the earlier days, even attending the CDC was not easy. Family members used to ask questions. They would ask if we were badmouthing our husbands to outsiders. While the other women would explain to their husbands where they went and what they learnt, I had no such answers myself even though I was myself the facilitator of the CDC. When we received any books, we could explain them to our families as we learnt to speak for ourselves. Now even those who opposed our activities have come around to support us."

Some people in the village still accuse her of spoiling the other women in the village. But she says these accusations do not sway her. Indra is concerned that she has not been able to control alcohol abuse in

the village, and now she plans

to empower the women financially. That is why she has formed a group of 42 women in her village. The group is in the process of enrolling women for vocational training. And why? "Men dominate us because we depend on them for money," she

explains.





Fought a case for forest expansion

It “I faced several challenges when I was chosen as chairperson of Tirkhule CFUG. Though the menfolk had eyed the post, I was chosen as everyone stood in my favour. Because of the support I have received from the women who chose me, we have been able to keep challenges at bay. And I feel I have been able to get a lot of work done under my leadership. This is a matter of pride for all the women in the village,” says [Radha Hamal](#) of the CDC in Piladi VDC - 8 of Dailekh district.

She adds, “Our village was close by Raniban (forest), which all the nine wards in our VDC claimed to be theirs. But when we refused to give up our own claim to the forest, Raniban was annexed to our ward. We returned

a forest that others were claiming as theirs. The ward has been earning money through the sale of black khoto (natural paint made by cooking the bark of sallaa trees). They have accumulated savings of Rs 60,000 through the sale of khoto as the price is Rs 6 per kg. We do not know how much the previous forest users’ group collected in the past. We are still collecting for what was distributed by the previous group. We have so far recovered Rs 6,000,” says Radha.

They had asked the forest ranger to recover the money from the previous forest users’ group, but when the ranger demanded remuneration for the work, they decided to collect the money themselves. Since the women took over the leadership of the community forest, deforestation and rampant felling of trees have been brought





under control. The forest guard had tried to stop a man from Ward No. 7 of the VDC from cutting the grass. The forest guard was beaten up for this. A complaint was then filed with the police, accusing

Radha and the forest guard of beating up this man. Those who filed the case claimed that the man who was thrashed sustained serious injuries and he had been admitted to a hospital in Nepalgunj. They also demanded Rs 7,000 as compensation for the injuries. Radha secretly sent two of her people to Nepalgunj to find out if the man in question had really been injured and was receiving treatment there. It was then learnt that they had made false claims.

The women then decided that the forest guard had not been carrying out his responsibilities properly. So they decided to appoint a woman forest guard and Mansara Rijal was chosen for that. Radha says Mansara, who is paid Rs 2,200 as a monthly salary, has been discharging her duties responsibly. She goes to the forest early in the morning and returns home for lunch at 1 pm. This would not have been possible for men. Not that they had

not appointed males in the past, but they decided to appoint a woman after the men kept quitting. Radha says the women are fed up with men who quit work if they do not get to take bribes.

With the fines collected from the forest, the women planned to purchase utensils for feasts and parties. The women had raised the issue in discussion class and they all agreed that they needed utensils for organising feasts. Not that the group did not have such utensils. But most of these have become useless and they plan to exchange the old ones for new. The CFUG also plans to purchase a stretcher so that it would be easier to carry the sick. This has on one hand helped to conserve the forest, while the women have on the other acknowledged that they can conserve the forest better than the men.

“There are two males, including the treasurer and a member, on the forest users committee, but we now plan to have an all-women users committee,” says Radha. “As the men have been saying that we don’t need forest guards, we suspect their intentions. Why are they saying that? Do they not want the forest to be conserved? That is why the women have decided to take the leadership of the forest into their own hands,” says Radha.



Surprisingly active at 53

'On December 2013, a man felled a tree in our community forest and took it away. A participant of our Namuna CDC informed us about this. Participants of the discussion class then went to catch the man and fined him Rs 4,000. The participants had said that he should be fined more, but we decided to settle for Rs 4,000 only in view of his financial condition. The tree he felled can only be used as firewood. So we decided that the fine was appropriate.'

Manmala Chunara, vice-chairperson of Jana Chetana CFUG of Lekhphaarsa VDC - 8, has many such stories about the efforts made for the conservation of the community forest. Though the committee has appointed two forest guards, a male and a female,

Manmala, 53, monitors the forest activities with equal fervour along with other officials of the community forest. "That is why our community forest, where timber theft used to be rampant, is now properly conserved," she says.

All the 250 households of forest users contribute Rs 150 each to pay the forest guards. They have set a fine of Rs 50 for grazing cows in the forest and Rs 25 for grazing goats. They have also fixed a fine of Rs 50 for stealing grass from the forest. Manmala is happy with the reforms that have taken place in the forest after the new working committee was formed. The committee has eight women members out of a total of 13 members. That is why she feels that women should show they are capable of doing things. A meeting of the working committee of the CFUG





takes place on the 20th of every month. Such meeting never took place under the former committee. Manmala complains that the former committee has not submitted details of its transactions despite requests to do so. She also says that the previous committee was irresponsible as the treasurer did not stay in the village and the chairperson never called the meetings of the committee.

The forest spread over 50 hectares does not have significant earnings. Since the new committee was formed, they have collected only Rs 12,000 and that too through fines and the selling of firewood for wedding parties. Manmala hopes that the income of the forest will increase as it is now under a new working committee. She also says that the women in the village have made up their mind to manage the forest themselves as chairperson of the committee Khagendra Bahadur Paudel has asked them to do so. She believes that women can assume leadership roles and carry out their duties effectively. She says the forest users are also of the opinion that women should hold all the positions on the forest users' working committee. It

has been observed that a committee with more women members contributes to social work also. According to Manmala, the community forest has provided wood for making furniture for Jana Kalyan Primary School. Likewise, the forest had provided firewood for cooking for eye patients who had visited the eye check-up camp organised by the Red Cross on January 15, 16 and 17 in 2013. Apart from this, the forest has been providing firewood at a discount for weddings, and for free for funerals.

Apart from this, the forest committee also has a provision for helping those whose houses are destroyed by fire. The group has bought a stretcher for carrying the sick. All these things have earned a good reputation for the members of the forest users committee.

Increased involvement of people in forest conservation, especially after the formation of the new working committee, has encouraged Manmala. She has finally understood the reason why the MRMV encourages them to get into the decision making structures and influence changes. "Had we not joined the discussion class supported by the MRMV, we would never have known about the forest committee, its functions, the need for us to join it and the role we can play," says Manmala.



Hope of raising living standard through mushroom farming

"When we stayed at home, we met nobody. Even when we met someone, we had nothing to discuss. When I started going to the CDC, I had conversations with other participants of the class. I learnt many things. I then felt that we too should do something. So we all decided to earn something and save part of it," says [Dev Kumari Fauja](#) of Sirjansheel CDC of Lekhparsa VDC - 8, Surkhet district.

"We then worked for wages on an hourly basis. We took Rs 30 per hour when working for participants of the discussion class, and worked for others on contract basis. This way we earned around Rs 8,866 in a single season. Apart from this we also deposited savings of Rs 10 every

month. We have invested this money at 24 percent interest.

At around the same time, the Bauddha Rural Organisation was providing training in mushroom farming. Dev Kumari and other participants brought this up at their discussion class. After that all 22 participants of the class undertook the training. After a three-day training, the same organisation provided the seeds. "We have already harvested our first crop. We ate some and sold most of it," says Dev Kumari.

The women of the CDC have now decided to start commercial production of mushrooms. She says they took the decision as they do not have any problem with market access and the seeds and training would be provided by various





organisations. Also, they would not require a huge space for mushroom farming and the profits would be good. They have already made preparations to start commercial production. After she started going to discussion class, she not only learnt about income generating activities but also about other things that would be helpful for women. She has now readied places for drying dishes not only at her house but also in other people's houses.

They also discuss issues of sanitation in their class. The facilitator also 'educates' the participants about the benefits of building toilets for each household. Influenced by the idea of building toilets, Gauri Pariyar and Basanti Tamar, both participants of the discussion class, have built toilets in their homes. Dev Kumari now says with pride, "There is now no participant in the class who does not have a toilet in her home." The participants of the class have also made up their mind to contribute free labour to build toilets for financially weak households.

There are other issues also that Dev Kumari and other participants of the class explain with pride. There are no women in the village who are not aware of prenatal care. Participants of the CDC have educated the villagers about this through a door-to-door campaign. What do they tell villagers during their door-to-door campaign? According to Dev Kumari, "We ask the

women to come to our discussion class and read the books we provide them. We also ask them to wash their hands before eating. We take their signatures to ensure their commitment."

Delegation to the health post

We asked the local health post to explain to us about the services provided by the health post and the process of seeking its services. But the officials at the health post demanded an allowance for this even though it is their duty to inform the people about the services they provide. They did not provide us the information and data we sought either. We also do not know if their meetings ever take place.

We discussed this issue at our CDC then decided to ask the health post to call a meeting of the health management committee. We then made our request. But they did not call any meeting and told us that they would do as they wished. We then took a delegation to the health post. We also submitted a memorandum asking the health post to call a meeting of the health management committee. After we handed over the memorandum, the meeting of the committee was duly called for August 20, 2014.

The meeting passed our proposal to provide us with a stretcher and to set up a sub health post close to Ward Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the VDC. However, nothing has been done so far. So, we are conducting an enquiry into the places we should visit and things we should do to start work as agreed in the proposal.



School now back on track

There was more politics going on than studies at Janak Rastriya Secondary School in the village. As the teachers were divided along political lines, this had a negative impact on the quality of the teaching. There was no discipline in the school. The teachers started becoming negligent about the morning prayers before classes and nobody obeyed anybody. As the school did not have a management committee, there was no one there to show the right path to the teachers and students.

This issue was raised emphatically at Hariyali CDC of Dasharathpur VDC - 8, Surkhet district. Everybody agreed that they should not remain mute spectators in face of the deteriorating state of affairs in the village

school. It was then agreed that a school management committee would be formed in coordination with the chairperson of the YHC, [Harisara Oli](#). The committee was thus formed.

Once the SMC was formed, villagers were invited to a gathering. There were complaints about factional disputes as four of the teachers were political appointees. "We submitted a memorandum asking the school principal and the chairperson of the SMC to improve the quality of education, keep the school free of politics and conduct classes till 4 pm even on Fridays," says Harisara.

The dispute in the school had intensified after one of the teachers filed a complaint at the district education office (DEO) that the school had appointed an incompetent





teacher. The dispute reached the district level. In the course of this, Harisara and other participants of the CDC also reached the DEO. They explained to the DEO officials that the major problem was

the political appointment of teachers at the school. The DEO then asked Harisara to form a committee to monitor the school. As per the DEO's suggestion, a school monitoring committee has been formed. Harisara is joint secretary of the committee.

Now the disputes in the school are being gradually resolved by Harisara and other participants of the discussion class. The quality of education has also improved. From December 14, 2013, the school has been running classes till 4 pm even on Fridays. They have also started appointing teachers to the vacant posts. "We have

asked the school in writing not to leave their classes without teachers, to regularise the morning prayers and to put a halt to negligence."

A child health committee has also been formed at the school. So, extra-curricular activities are also organised in the school every Friday. "I regularly visit the school as my children also study there. During my visits, the teachers, even if they are gossiping, immediately enter the class when they see me," says Harisara. "Anyway, the school, which had already fallen into decline, is now back on the right path, thanks to the collective efforts of all."

Dasharathpur (Surkhet)

Ward	HH	Population	Men	Women
1	94	503	236	267
2	153	676	285	291
3	90	390	185	205
4	176	714	300	414
5	239	784	334	450
6	94	477	221	256
7	192	862	412	450
8	102	530	253	277
9	81	411	196	196
Total	1221	5347	2422	2925

Poverty rate: **24.58**

Woman honored for her courage

Nandakala Barahi is a participant of our discussion class. An HIV-infected patient, she openly advises other women in the village to take precautions against the disease. Appreciating her courage, the participants of the discussion class feted her on April 14, 2013. Her husband has already died of the disease in January. However, the discussion class has made arrangements for high-nutrition food for Nandakala through a social organisation. Though her husband Bhim Bahadur is no more, the participants still remember this song sung by the couple:

*This is all I tell everyone
No one suffers like we do*



‘Pariwartan’ brings about change

Prabhat Cooperative and Democratic Women’s Network and the Women’s Association for Marginalized Women (WAM), a local partner NGO of MRMV programme in Surkhet, were jointly organizing an oratory competition. [Sita Khatri](#) also wanted to participate in the competition around the theme, “Women’s leadership: The need of the hour”. Twelve participants from various VDCs were in the competition.

A panel of judges comprising teachers was also formed to adjudge the winners. Though the competition was being contested by seasoned participants, Sita, who had studied only up to sixth grade, decided to participate also. When everyone had spoken, it was her turn. Sita said, “There are no irregularities where

there is women’s leadership, and they are not negligent. They are honest. Women have been lagging behind as there is a practice of including women only for token presence. Only when there is participation of both can a good house be built. Stop violence against women right from today.”

Sita was surprised when the judges adjudged her the winner of the competition. At first, she did not believe it. But she had to believe later as it was a fact. Who taught this 34-year-old woman how to speak? She says, “It was the discussion class (Pariwartan CDC) that taught me to speak.”

Sita not only learnt to speak after joining discussion class, but many other things also. She also underwent a 10-day training on forum theatre skills. After the



training, she together with other artists produced a play titled "Story of a firefly". She staged the play not only in each ward of the VDC but also in Nepalgunj. Sita plays the role of a teacher in this play based on the health problems of the village.

She plans to produce other plays as well as this one, which dealt with issues like lack of medicines at the health post, truant doctors and the negligence of students, was appreciated by many. "Because I was interested in theatre, I also underwent an additional four-day refresher training," says Sita, adding, "I had never seen a play but now I have started to actually produce them. She points out the difference between the plays produced by her and those of others thus: "There are lots of acting in the plays staged by others, but ours reflects reality." She also claims that because of this, her plays would help resolve various problems in the village.

Though she was not too satisfied till the seventh day of the training, she felt motivated from the eighth day onwards. Explaining about the practice of picking the theme of the play through discussions with other participants, she says: "On the final day of our training, we enacted a play at Mangalgadhi Chowk, Surkhet district. The audience appreciated the play and we felt we had performed well."

Sita also plans to enact other plays based on themes like misuse of mobile phones, child marriage and polygamy. Many people after seeing their play enquired where and how they learnt play. "Had I known where they taught people drama, I too would have gone for the training," she quotes them as saying.

Thanks to the community discussion class, Sita has now started staking claim to various leadership positions. She is the secretary of the CFUG in her village. Three years ago she was offered the position of chairperson of Laligurans Primary School Management Committee. But she had refused the offer as she was afraid to hold that position. "I didn't know anything then. I would not have rejected it if I am offered the position now. I would now even claim the position of chairperson of the SMC."

Sita is active not only in these groups. Sita, who was chairperson of the Users Committee for the Laligurans School-Pipal Chautara Road Repair Project, is now also a member of the WCF. Though people badmouth her, saying she ruined her home to become a leader, she does not care about such comments. Why? "People keep on bad-mouthing others. It is our duty to do our work," she says.



Women's protest improves studies

One day, the son of one of the participants of Namuna CDC complained that the teachers in his school went to sleep, played chess and did not teach in class during school hours. The issue was raised in discussion class. They then decided to monitor the school. They even paid a secret inspection visit there. It was found during the inspection that the teachers were in fact negligent toward their duties and the students had also gone astray.

The women then went to Chandrodya Primary School located in Ramghat VDC - 2, Surkhet to see things over there. As there were no signs of improvement, women from Ward Nos. 1, 2 and 3 of the VDC took out a procession to the school.

Participants of the CDC and [Lila Khadka](#), chairperson of the TPA, say, "Now the school takes the attendance of students twice a day to make sure they do not play truant. The studies have also improved."

The discussion class has also thought out a plan to solve the problem of students not attending school or going truant. Now, students not attending school either have to pay Rs 5 in fine or bring a letter from their parents stating the reason for the absence. Everyone sends their children to school for fear that they would have to pay the Rs 5 in fine. As the students do not miss school and the teachers also teach properly, this has become a matter of pride for both the school and the women.

Lila became a member of the TPA of the school only in June, but the association's





meetings have already been held thrice. She says they have discussed issues like management of clean drinking water for the students, improving the quality of education, when to publish

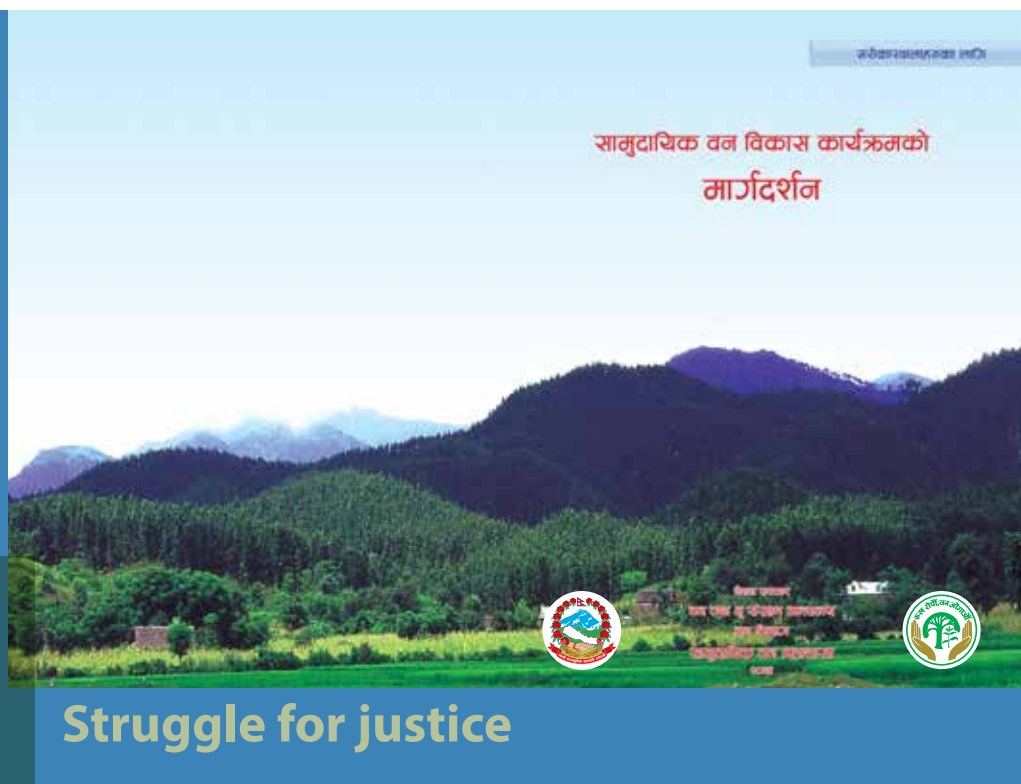
exam results, when and how to provide scholarships, etc. She says she is more confident now because the joint secretary and the vice chairperson of the association are both women and their voices will now be heard.

During discussions in CDC, she asks the teachers why they have not been able to keep the school clean and improve the quality of education like in private schools. She also puts the same questions to the guardians. She asks why they have been sending one child to a private school and another to a government school. They have been asked not to do so. "The students of the school have been coming to school in clean and tidy fashion," she says.

Lila has also been working to empower the women financially. Last January, the MRMV programme had provided them some money for breakfast. "As per our decision in the CDC, we decided to save the money and use it to train the women in making nylon footstools. Now almost all the participants of the class make nylon footstools, sell them in the market and earn some money," said Lila.

"I had borrowed money from a cooperative to buy goats. The goats have not grown up but I repaid the loan by selling footstools," says Lila, adding, "Other participants of the class have also paid their loans for goat farming by selling footstools." Other women of the village have also expressed interest in training for making footstools.

The participants of the class, who have also undergone training in mushroom and vegetable cultivation, have taken it as a big achievement that they do not need to ask for money from others. Lila says footstools are easily sold in the village. They sell each footstool for Rs 200.



The Sikta Irrigation Project used the village road to transport sand and aggregates. Vehicles carried heavy loads, but as the road was not repaired in time, it was in a very poor condition. It is riddled with potholes. One day, the participants of the discussion class raised this issue and expressed concern over matter. They then discussed if they could do something.

"We visited the office of Kalika Constructions, which has been awarded the project. They assured us of help but did nothing. The participants of the CDC went to the office of the construction company several times. We also took delegations to the office. We warned that we might have to bring all the villagers to the office.

But some of the villagers took bribes and tried to muffle our demand," says [Kamala BC](#), facilitator of the community discussion class of Mahadevpuri VDC - 5, Banke district. "We refused to relent even though it took them five months to address our demand. We compelled the contractor to construct a 800-meter road section from Jhijhari Women's Building to the highway." This road has now been widened to six meters and it has also been graveled. The potholes have been filled. "You earn money by using our road. But what do we get in return," the women had told the contractor. Only then did they succeed in their struggle, says Kamala.

Kamala and other participants of the CDC have also been struggling for justice at the Rimna CFUG. The group had an annual general meeting on March 14,



2013. Some of them had even tried to use Kamala. They had conspired to keep her mum, giving her some ordinary post. Some of them had warned that they would not give her any of the top posts.

But Kamala, who had undergone forest-related training and studied the rules and regulations related to community forests, cited a provision that made it mandatory for a group to have a woman either as chairperson or secretary. But the males still did not concede the point. Kamala is, however, confident that they would get important posts as provisioned by the law.

The general meeting, which would elect the leadership, has been deferred, but Kamala says nothing can stop them from holding the important posts. Kamala has undergone various trainings on climate change, local level planning process and advocacy and campaigning, and she says

no one can cheat her now. As the forest is inside the Sikta Irrigation Project Area and has collected around Rs 3.6 million felling trees for the project, a great amount of wheeling and dealing goes on for securing the top posts. The forest also earns additional money as a picnic spot. The top positions are considered lucrative for the added reason that the group is capable of providing Rs 2,000 to each household for building toilets. Kamala says the group needs strong leadership by women so that there would be no irregularities.

Kamala and other participants of the discussion class are also working to build a lab at the village health post. They have already raised Rs 10,000 from Jhijhari CFUG, of which Kamala is the treasurer. They have also sought funds from Rimna CFUG. They plan to seek funds from the VDC office, the district health office and other offices concerned for the village health post lab. Stating that most of their struggles have succeeded, Kamala says, "If one perseveres, one is bound to succeed. This is what we have learnt from our experience."



A Different Perspective

The young women, youths and children in the village say they are never tired of explaining about the favours the MRMV programme has done for them. Participants of the discussion class claim this programme has opened their eyes. Children organised in the CHC and involved in the MRMV are happy with the information, capacity building and entertainment programmes, the prizes and confidence they built being a part of the programme. Those who have received training in making video documentaries, developing plays and bringing out wall magazines say they have been able to ameliorate social problems through effective communications techniques. And the villagers are happy to learn about government services and facilities.

But how do the respected and educated members of society who have been observing this programme evaluate its effectiveness? Is the programme as effective as claimed by its beneficiaries? Or are there shortfalls as well? Can the programme be made more effective? In this section, school principals, health post in-charges, VDC secretaries, journalists, government officials, health workers and people from the indigenous community speak about these issues.





Effective in raising awareness about rights

The REFLECT method based discussion class supported by the MRMV programme has been effective in terms of raising awareness and building capacity of rights holders in the community. The programme being run in all the wards of Awalparajul VDC, Dailekh has been providing information about rights and services being provided by the government institutions. In addition, it focuses on whether the services have been effective and whether the service users have been making use of the services. Seen in this light, the MRMV programme has been informing and making aware the people about the services offered to them by the state. In addition, they have been showing their concern over whether work is being carried

out as stated in the citizen's charter.

I had also been invited to the discussion classes in all 12 communities of the VDC. I informed them about the services and facilities offered by the school. I also informed them about the process for availing of such services. The CDC participants also enquired about various other issues and I explained these to them. After attending the discussion class, I came to know that the programme especially the CDC had made the women in the village active and well-informed. Each of their questions to me reflected this. Anyway, they did a good thing by giving me the opportunity to inform them about the school.

The most important aspect of the MRMV programme is that it has well-informed





the children, youths and women about their rights. The child health committee (CHC) formed by the programme in our village has turned out to be very effective. Various activities are organised by the committee in our school. The programme has provided various items such as dustbin, mike, madal drum and stationeries for all the classrooms. School bags have been provided to the members of the CHC for keeping their books in. Because of all this, the programme has been able to educate the students about their health and other basic rights and issues.

Because of their affiliation with the YHC/ CDC and the CHC and participation in various programmes and activities, the students have been able to acquire necessary information about many new issues. They have been able to articulate their feelings. They have now understood that they need to organise themselves to complete any task effectively. It is the speciality of this programme to be able to move ahead through programmes related to societal and cultural change. On March 8, the participants of the discussion class and the members of YHC organised a cultural programme in our school on the occasion of International Women's Day. I had never seen such huge participation of women in any other programme. The programme was well-organised. In fact, I had never seen such an effective, well-organised and awareness focused

programme in the village before. It is my belief that this is the result of the MRMV programme. This shows that the women in the village are becoming aware and this process continues.

The situation did not change overnight. When the programme started, there were many challenges. There were even allegations that the programme was spoiling society. But the women continued their campaign. They proved themselves by bringing about changes. Hence even their detractors have now been left speechless. Many of them joined the programme as participants. This has also reduced corruption in development activities in the village. They have been warning against corruption in all kinds of activities. The number of women keeping watch from leadership positions has increased.

My wife Satyadevi is also a regular participant of the community discussion class. She is at the same time studying in class five in Bhawani Primary School in the village. I credit this to the CDC. The other women in the village have also been motivated as my own wife started going to school at the age of 48. We also discuss various issues raised in the discussion class. They have given her some reading materials as well. That is also equally worthwhile. It is the speciality of this programme that the work done by a few has inspired others to follow suit.

Sundar Kumar KC, Principal

Sita Janasahayog Higher Secondary School
Awalparajul, Dailekh



Things are now easier

It was I who first made a request to bring the MRMV programme to our village. Once it came to our village, people's expectations went up. Everyone thought they would get more medicines. People became more aware about the services offered by the health post and about the free medicines. So the demand for medicines went up, and we could not meet the demand. This created some problems.

We then coordinated with the team of the programme. We also put before them the constraints facing our health post. After six months, we did not face the supply crunch any longer. I went to all the 10 community discussion classes in all the wards of the VDC and explained to them about the services

the health post provided. The discussion class also invited us. After this people have come to understand many things. We also have our constraints. We get Rs 400 per 50 kg of medicines, but it costs us Rs 700. So it is not possible for us to provide as much medicine as people want. We have our own problems. Everyone should understand this. We have also explained this to the officials of the programme during our visits with them.

After this programme was launched in the village, there has been higher public awareness. This is a beautiful aspect of the programme. In this village with a population of 3,229 people, around 3,370 have already received services from the health post in the last six months. Similarly, 49 women have received child delivery services against the health post's



target of providing the services to 107 women this year. Women visit the health post for delivery if they do not already deliver the child on their way there. The programme must

be given some credit for the rise in the number of women receiving the health post services.

It is mostly the women who receive services from the health post. The programme must be credited for this as well. I have been working at this health post for the last 11 years. I am surprised to see the change in women over the years. No women with uterine problems or pregnancy complaints visited the health post then. But now all of them come and openly tell us about their problems.

Still, people from the Dalit settlement in Ward Nos. 1, 4, 6 and 7 do not come to the health post. It would have been much better if the public awareness programmes targeted such groups more strongly. Similarly, had the programme also provided physical support, the villagers

would have received even more services. If the programme is taken ahead in coordination with all concerned, it would be more successful. The programme also conveys the problems faced by the health post to the district via their own channels and puts pressure on us, asking why things are not as they should be. This has also made it easier for us to get things done.

The health post is in poor shape. When a place that is supposed to provide treatment is itself in poor shape, how can it function effectively? Therefore, everyone should help make the health post better-equipped. The youths and women of this programme have also provided us a gas cylinder. This has helped us sterilize the medical instruments. The youths and women have likewise built a waiting room at the health post. The mothers groups have given us 10 straw mats. The VDC office has also provided us staff and other help. The MRMV programme too has also been supporting us, which is a positive thing. But our problems should also not be overlooked.

Lal Bahadur Chaudhary

In-charge, Health Post, Piladi VDC
Dailekh



Even the ignorant became conscious

After the MRMV programme came into implementation and the discussion class began in the village, the children, youth and women have gained knowledge about various issues. Those who knew nothing have now become able to speak up. Even ignorant women have become aware. The most unlikely of women also speak about their rights. The people in this village were clever and the MRMV programme has made them more clever still. This is a matter of joy for the village.

The youths and women in the CDC also come to the VDC office. They ask us how big a budget we have and how we plan to distribute it. I show them all the details. It is a good thing

that youths and women want to know how much budget has been allocated for this village and how the VDC plans to spend it.

Not only the development works in the village, youths and women have also been showing concern about health issues. The VDC health post is not within easy reach of the people of Ward Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the VDC. So the youths and women have submitted a memorandum demanding a sub-health post in their area. They have also been raising the issue at other programmes. Hence, we have submitted their proposal to the district public health office after getting it endorsed by the village council. They ask us about the progress with their proposal every time they visit us.





We have raised their concerns at the district public health office. But they tell us they do not have such policy of setting up more than one health post in each VDC. Still, the office has given

us permission to set up a health post and also appointed staff but it has asked us to construct the health post building on our own. We have been assuring the youths and women that the VDC office would construct the building. This is all that the VDC can do.

They have also demanded arrangements for the treatment of snakebite victims at the health post. I forwarded this proposal to the district health office. But they say providing snakebite treatment at the VDC level is not possible. They say they do not have a snakebite specialist. The demand is reasonable as the VDC is prone to snakebite. But how is it possible for a VDC to resolve the problem when the state itself is helpless? The VDC has bought a freezer for the purpose. Anyway, it is a positive thing that the women have raised the issue consistently.

The women are on good terms with the VDC. They coordinate with us while organising their programmes. We also invite participants of the ward citizen

forum to attend their programmes. Things have become easier for us as we have started working collectively.

Sometimes they speak nonsense. When some women come to seek recommendations for citizenship to go abroad for work, we advise them to work inside the country, saying their children would suffer if they leave them behind at home. They say it is their right to acquire citizenship and to go abroad for work. But we also need to look at the practical aspects in certain matters. They don't have the capacity to analyse things. It would have been better if the programme also provided training for enhancing their analytical powers. They should not bring up negative issues in the name of my rights, my voice.

Last year, they organised nutrition fair and practically 'educated' the pregnant and lactating mothers together with their husband and in-laws about preparing nutrition food and use them in the time of pregnancy. The VDC provided them full support to them. I also want to record a note that the VDC is always ready to help them in their good work. The women would be financially independent if the programme is able to provide them skill-based training.

Tej Bahadur Rokaya

Secretary, Lekpharsa VDC, Surkhet



Need of skill development training

The MRMV programme being run in our village has played an effective role in 'educating' women about their rights. Several women have gained sound knowledge and have also started showing interest in various programmes and in the budget allocated for programmes related to women. Hence, apart from other things, MRMV also seems to have helped raise the level of awareness among women.

It is a good thing that women who felt too shy even to have a conversation with us are now capable of expressing themselves freely. Now they are willing to join various committees, assume leadership roles and also express interest in all kinds of programmes. This must be taken as a

positive change among the women. But it is not only MRMV that has brought about all this change. Changed context and other factors have also played a significant role.

Women are now interested in skill-based training that can make them financially independent. To that end they have been enquiring about procedures and resources and taking such initiatives as visiting the community forest, the VDC and other concerned agencies. They have also started training in tailoring skills and we have provided them support from our side.

These women have undergone several trainings in Nepalgunj and Kathmandu. They have been making video documentaries also. This is a good achievement for the village women. It has also developed in them a feeling that they





should do something and develop their own identity. It is a good trait of theirs that they consult with all groups in the village before starting any activity.

That is why they were able to resolve the dispute that had ensued in the process of constructing a road in the village. They have also started undergoing trainings after bringing all the women together. They have done many other things after convincing others. The things undertaken under the women's initiative and leadership have impressed other villagers also. Had they not moved ahead in coordination with all, it is unlikely

that these activities would have been accomplished.

Despite all these achievements, the MRMV programme needs to help the women even further. Though the women have become competent in terms of awareness, they are yet to become financially independent. The programme should create an environment wherein they can engage in income generating activities. Only when they become competent would the overall progress of society be possible. MRMV should pay attention to this issue. Only then can it accomplish its objectives.

Masta Bahadur Pun

Indigenous Nationalities Network
Kachanapur, Banke

Do you know?

- The National Agricultural Policy 2004 states that there must be participation of 50 percent women in any programme related to agriculture.
- There is a provision which makes it mandatory for any CFUG to have a woman as either chairperson or secretary. It also states that there must be 50 percent representation of women, including those from the marginalised, Dalit and indigenous communities. Also, there must be equitable representation of marginalised, Dalit, indigenous and other minorities in the remaining 50 percent.
- As per the irrigation policy, there must be 20 percent representation of women in the irrigation users committees.
- While announcing the budget for the fiscal year 2009/10, the government had announced a tax rebate for registering land in women's names. Such rebate for land in the cities was 25 percent, 30 percent in the villages and 40 percent in the mountains.
- On May 30, 2006, the government also took the decision to ensure at least one-third representation of women in all government mechanisms.
- On May 30, 2006, the government also decided to end all discriminatory laws and violence against women.
- On the same day, Nepal was declared a discrimination-free and untouchability-free nation.



Women working for social transformation

In our district, Oxfam in partnership with local NGOs has been carrying out activities for women's empowerment through its MRMV programme. It has supported discussion classes at the ward level and lobby and advocacy at the VDC and district level. I have found this programme, which is raising awareness among youths and women through the REFLECT method, very effective.

As part of the same programme, I had visited Piladi VDC to facilitate life-skills training for CHC members. I also visited other VDCs as a member of the stakeholders' monitoring team of the programme. On different days and occasions, I have also attended the programmes organised by the YHCs and CHCs. In this process, I have

seen students and women transforming themselves. Women have started speaking freely for their rights. I have seen children impressed by the constructive work carried out by their guardians. Similarly, I have also found the guardians happy over their children's active involvement in their activities.

Schools in the villages have improved a lot after the youths and women took an interest in them. Both educational environment and sanitation have improved at the schools as the youths and women have been organising programmes regularly and monitoring the schools. Students have become more conscious about their health. There is no negligence in the services provided by the health post. VDC secretaries and other officials are now more alert. Though women do not have



access to big projects, they have ensured that irregularities do not take place in the small development projects carried out in the village. In a nutshell, the villages have become better due to increased

awareness among children, youths and women associated with the MRMV and discussion classes.

The community discussion class has increased the level of awareness among women. Though this part of Dailekh district is considered relatively better off, the programme has made it even better. For instance, the women of the CDC often visit the district development committee (DDC) to enquire about programmes and the budget for their villages. They hold talks with the local development officer for hours. They enquire about the objective of the development work being carried out in their village, the budget allocated, the expected duration of the project and the forming of users committee. They have become so active that they enquire about these things over the phone if they are unable to make it to the DDC office in person. Some of them have even taken the programmes to their own villages. This is a remarkable change.

They enquire with us if there is any delay in releasing the social security allowance and demand to know the reasons for the delay. If they suspect someone of irregularities, they come to us directly to report about it and ask if anything can be done to stop the irregularity. They

come to us with their problems and ask us about the DDC programmes that might address the problems. They mostly feel that the DDC must support them in their income generating activities. We for our part explain to them about the resources available, the possibility of support from the DDC and the process for acquiring such support. Whatever the case, they do not have any complaints against the DDC.

Schools, health posts and VDC offices have become alert after the women started visiting the offices and the district level health, education and forest offices directly to make their complaints. They have also started organising their activities. They have started following due process while undertaking any activity. As a result, bodies like the CFUG and drinking water users group are better managed than before. They are more alert as they feel that the women of CDC are watching over their activities.

Though the MRMV programme is good, its scope is limited. On the one hand, it has not been able to include all the children and women in their respective wards, while on the other the women in other villages are still backward as the programme is being run in only three VDCs. As there are many backward areas in the northern and western areas of Dailekh district, the programme would have been more effective if it were expanded to those areas. Also, the programme would have been more sustainable if it focused on infrastructure development and income generating activities.

Shamsheer Shahi

Planning Officer

District Development Committee, Dailekh



Women becoming aware

I also had an opportunity to visit Ramghat, Dashrathpur and Lekhparsa VDCs in the course of monitoring the MRMV programme being implemented through Women Association for Marginalized Women (WAM) in Surkhet district. The monitoring team comprised representatives from the Women's Development Office, the District Education Office and the District Forest Office, among others. In the course of the monitoring, we inspected the discussion classes run in all the three VDCs. We also got the opportunity to see the activities carried out by students through their child health committees.

When we went to the discussion classes, we were happy to see the women speaking. They were not hesitant. They don't even feel shy. They

were capable of articulating their feelings. They said CDCs helped them transform. We also believed this. In this sense, I saw that women, who were earlier confined to their homes, are now more active. This I feel is a specialty of this programme.

I also saw that the youths and women were concerned about the activities carried out by the health posts, schools and VDC offices. They were also aware about the services offered by these offices, the process of acquiring such services and the interventions in case of negligence or obstruction in the services. We saw them interested in taking the maximum benefit from the services offered by these offices.

During the course of the inspection, the participants of the discussion class also asked me many questions. They asked me why the health posts do not have medicines which the government provides





for free. They told me they did not have a stretcher to carry the sick and enquired about the process through which they could get one. "They even take money while registering a patient's name. Why

do they take money when the services provided by the health post are said to be free," they asked me. They also enquired with me why the health post took money to register patients after 12 pm. They complained to me about ill-treatment by the health post officials and delay in providing the allowances meant for lactating mothers.

Their concern for these issues concerning health services made me happy. Perhaps, they are more curious about the health services as their programme is focused on the health sector. I tried my best to answer their questions. I told them that there is delay in providing the allowances meant for lactating mothers due to delay by the central government in releasing the money. I also told them that the health posts cannot charge fees for registering their name, under any pretext. I also told them that the government does not provide all the medicines for free, that there were only certain medicines which can be obtained free from the health post.

The best aspect of the MRMV programme is its contribution to increased awareness among right holders. As a result of their awareness about their rights, the youths

and women have assumed leadership positions in local decision making structures such as the CFUG, HFOMC, SMC, etc. On the one hand, this has increased the self-confidence among women, while on the other the women have proved that they too can do something if they are given opportunities. I have also seen that they have done good work in taking responsibility for the forests. I have seen that the women have developed a feeling they should do something once they get a role in such institutions.

As part of the same programme, CHCs have been formed in the schools. They regularly organise quiz and debate competitions. Even in these competitions the issues raised are mostly related to the health. We also found that the schools have become active due to the programme. These activities have also led to improvements in areas such as sanitation and punctuality.

The youths and women discuss all kinds of issues in discussion class. They also reach the district-level offices to present demands that the VDC cannot address. For instance, they have visited the district public health office several times to demand a separate health post for Ward Nos. 1, 2 and 3 of Lekhparsa VDC. Sometimes they visit the offices to demanding adequate supplies of medicine. They also come with various other demands. Their active participation in these affairs has helped make us more active also. This is a good thing.

Dambari Kandel

Senior Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
District Public Health Office, Surkhhet



Better if programme focuses on one area

I had an opportunity to monitor the community discussion class in Baijapur, Banke in January 2014. I also interacted with the participants of two CDCs. The youths and women put forth their concerns before the monitoring team, which included the information officer of the DDC. They also put before us the things they had learnt through the discussion class. Then they put forth their concerns. This helped both of us understand each other's concerns better.

Women mainly acquire informal education through the discussion class. The class focuses on awareness and rights. This women-oriented programme mostly focuses on the health sector. But we found the women also working in other areas such as education, forest, drinking

water, alcohol abuse and local disputes. They are also equally concerned about nutrition and maternal health. Seen in this light, though the programme is basically focused on health issues it has also attempted to resolve all other problemmes at the village level.

The discussion class and its participants educate the villagers about the services provided by local institutions and the process of acquiring such services. They inform the villagers about the kinds of services offered by these institutions, the process of acquiring such services, the required documents and the fees charged. This has made the villagers aware about the services and we found them making utmost use of them.

Another important aspect of the programme is that utmost effort has





been made to increase women's participation in local decision making structures. We have seen women joining forest, drinking water and school management committees and

working toward bringing about reform in these institutions and structures. After their increased participation in these local institutions, we have also seen a rise in their levels of self-confidence.

Women are actively working in the sectors of awareness, empowerment and leadership development. They have also learnt how they should work together with men to move ahead. Increased participation of Dalits and people from the Tharu community is another special aspect of this programme. Seen from this angle, the overall structure of the programme is quite good. The programme has become a joy to behold as it is aimed at increasing the participation of the marginalised people.

The CDC that we first visited had a majority of adolescent girls. They were educated. Hence, they spoke to us openly. In the second discussion class, they were a little hesitant as they were all housewives. They opened up to us only after we coaxed them. They were saying, "We have difficulty expressing our feelings." This is to say that the programme would have been much more effective had it included women of one age group instead of huddling all of them together. This is because the dreams,

aspirations, problems, understanding level and necessities of a 16-year-old girl, a 35-year-old and a 60-year-old woman are different.

As the MRMV programme has turned out to be very effective in raising awareness, it should also be expanded to other villages. Baijapur is a place dominated by hill people and the Tharu community. Both these communities are gregarious by nature. Moreover, the Tharu community follows a set system. So it is not surprising for the programme to succeed among these communities. In view of this, the programme should also be expanded to the southern areas dominated by people from the Madhesi community. The Madhesi community is far behind in terms of awareness. The programme would achieve its objectives better if it could reach out to the Madhesi community.

The programme has currently been focusing on providing information. It should also focus on providing formal education. That is because though the participants of discussion class put forth the issues, they are still not able to express their views individually. For instance, it is not easy for a woman to personally go and speak to the school head teacher, health in-charge, VDC secretary or the police. Hence, the programme should also provide them some formal education. The education should be aimed at making them more fearless.

Sukrarishi Chaulagain

News Head

Bageshwari FM, Nepalgunj

मैले अधिकार, मैले आवाज कार्यक्रम
रिफ्लेक्ट विधिमा आधारित
सामुदायिक छलफल कक्षा
रामघाट बडा नं. २, सुर्खेत

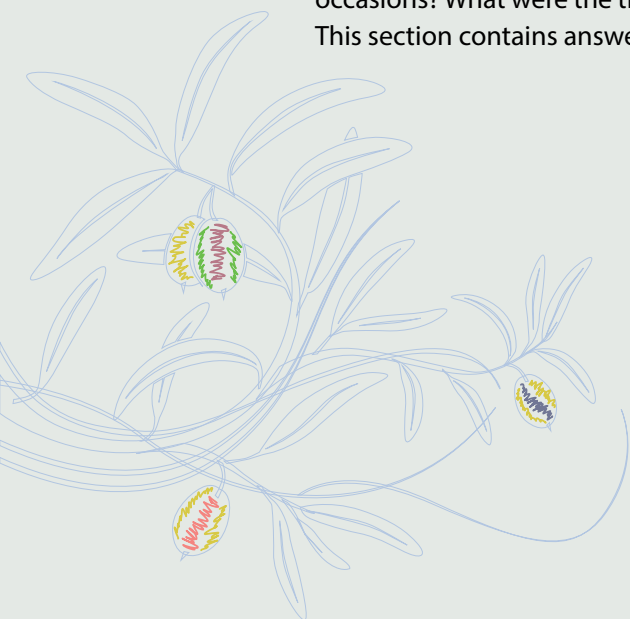


SECTION 9

Interest in Election

The second Constituent Assembly (CA) elections were being held in the country. These elections were of special significance as the people would be able to participate in the process of framing their own constitution themselves. This point was driven home at the discussion classes by their facilitators. It was thanks to this that the discussion class participants busied themselves going about seeking ways to ensure their maximum participation in the poll so that their problems would get addressed.

In the course of all this, they decided to launch a door-to-door campaign in the village to get people to ask those coming to canvass votes how they would resolve the problems facing the voters. The campaign would also caution them so that as far as possible the votes they cast would not be invalidated, and so on. The campaign reached from the village slopes to the political party offices in the capital. How then did they go about this process? Whom did they meet up with and what did they do on such occasions? What were the things that became the focus of their attention? This section contains answers to such questions.





Election fever in villages

- Will the girls get their ballot papers wrong?
- Will the political parties fail to nominate women from their Community Discussion Class (CDC) as candidates?
- Will the parties ignore their health-related problems?

It was these three questions in particular that heated up the atmosphere at the REFLECT method-based CDC, run as part of MRMV programme in Nepal, in the months before the second election to the CA in November 2013. Wide-ranging discussions took place on orienting the women participants of CDC to making sure the ballots do not become invalidated. There was a great deal of brainstorming on how to bring about the inclusion of CDC participants among the candidates for direct election as far as possible, and, if not, then among

the proportional representation candidates. And there were questions raised from all sides whether or not the parties would voice commitment to solving the problems of the local community concerning matters of health. The CDC participants came to the conclusion that this was an issue for which they themselves should launch a campaign.

With this conclusion that 'they should do something', the participants of CDCs being run at Mahadevpuri, Kachanapur and Baijapur VDCs in Banke district made their way from house to house. They asked people to vote in the CA election for individuals who are capable and who can understand their problems. They also got everyone to sign up to this commitment, says [Maldhan Chaudhary](#), who took the initiative in all this activity – they extended their programme even to the district level and managed to put their demands to the leaders of some major political parties. They reached out to journalists and sought the help of mass media. This had a real impact on the election.

While the women participants of CDCs in Banke were being caught up in the election fever, Surkhet was also starting to heat up. At Dasharathpur VDC they reached out to 425 households to 'teach' people how to handle the ballot, even coordinating with the VDC for the purpose. CDC participants at Lekhapharsa and Ramghat VDCs also motivated the voters to exercise their ballot and pick the right candidates. Moreover, those providing leadership for such programmes say - we took our programme even to the district level and kept reminding the political party leaders about it. And they took it positively.

Dailekh was not to be outdone. The CDCs being run at Dandaparajul, Awalparajul and Piladi VDCs were already steeped in the election. How could it be otherwise when the talk everywhere, in the village, at the village square and at the chautara, was about elections. So the local partners started off by teaching the CDC facilitators how to cast the ballot. Thereafter, the facilitators taught the women and girls at the CDCs and the latter in turn went home and informed one and all that the ballot would not become invalidated if it was stamped in a certain way. 'In order to impart such instructions we asked for and received the sample ballot papers issued by the Election Commission and using these as the basis for the instructions made things easier' - added [Meena Thapa](#), who played a lead role.

With over 3,000 women themselves in the villages actively involved in the campaign, it was natural for everyone's attention to be drawn towards the election. All these efforts to urge people to get involved in the campaign to write their constitution themselves, and to teach them how to prevent their ballots from becoming invalidated have turned out to be quite positive for everyone. And the participants were able to win hearts and minds among the voters through their suggestion that those who come soliciting the vote should be asked how they would go

Parties choose CDC participants as proportional candidates

It is the result of MRMV programme that the political parties chose Naina Khatri and Dhani Khatri from Banke, and Chandra Ghimire from Surkhet as the candidates of the constituent assembly (CA) elections. The CDC participants had demanded that political parties choose from among the CDC participants their electoral candidates for the first-past-the-post electoral system. The parties instead chose them as candidates for the proportional electoral system. Though the demand was more than this, it was also a huge achievement of the campaign launched by the youths and women, focusing on CA elections as part of MRMV programme.

about tackling the health rights issues of the voters.

So, be it candidates or their election workers, the first thing that the women of Piladi ask when they run into them is - will or won't your party make the participants of our discussion class your party candidates? The question from the women at Baijapur would be - our health problems are many, does your party have any plan for resolving them? And the women of Lekhpharsa would ask - why should we vote for you, do you have an answer? Such are the questions posed by CDC participants so that those coming to solicit the vote from them would be compelled to ponder awhile. They would have no alternative but to come up with a positive reply, which was recorded by the CDC participants.

Such questions that arose from the discussion classes run at ward level were not confined there. They gradually spread to the VDC level. And spreading from VDC to VDC they surfaced at district headquarters also. At district headquarters, women, children and young mothers who had converged for a whole day from all three VDCs under the auspices of the MRMV campaign, singled out their issues. The next day they called in the political party



leaders active in the district and the probable candidates and spoke to them about the issues. They made a written presentation. And they also secured a written commitment from them.

The MRMV campaigners of all three districts briefed journalists about the list of issues that they had worked out and the commitments made by the party leaders. They also asked the journalists for their opinions and advice. The journalists suggested that 'top echelon leaders of the district should be invited to programmes and that after the elections also initiatives should be kept up to see that the commitment made are duly implemented'. They took these suggestions quite seriously. The journalists also brought the issues to public notice through their respective media outlets.

In this fashion, the problems of children, youths and young mothers that arose

from 9 VDCs and 81 VDC wards in the three districts and were presented in an integrated fashion found their way to Kathmandu. In Kathmandu, the issues were further discussed throughout the day and were boiled down. Work was done to organise the issues that were identified in the two and half years since the MRMV programme first got started. The resulting document was titled, 'Citizen's Manifesto on Health'. This Manifesto was presented to senior leaders of major political parties, who were invited over the following day. Children set out their problems. Youths also made their case. The party leaders heard clearly about the issues affecting young mothers.

'After the presentations, we distributed the Citizen's Manifesto to the leaders. The following day also we went to meet some party leaders at their own party headquarters, we called for the inclusion of our issues in the manifestos being drafted with a view to the constituent assembly election, everyone reacted positively' – says [Rupesh Shrestha](#),

who was a lead person in activities centered on the capital. This Citizen's Manifesto, which was prepared by 114 individuals, who gathered in the capital from the villages of all three districts, reached the hands of political leaders from Bamdev Gautam of the Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist and Leninist (currently, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs) to Gagan Thapa of Nepali Congress (highly influential youth leader) to Hishila Yami of Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) influential leader of the party and also the wife of former Prime Minister. And this fostered an atmosphere that provided huge encouragement to the campaigners.

The journey continued. The women of the CDCs in Dailekh went so far as to organise a function to welcome two parliamentarians visiting the district for the first time after winning the election and remind them of their commitments. The parliamentarians gave the 114 women present at the function their phone numbers and asked to keep being reminded. This further enthused the campaigners. Surkhet and Banke have also learnt from this programme, and they are only waiting for a similar opportunity. The active role of women in the discussion classes in first seeking a commitment and then seeking implementation of such commitment has come in for continuous praise in the villages.

Meanwhile in the capital, Oxfam and its partners reviewed to what extent the political parties have accommodated in their election manifestos the issues and demands that they submitted. The review showed that all the six major political parties engaged in the MRMV campaign have included the issues raised in the Citizen's Manifesto on Health in their respective election manifestos. A delegation has already reached the offices of the main parties once, in December 2013, following the election, to call for implementation of the commitments included in the manifestos. The MRMV campaigners are now planning to visit not just the government ministries

Result of review

The women of the CDCs also engaged in reviews of the effectiveness of the election campaigns that they took up. A review carried out at Piladi came up with two new points. First – the campaign launched by the women was a big factor behind the fact that fewer votes were invalidated compared to the previous election. The men folk were also full of praise that for this reason they themselves voted carefully. Secondly – some of the women acknowledged that their votes were invalidated. Upon inquiry, it was learnt that such women did not come to the CDCs.

and departments but also the elected parliamentarians and their offices to keep up the pressure to implement the commitments made.

'For two and half years we worked in the communities and identified the issues. We went with these issues from the ward to the district and central levels. We informed the higher levels of the departments and ministries about the issues. In other words, we have so far secured the commitments of parties and high officials, but now we seek results' – that is the single voice of Meena Thapa of WEA in Dailekh, Durapati Nepali of WAM in Surkhet, Maldhan Chaudhary of SAC in Banke and Rupesh Shrestha of AYON in Kathmandu.





Thirst for Knowledge

MRMV programme is being run in Dailekh, Surkhet and Banke districts. Though the structure of the programme is the same in all the districts, it is only human nature to be curious about what the programme has been doing elsewhere. Similarly, it is not unnatural for there to be some differences in the necessities and participation of the people in different geographical locations. The facilitators of the programme went on an exposure visit to learn new things and to tell others about the good things they did through the programme.

So what did the facilitators see in the course of their exposure visit? What were their experiences? What kind of reforms did they felt it was necessary for them to initiate? Was it even necessary to organise such visits regularly? Were the programmes in other districts as effective as they had thought them to be? This section tries to delve into these questions. The facilitators find differences in their working style and understanding.





Means of exchanging knowledge

"Banke is a relatively accessible district. So there would be no villages in the district where motor transport and development have not reached. There is no place in the district not linked by motorable roads. The villages would have big houses and everyone would be rich. Also the level of awareness and understanding would be high." **Narsingh Shahi** of Awalparajul VDC, Dailekh felt these thoughts passing through his mind when he approached Banke on his way to Nepalgunj.

But Banke was not even close to what he had imagined. The district had backward villages. People living there were also poor and there were settlements where people had a low level of awareness and

understanding. There were villages with a large number of people living in huts. This was the experience he gathered during his exposure visit to Mahadevpuri, Kachnapur and Baijapur VDCs in the district. After this exposure, Narsingh did not feel hesitant in building a good rapport with them, enquiring about their lives and telling them about his own experiences. He opened up to them once he felt that they were also very much alike him.

Narsingh liked many things about his exposure visit from April 2 to 6 2014. He was impressed that the participants of the discussion class and YHC members in Banke had planted trees to save their village from being inundated by a swollen river. He also felt glad to see the women had graveled the village road on their own initiative. "The discussion class has its own

building in almost all the villages but I was impressed to see that they had even laid the bricks themselves. I had never expected women to lay bricks themselves,” says Narsingh. The 26-year-old, who had never gone outside his district, says irrespective of geography a changed mind-set is the best foundation of development. “I have seen women change their outlook. This new understanding is a major achievement of my exposure visit,” says Narsingh.

A lesson learnt

We were visiting Lekhparsa VDC - 5 of Surkhet to see the work the participants of discussion class and the members of YHC had carried out in the village. We were in trouble when the vehicle carrying us got stuck on the road. We kept on pushing the vehicle for a long time. And things got even worse when it rained. We learnt that the vehicle had gotten stuck as it had low ground clearance. Had we taken another route, we would have reached the village within two hours on foot. But it took us four hours to reach the village by vehicle.

Hence, I learnt two things from the visit. While travelling to villages with difficult roads, it is better to choose a vehicle with high ground clearance. Also, while going to new places one has to move ahead gathering enough information along the way. Otherwise, one gets into trouble. I have taken this new understanding as an achievement of the visit.

Sita Chaudhary
Banke

Recalling Tharu hospitality

We do not have a Tharu settlement in our village. When I reached the Tharu settlement in Mahadevpuri VDC of Banke, I was taken by surprise. I was surprised to see their clean homes, their hospitality and their unique attire. I was even more surprised to see the cultural programme they had organised to welcome us. They were so sociable, so talkative and so active. I also came to know through them that these changes had been brought about by the discussion class. I still remember the way Tharu people treated us.

Narsingh Shahi
Dailekh

Not only Narsingh, [Sita Chaudhary](#) who came to Surkhet from Baijapur VDC in Banke also says that visiting a new village, meeting new people and seeing their work are themselves an achievement. She was most impressed over the public felicitation of an HIV-infected couple by the participants of the CDC and the members of YHC, and the support they provided to the couple. “It is a courageous act to publicly honour an HIV-infected couple and also to provide them nutrition-rich food.”

“The community discussion classes in our VDC do not have any names, but all the discussion classes in Surkhet do,” says Sita, adding, “We also work on hourly basis, deposit our savings, construct buildings and join local decision making structures. But I found the CHCs here more active. I feel that our CHCs should also be made



more active." Sita says she has been able to understand things better after getting first-hand information about the activities of CDCs elsewhere. Earlier, she used to gain information about discussion class activities elsewhere only during presentations. "I always used to fear whether the participants of our discussion class were not lagging behind. But through this visit I have come to understand that we are not lagging behind. But still we have a lot to do. This is what I learnt through this visit," says Sita.

Sita says they had very little time as their visit was only for two days. She further says, "It would have been a lot better if such exposure visits were organised at least once a year." Sita, who has already visited

Dashrathpur, Ramghat and Lekhparsa, says, "Though the villages in Surkhet are remote, women there have done a lot of good work." She says they were not able to inspect programmes in all the wards due to insufficient time. She also says that they didn't have enough time for interactions.

The experience of [Hira Kumari Pun](#) of Lekhparsa VDC in Surkhet district has been no less interesting. She says she was impressed by the women of Piladi VDC, Dailekh, who constructed a waiting room at the health post with the money they collected in fines during their anti-liquor campaign, provided a gas cylinder to the health post and recovered the scholarship amount that was misused. She was also impressed by the idea of women in Awalparajul VDC who had used the budget meant for women focused programmes to

construct buildings for local institutions. Hence she says, “We were fortified to see that the women had completed a drinking water project that was left in limbo after an all-man committee had become dysfunctional.”

Hira was also impressed to see the active involvement of women of Dandaparajul VDC in constructing roads. She was touched to learn that a woman had been allowed to perform the last rites of her deceased mother to spread the message that daughters are not any different from sons. Hira also felt impressed by their decision to spend their savings to construct the village road at the cost of Rs 50,000. After the exposure visit to Dailekh, Hira has concluded that though Dailekh is underdeveloped and the women there cannot even speak properly, they had made great strides. She felt she was far behind compared to what the women in Dailekh had accomplished. She says such exposure visits should be organised regularly as they show where one stands in terms of achievement.

Troubled by repentance

The womenfolk of Piladi and Awalparajul VDCs of Dailekh welcomed us with such hospitality that we forgot all our fatigue. At some places they welcomed us with welcome arches while at others they offered us delicacies. They offered flower garlands and organised cultural programmes for us.

The women of Pangkot, Dandaparajul VDC came to welcome us playing musical instruments, singing and dancing. They sang devotional songs. Our indispositions disappeared on seeing their genuinely warm-hearted hospitality. Due to the long walk and continuous dancing and singing, I fell sick at Awalparajul, while Yamuna Chhetri fell sick at Piladi. But we recovered thanks to their warm hospitality.

Womenfolk from Banke had also come to visit our village. But we could not provide them such hospitality. In fact, we did not know that we should offer such hospitality. I regret not being able to welcome them the way they welcomed us during our visit to their village.

Hira Kumari Pun
Surkhet





Singha Durbar's gift

When radio and television broadcast news about the start of discussions in the Constituent Assembly (CA) on the things to be included in the new constitution, the participants in the CDCs and members of the CHC and YHC were taken by surprise. They were reminded of the pledges made to them during the CA election campaign by the electoral candidates, who are now lawmakers, to take initiative toward tackling the health issues afflicting people like them. Talk of this soon set the discussion class and the community abuzz.

Word spread from one ear to another and it was soon all over the place. On the advice of the CDC participants, YHC members and others, the facilitators of the CDCs reached the conclusion that they should not miss this opportunity to get the health issues of children, youths and young mothers addressed by the new constitution now being drafted. They then packed up for the road and made arrangements for someone to look after the household chores, including water and feed for the livestock for a few days.

And, after explaining things to their families, they set off for the capital city, Kathmandu, to hold a national assembly. That was where they would home in on the political party head offices and give an earful about their woes to top leaders ranging from the Deputy Prime Minister to the Chairperson of Constituent Assembly to the lawmakers. They would lay everything bare through the mass media, with the lawmakers duly present as witnesses. The idea was to bring pressure to bear from all sides toward seeking a solution.

A team from Dailekh all dressed up for the occasion, another team from Surkhet agog with enthusiasm and a team from Banke impatient to get there and make an outpouring of their problems, converged from three sides in Kathmandu. The coming together of these disparate travellers with the same objective, same goal and same intention added to the enthusiasm all around. Everyone was clear about their purpose – generate all round pressure and persuasion to encompass in the new constitution ways to tackle the problems of health that afflict the children, youths and women and the villagers at large. And the path also was clear-cut – meet the legislators and

high-level government officials and set out the problems before them. Make those problems known throughout the country.

The gathered women, children and young people of both sexes who numbered about 150 unbundled the problems that they had brought with them from the villages. When all the problems were mixed together, these took the shape of a memorandum. They boiled it down and set about streamlining and putting it into more congenial language. They also worked together among themselves to set out all their plans, such as which ministers and parliamentarians they were to meet, which were the government officials they would hand in their memorandum to, and at what times they were to head for the National Women's Commission and the National Children's Welfare Committee.

As per their plans, some of them went to the offices of Chairperson of CA Subas Chandra Nemwang, who is leading the work of drafting the constitution. Some reached the National Women's Commission and spoke to it about the problems that women are burdened with. Some others were at the office of former Prime Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai, urging him to give their problems a serious hearing. They also managed to solicit commitments from Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Bamdev Gautam and Nepali Congress party leader and the Chairperson of the Constitutional Committee Krishna Sitaula. They had a good opportunity to familiarise themselves with the corridors of power at the Ministry of Health, Women and so on.

The fact that members of the CA, who are busy at work on the constitution, committed themselves to taking initiatives for tackling the health problems of children, youths and young mothers in the villages, -- that is the main achievement of this gathering.

Participants in the national assembly of the CDC facilitators were greatly enthused by the support and solidarity extended to their demands from all quarters. That is why [Laxmi Sharma](#) from Kachanapur VDC, Banke, one of the participants, says they are returning to the villages carrying with them the hope that something will now definitely be done.

That fact that the problems of health afflicting youth, children and young mothers in the villages have been able to draw national attention is being taken as another big achievement of this programme. The participants are thrilled to see those problems, which were familiar in the villages and were at long last being remarked at district level also, now coming in for attention in the capital, and throughout the country. In this the communications media had also been helpful. According to [Kamala Gyawali](#) of Dandaparajul VDC, Dailekh, a problem pertaining to the villages had now found its way into the Constituent Assembly and the Singha Durbar, the apex administrative centre housing all the ministries and key government offices including the Prime Minister's Office. So, the likelihood of a solution had also increased.

The assembly of facilitators has come as a shot in the arm for the participants – in terms of enhanced confidence. With a good many political leaders and many government officials and rights workers backing them, the participants can feel reassured that for that very reason they will not have to put up with any further problems. And the suggestions for making headway offered to them by one and all have provided great leverage. The participants, who no longer felt that they were alone, even came to the conclusion that they were indeed into something good. That is why [Deepa Kharal](#) of Piladi VDC, Dailekh says– there were many who would put their shoulders to it when we called out to them. There was no reason at all for us to panic.

The participants of the gathering invited to the programme venue itself the lawmakers whom they had elected to the CA. They then reminded the lawmakers of the demands presented to them at the time of the elections and the pledges the latter had made. They were urged never to forget those pledges. The assurances given and commitments made by the lawmakers became useful ammunition for the participants. "This is a huge and unforgettable gain for us" – was the conclusion of [Sanchita Khadka](#), Mahadevpuri VDC of Banke. For this reason also people like Sanchita keep saying that the programme is so unforgettable.

What kind of assistance will you extend for putting up a health post building in our village? What role are you playing in addressing our demands? If ministers in the government from your party do not heed our demands, how will you bring pressure to bear on them? What have you done to ensure that medicines are available free of cost at the health post in our village, and in sufficient quantities? The staffs at the health post do not stay on the job, so what steps will you take to make sure they do? Such were the dozens of questions that the participants at the facilitators' assembly brought up face to face. And the lawmakers for their part gave their word that they would make adequate and all possible contributions to solve the problems. If they came up with genuine ideas the lawmakers said they were ready to extend any kind of help and even go with them wherever necessary. Once you are able to present the problem properly everybody will take it positively, opined [Parbati BK](#) of Ramghat VDC in Surkhet.

Another significant aspect of this gathering was that it was an opportunity to get to know about places and people, about ministers, leaders, social workers and rights advocates. [Sukra Bahadur BK](#) of Lekhapharsa VDC of Surket feels that the exposure visit provided an opportunity to learn a great many things and this led to greater self-confidence and an increase in their knowledge. In particular, the assembly and the exposure visit were a

great opportunity for the many participants who had come to the capital for the first time. Many of them felt that they were able to acquire a lot of new information just through hearing, seeing, listening, moving around and other such activities. That in turn helped them become more clever. For this reason, [Nirmala Shahi](#) of Awalparajuli VDC, Dailekh described it as an 'exposure visit'.

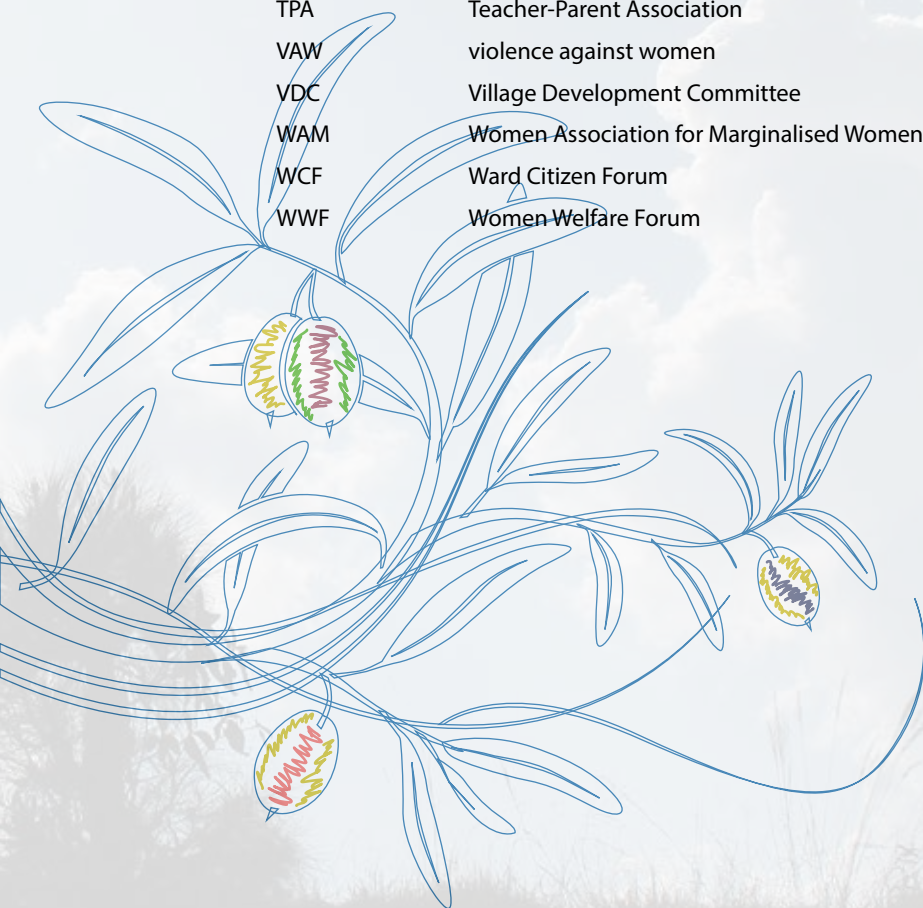
The participants learnt many things about topical issues, such as the importance of prior planning before holding any programme, the way political leaders and high-level government officials approach the problems of the community, the attitudes one encounters at the administrative centres, the preciousness of time, and the courteousness that should be shown in practical dealings. [Meena Basnet](#) of Ramghat VDC, Surkhet, an eighth grader, learnt that at Singha Durbar, even five minutes is considered a lot of time. "And indeed, one can get a great many things across and exercise much persuasion within that amount of time if one knows how to make use of it. We had no idea about this" – she added.

The CDC facilitators, who returned after depositing their problems at Singha Durbar, the administrative nerve centre of the country, appear satisfied that this time those problems will definitely get addressed. But what if that does not happen? The answer from them all in one voice was – keep up the pressure through an on-going movement. "However, we are hopeful it will not come to that because we are returning home with solid commitments" – [Yam Bahadur Oli](#) of Lekhapharsa VDC, Surkhet was saying while departing from the capital.



Abbreviations

CA	Constituent Assembly
CDC	Community Discussion Class
CFUG	Community Forest Users Group
CHC	Children Health Committee
DDC	District Development Committee
DEO	District Education Office
FCHV	Female Community Health Volunteer
FKDF	Freed Kamalari Development Forum
HFOMC	Health Facility Organisation Monitoring Committee
OCMC	Outreach Clinic Management Committee
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
Rs	Rupees
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
TPA	Teacher-Parent Association
VAW	violence against women
VDC	Village Development Committee
WAM	Women Association for Marginalised Women
WCF	Ward Citizen Forum
WWF	Women Welfare Forum





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