

Unpaid Work, Poverty and Women's Rights

In the Nepalese society, women have always been looked down upon as the weaker sex and thus, in the context of our country, they lag far behind men in all aspects of life. While men are thought to be the breadwinners and the heads of families, women are only confined to do the household work. However, all the work that they do within the house is not given importance, even though they toil hard day in and out, and put in more working hours than men. It is not just in Nepal but rather a global problem and according to the United Nations, women “earn only 10 percent of the world’s income and own less than one percent of the world’s property.”

It is since ancient times that sons have been given more importance than daughters in the Nepalese culture. While sons are considered to be the parents' care takers when they grow up, daughters are considered to be “someone else's property”, as they will have to get married and eventually leave their homes and go to their husband's homes. Therefore, since childhood itself, sons and daughters are discriminated against. Furthermore, sons are given the opportunity to get education, as it is believed that they will get jobs and earn money to take care of the household in the future, while daughters are not sent to school and instead made to do the house work in addition to taking care of their younger siblings.

According to the report “Nepal’s Implementation Status of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)” prepared by the National Women's Commission of Nepal in June 2011, “Gender relations in Nepal continue to be defined by a patriarchal value system, which perpetuates women’s subordination. Many women do not question it and to a certain degree believe that men have the right to control their lives and bodies. Women in Nepal are discriminated several times over. They are poorer than men with less access to property, income, inheritance and credit and often with little control over own or overall household earnings. They are less educated and more likely to be engaged in non-skilled work rather than in better paid professional, technical and management-related jobs. Though women's contribution to agricultural production is above 60% the total land holdings are only 8%. Also most women workers, over 70%, are confined to self employed, unpaid and low wage informal activities. Only 12% of women are in the civil service and 1.76 % is in the judicial service.” In relation to this, several Women's Rights Acts and Civil Codes have been implemented in the country, that is working towards women empowerment and gender equality. For example, the Gender Equality Act of 2006, Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act 2007, 12th amendment of Country Code that criminalizes witchcraft and recognizes it as a crime against state, Domestic Violence Control Act 2008. Furthermore, Government of Nepal (GoN) declared the year 2010 as year against Gender-Based Violence against Women and they have adopted National Plan of Action on United Nation Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and UNSCR 1820 in relation to Violence against Women (VAW).

In this context, one such INGO that is working in the field of unpaid work, poverty and women's human rights in Nepal is Action Aid. According to the report titled “Making Care Visible” by the organization, working in this sector, “Care is around us everywhere – from the mother who takes care of her children, to the wife who cooks her family's meals, the eldest daughter who helps with the housework, and the widow who works in the community kitchen.” Even though women and girls mainly carry out these kinds of work in their day to day lives, it is considered to be of lesser value than paid work as it is believed that it does not contribute to the family or the nations' economic well-being, even though it is very important for basic human well-being. Not just the men, but even women themselves consider it to be less important than paid work. Furthermore, the report states that “while all women regardless of class, race, caste and ethnicity are expected to provide care as part of their roles as

mothers, wives or daughters, living in poverty are disproportionately affected by this responsibility. Unpaid care is more difficult to do in the context of poverty as basic amenities, and access to public services are lacking.” This is very true in the context of rural Nepal, where women have to work twice as hard as their counterparts living in urban and more prosperous areas, to fulfill their daily basic needs. In addition to all the housework that they do, they also toil in the farms and take care of the poultry and cattle as well. This requires hard laborious physical work and stamina. The report thus states that “women's responsibility for care leads to the violation of their basic human rights to an education, political participation, decent work and leisure. It contributes to persistent gender inequalities.”

However, INGO's and NGO's like Action Aid are working in this area to advocate for Women's Rights and Gender inequality in the society. A case study of a Dalit (untouchable) woman, Sabitra Tolangi was given who resides in ward no. 6 of Hamarjung VDC in Terahthum, Nepal. Action Aid's “Unpaid Care Work Program” has been able to benefit a lot of women such as her, who now finds herself more empowered and aware of her rights than before. Being quite shy and timid, she was unable to express her views freely in the past, but after becoming a part of this program, she can now openly voice her opinions. At 47 years of age, she has 2 sons and a daughter. Her daughter is married and has a family of her own, and her elder son and husband have gone to Qatar in order to earn money to pay a debt that they owe, and she lives with her younger son, who is a high school student. To make ends meet, she has to labor and toil hard in her farm as well as at home. However, after becoming a part of the Reflect Circle called “Abhiyan Chautari” under Action Aid's program, where women meet and discuss “their unpaid care work and the impact this has on their livelihoods and well-being.” She has now become literate and finds herself more empowered. She says, “We used to only look after cattle and do housework. We were not confident enough even to greet each other in public meetings. Now I can speak in public and write my name. I have learned to write husband's name and my son's name too. I can even write names of my sister-in-law and brother-in-laws. Earlier when I asked for help, my son used to say, 'Why don't you do it yourself?', but now he obeys and helps.” She has indeed found a lot of support from the Reflect Circle where sharing and discussing problems with other women has given her and other women a platform to raise issues and find solutions.

However, there is still a long way to go and more must be done by the government to bridge the gender inequalities. According to the findings of the report by Action Aid:

- ⤴ Women spend over 4 hours on housework, while men only spend 58 minutes.
- ⤴ Women spend more time on subsistence agriculture than men and are the backbone of household food provision in Nepal.
- ⤴ Women in communities surveyed only had on average 26 minutes per day for social and cultural activities such as community discussions, while men had close to 2 hours.

Dr. Meena Acharya, a well known Nepali feminist columnist shared, “It was difficult to raise the issue of unpaid care work in the past as it was not taken on positively by the government. Now it is getting attention as a global issue and to address it, the government needs to act on both the policy and community levels.”

Therefore, using data from their research, Action Aid is working to develop social security policies together with the GoN, including the need for community child care centres. They say that such centres will help the women in rural areas by helping take care of their children, thus giving them more time to engage in income generating activities as well as giving them some free time for rest and leisure.

Work being done by Caritas Nepal in this Context

Introduction:

Caritas Nepal has been conducting a Cooperative Development and Enterprise Promotion Project. This project is run in the rural villages covering nine districts which are: Kavre, Lalitpur, Nawalparasi, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur. The goal of the program is to bring cooperatives, enterprise groups, and rural men and women to work together in an organized manner, and effectively reduce poverty and improve the social situation (child rights, women's rights, HIV and the environment.) One of the objectives of the program is to enable cooperatives to address social concerns (such as child rights, women's rights etc.) more effectively. Review of the program shows that women have greatly benefited from this project. Caritas Nepal has oriented the cooperative representatives on Catholic Social Teaching Principles, Child Protection, issues such as Unsafe Migration of Women and HIV in the five district network meeting undertaken and addresses the main social concerns through yearly action plans of the cooperatives. Concern for community is one of the main principles of the cooperatives. Based on this cooperative principle and Catholic Social Teaching of Caritas, this project was proposed and developed to reduce poverty and to address social concern for the poorest and marginalized communities. With this concern in mind, the cooperative project has been launched in nine economically and socially backward districts of the country with a focus to decrease the poverty of community members.

Beneficiaries:

The total number of direct beneficiaries of the project is 7084 out of which 5443 (77%) are women, 1641 (23%) males and 292 (4%) single women. The indirect participants, mainly household members are about 35,420 out of which at least 51% are women.

Besides the cooperatives reached, the program is supporting the following enterprise groups: total number of enterprise groups was 45 (538 people). Enterprise groups formed in the reported period were 4 units (23 people). Individual cooperative members supported for enterprise activity: 12 people. Therefore, the total people supported for enterprise activity (including follow up on the old group) were 573 people (out of which 341 are females). Thus, the program is reaching the poverty level households, especially women, ethnic and Dalit (untouchable people) and mobilizing them for change. This mobilization will realize poverty reduction benefits to the beneficiaries within the three year projected time.

The targeted people have been receiving training on various income generating activities such as pig, fish, goat, cattle and poultry raising, mentha, banana and various other vegetable farming etc. In this way, the project has initiated activities that are helping the rural poor to fight poverty. The analysis of 32 present groups indicate that 18 groups have made significant profits and contributed to income of the group members in the past cycle and the rest have also raised some profit. Out of the 25 cooperative managers, 10 are female. For example, the cooperative manager such as Mrs. Kamala Gautam of Kapabriksa Cooperative has been empowered by the salary provided and has worked effectively to improve cooperative services and record keeping. She has more confidence now for facilitating cooperative activities and improved reporting ability as well.

Women also take significant part in the narrative, financial reporting and annual planning. For instance, out of 235 people in the executive committee, 70% are female.

Another beneficial activity of the project was a pig raising training that was undertaken from 7 to 10

December, 2012 at Bijaya Guest House of Guleria. As a result, 25 people from 8 cooperatives were trained out of which 22 were females and 3 were males. The trained have started to improve their household pig raising activity and many are examining possibilities for expanding the activities for greater income generation. Similarly, a workshop for planning and review at the enterprise group level was conducted. 309 people took part in it out of which 131 were females.

Gender:

77% of the project beneficiaries are women. The cooperative and enterprise group members have equal rights and responsibilities (regardless of gender). This cooperative and enterprise project has trained both men and women to lead for change. Female participation has been noted to be 33% in management training, 61% in business plan training and 88% in pig raising training. 60% of members in enterprises (group and individual basis) are women. Out of 235 Central Committee members of 25 cooperatives, 165 are women. Similarly, of the 75 members in Account Supervision Committees 47 are women, of the 74 members in Loan Sub-Committee, 48 are women and of the total 38 members in other Sub-Committees, 23 are women. Thus on average, total women participation in leadership role in 67% (324 women). In this way, all cooperative and enterprise promotion decisions are noted to be made by men and women leaders of the cooperatives.

Caritas Nepal has trained women members of the cooperatives to be Cooperative Managers, members of lead committees, and members of enterprise groups. There are a total of 25 Cooperative Managers of which 10 are women. Similarly, the total 67 staff in the 25 cooperatives of 39 is women (including women Cooperative Managers). Among the 25 cooperative volunteers, 20 are women. There was 68.3% women participation on average in the Annual General Assembly. The project is encouraging women to improve their production role (utilize their free time for enterprises) and also play greater roles in household and community decision making.

Case Studies:

1. Case Study of Cooperative Manager Mrs. Sunita Sunar: My name is Sunita Sunar & I live in Bankatuwa VDC-6, (Guruwagaun Village) Banke with a family of four. I am 25 years old. There is a mixture of people belonging to various casts in my village. Since most of them are illiterate, there is a lack of social not to mention cooperative awareness in my community.

Economic condition of my family

Main occupation of my family is agriculture farming & labor. My family has 0.16 hector of land. It is not sufficient source for income so I am working in a cooperative to earn for my family’s livelihood. My husband is also working as a laborer in India.

Education & involved in training

I have completed my SLC (School Leaving certificate equivalent to class 10) from a Nepali Governmental School. I have received various types of training from organization which are mentioned below.

Sn	Training provider	Name of training	# of Training	Training period
1	Caritas Nepal	Cooperative account keeping training	1	7 days
2	Division Cooperative Office, Banke	Cooperative account keeping training	1	7 days

3	Caritas Nepal	Cooperative Management Training	1	5 days
4.	Caritas Nepal	Business Plan development training	2	5 days
5	Caritas Nepal	Cooperative planning & report writing training	1	3 days

Involvement in Organization & transaction

According to Caritas Nepal's animation process, our cooperative has been reregistered with the support of Caritas Nepal & INRUDEC under Income generation Project. I am working actively in this cooperative since its starting days. My hard work has been supported by the cooperative which has made me a manager. I am working as a part time volunteer in the cooperative because the cooperative's income source is very low. I have entered the cooperative with an aim to develop my community through the cooperative principle. There is scarcity of successful leadership in our cooperative because of lack of education. I look after the cooperative management & financial part as a cooperative manager. When I entered the cooperative, I was unaware of cooperative & its activities. Now my capacity & skill has been built up & I have been able to accumulate various skill and knowledge from Caritas Nepal trainings (Cooperative Management training, Cooperative account keeping training, Business plan development training, Cooperative planning & report writing training. etc.)

My responsibility is collecting savings of member, providing loan, management of cooperative meetings, facilitation on cooperative education, working in account management for transparency, conducting & managing various social activities, assisting In annual planning, preparation of annual and monthly report, coordination with line agencies & related governmental sectors, participating in cooperative network meeting & report submission etc..

Main achievement after involvement of cooperative

- I have been able to manage the overall cooperative and my capacity and confidence has been increased.
- Capacity building of cooperative personals and continuous support by Caritas Nepal has changed our cooperative drastically within 2 years.
- I am able to prepare annual plan, business plan, implement program, prepare various types of reports and update financial record keeping in the proper manner.

My future planning

I have committed myself to create a model cooperative with good governance in my district. I shall work to uplift the marginalized people, reform their economic condition, fight and spread awareness on rights of women & children.

2. Case Study of Mrs. Bindu Chaudhary

Introduction & Background of Family

Living in Padhanaha VDC-6, Bardiya for the past 33 with a family of 7 (3 female and 4 male), I am Mrs. Bindu Chaudhary. Our main occupation is agriculture.

Economic condition

The main source of income of my family is agriculture. We have 15 Kattha (0.5079 hecter) of land. All family members are involved in agriculture.

Education & Training



My community is Tharu (ethnic group). I have completed School leaving Certificate from a government school. I have participated in various trainings on skill development and cooperative, organized by various organizations which have been mentioned below.

S. n.	Training provider organization	Name of Training	No. of trainings	Period
1	Caritas Nepal	Poultry Raising Training	1	4 Days
2	Division Cooperative	Cooperative Management Training	1	6 Days
3	District Agriculture Development Office	Market Management Training	1	3 Days
4	Family Health Center	Family Health Care Training	1	6 Days

Involvement in group and cooperative:

District Agriculture Development Office has supported the promotion of agriculture sector and registration of Cooperatives. After registration of cooperative Caritas Nepal has been supporting the cooperative to improve the management and record keeping of the cooperative. Caritas Nepal has also supported promotion of Group Poultry Raising Enterprise and a Fresh House. I am involved in this group and work as per group decision. We have sold more than 1000 kg chicken amounting to NRs. 225,225.00 and have been able to make a Net Profit of NRs. 26,781.00 within the period July to December 2012.

Responsibility and Achievement from Fresh House

I have been involved in Jamuna Women Agriculture Cooperative. Now I am also involved in the Fresh House enterprise. Our group has 5 members. According to our Business Plan we have an annual profit target of NRs. 300,000.00. We are actively involved in the fresh house project. We work together when we do not have agriculture work and when we do we take turns to work in the fresh house. This work is challenging work for women but we have to work and show to the society that women can also do such kind of work. This is our half yearly performance. We hope we can work to our business plan. We supply meat to the community members and cooperative members at a price lower than other business holders.

My future plan

We are learning to promote fresh house management. We have to enlarge it. Our further plan is to provide fresh meat to the consumers, and we are planning to supply pork meat in future. Our business abides by government policies and guidelines. We are planning to build a model fresh house in our village and expand in future.

Conclusion:

In this way, Caritas Nepal and other NGO's and INGO's are working actively to promote gender equality in Nepal. The importance and worth of women is being promoted and people are slowly

becoming aware about such issues. Income generating activities, discussion forums and various training and seminars which are held especially for women and empowering them are urging them to be aware of their rights and helping them to gain confidence in themselves. Whether it is handling the household work or participating in income generating activities, women are slowly realizing that they are not inferior to men in any way.

Such awareness programs and various women focused projects are definitely helping the women of backward, rural and economically poor communities to a large extent. While promoting Women's Rights ensures that women are given due respect whether they carry out unpaid household work or get involved in paid work, helping them get involved in various income generating activities empowers them and gives them confidence and makes them self reliant. This has helped to change the attitude of the men towards women to some extent. If such projects are given continuity, in the long run women of Nepal will reap many social, cultural and economic benefits to a great extent.