



## Peace Bulding from Bellow

### Gender Equality and Social Inclusion: Foundation of Reconciliation, Social Justice and Prosperity

Many efforts in Nepal in the past were put to address the issues of social discrimination through the macro interventions but the benefits remain largely elite captured at the end.



*An inclusive session of CBPO members*

#### The context

Ensuring proportional representation of poor, women, Dalits, ethnic minorities and caste groups in power, governance and other socio-economic dimensions of development has been a challenge in Nepal. The development is largely influenced by the access to political power and resources and thus, people without access to these have been under developed, deprived or denied of their rights. The most excluded groups are the poor, women, Dalit and minority indigenous communities living in isolated remote villages. The issue was thus raised during the decade long (1996 - 2006) armed conflict, which succeeded in mobilising people on this ground. But then, the poor, women, children and so far excluded groups of the society were at the forefront of bearing glaring risks of the conflict situation.

Lately, efforts are being put together by the state and other agencies to bring the above

mentioned categories of people into the realm of exercising democracy, mainstream development and human rights, but the efforts are not reaching at the grassroots. Also, Nepal had expressed commitment to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 for addressing women's problems which got exacerbated during the decade-long armed conflict by way of enhancing their participation in the promotion of peace and security in the context of post-conflict prevention and resolution. Such attempts to craft policies and implement programmes for encouraging social inclusion and gender equality too need to go to grassroots level where women are severely affected.

Many efforts in Nepal in the past were put to address the issues of social discrimination through the macro interventions but the benefits remain largely elite captured at the end. Those initiatives failed to envision that the equal access to services by all can be achieved first through



Women participating in rural road construction (Jhyaunpokhari, Bhojpur)

**GESI guidelines and assessment formats are developed to facilitate staff and the partner CBPOs to streamline gender equality and social inclusion in project context.**

the realisation of needs of the people and the readiness of the excluded groups to own the project and to participate in the process as a stakeholder than just a recipient.

The PBB project areas are characterised as a significant blend of various ethnicities, with a majority of Janajati, followed by Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri, Sanyasi (BCTS) group and Dalits. Although the status of women varied across heterogeneous ethnic and caste groups given their differential culture, women at large can be generalised as a group collectively deprived of basic rights to health care, education, employment opportunity and life chances from the state. The situation is worse for women from poor and excluded groups or those who are single or widowed. Thus, to cater to these socially excluded groups, a GESI strategy was formulated by the project that is also complies with CIDA's GESI policy. GESI is considered as a cross-cutting thematic intervention of the project, encompassing almost all project activities. GESI guidelines and assessment formats are developed to facilitate staff and the partner CBPOs to streamline gender equality and social

## Tackling the stigma of Untouchability

"Our status was worse than that of a dog as it is allowed to enter the houses and also given a meal, while we were compelled to stay out in the courtyard. After the PBB intervention, society has stopped treating us like that and now we get to sit and eat together", Ms Chandramaya Panchkoti (member of Shirjanshil Mothers' Group, Kimalung-6, Bhojpur).

Like Chandramaya Panchkoti, many people from Dalit community had suffered the social stigma of untouchability for long because of discriminatory traditional caste system. Whatever efforts from the state and other agencies, they failed to release them from the highly discriminatory inhumane situation; rather they remained focused on short term relief approach.

inclusion in project context. It emphasises to advocate for 'reaching the unreached, and showing by doing', following the rights based approach—right to participation and voice the concerns. The project is addressing the issues and problems associated with gender discrimination, gender based violence and social exclusion to build and strengthen peace and harmony in the society. Project activities mainly target CBPO members and empower CBPOs to be more inclusive of the poor, excluded and women to enhance their access to and control over community resources and decision making process. Many efforts are focused towards garnering the capacity building and awareness raising programmes that can enable the marginalised women, Dalit, Janajati, conflict affected, poor and excluded groups to begin meaningful participation in mainstream development endeavours.

## Challenging the gender stereotype

Ms. Indira Basnet is a 22 year old from Khartamcha VDC of Bhojpur, who attended the masonry training, an unusual adventure by a woman as per the local mindset. The training was organized by. "I am amazed to see her accomplish what I did not even imagine," expressed the chairperson of the drinking water project, citing the work of Indira Basnet, who worked as a mason in the project. The statement presents the paradox of the perceived limitation of women within her gendered role; and, the fact that a woman is capable of any accomplishments if given an opportunity. Like the case of Indira Basnet, the PBB project seeks to break the cultural barrier of gender stereotypes pertaining to the socially constructed duties of women that often prevents their mobility and opportunities for life chances.

Like the mass educator James Yen had emphasized that to cater "to what people want rather than they need; and give awareness to people to want what is good for them"; the project, too, first focused on building awareness among community members on giving equal treatment and opportunity to women vis a vis peace building and demand-led project. As a result woman like Indira Basnet are getting opportunities for earning livelihoods. In this way the communities themselves are challenging the traditional gender biases and moving towards gender justice and equality.



## The interventions and results

Various training sessions, discussion forums and exposure visits are organised to strengthen the GESI component of the project. Continuous coaching and practice by the project staff as well as the members of the CBPOs had resulted positive indication for ensuring GESI in all project facilitated activities. Both women and men, mainly from poor and so far excluded groups of the society, are given equal opportunities and encouragement to participate, to get involved in income generation/economic activities, to be a part of the project management committees and other community governance structures. As a result, women have been able to ensure at least one seat in the major positions of the project management committees and get involved in different socio-economic activities. Thus, the gender roles, beliefs, social norms and social networks that have direct bearing on gender inequality are gradually improving in the project area. The women have been able to claim their respectful participation in income generation, economic activities, CBPO governance, resources management and endowment opportunities such as health, education and financial resources.

There is a good mixture in project undertakings not only from the perspective of gender but also class, ethnicity and caste groups. Since the community people are able to analyse and understand the pain of social exclusion and the gender based discrimination, mainly the gender based domestic violence against women; they showed high enthusiasm to adopt GESI guidelines and practices. As a result, they have put greater efforts to be inclusive and non-discriminatory while seeking participation in the



*Ex-combatants engaged in handcraft after the skill training*

governance bodies of the local groups as well as in the management committees of the projects that are being implemented.

GESI strategy and guidelines have been intrinsic part of the PBB project as a cross-cutting theme across the project components to address the issues of systematic discrimination and conflict arising from it. The project tries to address the root causes of dominance on women, that is economic dependence and culturally inscribed lower status. Following the PBB project intervention, the ongoing awareness and orientation about GESI to the partner CBPO members, a remarkable change was observed in confidence level and participation of women in public sphere.

Owing to the positive attitudes and continuous encouragement, women now easily express their views on the problems as well as solutions. Now

**There is a good mixture in project undertakings not only from the perspective of gender but also class, ethnicity and caste groups.**

## Single women's group towards economic independence

The "single women's group" of Khandbari, Sankhuwasabha is a CBPO of women with single status. The formation of group in itself is an accomplishment as these women are emerging out of their inferiority complex and unrecognised fear due to social stigma attached towards widows, divorces, separated or unmarried women. Following the trainings on conflict management, right based development, women empowerment and prevention of women from domestic violence, these women are actively realising their rights and uniting for collective actions. Women from this group earlier feared even to express themselves but now they can actively advocate for their rights and self-decision making, carry out need prioritisation and participate in networking with local government bodies and other government line agencies to channelise the resources allocated for the welfare of women by the state. The group has successfully



accessed the grants from different line agencies for activities that enhance livelihoods and economic independence of women of their groups.



Women are increasingly taking up skilled jobs: a women constructing reservoir tank (Dhupu, Sankhuwasabha)

**PBB intervention has been successful for taking bold steps to include poor, conflict affected people, unemployed youths, women, Janajati, Dalit, handicapped and other minority groups of people in project governance and benefit sharing.**

they participate from beginning till the end of the meetings and other similar gatherings, which was not the case before the project intervention. They have begun resisting domestic violence, individually as well as an organised group. This has helped reducing the incidences of domestic violence and family disputes. They are also working as a part of local level coordination team with other agencies implementing different activities. As a result, they have had good exposure and experience. Their representation in the village level peace committees, ward citizens awareness forums, local governance and community development programmes, village peace networks, etc., has increased notably. They have also started celebrating special days of their significance, such as international women's day, at local level. More and more girl children are being sent to schools and women are also working as local mediator in the process of conflict resolution. Thus, the PBB intervention has been successful for taking bold steps to include

## Some positive indications of promoting inclusion

In Singha Devi Samaj, a CBPO in Pyauli VDC of Bhojpur district, female and Dalit membership was minimal at initial stage. But following the GESI awareness trainings, the male members realised the need to give equal opportunity to women to take part in meetings and gatherings. In order to encourage fellow women, Dalit and poor to participate in the group, they waived the group membership fees. As a result, number of female members doubled, and further to this, five women including one Dalit are now members in the CBPO executive committee.

In general, the CBPOs with whom the PBB is working, are increasingly (currently 69% CBPOs) being inclusive of marginalised groups in the executive committee with positive discrimination and encouragement, while 21 percent of CBPOs have further advanced to make executive structure proportional to the membership population.

In a CBPO known as *Sansari Samabesi Samuha* in Dhupu VDS of Sankhuwasabha district, after inclusion of Dalits in the group and also in executive committee, the conflicts over benefit sharing has been reduced significantly as their voices and interests are heard in the group.

poor, conflict affected people, unemployed youths, women, Janajati, Dalit, handicapped and other minority groups of people in project governance and benefit sharing.

**Contributing author** : Sarba Raj Khadka

**Layout design** : Som Rai, RRN

**Published by** : Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN)  
P. O.Box: 8130, Kathmandu, Nepal.  
Street Address: 288 Gairidhara Marg, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Tel: +977 1 4004976, 4004985 Fax: 977-1-4004508 & 4443494, Email: rrn@rrn.org.np, Website: www.rrn.org.np

**Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN)**, established in 1989, is a Nepali non-government, social development organisation involved in rural development, action-oriented research and policy advocacy focusing on peasants, poor women, dalits and indigenous nationalities, and other vulnerable communities through the process of facilitation, social mobilisation, empowerment and self-organisation. RRN's work is based on the four-fold approach of rural reconstruction covering education to combat illiteracy and empower people to access their rights; sustainable livelihood to fight poverty; health to prevent disease, and self-government to overcome civic inertia.

**The Peace Building from Below (2009-2012) pilot project** is an initiative of Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), supported by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) with the goal to contribute towards sustainable peace building in Nepal. The purposes of the project are: (a) to develop and promote circumstance-based model(s) for community-based reconciliation that can be replicated nation-wide, and (b) to strengthen and mobilize Community-Based People's Organizations (CBPOs) for peace building and conflict transformation.

The project covers 19 Village Development Committees and one Municipality of Bhojpur and Sankhuwasabha districts located in the Eastern Nepal. The project adopted demand based development approach as means for facilitating reconciliation and peace building as the end results at the grassroots. It has included number of thematic areas of development, all of which eventually divert to reconciliation and peace. The main thematic components of the project are social mobilisation, infrastructure development, livelihoods support, capacity building, environmental conservation and gender and social inclusion.



**Canadian International Development Agency**

The publication of this issue of RRN Briefing Paper is supported by Canadian International Development Agency.