

Women's Rights Forum (Mahila Adhikar Manch), Secretariat

Annual report, 2009

In Nepal women constitute 51.1 percent of the total population but they continue to struggle for even their most basic rights. According to UNDP, human development report 2004, women's contribution in agricultural production is 60.5 percent but ownership of land is only 10.86 percent. Women are deprived of education, health and rights which has lead to their subordinate status in the society while cultural behavior, laws and traditional patriarchal value system considers women inferior to men. There has been very little change in the status of women even after the restoration of democracy in 1990. In the constitution of the kingdom of Nepal written in 1990, various rights are guaranteed to women. In practice however, women do not enjoy equal benefit as men in their civil, political, social and economic society due to discrimination institutionalized by family, society, market, and the state.

There are many challenges for women to be a part of an evolving Nepal and access opportunities, even though they backstopped the democratic movement equally with men. Therefore, considering this Women's Rights Forum started in 2005 in Parsa District, it has now been established in ten districts in 2008 with the support of AAN. Its purpose is to build women's rights holder networks with the aim of raising their voices, conducting movement, eradicating the root cause of violence against women through strategic alliances with established partners and national collaboration. The network strives to build up a strong women's movement from village level to National level to influence agendas for a new Nepal in favour of women.

The National Women's Rights Forum, Secretariat was established in 2008 at Prerana. Prerana has a long-term partnership with Action aid to host the Women's Rights Forum and coordinate advocacy and networking activities of the existing district chapters of the Manch as well as its coverage.

District Women's Rights Forum has been established in Bara, Parsa, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Dang, Rasuwa, Baglung, Parbat, Dolakha and Sarlahi which was expanded in 2008 to ten other districts (Makawanpur, Chitwan, Udaypur, Sindhuli, Saptari, Jhapa, Kaski, Banke, Lalitpur and Kailali).

The main objectives of the Women's Rights Forum, secretariat, were:

- Coordinate works (campaigns, movement, and capturing of voices) on women's rights across districts and continue to strengthen the Manch.
- Establish clear (working) linkage with government and other non-governmental actors.
- Create an enabling environment to ignite such campaigns and movements and seek to facilitate the process.
- Build a sustainable mechanism for the secretariat within two years to continue responding to the incidences of women's rights violations.

Major achievements

1. Formulation of strategy and organizational rules and regulation of Women's rights forum

The workshop was organized on 4 August, 2008 in Vijay Development Resource Centre, Gaidakot, Nawalparasi with the facilitation of National Women's Rights Forum, Secretariat to formulate the strategies and rules and regulations of the women's rights forum in order to put into action the women's rights forum more effectively and to proceed smoothly. The members of Women's Rights Forum and representatives from 11 partner organizations of Action Aid Nepal and other representatives from interested districts to form Women's Rights Forum participated in

a 3 day workshop. On very positive discussions on group work strategy and organizational rules, regulation of Women's Rights Forum was formulated with participatory conclusion.

The preparation of a draft of organizational rule and regulation and strategy, action plans on various levels (community, district and national) and planning and discussion on women's right to land campaign were the main objectives of the workshop. All partner organizations had prepared organizational structure, rules and strategy with their own prospect with the facilitation of national Women's Rights Forum secretariat before the workshop which were collected and discussed in group work and finalized the documents accordingly during the three day workshop. Mr. Jagat Deuja facilitated the workshop and all the participants actively participated to meet the objectives.

District Women's Rights Forum expanded to 10 districts and a National Women's Rights Forum working committee was formed representing all Women's Rights Forum established districts until December 2008 following the strategy and organizational rules and regulation. On the basis of its strategy, a Women's Rights Forum was also planned for 2009.

2. Movement

a. Mandal Movement regarding Laxmi Bohar's assassinate

Women's rights forum (WRF) supported and expressed solidarity from the beginning to the Mandal movement regarding Laxmi Bohar's assassination. This was initiated by women from Far and mid western regions against violence on women. The formation of high level investigation team on Laxmi Bohar's case, a formation of high level commission to look at all cases of violence against women and security to women's rights defenders were the main demands of the movement. It commenced with a hunger strike on July 13 at Maitighar Mandala, Kathmandu which lasted for 24 days. Various activities were conducted during the movement such as sit in protests in front of different party offices, huge rallies showing women's power, interaction programs with various organizations working on women's issues, press conference that pressured the government to address the demands. WRF members from 8 districts actively participated in rallies and sit in protest and 18 members were involved in a relay hunger strike continuously. In addition, with facilitation of National Women's Rights Forum, secretariat, the movement was also conducted in various districts organizing rallies, protests and fund raising to pressure the government and to assist the movement financially. Finally, the movement was successful in pressuring the government into forming a high-level commission committee after the 24 day relay hunger strike.

b. Women's rights to land (Hunger free campaign)

Hunger free campaign was organized by Women's Rights Forum, secretariat, because it is essential to strengthen alliances and leadership among rural women's groups and networks and increase their participation in mixed civil society organizations and networks. It also intended to push women's rights to land, livelihoods and food on to the agenda of regional and international floor and debates through a combination of advocacy, media and legal actions. The main objectives of the campaign were

- Form public opinion and influence policy makers on women's rights to land, livelihood and productive resources.
- Organize and expand hunger free women's campaign
- Link it with VAW
- Strengthen women's rights forum (MAM) and link it with other coalitions, networks of women's rights.

Hunger free campaign was started as a protest by the walking of WRF members in their village at community level, VDC level and district level in 25 districts. In every district press meets were organized inviting local and national journalists where press notes contained basic information on hunger, landlessness, VAW and local information was provided to influence policy makers, create mass awareness and orient journalists to our cause. Family members of Women's Rights Forum

members and those who would take part in the rally that was oriented on hunger, landlessness, VAW and other information along with the objective of Hungerfree women's campaign at all districts.

Equal rights to land, equal rights to production, equal rights to consumption was a major slogan of the campaign with many other slogans on women's right to land. Women walked alongside hundreds of other women from neighboring villages and districts to take part in a national Hungerfree rally and attended a national conference in Chitwan. During the procession, women raised their voices holding placards made of bamboo sticks, empty saal (Shorea Robusta) tree leaf plates and bowls symbolizing their hunger, holding various agricultural tools which symbolized equal rights to land, wearing caps with a slogan of Hungerfree women. They also organized corner meetings, held interactions with local political parties, sensitized villagers, families, civil society on those issues on their way. The rallies passing from one district to another welcomed and about 5000 Rural women from 25 districts which were gathered at the national Hunger free rally in Campachaur, Narayangadh Chitwan and were successful in submitting their 24 points of charter of demand to chair and speaker of the constituent assembly parliament in front of other policy makers, entrepreneurs, government and non-government organization's representatives, national and international journalists in order to include their demands in the new constituent. They also submitted rural women's signatures showing their solidarity to policy makers so as to pressure the charter of demands. Women also showed their talent by dancing and singing. Various female victims especially landless, local level non government organizations/networks/alliances working on women's issues to international journalists participated in the campaign and were able to share their voice through the speech.

The local and international media were mobilized during the rally and it culminated in Chitwan where information, live coverage, interviews, and photographs were provided.

Also, a commemoration and celebration was organized on the occasion of world dignity day by lighting lamps in memory of the dead and honoring the warriors of women's rights and also celebrated world aids day throughout the districts.

The participants felt their strength and were able to mass conscientization on women's rights to land and related violence and were also able to link with other women's networks, alliances and related organizations.

C. Violence against women

Women were successful in receiving their rights, to some extent, through various means such as collectively raising their voices, interaction program with concerned parties from community level to National level. They were able to get compensation for victims and pressured to take action against criminals according to the law. They became so empowered that they come to concern organizations or the sector in their district to get services and to inquire and vocalize their dissatisfaction if the service is not provided in their area.

The international 16 days of activism against gender violence was celebrated in all districts with various programs. Press conference, rally, world AIDS day and interaction on movement with family members, international disabled day, world dignity day, human rights day were carried out during 16 days of activism.

Similarly, WRF showed their solidarity in different violence against women events in respective districts such as violence due to dowry, violence in the name of witch, rape and murder by releasing press and pressuring concerned sectors to take action against criminal acts.

3. Women's rights forum expansion

The expansion process of women's rights forum is held from the second week of August, 2008 with the objective of assembling rural women who have been forced to become underprivileged due to various socio-economic and political reasons to raise their voice against violence,

discrimination, socio cultural practices. For this, district level workshop on "women's rights forum expansion and formation" was conducted by the National secretariat in the district with the presence of representatives from various government and non-government organizations such as women's development office, Family planning Nepal, Health post, CDO, bar association, Community police office and other women's groups and networks. It was conducted in Makawanpur, Chitwan and Nawalparasi district on the 27th, 28th and 29th of August respectively. Similar workshops were also conducted in Banke, Kailali, Kaski, Sindhuli, Udaypur, Saptari and Lalitpur in September and October. All the organizations participated in the workshop were convinced to form women's right forums in their working area and they made an action plan for it. They decided the organization in which secretariat of the forum will be situated and also made a plan for a district level conference of women's rights forum so as to form district working committees in the districts with the coordination and cooperation of secretariat of women's rights forum in all extended districts.

After the expansion of the district, women's rights forum was formed at VDC level first and finally formed district level forum representing the entire VDC level forum through the district level conference with the facilitation of district secretariat in their respective district.

In total, there are 19 district-level WRF formed one in each district and total members are 29452 as shown in the table below.

S.N.	Name of district	Total Forum		Total members
		District Level	VDC Level	
1	Parsa	1	17	3239
2	Dang	1	12	2578
3	Mahottari	1	16	1775
4	Sarlahi	1	12	2045
5	Bara	1	17	1240
6	Dolakha	1	15	1676
7	Dhanusha	1	18	1154
8	Baglung	1	5	981
9	Parbat	1	5	980
10	Rasuwa	1	10	812
11	Saptari	1	28	420
12	Udaypur	1	14(1municipalities)	315
13	Jhapa	1	17(2municipalities)	2000
14	Banke	1	13	351
15	Chitwan	1	25	7259
16	Lalitpur	1	13	438
17	Sindhuli	1	11	1200
18	Makawanpur	1	7	800
19	Kaski	1	6(1municipality)	189
	Total			29452

4. Established National Women's Rights Forum's committee

The National conference of Women's rights forum (WRF) was organized at Vijay development resource centre (VDRC), Nawalparasi on 9 December 2008. In the presence of Ms. Kete Nustedt, Mr. Bimal Phuyal, Director, Action aid International, Khem Raj Sapkota, chairperson of VDRC, the member of women's rights forum (WRF) from 18 districts and representatives from Action aid partner NGOs participated in the conference. Special guests along with WRF members shared their views in the first session of the conference. In the second session, a 15 member national

level working committee was formed by federal democratic way through election. Ms Sarita Shrestha was elected as chairperson of the committee by the election. There were 15 members elected representing each district where Women's Rights Forum was established and formed a **National Women's Rights Forum committee**. There were 6 members needed to complete the 21 member working committee. For this, the committee decided to select 6 members by nomination from the remaining districts. Eventually, the committee selected 5 members from the remaining districts but still one has to be selected from Kailali district.

National Women's Right Forum's working committee.

S.N.	Name	Designation	District
1.	Sarita Shrestha	Chairperson	Dhanusha
2.	Sita Pariyar	Vice Chairperson	Parbat
3.	Laxmi Khatiwada	Treasure	Dolakha
4.	Rubi Khan	Gneral secretary	Banke
5.	Nirmala Adhikari	Scretary	Rasuwa
6.	Bimala Ghimire	Member	Lalitpur
7.	Ganga Pariyar	Member	Dang
8.	Sunita Parajuli	Member	Makawanpur
9.	Usha Pun	Member	Baglung
10.	Suwatra Mahato	Member	Sarlahi
11.	Phulwati Rajbanshi	Member	Jhapa
12.	Anju Kumari Danuwar	Member	Sindhuli
13.	Shakuntala Shrestha	Member	Chitwan
14.	Prabhawati Devi Bin	Member	Parsa
15.	Aava Setu Singh	Member	Saptari
16.	Sadhana Barma	Member	Mahottari
17.	Renu Manandhar	Member	Parsa
18.	Kalpana Dhakal	Member	Kaski
19.	Ramrati Ram	Member	Bara
20.	Renuka Malla	Member	Udaypur

The working committee has conducted two national level meetings for further plan of the forum and for selecting their advisory committee according to the organizational rule.

5. HIV/AIDS and violence against women

Violence against women (VAW) and HIV and AIDS are so interrelated that VAW leads to HIV infection and sometimes it follows the infection. Due to VAW and HIV&AIDS women are facing more problems than men. Gender discrimination, discriminatory law, patriarchy, social and cultural factors such as early marriage, forced marriage, lack of education, son preference society are the reasons behind violence against women. While violent or forced sex, lack of power to negotiate sex, fear of saying no to sex and fear of leaving/ending a relationship leaves women vulnerable to HIV&AIDS. Lack of understanding of the interrelation between VAW and HIV&AIDS among people, stakeholders, society, even government, intensify the vulnerability of HIV positive women and survivors of violence. VAW and HIV both are human rights issues and legal and health crisis as well. Thus these issues need special attention from various accountable agencies such as state, policy, law, programs and strategies. Considering this, in Nepal, Women Won't Wait (WWW) campaign was launched on March 7, 2007 so as to disseminate the concept of intersection between HIV&AIDS and VAW to various stakeholders including government agencies, non-governmental organizations working in the field of women's rights and HIV and AIDS and youth. Several programs were and are implemented on VAW and HIV alone but the concept of their intersection was not there.

The representative from the National women's rights forum, secretariat participated in a review and planning meeting of the international campaign "women won't wait" in South Africa. Representatives from 11 countries participated and shared their achievements, issues, and problems with the campaign in respective countries. A discussion was also made on the importance of coalitions to influence policy change and implementation as well as increase resource allocation and donor accountability through policy analysis and publication of reports, building of alliances and movement support and ultimately to reduce HIV and AIDS and end violence against women and girls.

After the participation in the workshop, representatives shared experiences on the participatory review and reflection program (PRRP) of women's theme organized by Actionaid Nepal on December where all the representatives from actionaid partner organizations presented.

6. Coordination and cooperation

A mechanism has been developed on cooperation and coordination. WRF members attended Mandala Movement at Kathmandu regarding Laxmi Bohara's murder with the coordination of district secretariat organization and National Women's rights forum secretariat. In the coordination and cooperation of WRF, Women Human Rights Defender (WHRD), WE can, Women Security Pressure Group, Mukta Kamaiya Andolan, National struggle committee of Female community volunteer and various other organizations and networks such as FECOFUN, BBC, WEPCCA, WHR, FEDO working on women's rights issues and committed to end all forms of violence against women, the movement was successful in pressuring the relevant organizations to achieve the demands of the movement.

A Consultation workshop on women rights and security during CA process and beyond was organized by National WRF secretariat with the coordination of Actionaid Nepal, Sancharika Samuha, FECOFUN, WHRD, Himawanti, Blue Diamond Society, WHR, AATWIN, Nepal Dalit Mahila Uthan Sangh, National federation for women living with HIV/AIDS, Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), Conscious media forum and other various organizations.

Similarly, National secretariat of WRF participated in interaction programs, protest rallies, demonstration, training and advocacy programs with the coordination of WHRD for supporting and solidarity. Interaction programs on oppression and threatening of women working in the entertainment field, 16 days of activism, Non-violence training, planning for 8 March celebration were major activities where representatives from WRF actively participated.

To ensure women's rights to land in the constitution, a campaign "Hunger free women "was organized with the coordination of speaker of constituent assembly parliament, various national to community level government and non-government organizations, networks and alliances in Chitwan where about 5000 rural women from 25 districts gathered and succeeded in putting 24 points of charter of demand in front of policy makers and pressured them to incorporate those into the new constitution.

In the coordination with Federation for women living with HIV and AIDS, National secretariat of WRF participated in national consultation meetings on HIV and Gender in Lalitpur and similarly, participated in workshops and movements organized by Nepal disabled women's association and other networks and alliances.

Learning

- There is a need for unity, association, alliance, coordination, cooperation to achieve women's rights. The network gives the strength that can pressure concerned sectors from local level to international level to change policies and strategy in favor of women.
- There is a need of various meetings, workshops, trainings and exposure to empower women to have them actively involved in the network.
- We should not assume that grassroots women are weak and are not able to think themselves but they just need an opportunity, they can participate very actively and contribute to change social norms even though having many problems.

- There is a need for national to grassroots networks, alliances, organizations' coordination and mobilization along with exploration to achieve national level campaign and movements.

Threats

- It is difficult to convince the importance of Network to rural women due to various networks based on projects already formed in the society. They hardly believe that networks can work for a long time without financial aid.
- District secretariat and National secretariat of women's right forum is not established yet according to the rule of the organization. Therefore, it is difficult to set up information and coordination between district and national level.
- It is difficult to host meetings, backing and to participate in national level campaign and programs because all the members of national women's forum are from different districts.
- There is an interruption in district visits due to the political environment and changing context of the country.
- The life of women's rights defenders is uncertain in the working area due to insecurity.
- The incidents of women's violence are being increased because of lenient legal structures.
- Being extremely poor and unaware of their rights, rural women are influencing for participation at VDC, district and national level programs.

Cases studies

My name is Yamkala Hitang. I am 34 years old. I live in Huwash VDC, ward no. 2, Parbat district. I got married when I was 19. My husband died from blood cancer after 14 years of marriage. I could not go school in my birth home. I was interested in going to school while dropping my brother at school. I had attended one day in school by escaping. I have experience of suffering all kinds of sorrows, blaming of husband's death due to my reason by the society to depriving rights to paternal property. I was warned saying I could not get paternal property if I do not wear white cloth after my husband's one year cremation. But I think I am able to change myself and community after I joined the WRF. I wore different clothes instead of just white. Bhawan Tara Hitang and I jointly could cover the roof on the building for child class conduction 5 years ago. I did plow up first time in Chaitra 29, 2063. I asked many people before I plowed up but nobody supported me. There was a rule that if men plow one day, women have to plow up three days to get equal money. So my sister in-law and I plowed up the field to demand equal money for equal work. Many people spoke against it in the village. If any body died in the community they started blaming that it was because of women plowing in the field. Three other women also started plowing up the field after we did. I am continuing plowing and I am able to get equal money for equal work. There is no work a woman can not do. It is not good people believing in god and religion. We should start changing ourselves first to change the society. Network and group plays play a vital role in sharing women's problems and to get rights. Therefore, we should take our rights pressuring instead of demanding.

Jureli B. K 's story

My name is Jureli B.K. I live in Haku VDC, ward no. 3. My livelihood is based on daily wages. My daughter could not go to school due to our low economic status. Husband spends his earning money on alcohol. He used to beat me when he was drunk. I did not tell anybody even though he beat me daily. He used to say that he would kill me if he told anybody. I thought nobody is there to share my sorrows as I am Dalit. In 2064/11/14, he hit me on my back with a log and I became unconscious. After some time I became conscious but I was not able to speak and walk and I spent that night crying. In the morning, when I was able to speak and walk a little, I asked people for help. After a while some villagers came and asked me what happened and why he hit me. I also shared everything thinking that if I still did not tell he would kill me. They called the chairperson of the women rights forum immediately. After arriving she called other members of the forum and conducted an emergency meeting. The meeting decided that Mr. Lal Bahadur

B.K.(husband's name) should pay fine Rs.1000 as a penalty and it would be spent for her treatment. They also decided that nobody would provide him alcohol in the village and he was not allowed to beat his wife. If he did, he would be sent to district court. After that, he could not get alcohol as nobody gave it to him and he also stopped beating me as he was no longer drunk. As a result, I am living peacefully due to WRF. Now I am also the member of WRF. I would die if I did not share thinking that it was just domestic violence.

Bina's story in her own words

Bina Devi Mahato, residence of Bateswor VDC ward no. 7, Katani Tole, Dhanusha district got married with Ram Chander Mahato, Bateswor 12 years ago. She has one daughter and one son. She said I was beaten close to death in the absence of my husband by my uncle in law Damodar Mahato even though neighbours protect her blaming that their husbandry ate crop in his field. At that time, my neighbors took me Janakpur Anchal Hospital. I returned after 3 days in the hospital. My husband begged for justice in the community. Several meetings were stayed and called Damodar Mahato for attending such meetings to shut down issues but he never attended the meeting. We could not go anywhere for justice due to afraid Damodar.

There has been conducting Reflect at Dhanusha Sewa Samiti. Amongst, Devaki Devi Mahato, a mother of Bina Devi is the chairperson of Dhalkebar Center. This case was taken as an issue at the centre. The chairperson sent 5, 7 women to Bateswor to solve the problem. The society had several discussions and meetings for resolve it. People were disappointed as he never attended the meeting and depressed since he disobeyed others and frustrated from his arrogance.

Meanwhile, women's group sent people to call him to attend the meeting but people returned saying he was not at home. After that, they called his wife and told her that if he not attended the next meeting, he would be taken by force. At the same time, all the participants marched with violence against women slogan and they all backed to Dhalkebar. Then after, Rs. 200 had been collected by women's center. On the leadership of Dewaki Devi Mahato, they took tractors along with WRF members and arrived in Bateswor on time and had a meeting with victim and the society. They called the perpetrator, Damodar Mahato and were successful in forcing Damodar to give Rs 27000 as compensation to Bina Devi. They also forced him to apologize and state that he would never do this again. Cases of violence against women have been found slightly less in Bateswor village after this incident on 2064/3/10.