

Women in Nepal Inclusion, Empowerment, and Political Participation



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Summary:

Karuna Center for Peacebuilding has had a presence in the education and training of Nepali women since the early 1990's. In those years we partnered with a leading Nepal women's activist in a multi-year series of workshops for women focused on inclusion and empowerment. As these workshops were offered in many regions of Nepal where traditional cultures are very strong, we placed special emphasis on the tension between gender modernization and cultural preservation. Beginning in 2006, Karuna Center entered a new phase of its Nepal work, including training for women in the Nepal Parliament, for women leading civil society organizations, and for women in business. Gender rights and a gender-sensitive approach are also widely included in Karuna Center's peace leadership workshops, human rights training programs, and seminars for government ministers, media, and parliamentarians.

Current Issues in Nepal:

Nepal's people power movement in 2006 led to the removal of the monarchy, the end of a ten-year civil war, and the establishment of a parliamentary democracy. Elections in April 2008 resulted in a Maoist victory and the beginning of a process to write a new, people-centered constitution. Major issues to be addressed by the new government include the marginalization of women and of the ethnic and geographically dispersed populations, who were all under-served by previous governments. Nepal faces daunting problems of poverty, under-development, difficult terrain and geostrategic location, caste and class prejudices, internally displaced persons and other residues of civil conflict, and little national consensus on its future. The Maoist government has decreed that one third of parliamentarians be women, and as a result many new women are entering political life with no preparation and frequently scant education. Some new parliamentarians are barely literate.

Program Responses:

In response to these issues for women and with the support of a partnership grant from Hunt Alternatives' Initiative for Inclusive Security, Karuna Center has embarked on a series of seminars for new women parliamentarians representing all the major political parties. We have also developed women's empowerment and gender sensitive programs for women NGO leaders, women business leaders, and women/men working in human rights, ministries, and media.

Women Parliamentarians:

Women newly placed into Parliament need a wide variety of skills, which are being provided by various training organizations. Karuna Center is focused on women's leadership in developing sustainable peace and security in Nepal, replacing marginalization with broad social inclusion, and exploring post-conflict



Women in Parliament Exchanging Views

social healing. We have brought our international experiences to the Nepal women parliamentarians, who have little knowledge about the outside world or the role of women in government, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding. We have also focused on gender-based violence both in war and domestic life, and on the vulnerability and victimization of women in war. We have introduced them to UN Resolution 1325 on



*Training Program with KCP Partner
WIGG: Women in Good Government*

women, peace, and security, to coalition building, and media campaigns, and to using the stages of constitution development as a tool for peace and justice. Identity in the parliament is along party lines and initially women sat only with members of their own political party. We have been encouraging women to develop relationships more broadly in order to achieve legislative success, and we have introduced exercises in the workshops to that end.

In a cross-party meeting to assess the results of the training for the women parliamentarians, they reported high levels of satisfaction in terms of knowledge and skill acquisition as well as increased self-confidence, clarity, and inspiration. They are eager for more seminars from Karuna Center, with specific requests for leadership skills, advocacy, and increased international exposure and understanding. They are hopeful that we can bring women MP delegations to Nepal from comparable post-conflict circumstances.

Women in Civil Society and Business:

Karuna Center has partnered with women's NGOs and with women business leaders for programs on peace leadership, social healing, and reconciliation. Current partners include WIGG, Women in Good Government, and FWEAN, Federation of Women Entrepreneurs in Nepal. Program designs have included skills in conflict analysis, impact of identity and exclusion, peacebuilding and social justice interventions, training skills, leadership tools, coalitions, advocacy, and empowerment. Women in Nepal are far behind international standards, and are mobilizing to demand education, equal opportunities, human rights, and political inclusion. The women in our training programs are leaders in these efforts and deserving of a great deal of encouragement, support, and recognition as they struggle against traditional norms of gender, caste, and class exclusion. Karuna Center is pleased to engage with their quest for equality and full participation in the political, economic, and social development processes underway in Nepal.

Training of Trainers for Women:

Karuna Center is especially committed to encouraging a new generation of women leaders in Nepal, both in civil society and government sectors. As such, we are providing opportunities for those with exceptional skills and English fluency to attend CONTACT, a Peacebuilding Summer Institute in the US led by Karuna Center directors. Additionally, we invite these women to assist us with training in Nepal, offering them another level of leadership training and supervision. We are very invested in this arrangement and are committed to its continuation, so that Nepal enjoys strong and competent women's leadership in shaping its future.