

“Mothers’ Group”, light of hope for rural women in Nepal

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Sita Thapa, 18, shared her bitter experience about her alcoholic uncle when she had been in Lahachok VDC of Kaski district. He grabbed all the hard earned money by his wife who worked in the field with wages normally 25% less than those paid to men. He became incredibly irresponsible and wild once he was drunk. His small kids were forced to spend their nights with empty stomach.

But I noticed hope and relief in Sita’s voice when she shared about Mothers’ Group (MG), a non-political group formed by Gurung Women, who played a significant role on women’s empowerment and mobilization at grassroots. The women here are taking small yet crucial steps to make their society a better place to live in. The social group has been named “Aama Samuha” that is the group of mothers.

Mothers’ Group has become a popular women’s organization all over the country for women’s development. In remote areas Mothers’ Group (MG) are raising the voice against excessive sales of alcohol and are successful in declaring some of the districts as dry zone for alcohol.

Women are rated as a weaker sex. In case of rural Nepalese women, their standing in society mostly depends on their husbands’ and parents’ social and economic positions. They have limited access to education, health care, markets, productive services, and local government and suffer from malnutrition, poverty.

Major contributions of Mothers’ Group in the community development (1994 in Okanmura, 1999) in Syangja district are as follows: construction and repairing of village trails and road, construction of Buddhist monasteries and temple, construction of toilets, plantation of trees, assisting in the construction of a school building and furniture, managing literary classes, collection of common utensils, stopping alcoholism and gambling, and establishment of child care centre.

From the year 1988/89, Mothers’ Group got wide popularity after receiving a training to prepare women community health volunteers known as Female Community Health Volunteers (FVHVs) conducted by the Department of Public Health.

Currently there are nearly 50,000 FCHVs who cover all 75 districts of Nepal and 97% are working in rural areas. They receive no salary, only a token incentive of about \$40 per year, a bicycle and a sign that declared they are FCHVs. Since 1995, these dedicated women have visited every home in community twice a year to give doses of Vitamin A to breast feeding women and children up to age 5. They also collect data on each household, and provide de worming pills, immunizations, family planning materials and information on sanitations, nutrition and infant care.

The program now reveals 94% of children between six months and five years of age, whose mortality rate has dropped from 94 per 10,000 to 52. At least 12,000 lives have been saved.

Mother's Group has contributed a lot to women's health in Lahachok. Women's awareness on health has improved drastically in sanitation, hygiene and treatment. They are convinced that the education brings about a lot of change in the society. As a result, they have started sending their children to school without discrimination between boys and girls while selecting the schools.

Similarly, Mothers' Group played a vital role for developing awareness of income generating activities, economic influence on health, mental health, traditional ideology and caste as restriction against girls and the issue of dowry.

The rural women of Nepal are challenged with poverty and lack of basic facilities. They have a lot in their basket, such as looking after the house, family and also in the field. Besides their hectic schedule they managed to invest time in MG. It has been found that the Mother's Group has been successful in making women's life easier to some extent.

No matter how many the obstacles were against the villagers, they are coming up with hopeful ways to fight against the poverty and illiteracy. Mother's Group is one of such groups initiated by the women who to some extent, have been successful in becoming a light of hope for the villagers.



Members of Mothers' Group attending awareness training on women's health related issues