

1. Interaction and Suggestion Program with Newly Appointed Women Ministers

"Interaction and suggestion program with newly appointed women ministers " was the first bimonthly interaction program organized by SAS under the IMPACS Project. The program was held on 13th July 2004 at Kathmandu where 60 participants consisting of women activists, representatives from Civil Society and media people took part. Three women ministers of the present coalition government namely Asta Laxmi Shakya, minister for the Women, Children and Social Welfare, Pratibha Rana, minister of state for Science and Technology and Bhim Kumari Buda, Assistant Minister for culture, tourism and civil Aviation were invited as the chief guests of the program.

Speaking at the program Asta Laxmi Shakya, minister for the Women, Children and Social Welfare expressed her concerned over the increasing number of single women due to the ongoing conflict and laid emphasis on resolving the conflict and restoring peace. She added that it was the responsibility of one and all to protect the rights of women suffering from violence and terror to live in peace. Calling for unity among women for eliminating all kinds of violence against them minister Shakya referred to the state being sensitive about making proper provision for women affected due to it. She said her ministry would endeavor to raise the status of women in the country. She also added that she would press the government for special programs for women, Dalits, Janajatis and other minorities and under privileged communities.

Similarly Pratibha Rana, Minister of State for Science and technology said that women were working merely as service providers in the field of Technology. If given the right opportunity they can compete with men. She also expressed her discontent over the obsolete systems being used in government offices. She highlighted the role of science and technology and especially that concerned with communications being vital in the 21st century. Speaking on the occasion she also said that right to live in peace should be protected. Pointing out the need for one and all to work sincerely to restore durable peace in the country she laid emphasis on providing reasonable relief to the women affected by conflict.

On the occasion Assistant Minister for Culture, tourism and Civil Aviation Bheem Kumari Budha pointed out the need of skill oriented training for the all round development of women and also of Dalits. She laid emphasis on increasing their representation in tourism sector to raise their income generating capacity. She said that she would give priority to training more women in tourism sector and for potential foreign employment.

Bandana Rana, President SAS speaking on the occasion said that unity among ministers is a precondition to meet their commitments. The movement of fairer sex aimed at addressing various issues should not only amount to mere words but also be followed up by action by all concerned. She laid emphasis on participation of women at the policy level and expressed the view that the women ministers in the government would play important role in resolving the problems facing the country and become role model.

Suggestions From the Floor:

Durga Ghimire President, ABC Nepal:

Women ministers should work beyond their respective party agenda on issues pertaining to women. She pointed out those issues like discriminatory laws, peace restoration, laws on trafficking of women should be given more importance. She also requested them to bring a common development program for the upliftment of women in the country.

Sangeeta Thapa, Senior Office in Charge, UNIFEM Nepal

Abolition of discriminatory law should be given priority and emphasis to be given on allocation of more budgets on development work for women.

Dr. Shanta Thapaliya, President LACC:

Strict laws needed to be formulated against women trafficking. And at least one women representative should be involved while establishing Peace secretariat for resolving peace.

Gunaraj Luintail, Senior Journalists, Kantipur

Women ministers should sit at least once a week with journalist to share the achievement and discuss future plan of action on issues related to women empowerment.

Impact of the program:

The program became the platform for suggestion. Soon after the interaction, the minister for women children and social welfare called for a meeting in her office to take advice and suggestions for the future course of action with few women activists. Bandana Rana, President SAS and Program Director IMPACS program also took part in the meeting. In the meeting it was decided that both short and long term plans related to women's issues needs to be prioritized immediately. Beside this issue to granting citizenship through mother's name as well should be strongly put forwarded through the ministry by the minister herself. Suggesting the ministers the women activists pointed out the need of formation of women's commission as an independent body. They also suggested that there is the need of bringing the domestic violence bill before the floor of the cabinet. As women

and children are the prime victims of the ongoing conflict prevailing in the country therefore they stressed the need to involve women in the peace negotiation process for which the ministry's role is considered vital.

It was decided in the meeting that the minister would hold a regular interaction program on monthly basis with the representatives from civil society as well as the media persons in order to brief the achievement and activities of the ministry and also to take their input in this regard for the smooth and effective functioning of the ministry.