

Workshop On Reporting Women's Issues In Conflict Affected Areas

Organised by Sancharika Samuha Nepal (SAS)

24 May 2004, Bardiya

Executive Summary

Nepal has been bearing the brunt of fierce conflict between the Maoists and the government machineries since past seven years and the intensity of this insurgency is gaining momentum day by day. Since the armed conflict started by the Maoists in 1996, many women and children have fallen victims both from the actions of the State as well as the Maoists.

Though the Nepalese media, both independent and government-run, have been engaged in a grisly accounting of the number of people killed, yet it is not fully succeeded in providing information in an unbiased, neutral and well-informed manner especially about the reporting of issue related to women from the conflict affected in the mainstream media. It is felt that media can play more vital role in generating awareness among the general public and in creating pressure on pertinent issues related to the women of conflict affected areas. If proper coverage is provided in this sector then it could act as their watchman in safeguarding their right and the victims would be able to get necessary assistance from the concerned authority. Therefore the need to make working journalists, media educators and trainers and organizations of working journalists aware of their role on this issue is important. As most of the victims are from the mid western and far western region of Nepal where the Maoists had a strong hold

therefore a one day workshop on the issue was held at mid western region in order to focus on the improvement and unbiased reporting of the exploitation of women in conflict situation.

With the above objective Sancharika Samuha organized a daylong workshop on **"Reporting Women's Issues In Conflict Affected Areas"** at Bardiya with the support of FES on 24 May 2004.

In the workshop, which was held at Guleriya of Bardiya district, a total of nearly 60 participants consisting of journalists and representatives from the non-government organizations from Surkhet, Dang, Baki and Bardiya took part. The daylong workshop was divided into two sessions. The first was the inaugural session and the second was the working session. During the inaugural session honorable district judge of the Bardiya Mr. Bishnu Dev Poudel, S.P District Police Headquarter Mr. Shyam Prasad Nepal, Local development officer (LDO) Mr. Yagya Parsad, President FNJ, Bardiya Mr. Yubraj Shrestha, General Secretary, Sancharika Samuha Babita Basnet and the coordinator of the program Nirmala Sharma in their remarks highlighted on the issues about the impact of ongoing conflict on the life of women and children, the present setting of media in conflict affected area along with its role in days to come.

Babita Basnet, General Secretary Sancharika Samuha, chaired the inaugural session that was held under the coordination of FNJ Bardiya. The program that was commenced at 8.30 AM in the morning continued the whole day and was concluded at 5 pm in the evening.

During the working session, General Secretary Sancharika Samuha and the editor of Ghatana Ra Bichar Babita Basnet presented a working paper on **"Effects of Conflict on Women and Children and its Reporting in Media"** as

representative from the central level. Similarly as a representative from the mid western region local level journalists from Barbiya Mr. Minraj Sharma present a working paper of **"Impact of conflict on women and children and it's reporting from the districts"**.

In her paper Babita Basnet highlighted about the manner in which newspapers published from the capital project the news related to the conflict affected women in their respective papers. Moreover she also pointed out in her paper whether such reporting are sufficient for their effective coverage or not. She also stressed in adopting effective modalities for such reporting and need to increase reporting on women of conflict-affected areas.

Similarly in his paper Mr. Minraj Sharma briefed about the reporting from the conflict affected area. He through his paper highlighted about the importance of reports collected by the local journalists amidst their difficulties, obligations and their lack of knowledge on the issue in the conflict-affected area. He also remarked on the role they should play in days to come while reporting from these areas.

After the presentation of the above two papers local journalists attending the session participated actively during the open floor. During the discussion they put forwarded the need of conducting intensive trainings on reporting such issue in their area for enhancement of their skill. Beside this they also viewed the need of giving priority by the people in the decision making position at the central level to such news send by the local correspondence. They also pointed out the type of role they should play while giving trainings on gender issues and other such topics in their areas during future programs.

Inaugural Session

The honorable Chief Guest Mr. Bishnu Dev Poudel district judge Bardiya inaugurated the daylong workshop. Speaking on the occasion the chief guest said that women of our country who constitute more than half of the population must get adequate representation for projecting their issues through media. He pointed out that as journalists are considered the fourth element of our country therefore they should feel their responsibility in providing information in an unbiased, neutral and well-informed manner. He said that since this workshop has been held in Bardiya of the mid western region, which is considered as the most affected area by conflict, the critical conclusion that would come up will be adopted on strategies to address the issues which would prove very important and useful for future reference.

Similarly Superintendent of Police (S.P), District Police Headquarter, Bardiya Mr. Shyam Prasad Nepal speaking on the occasion stressed the importance of projecting the reporting of issue related to women from the conflict affected areas in the mainstream media. He said that this type of information flow among the mass could act as an important tool in helping establishing peace and security in the country. In the program, Local Development Officer (LDO) Mr. Yagya Parsad Adhikari also stressed the need of such reporting from the conflict-affected area, which would not provoke the pain and suffering of the victims. Like wise, speaking on the occasion Mr. Yubraj Shrestha President FNJ, Bardiya said that the journalist should give their special attention and considerations while reporting on issues related to the women and children of the conflict affected area. Beside this they should also focus their attention towards their reinstatement.

Briefing about the objective of the program coordinator Nirmala Sharma spoke on the effect of conflict on women and children. She said that the most affected from the

armed conflict are the women and children. Therefore the role of journalists is needed to be more effective while reporting from these areas. Their eye should not only be in search of formal reports but they should also try highlighting on the kinds of varied impact such as economical, psychological, physical and mental on these victims. They must stress on investigative reporting of incidences of their forceful recruitment from the Maoists and about the fear of the army labeling them as collaborators of the Maoists, about the young widows and orphans with no support or relief either from the government or other sectors in those areas and the plight of women taking over the responsibilities of their household. Therefore she added that there exists utmost urgency in maximization of projection of such investigative reporting in mainstream media.

Chairperson of the program Babita Basnet in her closing remark of the session said that the workshop with such participation of the local journalists especially hailing from the highly conflict affected area would definitely result in having concrete discussions on the issue and come up with constructive conclusion on it.

Working Session

During this session of the workshop two papers were presented, one on behalf of the central level media and the other from the local level.

- **Paper I**

The first paper was presented by General Secretary Sancharika Samuha and the editor of Ghatana Ra Bichar, Babita Basnet on "**Effects of Conflict on Women and Children and its Reporting in Media**" as representative.

Before initiating her presentation she held before the

participants that the word conflict is not a new thing in context of Nepal. It had existed here since time immemorial. There existed conflict between two rivals; between husband and wives; between communities and many more. Even there was conflict during Rana era. Nepal could not do way with this Conflict even after the restoration of democracy. With the commencement of Maoist rebellion this word got focused in more prominent mode in our society and people started using it in a totally new context depicting a violent situation. With this background projection she initiated her paper by defining what is conflict. She then highlighted in her paper the implications of various kinds of conflict in the life of women and children:

- Using them as human shields during the wartime.
- Forcing toward creation of solitary life (increase in number of widows)
- Pain of snatching away of the old age's support.
- Increase in number of orphans.
- Additional workload.
- Sexual harassment/Rape
- Displacement and Underground situation.
- Hamper on the education of children.
- Physiological effect on children.
- Living under fear.
- Un fulfillment of wish of commencing a happy family life.

She added that though there has been continuous increase in conflict situation since past eight years and has implicated lot of negative impact on the life of women and children, however there are some positive changes in our society due to it as well. Some of such changes she said are:

- Increase in decision-making power of women.
- Increase in the participation in politics.

- Increase in the capacity of holding responsibility towards both family and society.
- Justification of the fact that women can be a part of arm force.
- Decrease in domestic violence due to restriction by Maoists on gambling and alcoholism.

She also pointed out the type of role media is and should play during the conflict situation in her paper. While projecting the topics that need to be covered by media on conflict-affected women she figured out the following points:

- Though there has been an increase in coverage on women of conflict-affected area but still in they are in need of core exposure.
- Though media is giving exposure to the suffering of the widows of arm personnel killed during the insurgency but have not yet given adequate place to the widows of rebels killed.
- Large number of women becoming widow, their economic plight arising out of it, their children becoming orphan and their forceful ending of education, sexual harassment of women are some of the topics that media have not been able to project properly.
- Story of inhuman behavior inflicted on captured women rebels also lack coverage in mainstream media.

Similarly, the points that need to be followed by the journalists while reporting from the conflict affected area has been forwarded in her paper. Few among them are as follows:

- They should sincerely follow and respect human rights ethics while perusing their work.
- They should not indulge in inflicting bad name to anyone on biased ground and personal differences.

- Should address people with politeness.
- While interviewing the victims, their state of mind and physical well being should be well considered.
- Must not take alcohol or any other drugs or even gamble during duty hours.
- Should always take personal precaution for safety.
- Don't make documentary on victim's life that could impart negative effect.
- As far as possible keep the identity of victims a secret.
- Should respect the feelings of victim and should not give false assurances.
- Must remain far from political rivalry.

She also pointed out that the under mentioned things that needed to be kept in mind during the collection of news from the victims:

- Try to know about the type of treatment they received when imprisoned.
- Should try to find out whether the petition has been filed on the behalf of the victim and if not do they wish to.
- Has the victim-received medical attention or not and do they require any further treatment should be enquired with the authority.

In her paper she has also highlighted about the way of collecting news about the killing due to conflict as well as political murder. She pinpointed the following inconvenience a journalist has to face while collecting news from the conflict zone:

- Problem of getting accurate information.
- Problem of interviewing the victims.
- Inadequacy of resources and security.
- Discrimination due to political differences.
- Difficult terrain and transportation problem

- Lack of training on journalism.
- Problem in identifying issues due to conflict.

This way Babita Basnet while projecting the solutions for the problems faced during reporting from conflict affected area, stressed the need of such topic to be brought in the mainstream media.

Commenting on the presentation made by the journalists Babita Basnet, Nepalgunj correspondance of Space-time Mr. Sukra Rishi Chaulagain put forth his enquiry about how to raise issues on women form conflict affected area. Similarly Govinda Mishra from Rural Reconstruction Nepal uncovered the truth of discrimination of women victims both by the family and the society. Another journalist from Bardiya spoke on the plight of victims after the coverage of their story in media. Likewise Journalists from Naya Samrachana Dainik informed the gathering about the suffering of the Maoists family. They are not even entitled by the society for sympathy.

Among others who kept their views before the floor include journalist Aarakshi Pokharel, Leela Saha, Jhalak Gaur and Sarad Adhikari. They all were of the opinion that there has not been adequate reporting on women who have been made disappeared by the army personal as well as the rebels. Beside this they also spoke on the dilemma of journalists on not having been able to cover incidences in their report on issues that they could not tolerate to keep them unvoiced.

- **Paper II**

As a representative from the mid western region Mr. Minraj Sharma, a local journalist from Bardiya presented the second paper of the session entitled "**Impact of conflict on women and children and it's reporting from the**

districts".

In his paper he highlighted the impact of conflict on the life of women and children and its reporting from the local source. He while presenting the paper stressed on the need of projecting the news of victims of conflict not only as mere news but also should in a way that those victims be able to get some justice on their part. He said that due to this conflict, women of rural Nepal are more victimized than those from the urban areas but even then the local newspapers and magazines do not give much priority in publishing these reports.

While quoting from the book on human rights published by INSEC he mentioned in his paper that during 2003 itself due to the action from the Government's side 672 women were victimized. On the other hand due to Maoists action nearly 192 women victims have been reported. Beside this, due to other sector nearly 784 incidences occurred where 810 women were reported victimized. He in his paper has also represented the impact of conflict on women and children in the following way:

- Social discrimination
- Economic burden.
- Solitary feeling within society
- Widow at early age.
- Compulsion for displacement.
- Scarcity of employment.
- Mental agony out of fear and scare.

He has also raised the problem faced by journalists while raising such issues in their reports through their local newspapers. He also by citing examples portrayed how the local journalists are presently covering the reports on victims of conflict. Therefore concluding his paper he stressed the need of training on gender reporting in conflict areas to the

journalists so that they would be able to produce more effective report in raising the issue.

While commenting on the paper presented by Min Raj Adhikari, local journalists Prithivi Bahadur Singh, Gopi Buda, Shyam Nepal and many more kept their view on need of positioning issues like Government's regard towards proving compensation to the widows of conflict, acceptance of wrong committed by both rebels and government, misbehavior towards the captured by police personnel and many such in their reporting.

Towards the end of the workshop journalist Basnet and Sharma clarified the queries raised by the participants on their respective papers.

Conclusion

In her concluding remarks at the end of the workshop coordinator Nirmala Sharma asked the participants to put forward the type of strategies journalists should following in future while reporting on the women and children victims of conflict. The participants suggested the following strategies that need to be implemented for the improvement of reporting on women and children in conflict areas:

- Need of gender training to the reporters/ journalists.
- Lack of knowledge on the issue.
- Putting an end to Human Right abusement both by government and rebels.
- Need of gender training for people in the decision making position at the central media level.

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After the presentation of the above two papers local journalists attending the session participated actively during the open floor. During the discussion they put forwarded the need of conducting intensive trainings on reporting such issue in

their area for enhancement of their skill. Beside this they also viewed the need of giving priority by the people in the decision making position at the central level to such news send by the local correspondence. They also pointed out the type of role they should play while giving trainings on gender issues and other such topics in their areas during future programs.

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She added that though there has been continuous increase in conflict situation since past eight years and has implicated lot of negative impact on the life of women and children, however there are some positive changes in our society due to it as well. Some of such changes she said are:

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- Increase in the participation in politics.
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rebels killed.

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- Decrease in domestic violence due to restriction by Maoists on gambling and alcoholism.

She also pointed out the type of role media is and should play during the conflict situation in her paper. While projecting the topics that need to be covered by media on conflict-affected women she figured out the following points:

- Though there has been an increase in coverage on women of conflict-affected area but still in they are in need of core exposure.
- Though media is giving exposure to the suffering of the widows of arm personnel killed during the insurgency but have not yet given adequate place to the widows of rebels killed.
- Large number of women becoming widow, their economic plight arising out of it, their children becoming orphan and their forceful ending of education, sexual harassment of women are some of the topics that media have not been able to project properly.
- Story of inhuman behavior inflicted on captured women rebels also lack coverage in mainstream media.

Similarly, the points that need to be followed by the journalists while reporting from the conflict affected area has been forwarded in her paper. Few among them are as follows:

- They should sincerely follow and respect human rights ethics while perusing their work.
- They should not indulge in inflicting bad name to anyone on biased ground and personal differences.
- Should address people with politeness.
- While interviewing the victims, their state of mind and physical well being should be well considered.
- Must not take alcohol or any other drugs or even gamble during duty hours.
- Should always take personal precaution for safety.
- Don't make documentary on victim's life that could impart negative effect.
- As far as possible keep the identity of victims a secret.
- Should respect the feelings of victim and should not give false assurances.
- Must remain far from political rivalry.

She also pointed out that the under mentioned things that needed to be kept in mind during the collection of news from the victims:

- Try to know about the type of treatment they received when imprisoned.
- Should try to find out whether the petition has been filed on the behalf of the victim and if not do they wish to.
- Has the victim-received medical attention or not and do they require any further treatment should be enquired with the authority.

In her paper she has also highlighted about the way of collecting news about the killing due to conflict as well as political murder. She pinpointed the following inconvenience a journalist has to face while collecting news from the conflict zone:

- Problem of getting accurate information.
- Problem of interviewing the victims.
- Inadequacy of resources and security.
- Discrimination due to political differences.
- Difficult terrain and transportation problem
- Lack of training on journalism.
- Problem in identifying issues due to conflict.

This way Babita Basnet while projecting the solutions for the problems faced during reporting from conflict affected area, stressed the need of such topic to be brought in the mainstream media.

Commenting on the presentation made by the journalists Babita Basnet, Nepalgunj correspondance of Space-time Mr. Sukra Rishi Chaulagain put forth his enquiry about how to raise issues on women form conflict affected area. Similarly Govinda Mishra from Rural Reconstruction Nepal uncovered the truth of discrimination of women victims both by the family and the society. Another journalist from Bardiya spoke on the plight of victims after the coverage of their story in media. Likewise Journalists from Naya Samrachana Dainik informed the gathering about the suffering of the Maoists family. They are not even entitled by the society for sympathy.

Among others who kept their views before the floor include journalist Aarakshi Pokharel, Leela Saha, Jhalak Gaur and Sarad Adhikari. They all were of the opinion that there has not been adequate reporting on women who have been made disappeared by the army personal as well as the rebels. Beside this they also spoke on the dilemma of journalists on not having been able to cover incidences in their report on issues that they could not tolerate to keep them unvoiced.

- **Paper II**

As a representative from the mid western region Mr. Minraj Sharma, a local journalist from Bardiya presented the second paper of the session entitled "**Impact of conflict on women and children and it's reporting from the districts**".

In his paper he highlighted the impact of conflict on the life of women and children and it's reporting from the local source. He while presenting the paper stressed on the need of projecting the news of victims of conflict not only as mere news but also should in a way that those victims be able to get some justice on their part. He said that due to this conflict, women of rural Nepal are more victimized than those from the urban areas but even then the local newspapers and magazines do not give much priority in publishing these reports.

While quoting from the book on human rights published by INSEC he mentioned in his paper that during 2003 itself due to the action from the Government's side 672 women were victimized. On the other hand due to Maoists action nearly 192 women victims have been reported. Beside this, due to other sector nearly 784 incidences occurred where 810 women were reported victimized. He in his paper has also represented the impact of conflict on women and children in the following way:

- Social discrimination
- Economic burden.
- Solitary feeling within society
- Widow at early age.
- Compulsion for displacement.
- Scarcity of employment.

- Mental agony out of fear and scare.

He has also raised the problem faced by journalists while raising such issues in their reports through their local newspapers. He also by citing examples portrayed how the local journalists are presently covering the reports on victims of conflict. Therefore concluding his paper he stressed the need of training on gender reporting in conflict areas to the journalists so that they would be able to produce more effective report in raising the issue.

While commenting on the paper presented by Min Raj Adhikari, local journalists Prithivi Bahadur Singh, Gopi Buda, Shyam Nepal and many more kept their view on need of positioning issues like Government's regard towards proving compensation to the widows of conflict, acceptance of wrong committed by both rebels and government, misbehavior towards the captured by police personnel and many such in their reporting.

Towards the end of the workshop journalist Basnet and Sharma clarified the queries raised by the participants on their respective papers.

Conclusion

In her concluding remarks at the end of the workshop coordinator Nirmala Sharma asked the participants to put forward the type of strategies journalists should following in future while reporting on the women and children victims of conflict. The participants suggested the following strategies that need to be implemented for the improvement of reporting on women and children in conflict areas:

- Need of gender training to the reporters/ journalists.
- Lack of knowledge on the issue.
- Putting an end to Human Right abusement both by government and rebels.
- Need of gender training for people in the decision making position at the central media level.

