

Workshop for Journalists
On
Reporting Women's Issues from Conflict Affected Areas
(18th -19th April 2005, Pokhara)

Report

Submitted To:
FES Nepal
Sanepa, Lalitpur

Submitted By:



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June 2005

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Executive Summary

Nepalese media, both independent and government-run, though 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. Hence there is a need to make working journalists, media educators and trainers and organizations of working journalists aware of their role on this issue is important.

Therefore with the objective to:

- Sensitizing Journalists on using media for human rights and peace.*
- To increase the skills and knowledge of journalists involved in influential news media that accord greater understanding, sensitivity and high priority to conflict reporting.*
- To improve the depth and quality of reporting.*
- To share ideas and experiences of media people from different region.*
- A combination of safety training and writing exercises concentrating on objective, accurate coverage of conflict situations for the journalists reporting from the hostile environment specially on women issues.*

Sancharika Samuha with the support of FES Nepal organized a two day long residential workshop cum training program on the issue at Pokhara, Kaski on 18th and 19th April 2005 as the mid western region of Nepal having the strong hold of the Maoists have most of the victims of the situation. Therefore in order to focus on the improvement and unbiased reporting of the exploitation especially of women and children in conflict situation Sancharika Samuha with the support of FES Nepal conducted the program.

The program was designed to help create a robust, independent media in conflict areas, through intensive training or re-training of local journalists in the techniques and principles of accurate and impartial news reporting and editing with special emphasize to women and children in conflict situation. It looked at issues surrounding social, political and economic change during conflict, including militarization, refugees and missing persons, civil rights, democratic processes, economic and financial loss.

In the program more than 50 participants consisting of journalists from Pokhara, Baglung, Myagdi, Tanahu and Parbat took part. Resource persons namely Ram Krishna Regmi and Babita Basnet took the working session along with the program Coordinator Srijana Thapa supervising the overall Program. Beside the above-mentioned personnel, Dev Raj Dahal, Country Representative from the FES also attended the program and shared his in depth knowledge on the issue with the participants. During the working sessions Ram Krishna Regmi presented his papers one on media and the other on gender equality with special reference to impact of conflict on women in the context of Nepal. Like wise Babita Basnet shared through her paper the current scenario of Nepali media and how they are report on issues of women from conflict-affected areas. On the second day of the workshop journalists from Baglung Mr. Hari Narayan Gautam and Deepak Gautam presented a combine paper on challenges and problems faced by journalists outside the capital.

Proceedings of the Workshop
(18th to 19th April 2005)

Proceedings of Two-Day Workshop on Reporting on women issues from conflict affected area

First Day

Sancharika Samuha, with the support of FES Nepal organized a Two-day long residential Workshop on "Reporting on Women Issues From Conflict affected areas" on 18th and 19th April 2005 at Pokhara Kaski. Training was provided to nearly 50 participants representing various print and electronic media in and around conflict affected areas of Pokhara, Baglung, Tahanu, Parbat and Mygdi. The participants of the training consisted of journalists who were involved this sector since long. Though all of them had undergone formal training on journalism but only few of them had some special training in this regard. The Resource Person for the training was Babita Basnet senior journalists and Editor of Ghatana Ra Bichar, along with Mr. Ramkrish Regmi, conflict specialists and senior journalists. Beside them two local level journalists Mr. Hari Narayan Gautam and Deepak Gautam also jointly presented their paper on challenges and problems faced by journalists outside the capital. In the program Country Representative of FES Mr. Dev Raj Dahal was also present. Although various programmes had been organized on gender and media before, but this type of two-day residential programme on gender and conflict reporting was a new of its kind. The program mainly centered on the present situation of the country and how media can play its active and responsible role to cope with it.

Inaugural Session:

The Resource person of the program and general secretary of Sancharika Samuha Babita Basnet welcoming the participants highlighted about the objective and importance of the training at the present conflict situation. In her welcome address she placed before the participants the present scenario of the country and how women are specially affected from it. Though lives of every individual are affected by conflict but it is the women who suffer doubly and hence they are more affected by it. They not only have to bear the pain of loosing their near and near ones but at the same time have to bear the burden of responsibility of running their house hold. The plight of displaced people is more pathetic. In such situation role of media becomes more vital. Whatever news on conflict the present media is disseminating they are more from the outside districts than from Kathmandu. Therefore local journalist have more vital role to play in this regard. She also added that it is high time that local journalist should be more gender sensitive and try to bring more news coverage from women perspective. For this there is need of much discussion in this regard so that this issue gets maximum priority in their work.

Speaking on the Occasion, Country representative of FES Mr. Dev Raj Dahal informed the participants about the area of work where FES is concentrated, background about the organization and its mandate. Giving the definition of conflict and the reason why it happens he said that conflict only affects the weaker session of the society and the country as a whole. He added that during the conflict situation media has a greater role to play. Media in one hand has

the power to pacify the conflict situation and on the other it can also aggravate the situation as a whole. He said that FES has in its mandate has taken the issue of women as the cross cutting theme. He also pointed out that conflict occurs not due to one reason. It has number of reasons in its fold. Similarly for its solution too there exists number of avenues and which needs to be framed

Senior journalist and resource person, Mr. Ram Krishna Regmi delivering his remarks on the occasion said that issues related to women are the social issues and hence if any journalists writes on it then the whole society would be awarded by it. He gave emphasis that newsroom should not leave aside such a critical issue and journalists should at the same time be more sensitive while reporting on them.

Similarly speaking on the occasion, President of Federation of Nepalese Journalist, Kaski branch Mr. Rabindra Bastola said that journalists should also give importance to issues related to displaced people due to conflict. He showed his gratitude towards FES and Sancharika Samuha for raising such issue before the journalists.

The Outgoing President of FNJ Kaski Mr. Punya Poudel who was also present in the ceremony said that district level journalists require this type of training where they could learn the technique of conflict reporting covering every aspect of it.

Likewise Vice president of FNJ Kaski Mr. Badri Binod Pratik said that women have suffered most due to the ongoing conflict situation. Women have become widows at an early age and children have become orphans in so many incidents. Most of the men and the youths fled the villages for fear of forceful recruitment from the Maoists and the fear of the army labeling them as corroborators with the Maoists. This left the women from the villages to take over all the responsibilities of the household as well as to tender to the fields and the livestock and look after the children as well. He also sighted the example of women taking up the work of plowing and putting sheds in their houses climbing the roof top all by themselves, the work which previously were done by men folks and women were not suppose to do.

Working Sessions

Session One:

Paper Presentation "Issues of conflict in media"

The first session of the day started with the introduction of the participants. In the program Journalists of both print as well as electronic media from Pokhara, Baglunj, Myagdi, Parbat and Tanahu took part.

Initiating the Working session, Babita Basnet resource person and the coordinator of Media Monitoring from Sancharika Samuha informed the participants about the aspect that would be covered in the training program. She in her session shared with the participants her findings about the reporting on women issues from conflict areas through her paper entitled "Issues of conflict in media" based on the findings of media monitoring conducted by Sancharika Samuha. (attachment in the annex)

Through her paper she informed the participants that in the media issues related to women from the conflict area are largely published and covered in the media. Similarly news related to rape and sexual harassment on women in this situation also are getting highlighted on large scale through media. She took this as a positive approach as this portrays the true situation of women in these areas.

Beside the above issue the present media are also fast increasing news related to widows of people who died due to confrontation between Maoist and arm personnel. Here also news of widows of arm personnel is getting more highlighted than that of the Maoist. She said that as journalists could access more easily with the police personnel either in the event sight or in other places they could cover their issues more easily and nicely. But the case is totally reverse when it comes to covering news on Maoists side.

In her paper she also mentioned that media are also busy covering news on women who have suffered various forms of mental and physical abuse, rape and other human rights violation by both Maoists and government security forces. Reports of Women been forcibly used by security forces and the Maoists as informants, Rape, torture and killings of family member and its a grave psychological impact on women and the status of refugee women are also covered in the media. It is also seen that more and more women are getting victimized or killed in the ambush kept by Maoist.

From her paper she also informed that most of the features and news / issues related to women of conflict areas comes from outside the capital collected by local journalists. Larger number of news comes are based on field reporting of the incidents that have taken place. It is not at all an easier task for the local journalists to collect information from the actual field condition where the incidence has occurred. On the top of that they should take much precaution while covering news related to women and children who have been victimized. This needs greater amount of sensitivity on their part. It is not only their duty to project the event but at the same time they should be more sensitive towards issues depending upon its nature. They should inform people following the five basic W's of reporting i. e. What, When Why How and How and Where. Journalists should always consider these 5 W's as the fundamental of their professional ethics. She also said that while covering any news on conflict journalists should always take into consideration information on fundamental rules to be followed by the fighting parties, nature of incidence, status of victim and his/her psychological condition. Apart from it authenticity of source providing the information should be also checked and gender sensitivity should be followed as well.

Open Floor:

Immediately after the paper presentation the floor was made open to the participants. During the open floor participants threw some of their queries to the resource person based on her presentation. They also took the platform to share their experience as well.

Denesh Regmi, Reporter Kantipur Daily, Pokhara:

Shared the incidence of a place called Landruk in the region where a prominent women leader was killed and whose reporting was covered by him.

Ghanashaym Khadka, Reporter Beni:

Informed about the problems faced by the single women of the villages affected by conflict the challenges he has to face while reporting on the issue.

During this session reporters hailing from the Maoist affected shared their experiences with the participants. Similarly journalist from Pokhara namely Badri Binod Pratik, Punya Poudel, Rabindra Bastola commented on the paper. During the session live discussion took place on the present conflict situation and the role of media.

Dev Raj Dahal:

Commenting at the end of the session Dev Raj Dahal, Country Representative FES said that journalists could become a part of the conflict or a part of solution depending on the selection and evaluation of information they report. This is the reason media freedom is central to understand the state of the nation. Responsible journalists deal with conflict occurring in everyday life and report the societal feedbacks into the circulation of power and its resistance seeking to nurture normative political order based on dialogue, negotiation, consensus and peace.

He said that what has media learned from the seven years of violent conflict and tragedies and what message do they convey to the Nepalese citizens? Where do journalists stand in the conflict? How can a violent conflict be transformed into a non-violent phase? What are its legitimate mechanisms? How can “balanced reporting” be obtained? How can media provide common grounds for contending actors for agreement? How can all conflicting parties return to a common vision, determination and patience? How media can help achieve democratic peace?

Speaking on the role of reporting, he said that Media could inflame conflict by circulating “negative message,” in society. It can also become a messenger of peace, reconciliation and unity of people. This is the reason professionalism and credibility of journalists is absolutely essential to understand the sinews of media power. Of course, media power works in multiple ways. What is the reference point of journalists in the conflict—human values, public interests, pecuniary instinct, class interest or geopolitical considerations? Where do they fit into the diverse political spectrum and social hierarchies? Obviously, the most important mission of reporting events is to assume public interests into account and renew human sensitivity during conflicts.

He added that the pattern and identity of media ownership are other two important considerations for their conflict sensitivity. Because sectoral perspective of the media tends to absolutize the differences, breeds conflict and does not grasp the wholeness of the issue. In a situation of political uncertainty, what is critically important is how political actors can achieve common good together, not what they oppose.

He also said that In plural societies like Nepal, the watchdog function of media narrows the knowledge gap, helps to capture the diversity of perspectives and gives voice to the voiceless’ people’s desire for social change.

Responsible press tries to bring knowledge to the public, provides a voice for the citizens to be heard and heeded, helps build public consensus to bring desired social transformation and enables the government institutions to perform. In a situation of violent conflict, media’s role lies in debating objectively about the health of the country and people, framing and phrasing

conflicts in a rational manner, offering concrete options rather than just criticism of actors, and furnishing practical initiatives to the conflicting parties to resolve their conflicts of various kinds—structural, manifest, perceptual and latent.

He added that Journalists could contribute to conflict management by providing democratic space for dialogue, mobilizing public opinion on the desirability of non-violent conflict transformation and focusing on the accountability of leaders for their actions. They can also offer the analysis of the causes, options and possible solutions of the conflict.

Session Two:

Paper Presentation " You" report victims of conflict; "They" will re build the Society.

During the Second Working session of the day Senior Journalist and Resource person Mr. Ram Krishna Regmi presented his paper entitled "**You" report victims of conflict; "They" will re build the Society.**

Through his paper Mr. Regmi said that press persons do not build or rebuild society themselves. They rather help others to do the job by reporting properly and appropriately. Their concentration on reporting - telling the true tale of conflict, communication the real plight of people, digging the basic issues, finding a comfortable way out of the clash could be the key to open series of opportunities in the conflict ridden society. Reporters do possess power to transform helpless victims of conflict into dynamics builders of peace. Their productions could ignite the process of crafting an outlet in the dark tunnel of war.

He through his paper said that since the trio reporting i.e. reporting, women issues and conflict has their own specific features; they expect practicing journalists to have full understanding of the same. Reporting is a tool developed by press to inform people as per their right to know; it has to be performed bearing in mind the trust citizens have place on the fourth Estate. Women's issues are human issues. They are the agenda of the society and they deserve un-discriminated and un-biased deal, they can neither be ignored nor looked down upon as second-class citizens concern or less priority theme.

Conflict is a special situation in which violence arrests laws, psychology panic hijacks confidence and enmity is pumped into conventional human or community bond. This ultimately results in the paralysis of what is generally called walks of national life.

He said that reasons leading to conflict in Nepal could be many: the prominent one is the sense of inequality, discrimination, hate and deprivation that sections of population felt for centuries. Restoration of democracy in 1990 could not address this feeling and this further intensified popular frustration. The development woks undertaken in the name of economics uplift raised ambitions without supplying means to satisfy them. This fueled opposition, which took over time the shape of present conflict.

Speaking on the role of reporters he said that reporting by nature is a field job of collecting facts and passing on the same to the public. All rules that reporting has to follow are so tough that they

make reporters jobs highly vulnerable in war. Getting the women's issues such as displacement, security, sexual violence, access to medical care and food, detention, disappearance covered is really challenging.

He added that the basic purpose of reporting the issue is clear and specific, it warns to:

- Raise awareness on specific gender concerns
- Establish the platform for a dialogue.
- Strengthen partnership among major stakeholders.
- Explore on a sustainable manner ways to build peace.
- Prevent or alleviate sufferings.

Problems facing reporters are varied; the following are highly complicated:

- Tracing source of news and verifying the information.
- Which information to trust.
- Knowing the actors of conflict and their specific roles.
- The helpless state of the innocent who get trapped in conflict, difficulty in approaching them their fear in voicing pain.
- Challenge to move around for exploring the reality.
- Negative impact of violence.
- Lack of regard for the Reporting compulsion of press.
- Use of press for psychological war through the practice of hand out information or conduct tour.

Speaking on the conflict management he said that it could be done in a non-transparent manner. It is difficult for press people to get into it easily. But they should make efforts to have access to information. Conflict reporters particularly women's issues reporters should have complete faith in the following concepts:

- Conflict is a special situation for reporting.
- Women suffer most from its impact.
- Women could contribute to solving the conflict and peace building.
- Difference of conflict can be acknowledged and appreciated.
- Conflict, viewed as a solution building opportunity can lead to positive change.
- When the conflicting parties build on one another's strength to find solutions, a climate is created that nurtures individuals self worth and opportunities for fulfillment of each individual's needs.
- Conflict should not allow women's problems to be suppressed.

Therefore he said that media persons should utilize the method of framing in reporting the women' issues and stick to general principals of journalism.

Framing serves the following main purposes:

- To define problem.
- To diagnose causes.
- To make sound judgments on the basis of equality and justice.
- To suggest remedies.

Concluding his presentation he said that to Nepali reporters in conflict zones there should be no women's issue that could be so good as to exaggerate coverage or so bad as to suppress publicity.

The presentation made by the senior journalist Mr. Ram Krishna Regmi was appreciated and approved by all the participants. After the brief queries on the paper the session for the day was ended.

Second Day

Session one: Paper Presentation

The second and the concluding day of the workshop initiated with the presentation of paper jointly prepared by two journalists from Baglung namely Mr. Hari Narayan Gautam and Mr. Deepak Gautam. The paper was mainly based on the types of problems that local level journalists are facing in the present conflict situation. It also covered the aspect of status of conflict, challenges of reporting on women issues from conflict areas and the struggle taken up by the journalist to cope with the situation. (Paper Attachment: Annex)

In their paper Harinarayan and Deepak Gautam highlighted about the impact of conflict on women. Therefore reporting on such an issues is a real challenge to the journalists working in field they said. Through their paper they also tried to portray the hardship both social and economic that journalists have to face to carry on their profession with utmost sincerity. Amidst such hardship to take up the challenge of covering such sensitive issues related to women is really a tough job. They at the same time also portray the difficulty faced by journalist in collecting news on it.

Concluding their paper they suggested that media should play an active role in helping in establishing sustainable peace in the country. For this full freedom of press is the essential things and which must be granted at any cost.

Comment:

Commenting on the paper written by Gautams Journalist Ms. Durga Bhandari said that authors truly depicted the problems faced by reporter in collecting news related to women from the conflict situation. Interviewing a woman victim and collecting information of the event needs lots of sensitivity on the part of the reporter. It is seen that whatever news are coming on women issues from the conflict affected areas, women journalist mostly collects them from the actual field situation. Therefore they are lesser in number compared to other news from the conflict areas.

Open floor:

During the open floor of the session participants raised the need of fellowship required for acquiring training on conflict reporting. Similarly they also suggested the need of dress code for the reporters' reporting from the conflict areas.

Session Two: Experience Sharing

The second session of the day was exclusively kept for sharing the experiences of the participating journalists who have been engaged on reporting from the field on events related to conflict. From the discussion the following information were derived:

- Due to conflict large number of innocent people are been killed and at the same time reporters are face difficulty in collecting authentic information about those incidences.
- Great number of problems arised when journalist go to the field to collect news on issues related to women victims in conflict areas specially about the incidence of sexual assaults.

- The people from the conflict areas due to fear of the arm personnel as well as the Maoists do not come forward to give genuine information about the incidence to the reporters.
- Physiological torture faced by the journalists on reporting news from the conflict areas.
- Problems faced by the journalist to send news at the national level media about the happening in the field due to not function of telephone / fax and other communication facilities.
- Due to the suspicious environment created out of conflict people do not give true information.
- Due to economic, geographic and communication problem reporters are finding it difficult to collect news from the conflict affected areas.
- Displaced people due to physiological trauma hesitate to provide information to the reporters.
- Security problem for the journalists.
- Due to fear of social stigma women hardly come out and tell their suffering specially about the sexual to the reporters and due to it very less number of news on such cases.
- Victims due to fear hesitate to name the pain inflictor.
- Women are threatened with invasive security checks during travel and random household searches by the Maoists and security forces.
- Lesser number of conflicts reporting training to the journalists.

From the session single voice from the participants came out on the requirement of conflict reporting training. They requested FES and Sancharika Samuha to organize such trainings in near future specially targeting the local level journalist who actually go to the field to collect information. This would not only enhance their capacity but also would also help them to become more sensitive towards the issue while covering them.

Session Three: Group Discussion:

Group Discussion was the last session of the day where participants were broadly divided into three groups. During this session the groups were give three different topic to work on:

Group One: Situation of displaced people in conflict areas

Here the participants were suppose to discuss on:

- Situation/ condition of displaced people
- Status of women.
- Role of media

Participants came up with the following suggestions while discussing the topic:

Situation/ condition of displaced people

- ❖ Lack of houses for living.
- ❖ Problem of fooding.
- ❖ Lack of employment opportunity.
- ❖ Problem of Social amalgamation.
- ❖ Economic problem.
- ❖ Problem of carrying on traditional norms.
- ❖ Mental Pressure

- ❖ Problem of water and Sanitation.
- ❖ Problem of education / Schooling.
- ❖ Increase in criminalization.
- ❖ Increase migration to foreign land in search of work.
- ❖ Used by the vested parties.

Status of women:

- ❖ Additional workload.
- ❖ Sexual harassment.
- ❖ Forceful involvement in sex trade.
- ❖ Work exploitation.
- ❖ Increase pressure due to additional household responsibility.
- ❖ Problem of educating girl child.
- ❖ Insecurity.

Role of media

- ❖ Field reporting giving information on their status.
- ❖ Identification of actual problem.
- ❖ Increase publication of features/articles focusing on solving the problem.
- ❖ Creating network of the local journalists and bringing the voice of the displaced people in a stronger manner.

Group Two: Additional workload befallen on women due to conflict

Here the participants were suppose to discuss on:

- Empowerment opportunity
- Exploitation and sufferings.
- Role of Media personnel

Participants came up with the following suggestions while discussing the topic:

Empowerment opportunity:

- ❖ Enhancement of decision-making capacity.
- ❖ Leadership Opportunity
- ❖ Enhancement of self-confidence.
- ❖ Economic empowerment.

Additional Workload:

- ❖ Additional workload of agriculture / farming.
- ❖ Increase responsibility in social work.
- ❖ Increase responsibility on rearing their children in absence of their male counterpart.
- ❖ Living in fear.
- ❖ Increase of traditional social responsibility.
- ❖ Actively involved for livelihood.
- ❖ Complete responsibility of children.

Exploitation and sufferings:

- ❖ Exploitation of labour as they are deprived from getting right remuneration for their work.
- ❖ Physically and mentally tortured.
- ❖ Pessimism.
- ❖ Lack of assistance in solving their problem.
- ❖ Hamper in children's education.

Role of Media personnel:

- ❖ Publication and distribution of materials that would be helpful to women victims.
- ❖ Encouragement to the widows.
- ❖ Helping in managing problems related to women in conflict areas.
- ❖ Discouragement of social division.
- ❖ Encouraging women leadership through their writing and publications.

Group Three: Requirement of physiological trauma center for counseling in conflict areas

Here the participants were suppose to discuss covering the following:

- Victims and psychological trauma.
- Impact of trauma on women
- Role of media.

Participants came up with the following suggestions while discussing the topic for news collection:

Victims and psychological trauma:

- ❖ Do not want to talk freely.
- ❖ Social impact.
- ❖ Displacement.
- ❖ Impact on the life of rural and urban areas.

Impact of trauma on women

- ❖ Fail to express their pain.
- ❖ Mental pain.
- ❖ Physical weakness

Role of media:

- ❖ Finding the cause of conflict.
- ❖ Acting as a bridge between the two confronting parties.
- ❖ Creation of peace talk friendly environment.
- ❖ Increase reporting of news that will enhance confidence among the people.

Conclusion

In her concluding remarks at the end of the workshop Resource person Babita Basnet asked the participants to put forward the type 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:

1. Need of gender training to the reporters/ journalists.
2. Lack of knowledge on the issue.
3. Putting an end to Human Right abusement both by government and rebels.
4. Need of Press Freedom