

## ENSURE EQUAL RIGHTS TO WOMEN: EXPERTS

- By Staff Reporter

Lalitpur, July 14: Human rights activists, politicians, women activists and lawyers today emphasised the need make an end to all forms of discrimination against women and ensure their equal rights, including the rights to parental property.

They expressed the views at the report release programme of a pilot research on "Equal Rights to Parental Property—Focus on Public Perception of the Will System and Implications of Cross-Border Marriages in Madhes (Terai area)."

Releasing the report jointly, Prof. Kapil Shrestha and Ms. Indira Rana, members of Human Rights Commission, said that despite the constitutional provisions and Nepal being a country to ratify the 18 human rights related international conventions, Nepalese women are still the victims of discriminations.

The pilot research, which was carried out in and published by Sancharika Samuha (SAS) with the support of SVN/Nepal, was based on focus group discussions.

A total of 82 persons from various walks of life of Kathmandu were selected for the focus group discussion on the issue of Will System. Similarly, 100 families from each of Ward No. 6 and 7 of Jayespur Village Development Committee (VDC) and Ward No. 17 of Nepalgunj Municipality were selected through random sampling and administered with the Standardised Scheduled Household Interview on Cross-Border Marriages in Madesh.

The research suggests that the Will System is not suitable at present in the context of Nepal. It also shows that the equal property right to women will not create anomalies even in the Terai, where the practice of dowry is rampant. The study shows that of the total marriages in the Terai only 25 per cent are cross border ones.

Prof. Shrestha said that the paradoxical situation is that we are talking of democracy and human rights but we have not given equal rights to women.

He also urged the lawmakers to be serious about passing the National Civil Code (11th amendment), which is related to the Parental Property of women.

Ms. Rana complained that the lack of political commitment and proper implementation of the laws have deprived women of their rights.

She expressed her disagreement that the starting to give parental property to women could bring about adverse changes in the social structure of the Nepalese society.

Addressing the programme, Daman Nath Dhungana, former Speaker of the House of Representatives and senior lawyer, said that the equality between men and women has been a global standard.

"But what I have been unable to understand is that the movement of equality of Nepalese women has been limited to the issue of sharing property only," Dhungana further said.

He also stressed on the necessity of rational policies to ensure equal rights of women.

On the occasion, Prem Bahadur Singh, lawmaker, said that various studies have shown that the public opinion is in favour of providing property rights to women.

Singh also informed that a study recently conducted by the Human Rights Committee of the Parliament

indicated that 98 per cent of the respondents were in favour of ensuring equal property rights to women.

Jan de Witte, Director of SNV/Nepal, said that the patriarchal social structure has affected women's overall development in Nepal, where the maternal mortality rate is the highest in the world.

Witte believed that the passing of the Bill related to the equal property rights to women would be helpful in raising the standard of Nepalese women.

Speaking at the function, Pratap Pathak, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, expressed the view that the Beijing Declaration has to be implemented effectively for the empowerment of women.

Pathak further pointed out the need to make proper amendments in the existing laws and implement them properly.

Speaking from the chair, Bandana Rana, Executive President SAS, said that the equal property rights to women could alone pave the way for gender equality.

On the occasion, Dr. Krishna Bhattachan, Research Consultant, spoke about the method and findings of the research.

Gyanu Pandey, Vice President of SAS, delivered the welcome speech, whereas Maya Giri, SAS Treasurer, conducted the programme.