A Brief Report on

Lessons Learned from 'VOICE: Voicing for Equality and Justice for Women Karnali' Project

Documented by
KIRDARC

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Introduction

Background

This report documents lessons learned from the second phase of **"VOICE: Voicing for Equality and Justice for Women Karnali"** project that KIRDARC Nepal in technical support of WWS and Mission East implemented in 6 VDCs of two districts (Mugu and Humla), currently in 3 Rural Municipalities and 1 Municipalities of Karnali zone. The project was financially supported by Civil Society in Development (CISU).

Despite abundant opportunities, Karnali region is characterized by the high levels of social, political and economic disparity and discrimination, primarily on the basis of caste/ethnicity, gender, and ability. Women and so-called lower caste people (mainly Dalits) from the region are subjected to multiple marginalization. Marginalized and discriminated against, they have lower access to education, livelihood opportunities and access to health facilities, thus further increasing their vulnerability. In most communities discriminatory practices are widespread, leading to cultural practices like child marriage, domestic violence, and exploitation. These practices often contribute to causing malnutrition and higher infant mortality rates among girls/women. In rural areas, most girls don't have access to any education further than the third grade in primary level. The lack of education implies that women also feel more insecure and are unable to participate in decision making, as their negative self-image emanated from perceived "less" knowledge and education than that of their male counterparts prevents them to do.

Prolonged discrimination and marginalization of women in the region is a result of widely accepted social norms that 'women are subjected to be treated like property disposed at the service of men'. Moreover, a culture of silence among women and indifferent mindsets of male in the society have resulted in non-intervention from outsiders as VAW, particularly domestic violence against women and girls is largely considered as family matter. In such a situation, it is not surprising that despite a growing awareness of their rights still a significant number of women are yet unable to participate in decision making that determines their destiny. Despite growing attention paid by both the government and civil society organizations women, especially from Dalit community are still treated as mere recipient end of the development service delivery.

In order to enhance inclusive participation the VOICE project aimed at empowering women (Dalit, single, person with differently able, socially excluded and ultra-poor) to fight against gender based violence and advocate for their development rights towards local state structures and have increased social participation through training and allocation to resources.

The overall development objective of VOICE project is to empower women and civil society organizations for better inclusion and development in the Karnali Zone, Nepal. This is aimed to have achieved by creating a conducive and inclusive environment for women and girls in the Karnali region to be able to participate in, contribute to and benefit from development efforts at local level.

To contribute towards the overall objective of the project some objectives have been set that are related to three different project results as follows:

1. Women & Girls have adequate knowledge, skills and capacity to fight discrimination and violence and their family and wider society have positive attitude, perceptions and behavior towards them.

2. Civil Society has better capacity and stronger networks to complement government efforts, work as watch-dogs, influence local policy decision (resource allocations, programming, etc.) in favor of right holders, forward accountability

3. Local Government structures (VDCs and DDCs) are more inclusive, and accountable

The project is focused on one of the most marginalized and poor areas (6 VDCs) of Nepal to benefit women (Dalit, Single and Women with Disability) and most vulnerable, but to reach them effectively, the project has worked with other groups, especially government service providers, civil society organizations. The project developed capacity of local individual women, women's groups and CBOs by creating 18 Women Groups, 18 Adolescent Girls Group, and 8 networks of those groups in these VDCs.The detail of the direct and indirect beneficiaries groups include:

Direct beneficiaries Groups (means)	Indirect groups/Impact Groups
70 Social leaders/ Teachers : *(5 social leaders+5 teachers) per VDC and 5 in district* - Family Members (especially male partners) 30 Political leaders: *approx. 5 leaders per VDC* 40 Police Office staffs: *20 in VDCs and 20 in districts* 90 VDC body members: *15 persons per VDC* *60* Local CBOs/local groups: *10 groups per VDC* *54* FCHVs: *9 FCHV per VDC* *10* Civil Society Organizations: *5 CSOs per district*	4000 women and 54 women groups (paralegal committee), among which: 1,000 Adolescent girls 3000 women including (100 Single women, 2,000 *Dalit* women, 250 women with disabilities) - And 1,000 children (indirect)

Objectives of the Learning Documentation:

The learning documented hence is expected to be disseminated to wider groups, networks, community people, stakeholders, government agencies and other actors working for women empowerment. Further it is expected to inform the next phase of the VOICE project and other similar projects as well.

Specific objectives of the Lessons Learning Documentation included:

- Collect the lessons learnedfrom phase second of VOICE project and document.
- Disseminate and share the project learning among wider groups, networks, stakeholders, government line agencies, and other people working on women empowerment issue.

- Use the learning while planning for the next phase of the project.

Approach and Methodologies of Lessons learning Documentation

The image (in the right) briefly captures the key steps followed to document the lessons learnt from the VOICE project. Here are some of the key steps the team undergo to capture the lessons:

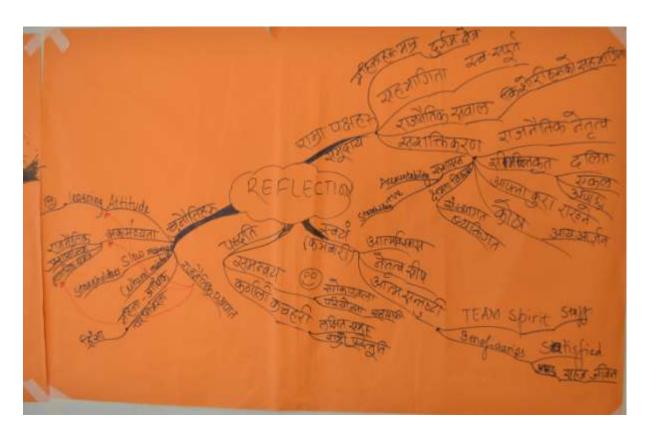*1. Defining the scope of lessons learning documentation*

In this step the need for lessons learned was identified and the scope of the exercise was elaborated in the terms of reference. Establishing the specific need and purpose for lessons, the audience for the product, and which individuals should comprise the project team was finalized after consultation between key project staff and the project implementation partners, taking the planned activity in the project document into consideration. MEAL Coordinator was primarily responsible to draft the ToR, define the scope of the exercise in consultation with partners and project team. A consultant was then hired to help VOICE team in documenting the lessons. The team then agreed to a product format (length, style, and presentation), data collection and analysis methodologies (e.g., literature review, reflection workshops and core team reviewing the workshop outputs) and process, dissemination strategy, and other activities that will be needed.

2. Reflection on project journey and results and document lessons
The reflection on VOICE project was a second one in the continuum after review of the literatures, including project documents and other periodic reports. A workshop was facilitated in Surkhet participated by the entire project staff from the project area. A full-day workshop was devoted in self-assessing the project from different perspectives. The reflection process aimed at capturing information through structured and unstructured processes focusing both upon positive experiences that achieve organization goals, and on negative experiences that result in undesirable outcomes. The reflection workshop was mainly guided by the following key questions:

- What were the key areas of your involvement in VOICE project?
- What are the key areas of interventions?
- What were the approaches/strategies and activities?
- Which of the strategies and activities you think have been effective/less effective?

- What were the high/low points/excitements /frustrations to you while working for the project?
- What went well? What didn't go well?
- What were the unintended consequences –both the positive and negative?
- What is your impression about the:
    - Project designing
    - Project implementation including linkages, coordination and communication?
    - Consortium approaches
    - MEAL
    - Human resource management
- If you had it all to do over again, what would you do differently?
- What recommendations would you make to others doing similar projects?

Following the plenary reflection on these questions, focused group work was facilitated to help project team to locate challenges and issues for lessons learnt and jot down key elements around these issues. The exercise was guided by the following template:

Aspects	Issues	Success/Problems	Effects	Recommendations
Project Designing	Need analysis			
	Risk Analysis			
Financial Mgt.				
Project Implementation	Coordination/Linkage Consortium mgt.			
HRM				

3. Review for applicability

Following the reflection workshop the ideas were organized and the key areas of lessons were identified. Additional information was gathered from the project documents to substantiate key learning identified from the reflection workshop. Next, the project team members available in Kathmandu office (KIRDARC) were invited for a half-day workshop to review the relevance and applicability of the lessons. The workshop helped to triangulate, clarify and fine-tune the angling of the lessons learnt from the futuristic planning perspective.

4. Lessons learned repository

The storage aspect of lessons learned usually involves incorporating lessons into an electronic database for future sharing and dissemination. KIRDARC and its project implementing partners will store the lessons leaning document in a manner that allows users to identify search lessons by keyword.

5. Dissemination and sharing

Since lessons learned are meant to inform the future decision making –both internal and external to the project partners, KIRDARC will disseminate the document through various communication media, including its regular publication, an annex to the final project evaluation report, electronic newsletter and so on.

Structure of the Report

This report is structured as follows:

- Second chapter highlights overall staff impression on the project as captured during the project reflection workshop in Surkhet, where they were encouraged not only to share their personal impressions but also to highlight what they found community stakeholders and project beneficiaries were sharing with them. This chapter while highlighting both the positive aspect as well as the areas for improvement for the project from staff and community standpoint, serves as a basis for drawing upon lessons presented in the following chapter.

- Third chapter presents key lessons learned from the project with their implications to the four main phases of project cycle management – need analysis, project designing, execution, and Monitoring, evaluation and learning documentations.

- Fourth chapter presents conclusions,with some recommendations blended in, from external perspective, that in some cases echo the perspective of the staff members while, in some cases bring new lens to see the same picture.

- Fifth chapter presents some case studies, success stories, good practices and innovations that are the source of key lessons learned and documented in this report. These cases gives down-to-earth picture of the project partners, which they can replicate, scale-up and take into consideration while planning for the next phase of VOICE project.

Reflection on VOICE Project

Positive Aspects of VOICE Project

A significant level of improvement in the ladder of participation of those marginalized groups of people has been observed. Since the beginning of the first phase of the project a constant intervention was made to increase the participation of the right-holders. As a result, the group of marginalized people, who used to either belong to 'passive participation' or 'tokenism' level at the beginning of the project has now, to some extent, got to the 'self-mobilized level of participation'. There are several examples demonstrating that women as a group of organized citizens analyses their marginalization and the legal frameworks; set priorities, identify issues for advocacy and hold concerned duty-bearers accountable. Improved governance in the project area has been applauded by the stakeholders.

Politics had, until very recently, been seized by some local elites, particularly men from so-called high caste groups. As a result, young women were found not interested and not participating in issues/events of political significance - involvement in the distribution of valuable resources and power. However, after the project having them empowered the adolescent girls are increasingly participating in dialogues and other activities that shapes the political agenda in the project area. Their engagement in the dialogues have resulted prioritization of marginalized people's issue in local development agenda and some resource allocation as well.

Those empowered from the project intervention includes Dalits (so-called untouchable social caste group), single women, who suffer social taboos, and differently able groups. As a consequence of empowerment initiative the leadership skills of women has demonstrably enhanced. They are claiming not only ESC rights, but also civil and political rights including space for political participation in the changed political structure of local governance. Most of the women are now able to put up their points in public gathering, which was merely a dream until few years back.

Investment in both the individual as well as institutional capacity building has been found a successful strategy, which could be replicated and scaled up. While individually they were enabled, through investment in institutional capacity development, they got a platform to constantly use their enhanced skills and prove themselves. In addition, institutions made them more confident and it was easy to establish the linkages to various other institutional set-up in their catchments area.

While women groups are able to ensure that equitable resource allocation is made by the local government and other government institutions, they have invested the fund in income generation activities that aims to help women break vicious cycle of poverty on their own.

From the standpoint of the project team, they are happy with the opportunity that the project provided to them in developing their confidence in project cycle management even in the seemingly difficult geographical terrain. They are happy with their enhanced leadership ability. Moreover, they were proud of the team spirit they enjoyed while working, which they believed to have been one of the key factors for the project success. Their happiness has one more reason that many differently able groups are enjoying easy life as a result of the project they were part of. This sense of achievement among the staff members is worth appreciating.

While the staff members happily claim that all of the project beneficiaries are women from remote and long-time neglected area they are calling for increasing male participation in the project, which seems to be contradictory in the first place. However, it is a result of growing understanding that 'meaningful engagement of male members of the society is also equally important for women empowerment, particularly in a context where social taboos and various social norms are to be dealt with'.

Challenges

Key challenges as experienced by the project team were mainly related to the factors external to the project implementing partners. Here are the key challenges identified during the reflection workshop:

Despite good coordination with stakeholders and project partners, learning attitude of the local stakeholder was not satisfactory, as it resulted in their slow response that was not expected. Indifferent mindset of those stakeholders, mainly the political actors in the region, administrators and some civil society organizations in addressing the issue of marginalized groups in general and Dalits, differently-able groups and women has somehow halted the pace of changes. In addition to that, socio-cultural taboos was clearly reflected in heavy economic reliance of women and political discrimination with wider acceptance.

Project Designing

The project designing is claimed to have taken lessons from phase one well into consideration. While formulating the project previous project reports were reviewed and project staff were consulted and their ideas incorporated. Moreover, participation of right-holders was ensured by holding discussions, interaction and meeting sessions with them. Case study of the prominent issues were developed and video clips from the stakeholders, including the right-holders were thoroughly reviewed to know what they want to be included in project planning.

KAP Survey was conducted to assess the current status of prospective beneficiaries on the issues that project was going to address. The project team considered the project success lies in its approach and strategies to identify the pressing needs of the beneficiaries.

Enough effort in making the need analysis close to reality, as considered by the entire project team, has paid well off to deliver results better. As the real need of the community has been identified and the efforts have been made to overcome the challenges, a series of positive results have been proudly achieved:

- Increased political participation of women is evident in their broadened understanding and raising local issues/concerns in public program and claiming for their rightful entitlements. It demonstrates that their leadership has significantly developed for advocating for their change.
- Increased leadership capability of those women enabled them in bringing local problems as discussion agenda and try to address those problem.

- Increased saving and credit mobilization among marginalized women have noticeable contribution to the income generation. Furthermore, they are capable of local resource mobilization and better program implementation.

However, the staff members perceived that the areas for improvement included:

- Though the number of cases claiming for their rights has been significantly increased (through submission of application/complaints by those women groups) justice is either delayed or denied. It is due to indifferent mindsets of those concerned stakeholders and lack of full cooperation from political parties and local stakeholders.

- In addition to that, no full cooperation from family and community to the victim survivors has been in place so far, thus hindering the access to justice.

Based on the lessons learned from this phase of VOICE project the staff members recommend that in the next phase of the project it should be considered:

- Blending empowerment and income generation programme together

  Despite the empowered women were helped to get their linkages developed with various line agencies for them to be able to successfully mobilize local resources, the project had less focus on their ESC rights. Further, there was no specific and direct financial investment from the project to help them fight poverty- a chronic social phenomenon. As the resource mobilized at the local level was not enough to the extent that would help address poverty at the broader and significant level, there was an expectation of the project beneficiaries that additional support from the project, especially in income generating programme, would be better. Moreover, due to less emphasis laid by the project, the project team was not monitoring enough to see the use of financial resources mobilized by the group from results-chain perspective.

- Include family members also as program beneficiaries to ensure their full-fledged cooperation, without which the success of the women group members is very unlikely to last

  Despite the engagement of men was expected in the second phase of the VOICE project, core focus was still the Women Groups and their empowerment. They were thus able to lead group meeting, prepare action plan, lead campaigns and mobilize local resources to some extent. The campaign led by women groups was expected to sensitize men in the society and thus get their supports. As line of thought between men in the community and women group members were found different, it was somehow difficult to get strong support from male members of the community. Hence, there is a felt need of having a bridging mechanism in place that could simply be a capacity development programme targeting directly to men so that a direct interface between men and women could be generated. Having a kind of mechanisms and some direct program targeting men. Apart from this project team needs to monitor and bring an issue into the scope of periodic review to discuss the extent to which women group members of the project have had any interface with other group in the community that includes male members as well.

- Engage all key stakeholders and political parties in the program so as to get their needful support at various stages of project cycle implementation and moreover, to increase the likelihood of them extending their cooperation and support to the WDAG members in the community.

  In fact, availability of the key stakeholders, particularly the local government staff, and accessibility of women groups to them was a problem. VDC Secretary used to be rarely available in the project area and as a result, key activities (despite to have those mutually agreed before), such as meeting, joint monitoring, planning, resource allocation were halted. However, after recent successful local level election, it is more likely that local government officials will be available and more accountable to work with.

- Capacity building of local government and their engagement in joint action planning.

  Investment in capacity building of those stakeholders, especially at this juncture where most of the newly elected local government officials are not fully aware of their roles and are not skilled enough, will play a crucial role - firstly, to ensure that duty bearers have enhanced readiness to fulfill their duty in a responsive and inclusive way, secondly, to link those stakeholders with project beneficiaries groups that will continue looking for collaboration and coordination with local government and other stakeholders to ensure that their rights are fulfilled.

- Categorization and capacity building plan of the groups - include from the start of the project.

  Though capacity building plan has paid off well resulting in the improved institutional capacity of women groups in identifying their issues, prioritizing, advocating and local resource mobilization for advancing their cause, it is to be consider well from the start - as it provides project team an ample time to invest in preparing and mentoring well-laid out exit plan. Moreover, it will be an opportunity to design and execute tailor-made capacity building plan taking specific requirement of each community-based groups rather than treating all the same.

Financial Management

Though the budget was allocated well and it was enough to execute all of the planned activities without compromising quality of the stipulated outputs the project aimed at delivering in particular time-frame, and there was no complaint from the project staff on their salary issues, there were some problems with regard to the fund release. As, in few cases, the fund was not received on time it delayed the implementation of planned activities and particularly in the areas where weather conditions are to be highly consider while planning for any activities, rescheduling the activities and making sure that all other stakeholders, whose presence is important for the activity, gives the project staff very short span of time and they will find the activities overwhelmed.

However, as the daily subsistence allowance was not available for staff and their care takers (especially to those physical challenges and child bearing mothers) they were not found enthusiastic in participating any program. Their participation was not good as those people who were expected to attend the program, living in the distant village, were unable to do so, and their knowledge, skills and practice was not developed upto the mark. Hence, it is required to make sure that:

- Fund is released on the basis of monthly action plan.
- There is a provision of traveling allowance for those participants, especially the physically challenged one
- Program is organize in a location to ensure that villagers don't have to travel long
- Food and traveling cost is made available to care givers

Project Implementation

While most of the activities were accomplished on time an adaptive approach was linked to timely monitoring that helped adding necessary activities, rescheduling and re-budgeting to make the project a success the collaboration and cooperation with GOs and NGOs helped a lot. Though staff turn-over added

difficulties in implementing the project as changing activities was time consuming and delayed fund release made it difficult to implement the project the team aligned some of the project activities to similar activities planned by other NGOs, which helped achieve efficiency and 'value for money'. There are some notable examples of such endeavor. While the disaster risk reduction (DRR) related issues were linked with other projects that KIRDARC has been implementing in the region, GBV related cases were coordinated well with 'Group of Helping Hands'. Similarly, the project has supported Women Development Departments to strengthen the task forces formed at the local level.

Coordination, as claimed by the project team, was excellent in bringing stakeholders and project partners together. Moreover, Karnali Kachahari, a unique modality, an adapted version of traditional format of public discourse, helped people to use endemic practice to hold the government stakeholders to account.

Despite this, the team felt that it did not experience full-fledged cooperation from some groups in the project area. The team considers two main responsible factors:

- Serious capacity deficit (poor understanding of their own roles and necessary skills) among those available local government staff members in the project area was a consequence of not having minimum educational qualification among many of them.
- Apart from insufficient human resources (VDC Secretary) in place, frequent transfer of those staff made it difficult for the project staff and Women Group members to coordinate and collaborate with the local government institutions.

The group felt that this painful experience has a serious implication. Apart from making assumptions, such risks factors are to be accommodated in the Risk Management Plan, which further needs to be brought into the scope of monitoring and evaluation plan. Moreover, in the changed context, capacity deficit of those newly elected local government officials will be a key concern, for it presents both the opportunities for collaboration and partnership as well as poses a challenges working with leaders having power without knowing what it is and how to use it wisely.

Challenges experienced by the project team are something that should have well dealt with in the Risk Management Plan. These challenges included:

Learning attitude of the district level stakeholders did not meet the expectation of the project team. The project team feels that mindsets of political, administrative and even civil society actors was indifferent and insensitive to the issues of marginalized women, which should have properly taken into consideration while formulating the project. As a result of such mindset, the stakeholders were responding to the needs of those marginalized group slow. Cultural resistance was considered one such factors that people holds back in their mindsets and their behaviors, in a subtle way, rather contributes to the reproduction of inequality and injustice where women are deprived of very basic human rights and see multiple marginalization. Partisan political influence also was found one such factors hindering social justice to those marginalized women. It is hence, found to have accomplished PESTELI analysis and prepared a comprehensive Risk Management Plan and bringing it to the scope of project monitoring.

Staff members, if given the opportunity to design and implement the similar project again, they would like to:

- Increase the project coverage to make sure that those not benefited from the project will come to the project scope. Moreover, include family members of those marginalized women in the program so as to ensure their support to those women.

- To reduce frustration among those women, who attempt to break the silence and wish to fight for justice against SGBV that has even lead to suicidal cases, it is imperative that political parties are also provided with legal education so that they don't try to influence the justice process. Moreover, it is a must to provide legal aid to those marginalized groups that would not only support them with technical skills they lack, it will serve as an emotional support to them.

- Strengthening District Women Network for advocacy and resource mobilization requires more attention. In addition, their engagement in facilitating 'access to justice' process would be vital from those survivor's point of view.

- Provide more exposure to the successful cases of Income Generating schemes to encourage and help women groups learn better.

- Continue facilitating Group Development Planning process from the start of the project to ensure its linkage with the local government plan and get it matured during execution phase.

- Develop capacity of local governments in the project area to make them fully understand the scope of their duties from accountability perspective so that it would be easy for CBOs (such as women groups) to collaborate and coordinate without external support.

- Media mobilization be considered from the start of the project.

- Assessment of the group from the start, that would serve as a baseline and could be considered as a reference in tracking success of group maturity through periodic assessment. It will further help design tailor-made capacity development plan of those groups.

Lessons Learned

This chapter briefly highlights the lessons learned with its implications to the different phases of project cycle management. The graphics below summarizes those lessons from futuristic perspective and these points are briefly elaborated further:

Keep up the good practice of engaging local stakeholders and beneficiaries in need analysis to ensure the relevance

Make space for and encourage staff for 'adaptive learning' approach of project management and acknowledge innovation

Inculcate 'Learning Lens' among the project staff to ensure that cases are collected and documented well from the start

Need analysis

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Documentation

Project Designing

Plan to establish project linkage with legal service and economic empowerment of women survivor of violence

Make sure that project monitoring bring the detailed-out Risk Management Plan within its scope and make necessary adjustment

Execution

Empower local government and other institutions to be responsive and accountable towards the rights of marginalized groups

Encourage and provide technical assistance to Women Groups to have more interface with other CBOs and male members of society

Mobilize media from the start of the project to have broader and spillover effect on campaign against VAW

- Perpetual lessons from the projects and meaningful engagement of the key stakeholders, including the right holders the proposed project aims to work with during the need analysis carried out in a systematic way is important for the project to be relevant. It not only helps identify pressing needs of the right-holders but also inculcate a sense of ownership of the project, a fundamental criteria for their participation during the project implementation and hence sustainability of project results. Thus, it is advised that the good practice of engaging stakeholders and beneficiaries (right-holders) in need analysis be continued.
- No matter how well the project designing has been, there are various external factors and the changes in the environment that makes some of the activities obsolete over the period of time. 'Adaptive learning and management' approach thus needs to be recognized as important factor of project success and the staff needs to be oriented on the concept and approach so that they are

encouraged to accommodate the approach while implementing the project as appropriate. Orienting them with the concept not only send a subtle message to the project team and hence encourage them to apply it rather it gives them with some tools and case studies from similar other context that gives them with more confidence.

- Despite legal frameworks in place to provide legal and subsistence support for violence survivor women, the implementation is far behind and almost non-existent due to various reasons. There is a clear risk that the failure of survivor women denied for justice will not only deteriorate their life further rather it may discourage others in the community to seek justice through formal justice mechanism. Breaking the silence is a first and important step, but there are several other procedural aspects where women survivor needs support – psychosocial, legal and economic. So, the project needs to consider establishing linkage with legal support and economic empowerment support, provided by other projects or other institutions, to violence survivor women.

- Capacity building of local government is vital. Investment in capacity building of those stakeholders, especially at this juncture where most of the newly elected local government officials are not fully aware of their roles and are not skilled enough, will play a crucial role - firstly, to ensure that duty bearers have enhanced readiness to fulfill their duty in a responsive and inclusive way, secondly, to link those stakeholders with project beneficiaries groups that will continue looking for collaboration and coordination with local government and other stakeholders to ensure that their rights are fulfilled.

- Wider stakeholder support could be best garnered once they are fully sensitized and there is an environment of mutual understanding among the key social actors. A massive and aggressive media campaign on some pertinent social issues/problems from the very start of the project helps create such environment and sensitize the social actors that increases the likelihood of them extending their supportive actions towards the initiative of those marginalized groups.

- Cooperation of male members – from their own family and community – is a fundamental requirement for WDAG to succeed. Apart from investing in their systematic capacity building effort, it is imperative that the project encourage and support them to increase more interface with male members of the society through their proactive engagement and participation in various social forums and institutions.

- Preparation of Risk Management Plan should not be considered a ritual function. A detailed out risk management plan, supplemented with risk log, needs to be linked with the M&E Plan of the project so as to ensure that risk tracking and analysis could be brought into the scope of regular monitoring. It helps the project team to make more informed decision and make the implementation of 'adaptive learning and management approach' a reality.

- Learning lessons from various stages of the project cycle management is a key to scale up and replicate the successful model as well as improve the project as needed. However, a systematic effort from the very start of the project is required to well capture the lessons and document in right format. This is possible only when the staff members are well equipped with that 'lens'and are taught on how to use the 'lens' effectively. There are several cases, stories documented by the project team. However the 'lessons learning' perspective is painfully missing and it was very difficult, at the end of the project, to see all those cases to be scrutinized from that perspective. Hence, it is required that staff members are equipped with that 'learning lens' from the beginning and make sure that periodic review and reflection is organized to give them the space/opportunity to fine-tune their skills and lessons are well documented.

Conclusions

- The project has been a success in empowering women groups (WDAG), a launching pad, for the project to create a multiplier effects from the rights-based perspective, hereby holding local government and key stakeholders to account. From HRBA perspective, both the supply and demand side of governance were sensitized and empowered to ensure inclusive, accountable and responsive governance outcome that has been denied for long. Project team has, with sufficient evidence, observed a significant level of improvement in the ladder of participation of those marginalized groups of people. Increased political participation of marginalized community, in identifying causes of their long time suffering, setting priority, making action plan and putting demands for action to ensure their rightful entitlements is clearly visible to the stakeholders and the project team. Hence, literacy class and Kachahari, an endemic form of public discourse, are found to have played a significant role to empower those marginalized communities. So, its continuity is likely to institutionalize some good practices and to replicate the successful cases in similar context.

- Capacity building of women groups seems to have contributed well in making the change a reality.Even from sustainability perspective, institutional development is perceived important areas to invest. However, progressive approach needs to be employed to assess the status of those groups, make tailor-made institutional capacity development plan and engage those group members in self-evaluation of their progress towards the agreed-upon destination.

- Capacity development of local government officials (elected representatives as well as administrative staff) could pay-off well in the changed political context, where most of the officials are neither fully aware on the scope of their roles and duties nor are skilled in doing their job well. It could be a good entry point for the project team to establish rapport with them as well as to help project graduated WDAGs in establishing linkages, which would further ease collaborative actions in the future.

- A mechanism for WDAGs and other groups to learn from each other would be nice to systematically develop a institutional development model where a relatively matured group helps other new groups develop by learning from their prior experience of going through the similar phases of turbulence and their successful strategies in overcoming those troubles.

- In order to increase the likelihood of women survivor of violence accessing justice, it is essential to link them with legal support, preferably provided by civil society organizations and further linking those women to the district level women network so that political influences will be minimized.

- Linking empowerment dimensions with income generation initiatives, not necessarily from the same project or other project implemented by the organization itself, will have two immediate benefits: firstly, women will have more access to financial resource, a rare and valuable productive resource and it further increase their say in domestic and societal decision making process with their decreasing their financial dependence over men; secondly; it helps them fight extreme poverty, which is a key concern of economic rights as well.

- Though the direct programme beneficiaries constitutes women from marginalized communities, including disabled and so-called untouchable groups, it is of utmost important to focus on 'men engagement'. In so doing, some men targeted interventions should be planned to ensure men 'buy-in' the project idea and likelihood of them cooperating WDAG as well as female members in their family increases.

Case Studies, Success Stories, Good Practices and Innovations

This chapter includes some representative case studies, success stories, good practices and innovations that are the basis for drawing key lessons of the project.

<u>Success Story - 1</u>

Women with poor social status turned out to be change agent

Sidhura Rawal, 29 from Chhayanath, Rara municipality -9 is a Secretary of Rara Women Discussion Group from Murma, Mugu. She has six members in her family and both of them (herself and her husband) are economically active.

She was an illiterate woman. Despite belonging to economically active age group, being one of the poor family members, she was financially challenged. She lacked confidence in doing something to improve her social and economic well-being. As she had almost no idea about women rights and social participation, she was not participating in any of such social and development activities.

A group formed by the VOICE project once invited her to a public discourse known as Kachahari, where she heard various women raising their voices in public. She was surprised first to see that women like her were raising voice for their rights. She was then interested to be a part of the group and expressed her desire to the WDAG members, who invited her to the Kachahari program. Joining literacy class was a turning point in her life as she learnt many things – from basic literacy to financial literacy, from rights issues to the mechanism to claim for their rights and entitlements and vegetable farming. She started attending regular monthly meeting of the groups and saving in her groups on regular basis. In addition, she started keeping minutes of the group record –meeting minutes and saving/credit scheme. She was very active in implementing what she learnt from literacy class. One of the immediate action she took after literacy class was vegetable farming. As she knew, from the literacy class, where to approach for the vegetable seeds and other improved technology, the credit from her own group helped her to buy the materials needed. In addition, she started motivating groups and other community members to start vegetable farming. Apart from selling her own vegetables in the local market, she was collecting vegetable grown by community and group members and supplying to army barracks and local hotels.

Increased awareness of the local dynamics, legal and policy frameworks, and increased financial status gave her enough confidence in eventually leading other community based organizations, including Forest User Groups. Currently, she has started raising voice against social evils and malpractices. The changes Sidhura Rawal experienced in a short span of time means a lot that teaches us a lesson that even women without any formal education, if provided with knowledge and skills, can be a role model in leading

social actions and campaign impacting the lives of many people, who can make a change in their lives too.

Success Story - 2

Traditional Healers effectively mobilized to reduce Chhaupadi, an inhumane practice

Menstruating women, in Mugu, are not allowed to touch the foundation of house and they are restricted with their mobility to go to public places such as temple, tap and schools. Neither can they touch herds (cow, goat etc.) not they get nutritious food during the period. Rather, they have to do labor intensive work. They don't take care of their hygiene and are forced to stay in a small hut that is poor in terms of sanitation where they are usually suffered with sexual violence - rape and other forms of violence. Due to this inhumane practice, they get various diseases.

The project team collected data of those practitioner traditional healers in the community. The traditional healers, who are considered as representatives of the gods, were oriented on women health issues and were requested to take an advisory role in groups, in a good hope that their support to the key project messages (i.e. against Chhaupadi practices) would have multiplier positive effects in the community. It was an innovative move to ensure 'men engagement' to address GBV issues, widespread in the community. WDAG organized anti-chhaupadi campaigns that were actively participated by those traditional healers. Traditional healers were even invited as a guest in radio interaction programs to disseminate anti-chhaupadi messages that would be more appealing to the common people. Appeal from traditional healers was found effective in creating positive environment for the menstruating women as the message not only motivate those women to abandon the inhumane practice, but also help get support from their male counterparts and other family members.

As a result of regular campaigns, women are now allowed to stay at safe and clean place inside the home, which used to be a dream until very recently. In addition to chhaupadi huts being destroyed, increased acceptance during menstruation has contributed in reducing SGBV against women. Girls are now regular in their school while women are attending informal class on regular basis. They are now able to go to the public places and they have gained confidence in speaking in various public programs. The unprecedented change in the communal practice was possible because of increased awareness in the society as well, but mobilization of traditional healers (considered as *Deuta*, i.e. god, in the community)played as a catalytic role to speed up the awareness and increasing social acceptance among the male members. This success teaches a strong message that strategic mobilization of traditional institutions could be a game changer, especially, in social transformation programme.

Success Story – 3

Women Network capable in mobilize local resources

The achievements made by Women Network in the project area best demonstrates how a systematic capacity building effort empowers Women Network resulting in its effectiveness and increased legitimacy from the stakeholders. This story further justifies systematic intervention in capacity building of community-based organizations, particularly of those marginalized groups.

Group development plan prepared and subsequent investment in its capacity building was a key project intervention that was found helpful in systematic development of the groups. As a result of tireless effort of the project team Women Network in the project district has been found rewarding. The Women Network was thus successfully mobilized. After a delegation of Women Network they were successful in establishing a District Food Depot and Health Post in their community.

Similarly, the Women Network discussed in their regular meeting that women's access to family planning measure is limited and they are forced to give birth to more children than they wish to. They decided to organize a camp but the resource was a bottleneck. They developed and submitted a proposal to ……... The response of the concerned stakeholder to their proposal was positive and the Women Network was able to organize a Family Planning Camp that provided family planning supports to women, including Norplant and other birth control means, with an aim to control ever increasing birth rate in the community.

The success has two-fold implications – firstly, women in the community have increased access to health facility and other services of their pertinent need; and secondly, they have developed a confidence in mobilizing resources from local stakeholders (line agencies) for the common cause.

Good Practice -1

Learning Peer: A Better Approach to Improve Learning Achievement

Poor participation of women in literacy class and discussion groups, caused due to irregularity and not raising any voice during the discussion, resulted that those women were not confident speaking in public. They were not aware of the benefits of such discussion and as a result of their irregularity they missed discussion on some of the significant issues as well.

In order to address the problem, the project team categorized participants in two groups - regular and irregular and several peer groups were formed comprising one regular and one irregular participants. All those peer groups were given a responsibility to find their peer members in the class and inform other classmates about the whereabouts of their peer members every day. Peers were encouraged to sit together in the classroom to ensure that the regular one and confident one help the poor one to better learn.

This approach of peer learning encouraged those irregular participants change their habits and they started coming to the class on time. In addition, the learning was far better – for both peers; those regular one got better confidence with their learning while helping their irregular and poor peers, whereas those irregular ones got benefit from their regular peer learning partner. Additionally, emotional bonding between the peers was also high for them helping each other to grow better. It was interesting observation that there was a subtle competition as participants were trying to make their peer learners better than others in the class.

A key lesson of this good practice is that 'if irregular members in the class is paired with the regular members, it makes both of them responsible for their joint learning and mutual growth'. This approach is useful in informal education classes, non-formal training programs as well as in the formal educational setting where learners are likely to get irregular, come late as well as don't understand what is being

taught to its fullest possible. Those learners will be responsible for their learning achievement as well as feeling a sense of achievement by helping others learn.

Good Practice -2

Group selected the training participants itself

A case from WDAGs depicts how a mutually shared responsibility between the project team and local group could be instrumental in leadership development of the groups as well as resulting in enhanced ownership of the capacity building initiative.

Unlike a conventional approach, where a training participants are picked up from a group members, by the project team based on the perceived needs and prospects of the training participants in contributing to the group post-training period, the group in 6 VDC was given a responsibility to select participants for a training on RBA, GESI, GMLD, etc. organized by KIRDARC at the entire project VDCs. Though it was the first experience of its kind, the Women Group successfully managed to select training participants. "It made us feel more responsible in making a decision that meant to be rational and beneficial for the group from long-term perspective. We were a little cautious at the beginning if we might see conflict within the team, but we were able to do it easily".

From the programmatic perspective, it has some landmark significance. Firstly, the participant selection process is proved to be handed over to the responsibility of group itself, with some guidance note on selection criteria if needed, to make the group feel responsible. Secondly, the group ownership of the training – both in terms of process as well as product - would be high and when they are given such responsibility they put their level best effort in making the training a success. It further helps inculcate a relevance of the training among the Women Group members that the training is meant to help them develop their knowledge and skills in order to increase the effectiveness of the group itself, which ultimately requires the right participants be chosen for the course. Hence, it is found to be an effective mechanism to enhance collaborative leadership skills of the Community-based organizations with a potential of replication in other contexts as well.

<u>**Good Practice -3**</u>

Disabled participation in training made possible as the training/workshop venue were chosen close to their house.

Disabled (differently able) people are usually left unattended and their participation in training and any workshop rarely takes place. One of the reasons for their low participation is insensitive physical arrangement for the workshop that is not disable –friendly. As the programs are usually organized too far away from where the disabled are living the chances of them attending the program become low.

A reflection on the issue of disable people's participation in capacity building events including training and workshops helped the project team to realize that given the typical geographical situation and poor infrastructure should not remain a barrier for their participation, one of their rights. The group then decided to make some changes in its implementation approach by organizing the capacity building events in a nearest possible venue to where disabled people are living. "Though the facility was not up to the expected level compared to other usual workshop and training venue, we found it good in that it ensured participation of those people, who otherwise would remain excluded" said Ms. Junkali Rokaya Chairperson of Women Group member.

"It is the first time me attending any workshop and I am excited to be here. I could not attend this program had it been organized in other village. I am thankful to the Women Group for organizing it here that made my first ever participation in such event possible" said Ms.It is not only the number of participants and their diversity that matters. It is the inclusiveness of participants and their ideas being incorporated in the discussion and decision making process that counts. Apart from increased number of participants, the sense of responsive project management team that was successfully portrayed among the marginalized community was significant. It further demonstrated a success story that taught Women Group a subtle message that it is their responsibility to ensure the rightful participation of those groups and different methods could be employed in finding local and innovative solution. "It was our first attempt to pilot this approach and we wanted to see if it helps those marginalized and disabled group of people to attend the program. The response of those disabled participants was immensely encouraging. So, we strongly recommend KIRDARC management to consider using this innovative approach to further advance inclusivity and participation of such groups in its other initiatives" said the project coordinator Mr. Rishi Adhikari.

Innovation -1

Day-time Literacy Class is Inclusive and Results Better

A literacy class as such could exclude some people for various reasons – some being their physical and some being socio-cultural. However, the project team has proved that if a responsive project team brings an innovative in the implementation approach the same literacy class could be inclusive making it possible for all to get benefit from it.

It is mostly taken for granted that literacy class is organized in the evening. A widely accepted common understanding has played a key role to make it happen. It is believed that women are free in the evening, especially after completing their household chores. It simply means that women are expected to attend the program if it takes place in the evening, a perceived time for their easy availability. However, in a remote areas where women are heavily engaged in work throughout the day and women status is far behind that of women it is very unlikely that they are available even in the evening. The evidences show that in most of the literacy classes regularity is a serious concern and as a result, the benefits is not as expected.

To address the problem the project team discussed the issue with Women Group and found that the risk of not having regular attendance of the prospective participants in the literacy class is high. While brainstorming possible way-forward the group decided to change the timing of the literacy class to the daytime so that most of the women could come and discuss the issues of their concerns apart from learning literacy. It was a new experiment of its kind that was questioned by some members in the society. However, it was found that all the women and even some disabled who joined the program were able to attend the class for it being suitable time for them. For some disabled it was easy to come in the day time and for women they could attend the program and upon going back to the home even managed to complete their regular chores.

The significance of this innovation is obvious. It reminds the project team to be responsive and consult the beneficiaries on how best the activities could be made relevant to them – not only in terms of the activity itself, rather the process of executing that particular activity – to increase the project reach as well as ensure the inclusivity of those marginalized segment of the society.

Annexes

Annex 1: Reflection Workshop Schedule

Workshop on Documenting Lessons from VOICE Project			
Valley View Hotel, Birendranagar			
9th November, 2017			
Workshop Schedule			
Time	**Topics**	Methodology	Responsibility
8.00 – 8.15	Opening and Context Setting	Participatory	Gautam Raj Adhikari and Rishi Adhikari
8.15 – 9.00	Plenary Reflection on VOICE Project	Group Discussion	Uttam Uperati
9.00 – 10.00	Locating Achievements, Challenges and Issues	Power Point Presentation, Group Discussion	Uttam Uperati
10.00 – 10.15	Tea Break		Uttam Uperati
10.15 – 11.00	Discussion on Essentials of Good Practices and Lessons Learned	Power Point Presentation, Group Discussion	Uttam Uperati
11.00 – 12.00	Mind mapping exercise for Good Practices, Lessons Learned, Innovation, Success Stories/Case Studies	Power Point Presentation, Group Discussion	Uttam Uperati
12.00 – 12.45	Lunch Break	Group Discussion and Presentation	Uttam Uperati
12.45 – 1.30	Group presentation on key elements of GPLL	Group Discussion and Presentation	Uttam Uperati
1.30 – 2.30	Group work continue in elaborating the GPLL	Group Discussion and Presentation	Uttam Uperati
2.30 – 4.00	Group writing presentation and feedback (tea served)	Group work and Presentation	Uttam Uperati
4.00-5.00	Continue Group writing presentation and feedback	Group work and Presentation	Gautam Raj Adhikari and Rishi Adhikari
5.00-5:30	Closing Remark		

Annex 2: List of People Consulted

Reflection Workshop in Surkhet
From Mission East: Alex Ramos Pena, James Samuel, Prakash Katuwal
From KIRDARC: Govinda Bahadur Shahi, Rishi Adhikari, Gautam Raj Adhikari, Prakash Adhikari, Budha Bhandari, Pushpa Gharti Magar, Tara Chand, Manju Rawal, Sattyadevi Bam, Kusha Budha, Bharat Shahi and Megha Raj Neupane
From WWS: Kashi Nath Nepal, Pabitra Devkota and Ruplal Rawat

Reflection Workshop in Kathmandu
- Madhab Raj Neupane
- Gobinda Bahadur Shahi
- Rishi Adhkari
- Gautam Raj Adhikari