

# FRIENDSHIP PARTNERSHIP OWNERSHIP



SNAPSHOTS OF SHARING  
IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES  
IN NEPAL 2014 - 2017

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# FOREWORD

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BY **RASMUS HELVEG PETERSEN**  
DIPD DIRECTOR



Nepal was one of the first countries that DIPD chose to be engaged with, and the project we run with JOMPOPS – an active political party platform which includes all the major parties of the country – has been a success story we like to talk about.

The Nepal story has sub-stories, and this is what this publication is about. I am pleased that the DIPD team in Nepal decided to come out with a popular report covering some of the key activities it undertook during its first phase period of July 2014-December 2017.

The document chronicles a dozen examples of what Nepal's one-and-only JOMPOPS – Joint Mechanism for Political Party Strengthening – decided to focus on and implement with support from DIPD during these years that followed a successful piloting of an initial initiative of February 2012-June 2014 period soon after DIPD's probing in 2011 for a collaboration with the platform.

Nepal had come out of a debilitating 10-year civil war in 2006, when multiparty democracy was re-instated, and the political parties began to write a new constitution through a Constituent Assembly, even while making sure that the political parties became safeguards against any possibilities of the newly-restored system slipping.

It was in this context that DIPD's support became a natural fit to the domestic efforts to go forward to strengthen democracy, build parties, and provide a basis for an all-inclusive constitution. JOMPOPS thought DIPD – with the mandate it had – could be handy in the

political parties' endeavours to make the parties more gender-equal, strengthen their district branches and enhance multiparty collaboration.

Within our mandated framework of democracy-strengthening and party-building, we at DIPD, in our approach to working with partners around the world, always emphasise our role as a purveyor of ideas for inspiration and a supporter of the cause that our partners choose to take up. Democratic and political experiences from Denmark, wherever relevant, are offered to partners who, while appreciating such exchanges of ideas and experiences, go about their work as their contexts dictate them.

Going through the 12 vignettes on JOMPOPS-DIPD work, it is easy to get the affirmation that DIPD found in JOMPOPS a friend and partner that took well to such ideas and experiences and owned the project in more ways than one. The title of the document, in a way, therefore, is suggestive of the approach that the Nepal project has taken: a comfortability with each other – Danish and Nepalese counterparts – as camaraderie develops, and local political ownership over priorities, in letter and spirit, lead to a partnership that delivers.

DIPD shares the pride that JOMPOPS has in contributing to some degree in the constitution-making. I specifically think about interventions for women to get their rights to pass citizenship to their children – as well as in, e.g. the campaign to fight violence against women, building a base of trainers for political parties, the drive to get local women to take up their rightful place in the political sun, or maintaining multi-party collaboration amidst the sharp political polarisation in party positions on issues of the day.

The collaborative spirit, we hope, will continue during the 2018-20 phase that is now underway. We hope to see the DIPD support, through JOMPOPS, continue to benefit Nepal's democracy and political parties, in ways that JOMPOPS itself will chart out and decide how to move forward on.

# IDEAS THAT INSPIRED

## THE STORY OF DIPD IN NEPAL

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BY **SHRISHTI RANA**

DIPD REPRESENTATIVE TO NEPAL

Nepal is categorized by the United Nations as a Least Developed Country. This categorization is not simply an abstract ranking; on the contrary, the ranking reflects the life for people living in Nepal.

For example, 25.25 percent of the country's total population of 26 million live below the poverty line, that is, on less than two USD a day. While there has been some recent improvement, Nepal still has the highest poverty rate in South Asia. A staggering 6.6 million people, more than the total population of Denmark, have to survive every day on less than the cost of a can of coca cola!



***Prospecting for a Platform:*** Members of the major political parties and international partners in February 2010 jointly exploring political party strengthening programmes that finally led to setting up of the JOMPOPS platform.

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Many of these people have little access to even minimal education, healthcare or employment opportunities, let alone other resources of a decent living standard. Every day around 70 families lose a child under five, to diseases caused by unclean water and bad sanitation. UNICEF reports that approximately 0.6 million children aged 5-17 years are engaged in hazardous work and thousands of girls are sexually exploited in cities across Nepal every year.

Additionally, it is estimated that hundreds of young women are forcibly sold into brothels in India and elsewhere every year. A further

2.000-2.500 young men and women leave Nepal every day to seek work in the Gulf and elsewhere, where many are forced to live in inhuman conditions. The extent of this problem is evidenced on a daily basis by the number of coffins (around three per day) containing expat workers arriving at Nepal's only International Airport.

## HOW COULD DENMARK BE RELEVANT?

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The contrast, then, between Nepal and Denmark could hardly be greater. One is a least developed country, while the other is a country ranked by the UN as the fourth most developed, after Switzerland, Australia and Norway. This ranking includes average life expectancy, length of education, and gross national income per capita – all of which are so different in the two countries that they are barely comparable.



***It is Official:*** The first formal Steering Committee meeting of the JOMPOPS platform, March 2012, following its decision to partner with DIPD; Director Bjørn Førde had been invited from Copenhagen to attend this meeting.

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These huge differences caused the nascent platform of political parties in Nepal – when contacts were made to this forum created earlier within the framework of a small Danida project on political party strengthening – to initially question what they might have in common with Denmark; how the Danish democratic experience could be relevant. They were also fearful that exposure to the advanced Danish system would lead to unrealistic, in the short term anyway, expectations – creating more dissatisfaction and frustration with the prevailing political system in Nepal.

In a nutshell, when DIPD was exploring a partnership in Nepal, the main question that major political parties of Nepal discussed at length was: Could engagement with DIPD be worth the time and effort required to invest in the project, especially during a period of critical political transition in Nepal?

The decision to collaborate with DIPD was not an easy one to reach for the partners in Nepal, because what DIPD offered was different



from that being offered by other international partners in this area. DIPD offered ideas. DIPD offered sharing of Danish political experience through the direct involvement of Danish political parties, and in a formal way. Generally, few international partners in Nepal were interested to engage with political parties institutionally like DIPD. While some embassies and international organizations facilitated interactions between politicians from their respective countries and Nepalese politicians, this was done on an ad hoc basis and had a limited reach.

So, partnership with DIPD, an institution created by an Act of the Danish parliament to work on strengthening of political parties and democracy around the world, would be exceptional in several ways. While this newness was, for some, attractive, generally politicians in Nepal were hesitant.

Caution stemmed from the fact that there were already several other international organizations working in Nepal, including in the field of governance. At times, these organizations came with a lot of money, but they did not invest in comprehensive local relationship-building, i.e. in nurturing close partnerships with the Nepalese. They were seen to be using their strength of money and other resources to influence things, at times causing more harm than good for the local partners.

This prevalent approach had swelled skepticism among local politicians who, therefore, became even more keen to ensure that projects offered by new international actors did not further damage Nepal's journey to stronger democracy.

After much contemplation, the representatives of the multiparty platform – known as the *Joint Mechanism for Political Party Strengthening* (JOMPOPS) – finally decided to initiate a pilot project before considering any further engagement. This platform had been set up by major political parties in 2011, primarily with the objective to engage with international assistance on political parties.

It was run by a Steering Committee comprising two representatives of each member party – at that time including the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist), the Madhesi People's Rights' Forum (Democratic), the Madhesi People's Rights Forum Nepal, and the Tarai Madhesh Democratic Party.

## THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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At that time, Nepal was going through a huge political transition, following ten years of violent armed conflict and restoration in 2006 of multiparty democracy which had begun to suffer soon after its installation in 1990, following 30 years of a *panchayat* system with no political parties.

In fact, multiparty democracy had been first introduced in early 1950s, when as the wave of decolonization swept around the world, many political activists and ordinary youths had risked their lives to overthrow an authoritarian regime. The first parliamentary elections were held in 1959. However, before the first parliament could start to function in 1960, the King took over all the executive powers with the backing of the Nepal Army.

Then, the King immediately banned political parties, and party leaders and democracy activists were either forced into exile or imprisoned under harsh conditions and often enduring torture by the security forces. One such prisoner to experience torture was the current leader of the Nepali Congress party, *Sher Bahadur Deuba*, whose tongue was given electric shocks – which still impedes his speech today. Another is JOMPOPS Steering Committee member, *Asta Laxmi Shakya*, who was tortured almost to death by the security forces when she was jailed during her political struggle.

Despite such awful repression, political activists had continued their struggle for democracy, resulting in restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. But it began to wobble soon; within six years, the activities of an ultra-leftist Maoist group had sparked an armed struggle that eventually culminated in a violent protracted civil war.

Mirroring events in 1960, the monarchy – which had a constitutional monarchy status since the 1990 democratic change – took advantage of the situation in February 2005, usurping the executive powers of the democratically-elected government, once again with the backing of the army. A state of emergency was declared, and civil liberties were suspended.



***The Crusade:*** The People's Movement for Democracy organized by the democratic alliance and the Maoist party led to the restoration of multiparty democracy in April 2006 and also paved the way for elections to Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution of Nepal. (Photo credit: The Kathmandu Post daily).

This situation encouraged the Maoists to join forces with other parliamentary parties in the construction of a new peace process. The main crux of this process was that the Maoist party would give up its violent political struggle and come to the peaceful democratic mainstream in return for the parliamentary parties agreeing to an election to the Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution for Nepal.

As part of the new peace process, the parliamentary parties and the Maoists launched the *second People's Movement* in 2006, organizing peaceful demonstrations throughout the country calling for the restoration of multiparty democracy. Many ordinary Nepalese citizens were killed by the security forces and hundreds were injured. Finally, the King had to relinquish his power and multiparty democracy was restored in 2006.



**Bonding Campaign:** Many informal events in the initial phase fostered friendship between Danish and Nepalese leaders; in the photo, leaders from the Danish political parties participating in the cleanliness campaign organised by the JOMPOPS SC members, April 2012.

In this context, it was important to protect and strengthen hard-earned democracy so that Nepalese people did not have to fight yet another battle. That is why the major leaders of the political parties had concluded that political parties' organisations and democratic practices within them needed to be strengthened and institutionalised. They also realised that given Nepal's limited experience on democracy, Nepal needed to learn from older and more mature democracies.

It was against this political backdrop that the Steering Committee of the JOMPOPS platform initiated its pilot partnership with DIPD in 2012, signing a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the member parties and then jointly with DIPD.

## COMMONALITY OF SHARED VALUES

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The first task for the representatives of Nepal's major parties was to get to know their Danish counterparts, believing that only then could they effectively collaborate. Inside DIPD, there was a slight hesitation because it was difficult to generate a tangible outcome from such an orientation exercise itself. However, DIPD Director Bjørn Førde had enough vision to take the necessary plunge, and the pilot venture embarked on an introduction programme which would lay the groundwork for engagement.

Nine politicians from various political parties in Denmark flew to Kathmandu in April 2012. When the Nepalese politicians met them, they first seemed baffled. In Nepal, politicians are generally serious, and the political culture is formal and strictly hierarchical. They expected the Danish contingent to be mainly middle-aged, grey-haired, somber men, who only conversed about political issues. Instead, Danish male and female leaders were enthusiastic and exuberant, some in their early 20s. They laughed and joked, dressed casually and socialized over a beer.

These differences could have caused awkwardness. Instead, the Nepalese politicians gradually warmed to the informal Danish style, and what appeared as a genuine interest in Nepalese politics.



**Steps in Unison:** Ulla Tørnæs (current Minister for Development Cooperation), dancing with the female JOMPOPS SC members in solidarity for the JOMPOPS's initiative on Ending Violence against Women, April 2013. Bjørn Førde, the then DIPD Director lends a hand too.

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The Nepalese politicians were particularly impressed by a young Red Green Alliance politician, Allan Ahmad, from the Muslim minority group in Denmark, by his active engagement in discussions. He explained he was a local councilor in Copenhagen and that he planned to stand as Mayor in the upcoming elections. This was a



surprise to the Nepalese representatives as in Nepal such a position would only be given to a more mature (older) person. The enthusiasm of this young councilor encouraged the Nepalese politicians to think that younger people in Nepal should be given more opportunity to assume decision-making roles. The Nepalese politicians were also impressed that, regardless of being from the blue or red bloc – as the parties in Denmark are tagged as belonging to, blue being to the right and red to the left – all political parties in Denmark seemed to share a profound respect for the values of democracy, social justice, and human rights. These were values that the Nepalese political parties were fighting to protect and nurture and which also underpinned the project. These shared values became the basis of connection between the groups.

At the end of the introduction phase, the Nepalese politicians realized they had more in common with their Danish counterparts than there were differences. These commonalities are similar to the main challenges of today's politics worldwide: the erosion of citizens' trust; the imperative of accommodating a myriad of diverse communities; and dealing with the climate change; just to mention a few.

Nepalese politicians concluded that friendship was as important as partnership for the formation of an equitable relationship. In furtherance of that ethos, many activities during the initial phase were designed to strengthen friendship between Danish and Nepalese representatives – building trust and comfortability with each other. This would later be the foundation for continuity and success.

## FOSTERING OWNERSHIP

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One of the key principles of the DIPD strategy was that the project should be locally owned. Chairperson Henrik Bach Mortensen and Director Bjørn Førde always stressed the importance of this principle and worked to ensure that it was embedded in all the DIPD projects.

This commitment was reassuring for JOMPOPS members, who were frustrated by the practices of other international organizations, which had directed programmes from headquarters elsewhere, with little local anchorage in place. Indeed, some Steering Committee members were so concerned about this that when approaching the DIPD partnership they stipulated a condition that decisions should be made locally, rather than from afar in Copenhagen.

One of the representatives from the CPN-UML Steering Committee, Asta Laxmi Shakya, had said: *"We only seek sharing of their own experiences from the Danish or any other international counterparts to deal with our challenges. International partners' engagement should be about learning from each other."*

A representative from the Maoist party, Khimlal Devkota, had said: *"In the JOMPOPS platform, we have representatives of all the major parties of Nepal. As political leaders of this country, we can and*

*should make our own decisions. International partners like DIPD should support them based on our requests, of course within the limitations of their thematic priorities.”*



**Top Participation:** Local ownership made it possible to engage top and influential leaders in the programmes supported by DIPD. In the photo, former prime minister Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba with DIPD Representative at a programme organized by the party to promote internal reforms to make it more gender equal, November 2015.

This stance resulted from the political parties' experience of dealing with international partners and donors since the 1990s and the changing contours of Nepal's NGO world. After multiparty democracy was restored then, international agencies and organizations swarmed into the new democratic kingdom, triggering a mushrooming of NGOs in the country – to such an extent that, by the turn of the century, there were around 4,000 NGOs registered in Nepal, perhaps making it a country with one of the highest per capita NGOs in the world.

Most international support for these NGOs, and the public institutions they assisted, was directed by the priorities of the supporting countries rather than by the needs of local Nepalese people. The foreign organizations themselves decided which areas to assist, rather than responding to any particular needs identified by partners in Nepal. More importantly, it appeared they had no coherent strategy – which resulted in the emergence of “NGO empires” across Nepal, each run by a different donor country.

However, Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, were perceived as being different. They were regarded as having more respect for local ownership and policies of non-interference in the political affairs of the country. The senior leaders of Nepal's political parties were initially attracted to DIPD because it adopted this same hands-off model – no matter if it could not offer the same extent of

financial support being offered by other well-funded international organizations.

In practice, strong local ownership meant that the Platform was able to assume responsibility for all the activities of the project. An important positive outcome of this was that the political parties agreed to share the costs for all joint activities. This arrangement had multiple benefits: First, most activities could be embedded within the political parties as they invested their own resources from their respective party organization's funds. Second, DIPD could support more activities than it was initially thought the limited budget would allow.

Third, and probably most important for the long-term success of the cooperation: Political leaders became more engaged in the programme than they might otherwise have been, had it been directed and fully managed by an external partner. Importantly, this created closer ties between JOMPOPS and its member parties and DIPD – laying the foundation for a deepening of the partnership.

## THE DEEPENING OF PARTNERSHIP

Drawing on insights gained in the initial pilot phase, the JOMPOPS platform sought the technical support of DIPD during the next engagement phase, starting in July 2014 and ending in December 2017. This covered three key areas in particular: Strengthening of the multiparty culture; Promoting women's participation in politics; and Strengthening political parties at the local level.



**High-Level Support:** CPN-UML's ex-Chair and former prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal (with cap) participating in the multiparty orientation programme related to Ending VAW in Rautahat district, which has high incidents of violence against women, December 2015

It may be useful to elaborate on the political situation in Nepal at that time, to clarify why those key areas were chosen by the Platform.

Nepal was going through a constitution-making exercise. The Constituent Assembly (CA), elected in 2008, had failed to promulgate the new Constitution due to sharp differences among the main political parties on key issues – such as restructuring of the state, election system, and forms of governance. This first CA was dissolved in 2012 and election for a new Assembly was held in November 2013. The new CA's work was critical for the nation – if a new Constitution was not soon written and ratified, multiparty democracy and the peace process would be jeopardised.



**After the Pilot:** JOMPOPS SC members agreed to continue their engagement with DIPD for the next phase after extensive discussions during a residential meeting in Pataliban, near Kathmandu, in May 2014.



**Non-Political Positions:** The JOMPOPS platform also squeezed in informal short sessions in formal programmes that contributed to building strong bonds with each other; JOMPOPS SC members during a yoga session in Pataliban, May 2014.

Hence, in 2014, when the new engagement of DIPD in Nepal was being planned, the urgent need of the political parties in Nepal was to foster an agreement among political parties on the core constitutional issues. The JOMPOPS platform, therefore, favoured inclusion of an intensive programme of multiparty dialogue and collaboration



in the new project, with the aim of helping finalise the new Constitution even while encouraging parties to join hands to run the country based on consensus. The Platform, again, looked to Denmark for inspiration – in particular learning about the Danish history of successful coalition governments, which had seemed elusive in the case of Nepal.

The Platform also felt much could be learnt from the Danish ideas with regard to the political representation of women. At that time, encouraging women to become more involved in politics was one of the main priorities of the Nepalese political parties. After the restoration of multiparty democracy in 2006, a one-third female representation in Parliament had been guaranteed. However, political parties had not introduced corresponding reform of their own organisational structures – so the number of women in the main decision-making units of the parties stood at less than 20 per cent. All the structures and the practices of the political parties remained male-dominated and not gender-friendly.



**Capping Off a Meeting:** Danish leaders and others attending the 24<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee meeting donning Nepali caps presented by the JOMPOPS SC members, January 2016.

It is important to note here that women comprised 40 percent recruits in the Maoist's People's Liberation Army and therefore political leaders deemed it necessary to create a conducive environment for women to grow in politics, to prevent such rebellion from women in the future. With this in mind, the JOMPOPS platform focused on training women for decision-making positions, and on the introduction of reforms inside the parties – based on Danish experiences – which would make them more gender-friendly.

In addition, the JOMPOPS platform prioritised using the Danish ideas and experiences of strengthening local political party branches, which are the lifeline of the parties and the source of people's representatives that run the local governments. From experience, when democracy in Nepal was jeopardized again and again, it was clear that local branch offices had to be empowered, if democracy was to be sustained, as only a strong political party base could

withstand authoritarian attacks. And the 12-year vacuum of local government in Nepal was sooner or later going to be filled, post-constitution. Strengthening of parties at the local level, thus, became a priority for the JOMPOPS platform in its new DIPD engagement.

With the technical support of DIPD, the Platform began conducting regular campaigns, training courses, workshops and seminars, study tours, and experience-sharing programmes, on subjects reflecting the three key thematic areas mentioned above. During this period of three and a half years, the relationship between the Platform and DIPD deepened further. Through the Platform, DIPD also worked closely with key institutions in Nepal, like Parliament, the Election Commission, and the Women's Commission.

## SOME KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

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While it is fashionable in the international assistance community to seek measurable, quantifiable outcomes from the efforts and resources invested, sometimes the most valuable contributions are immeasurable. Good relationships between members of the Steering Committee – developed over the years of working together and sustained during difficult times – could be considered one of the most important gains arising from DIPD engagement in Nepal, and which created a bedrock for smooth implementation of the initiative.



**Supreme Law:** Promulgation of the new Constitution of Nepal by the President, September 2015; JOMPOPS SC members who were MPs during that time played an active role inside the Constituent Assembly to sort out differences among political parties on the major issues during the exercise. (Photo credit: Republica daily).

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The Platform's fine examples of successful multiparty collaboration have inspired the development of a new multiparty culture in Nepal. By facilitating regular multiparty dialogue and collaboration, during the constitution-making exercise, the Platform made a positive contribution to the new Constitution and democracy in Nepal. Through

its continuing campaign to end violence against women, the Platform has also successfully demonstrated that more can be achieved, if political parties work together.



**Reforms Within:** Around 500 elected national convention members of the Nepali Congress party met on the eve of the National Convention of the party committing to prioritize internal reforms to make the party more gender equal with the technical support from DIPD, March 2016.

Even in the challenging political period after the Constitution was promulgated – when the three Madhesi-parties boycotted the constitution declaration process, resulting into political polarisation – the Platform continued its regular dialogue and collaboration, contributing to preventing potential violent conflicts in Nepal.



**Multiparty Teamwork:** JOMPOPS continued its multiparty collaboration even in difficult times; JOMPOPS SC members hosted DIPD's new Director Rasmus Helveg Petersen in Lumbini in one of such times and conducted local activities; Chair Dina Nath Sharma presents a memento to the DIPD Director, March 2017.

The political parties concur that multiparty collaboration – facilitated by the JOMPOPS platform, with the technical support from DIPD –

has provided them with an avenue to promote multiparty culture. The Nepali Congress Party representative in the JOMPOPS platform, Chitra Lekha Yadav, says:

*“Inside the Parliament, we have to take up the party’s formal position, due to the whip system. So, there’s little possibility of exploring broader agreement among the political parties, even on issues of common concern. The JOMPOPS platform provides an informal avenue for us to discuss, and if necessary we can adjust our respective positions and seek agreements.”*

JOMPOPS SC member Jeetendra Narayan Dev, who earlier represented a Madhesi party in the Platform, explains it like this:

*“This has been a unique platform where all the major parties have come together and stayed together. Despite our differences, we don’t criticise each other but instead try to work with each other on the common issues. That’s why the JOMPOPS platform has contributed significantly to strengthening multiparty culture in Nepal.”*

Initially, when political party representatives met at multiparty events, supported by DIPD, they could not mix well. They would tend to sit only with their immediate colleagues and DIPD had to request them to interact with those from other parties. Electoral combativeness had encouraged political parties to be very competitive and there was sharp partisan polarisation.

However, after a slew of regular multiparty dialogue and activities, JOMPOPS party members became more comfortable with each other and inter-party working became common. Now at multiparty events, supported by DIPD, members engage cross-party with no prompting.



**Local Culture:** JOMPOPS promoting multiparty culture at the local level. The SC members from different parties attended a programme hosted by the Nepali Congress party’s local branch during the Director’s visit, March 2017, where he also handed out copies of one of DIPD’s publications.





**Grassroots Interaction:** The DIPD Director, Rasmus Helveg Petersen, sharing Danish experiences on women in politics with local party members, March 2017.

During a visit by DIPD Director Rasmus Helveg Petersen in 2017, all JOMPOPS Steering Committee members, from various political parties, attended events in Lumbini hosted by the local branch offices of the Nepali Congress and the CPN-Maoist.

This was a remarkable collaboration, not least because at that particular time the three Madhesi parties were agitating against the Constitution, which was declared by mainly the alliance of Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and the Maoist party. The Madhesi parties had felt that their call for fair representation in state institutions was not addressed by the new Constitution.

They were also angry at the use of force against Madhesi activists by government security forces, led by the CPN-UML and Maoists – which had resulted in death, injury and human rights violations. In their day-to-day politics, therefore, the parties were very much at odds. Nonetheless, they were able to come together for a common programme, even at a local level, where sometimes strong sentiments among local cadres could be more difficult to manage.

The Steering Committee representative from the Tarai Madhesh Democratic Party (TMDP), Jitendra Sonal, had said:

*“It’s politically risky for us to be seen with the leaders of the three big parties, which were perceived as responsible for the deaths of many Madhesi agitators recently. Yet, we are continuing to participate in the activities of the Platform because we really believe that we should collaborate on common issues despite our differences.”*

This kind of continued dialogue and collaboration, in difficult political times, can be considered a significantly positive change in Nepal’s political culture. As collaboration between the JOMPOPS members strengthened, the Platform hosted a number of notable multiparty activities, in partnership with DIPD, which promoted the three key priorities mentioned above.

The campaign “*Gender Equality in the New Constitution*”, initiated by the JOMPOPS platform in 2014, resulted in amendments in the draft of the new Constitution – giving women married to men with Nepalese citizenship the right to transfer citizenship to their children. The draft version had deprived them of this right.

The campaign “*Ending Violence Against Women*” has led to policy reforms that address this issue, within the political parties. Prior to the JOMPOPS campaign, this issue had not figured in the agenda of the political parties, as they saw it as an issue to be dealt with primarily by NGOs.



**Myanmar Seminar:** Delegates from Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Denmark at the regional seminar on “*Strengthening the Role of Women in Politics in Myanmar*”, in Nay Pyi Taw, March 2016.

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**Point Women:** The Coordinators for DIPD in Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar (from left to right) – Shrishti Rana, Phuntshok Chhoden Tshering and Khin Thazin Myint – who all happen to be women, have contributed to emphasizing the message – that women can succeed if they are given opportunities – to the local partners in their respective countries; in the photo, the Coordinators at the regional seminar in Kathmandu, September 2016.

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In addition, a series of gender sensitisation programmes resulted in all the JOMPOPS parties conducting a gender audit of their main policy documents including statutes and working towards necessary reforms to make political parties gender equal. Initially, when DIPD started its gender equality work, engagement of male politicians was not always very forthcoming, as the issue was regarded as one to be handled only by women politicians. However, over time, more male JOMPOPS Steering Committee members got engaged, and many have become active campaigners for gender equality inside their political parties.

One of the senior party leaders and JOMPOPS Steering Committee member, Dina Nath Sharma, said:

*“Generally, in most political programmes, women are not seen on the dais. These days I demand that at least one woman should be represented on the podium.”*



**The Third Forum:** Participants from four countries gather in Thimpu to discuss "Women in Governance, Leadership and Politics in Bhutan with a Regional Dimension", March 2017.

DIPD can certainly take some credit for the fact that today gender equality within political parties is considered essential for the strengthening of democracy. Drawing from inspirations from Denmark, JOMPOPS conducted a series of training programmes aimed at encouraging more women to contest for decision-making positions. The Platform partnered with ECN to encourage female leaders, already active in the parties, to contest local elections in 2017.

Because the elections had been called at such a short notice, JOMPOPS was the only organisation able to offer these highly-appreciated quick training programmes in all the seven provinces of Nepal within the set timeframe. This was possible only due to a mature sense of multiparty collaboration among JOMPOPS members.

Other training programmes for female leaders focused on marginalized groups, such as local Dalits and Madhesis. In this way, DIPD resources also reached the most vulnerable and the needy in Nepal.

Additionally, to strengthen political parties at the local level, some local leaders were trained as trainers – who later went on to train hundreds of grassroots members on a range of topics. There was also a particular focus on the youth of Nepal. Towards the end of the final project year of 2017, the Maoist and CPN-UML parties offered leadership skills training to hundreds of young men and women.

A notable achievement during the 2014-2017 engagement was the sharing of experience gained from promoting women in politics at the regional level among DIPD's partner countries. A series of three regional seminars was organised with DIPD's other partner countries in the region, Bhutan and Myanmar, enabling parliamentarians, politicians and experts from the three countries and Denmark to discuss best practice strategy and share stories of success, which provided inspiration for future work in this area.

In Nepal, the regional seminar was conducted by the JOMPOPS platform in partnership with the Parliamentary Committee. The seminar enabled law-makers and political party members to identify practical steps to promote gender equality. Nepal also contributed to the seminars in Bhutan and Myanmar by sharing stories of how it had ensured increased representation of women in the Parliament.

The seminars provided an invaluable opportunity for DIPD's local Co-ordinators of the three countries, who all happen to be women, to bond, and to create the basis for future collaboration.

## HOW TO MOVE AHEAD?

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Following the promulgation of the new Constitution in 2015, Nepal focused on conducting three elections: national, provincial, and local. By the end of 2017 – which coincided with the planning of the next engagement phase of the JOMPOPS-DIPD project – these elections were successfully completed.

The Platform, building on what has been achieved, decided that the next phase should also prioritize the training of the *newly-elected representatives* – at all three levels of governance – their early competence being essential for effective leadership and democracy.

JOMPOPS also decided that its initial three key areas of focus – strengthening multiparty culture; promoting women in politics; and strengthening political parties at the local level – should continue to direct the strategy, because they remain relevant.

DIPD accordingly designed the next engagement phase to cover the 2018-2020 period, which will also take up the youth activities at the local level even more. Also, one of the Danish parties, the *Social Liberal Party*, will directly engage with the JOMPOPS platform on promoting youths and women in politics.





**Multiparty Handshake:** The JOMPOPS platform has emerged as a fine example of multiparty collaboration in Nepal strengthening overall democratic culture. In the photo, Steering Committee members of JOMPOPS at an event in January 2018 soon after the elections in late 2017.

There have been a few important changes in Nepal's political scene that may impact JOMPOPS activities during this phase. Following the declaration of the new Constitution and the subsequent elections, political parties – including some of those in the JOMPOPS platform – have merged. This was partly caused by the introduction of the threshold in the Election Law which entails political parties to secure at least three per cent of the total vote in the PR race and one seat in the FPTP race to get status as a national party.



**Leading Women:** Three female JOMPOPS SC members who are also senior leaders have been leading the campaign on women in politics: Asta Laxmi Shakya from the CPN, Chitra Lekha Yadav from Nepali Congress, and Renu Yadav from the Federal Socialist Forum-Nepal, January 2018.

One of the Madhesi parties in the Platform – the Tarai Madhesh Democratic Party (TMDP) – has merged with other smaller Madhesi parties, to form the *Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal* (RJP-N). Another Madhesi party in the platform, the Madhesi People’s Rights Forum (Democratic), has joined the Nepali Congress. Earlier, the Madhesi People’s Rights Forum-Nepal had united with some smaller parties to form the *Federal Socialist Forum-Nepal*. A split in the Maoist party had led to the formation of a new party, *Naya Shakti*.

Much more dramatically, after the elections, two big parties in the JOMPOPS platform – the CPN-UML party and Maoist party – merged to form the new *Communist Party of Nepal*. This has changed the dynamics among Nepal’s political parties, as the CPN became the biggest party, controlling nearly two-third seats in the new Parliament.

These changes may offer new opportunities for DIPD because the newly created or merged parties might be more receptive to new ideas. However, a political environment, dominated by one big party, may well create new challenges for the continuation of JOMPOPS collaboration at the same smooth manner.

There is a risk that the biggest party may try to impose its will, without respecting that of opposition parties – as repeatedly demonstrated around the world – in the affairs of the nation, which may find reflections in Nepal as well. This has made DIPD’s engagement with the JOMPOPS platform ever more critical and vital, if the new multi-party culture is to be preserved. Cohesion and a spirit of togetherness as seen among JOMPOPS representatives through the thick and thin of recent years provides a basis to maintain that culture.

## THE THREE KEY FACTORS

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When DIPD decided to engage in Nepal in 2012, the political context was highly fluid. Nepal was still in a complex political situation carrying the legacy of a violent conflict, which had destroyed any trust there might have been between the major political parties. Nepali Congress members and members of the UML party had been killed by Maoists during the war, and the security forces, led by the NC and UML governments, had caused the deaths of Maoist cadres.

Not surprisingly, bitterness between the two sides was very real. Even after the end of the armed conflict in 2006, grudges ran deep and, tellingly, the parties disagreed on crucial aspects of the peace process and the constitution-making.

The three Madhesi parties – whose members had also been killed by the alliance of the NC-UML-Maoist government during various agitations post-2007 – were bitter and angry with the three big parties. They were frustrated because they believed their various grievances related to increasing representation of the Madhesis at different tiers of the state structure were not being addressed, despite

repeated commitments by the big parties. The three Madhesi parties themselves were also divided along caste, ethnic and geographic lines and lacked the spirit to engage in meaningful collaboration among themselves.

After the pilot phase, when JOMPOPS and DIPD were in a planning meeting to outline the activities for the 2014-2017 phase, I remember the JOMPOPS parties were arguing with each other on various issues. A senior external facilitator told me:

*“You can’t be too ambitious in this kind of project. If we can manage to get these parties with such diverse backgrounds together for meetings, we can already call it a job well done.”*



**Practice Session:** DIPD has been able to contribute to a new political culture, in which training sessions see resource persons from other parties as well. Here, Nepali Congress leader Chitra Lekha Yadav is training the newly elected MPs of Province 3 of the CPN-UML and the Maoist parties on the parliamentary practices during a training supported by DIPD, January 2018.

But, in practice, what happened exceeded all our expectations. The six parties not only came together but they worked together and stayed together. Today, when Steering Committee members meet, the atmosphere is always warm, like in a gathering of good friends, and they invite each other to their respective party events. These seemingly small changes have created a new political culture in Nepal in which political parties do not only compete but also cooperate in their common interests and respect each other despite their differences.

The political parties in Nepal now consider DIPD as a trusted partner, one of their “own”, and no longer an outside actor. When DIPD staff from Copenhagen visit Nepal, they are genuinely welcomed by Steering Committee members, sometimes even to their homes – a gesture that demonstrates they are viewed as close friends. And, now, the political parties themselves are approaching DIPD with requests for support in crucial areas; for example, in the training of newly-elected people’s representatives, which affirms the level of trust DIPD has been able to secure from the partners in Nepal.

Reflecting on what made it possible for the JOMPOPS-DIPD engagement to flourish in such a cordial way, a few things – actually, three factors – stand out in my mind.

**HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS:** DIPD's experience in Nepal tells, first and foremost, that successful partnership must be based on genuine friendship. In this context, genuine friendship is based on mutual trust and respect. This was evident throughout the political party support programme in Nepal, as party leaders prioritised friendship over any technical considerations of the project.



***New Parliamentarians:*** DIPD/JOMPOPS supported the Parliament Secretariat following its request to train the newly-elected women MPs in Province 2 which is considered relatively behind on the empowerment of women, March 2018.

In the past, although most international agencies providing assistance in Nepal claimed to respect local views and interests, in practice, they often failed to do so. That historical experience has made politicians particularly appreciative of DIPD's you-know-best approach, which demonstrated genuine respect for local partners. This is the most significant factor contributing to the successful engagement between the Nepalese political parties and DIPD.

I must mention here the role of the then DIPD Director Bjørn Førde, who was able to create that friendship in a seemingly effortless, natural way. He always respected Nepal's political leaders and, unlike some other international organisations, which blamed our politicians for everything, he understood their motivation and structural constraints. He also trusted them to make their own decisions, allowing them the space to make, and recover from their own mistakes. His affection and care for the people of Nepal sounded genuine, and it seemed to come from really accepting some of us as his real friends.

Under his leadership, DIPD was able to establish an enduring friendship with the JOMPOPS platform, now being sustained by the current Director, Rasmus Helveg Petersen. The new Director has adhered to the former Director's policy of prioritising human relation-



ships, and he demonstrates the same kind of respect for and sensitivity towards local partners that his predecessor had. Thanks to the leadership of these two men, the political parties have come to trust DIPD. That trust is the single most important factor responsible for the way it has been possible to create and foster the partnership without facing any serious strains or differences.

**FLEXIBILITY:** Another important factor that led to the success of the DIPD-JOMPOPS engagement is the flexibility, which was embedded in the design of the initiative and utilised in the implementation phase of activities. At that time, Nepal was experiencing multifaceted political transition, and events were unpredictable and changeable. The devastating earthquake in mid-2015 was followed by the Madhesi party agitation, which led to the blockade of essential supplies from India – making it quite difficult to conduct activities as planned.

To respond to such uncertain developments, DIPD adopted a policy of flexibility, enabling Steering Committee members to decide when and how to conduct planned activities, and even postponing some of them at short notice, if necessary. DIPD also responded flexibly to the need to change some parts of the programme, to adapt to the constantly evolving political context. For example, activities planned by JOMPOPS, in partnership with DIPD, initially did not address issues concerning Nepal's new constitution-making. However, when the Platform decided it should contribute to that end, activities were revised to suit that purpose.



**Hearty Welcome:** Top leaders of Nepal's parties have often participated in the activities supported by DIPD; in the photo, the DIPD Representative greets the Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba during an experience sharing seminar on the coalition cultures of Denmark and Nepal, January 2016.

This flexibility was quite important because if DIPD had adopted a rigid approach and stuck to supporting only the activities incorporated in the approved project document, the changing needs of political parties in Nepal could not have been accommodated. Flexibility ensured that DIPD's engagement in Nepal was relevant.

**TOP LEADERS' BUY-IN:** Almost all the Platform's Steering Committee members hold senior positions in their parties. For example, a Steering Committee member from the Communist Party of Nepal, Asta Laxmi Shakya, is in the party's Standing Committee – and, as such, she is its most senior female leader. Likewise, a Steering Committee member from RJP-N, Jitendra Sonal, is the General Secretary of his party and a Minister in Province 2. Out of 12 Steering Committee members, eight are currently members of Parliament.

The close and continuous engagement of such influential leaders in the project meant that party members at all levels, including the top leaders, could be encouraged to engage with activities. The most senior leaders of all the six parties participated in the relevant programme activities and kept themselves updated on the DIPD-JOMPOPS partnership. Steering Committee members and the DIPD Director met with top party leaders on a regular basis. These interactions helped to guarantee the support of top party echelons and parliamentary representatives. And, the buy-in and direct involvement of the senior leaders also helped to give the project further legitimacy and endorsement, which was important to the overall success of DIPD initiative in Nepal.

## ON A PERSONAL NOTE

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Finally, I would like to reflect about my own personal involvement as Project Co-ordinator for nearly five years. When I was given the responsibility of facilitating engagement between the six political parties and DIPD in 2012, DIPD did not have any infrastructure in place here or prior experience of working in Nepal. The JOMPOPS platform was also in its infancy, and without any institutional support mechanism. More importantly, I was young and inexperienced. The political culture was strongly male-dominated. So, as a woman, I was not sure to what extent I would succeed in my task.

But the DIPD Director at the time, and some Steering Committee members, saw my involvement in the project as a way to demonstrate that young women can succeed in leadership positions, if given the opportunity. The hope was that I could become an example to encourage other young women to assume leadership roles.

Because of the opportunities I was given as well as their trust and consistent support, I was able to manage the DIPD-JOMPOPS engagement from 2012 to 2017 without any serious issues or questions about my competence. One of the Nepali Congress leaders was so impressed to see a young woman working with major political parties, and dealing with influential political leaders, that he invited other MPs to meet me in my office.

That day I felt like I was able to embody the important message that young women can succeed in any responsible, political role if they are given the right opportunity and right support, and to convey that message to the Nepalese leaders.



**Light Moment:** CPN-UML's senior leader and former Prime Minister, Jhalnath Khanal shares a joke with the Danish MP Rasmus Nordqvist during the seminar on coalition culture, January 2016.

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Of course, one of the reasons why I was able to deliver on my role should be attributed to the wonderful project team in Nepal – a team whose members are non-partisan and do not carry any political label. Non-partisanship was a consideration also in hiring consultants and resource persons for various tasks. Careful choice of people who could deliver the asked-for technical support without stepping on political toes mattered in successfully organising the events.



**Pepping Up the Youth:** Promoting youth in politics has been one of the priorities of DIPD in Nepal. In the photo, former DIPD Director Bjørn Førde is with the youngest JOMPOPS SC member Suresh Mandal, January 2016. A student leader when he came into SC, Mandal went on to become a Central Committee member of his party. He won the elections to the provincial assembly of Province 2, where he is now a State Minister.

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The project team got a further boost when in mid-2016 the Senior Adviser was recruited, who came with a long experience and rich political insights. He was my boss in my previous job. In this culture, many senior men would perhaps hesitate to work under a woman especially if they are younger. Yet, by agreeing to be a part of my team, he gave me great confidence to take up heavier tasks, as the year 2017 turned out to be full of.

Broadly speaking, JOMPOPS's steady, hands-on guidance and involvement, the project team's full dedication, and support from DIPD headquarters all went into making the Nepal project a success that I have been fortunate to be part of.

I hope we are able to keep up the good work in the coming years!



**DIPD – Denmark and Nepal:** (From left to right) DIPD Board Chair Henrik Bach Mortensen, Representative to Nepal Shrishti Rana and the then DIPD Director Bjørn Førde. The DIPD top officials were a constant source of support, guidance and encouragement.

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## 1

FROM 'AND'  
TO 'OR'A WOMAN EARNS A RIGHT TO PASS  
CITIZENSHIP TO HER CHILD

In the long years of constitution-making that started in 2008, no discussion about gender equality was complete without the flagging of a blatant denial of right to women to pass citizenship to their children. In the scheme of the struggle for equal gender rights, the state's long-standing refusal to treat women as equal to men in a matter as significant as citizenship right vis-à-vis their kids long stood as a reflection of a patriarchal society that Nepal remained. Many women and their children suffered because of this serious lacuna in citizenship rights of a nation's citizen.



**Signing Up:** Attendees of the Kathmandu seminar in February 2015 put their pen to a commitment banner.

This had to change, JOMPOPS SC members agreed. And thus, was born a campaign it led, through visible advocacy and quiet lobbying with their own political parties and their highest leadership, Constituent Assembly members as well as its Chair.

JOMPOPS also drew on the civil society's advocacy at the citizens' level by allying with one of Nepal's premier human rights organisation, which was supported by an aid agency. (A version of this article was contributed by DIPD to a publication of the latter).

One instance of this was supporting partners in their campaigns to ensure gender equality in Nepal's new Constitution. This resulted in amendments to the provisions on citizenship before the Constitution was promulgated on 20 September 2015.

## ROLLBACK

Nepal's Interim Constitution (2007) granted a woman the right to transfer citizenship to her child, which meant that a person could claim citizenship through either mother or father. However, in a roll-back, this provision was scratched out from the draft of the new statute. Instead, the draft provision stipulated that, a person would only be able to claim citizenship if both "father and mother" were Nepali citizens.

The proposed citizenship articles were also discriminatory towards women in other respects: while the foreign wife of a Nepalese man could get Nepalese citizenship immediately, the foreign husband of a Nepalese woman would have had to wait 15 years; and the children of the Nepalese man would get citizenship by descent, but the children of the Nepalese woman married to a foreigner would only be naturalized citizens.



**Handing in a Memo:** JOMPOPS SC members Renu Yadav, Par-suram Meghi Gurung, Binod Bhattarai and Arjun Thapa, and others, hand over to Chairman of the Constituent Assembly Subhash Nemwang a memorandum with recommended texts for changes in the draft statute related to citizenship clauses.

These provisions, needless to say, violated the basic human rights of all Nepalese women. They were also in contradiction to the ideal of a liberal democratic citizen as a free autonomous individual. In the

past, many people in Nepal were not recognised as citizens, rendering them stateless. One reason for this was the inability of mothers to pass on citizenship.

Fearing that these draft clauses could find a way into the eventual statute, JOMPOPS, with support from DIPD, spearheaded a campaign — *Ama ko naam ma nagarikta, Nagarikta ma laingik samantata* (Citizenship through Mothers, Gender Equality in Citizenship Rights) — seeking corrections.

In February 2015, five regional-level meetings were organized to draw attention of political parties, government institutions, civil society organisations and the media to the controversial citizenship proposal. A seminar in Kathmandu, participated by senior politicians and the Constituent Assembly members, explored strategies to sharpen the campaign.



***In Solidarity:*** Senior UML party leader Bidhya Devi Bhandari (far left), who later went on to be Nepal's first President after the promulgation of the new Constitution in September 2015, gives her view at the Kathmandu seminar in February 2015.

A coalition on equal citizenship rights – an alliance of political parties and civil society organizations – emerged from the meeting for jointly advocating on the issue. A signature campaign drew much political interest, with attendance in the event by top leaders including Bidhya Devi Bhandari, who was elected President of Nepal after the promulgation of the Constitution later in the year in September.

## INTENSE LOBBYING

The final phase involved intense lobbying by the coalition led by JOMPOPS for amending problematic citizenship provisions. It also campaigned individually with influential members of the parties. The group submitted a memorandum with recommended texts to the Chairperson of the Constituent Assembly and the all-important phrases were incorporated in the final draft. According to the provisions in the new Constitution promulgated in September 2015, a person can obtain Nepalese citizenship if either the “father or

mother” is a Nepalese citizen, unlike the previous proposal with provision of both “father and mother” having to be Nepalese citizens.

Finally, women were granted equal citizenship rights as long as they were not married to foreigners. Even though the changed provision is not fully gender equal, it is a significant step towards that direction and JOMPOPS members agree that DIPD’s support to the campaign was crucial in making this possible.



**Views from the West:** JOMPOPS SC Member Jitendra Sonal (centre, at the head table) at a discussion session on “Issue of Citizenship in the New Constitution” in Dhangadhi, Far West Region – one of the regional events organised in early 2015.

The replacement of “and” by “or” in the very final draft statute – and it being finally endorsed – marks a remarkable victory in the long struggle for equal citizenship rights for Nepalese women, even though the law still discriminates on citizenship rights of women married to foreign citizens. Securing citizenship rights for mothers in the new Constitution, nonetheless, remains a significant stride towards gender equality and empowerment of women.



**Views from the East:** JOMPOPS SC members Binod Bhattarai and Parasuram Meghi Gurung (seated at the front table, from left to right) with other discussants at a forum in Biratnagar, Eastern Region, on the citizenship issues in early 2015.



## 2

# WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICS STEP UP TO ELECTIONS

## TRAINING IN TIME HELPS CANDIDATES TO PREPARE

All politics may be local, but all or most local politics should certainly not be all about male politicians. This is what seemed to be implied by an important command from Nepal's new Constitution 2015, which guaranteed that 40% of elected officials for local level should be women, one of them from the Dalit group, to boot. Two positions in a five-member Ward were thus reserved for women.



**ECN-JOMPOPS Collaboration:** Chief Election Commissioner Dr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav, flanked by JOMPOPS Chair Dina Nath Sharma (right) and an ECN official and JOMPOPS SC member Khimlal Devkota, addresses the inaugural session of the orientation for ECN staff in Kathmandu in January 2017.

Going a step further, the Local Level Election Act 2017 passed not too long before the local elections in May 2017, provided that a political party had to have a female candidate for either the mayor or

deputy mayor position of a municipality (chair or vice-chair in the case of Rural Municipality).

All this meant political parties entering the local elections, suddenly were faced with the prospect of having to not only find a lot of potential female candidates from among their members across the country to fight the polls in 753 local levels that Nepal now was laid out in, but also to train them properly to enter the fray. The local elections were happening in the country after a gap of 20 years.

Women politicians lacked opportunities to get the knowledge and skills required for participating substantively in the full electoral process, and women's participation in political parties' local units was still meagre. There was a huge need for training of potential women who could compete well in the local elections and win seats, prove themselves as competent leaders and move up the ladder.

## UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY

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JOMPOPS held that, in the scheme of its Women in Politics work, helping local women politicians come to the fore with confidence as local elections approached, was the proverbial need of the hour. It was an unprecedented opportunity to directly contribute to smoothen the road for deserving women to the elected local-level positions including in the powerful top positions of the municipalities – the training was to make them willing to contest elections, and to empower them with necessary technical knowledge to stand in the elections. They were to, at the same time, sensitize leaders of the political parties towards promoting women's effective participation in politics, more generally.



**All in One:** Participants from seven districts pose for a picture with ECN officials, JOMPOPS SC members and resource persons on the first day of the orientation.

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As local elections drew near, JOMPOPS in partnership with DIPD coordinated with the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) to conduct training for women candidates in all the seven provinces of the

country. ECN, the only organization with the official mandate to conduct such election-related training for women, was happy to join forces with JOMPOPS to help local women politicians of all political parties in seven selected districts, one in each of the seven provinces that the federal Nepal has been constitutionally delineated into. For JOMPOPS, through this training, it was also an opportunity to expand its collaboration with other parties, new and old, registered with the ECN in the concerned seven districts.



***Planning the Roll-Out:*** DIPD Senior Adviser Murari Shivakoti running a session to plan the series of trainings in the districts across seven provinces.

Two weeks before the nomination of candidates in late April for the local level elections, over 300 potential women candidates – from all the parties with presence in the districts – were trained in the seven districts representing all the seven provinces of Nepal. I

n an atmosphere in which political parties were admittedly uncertain about how to get so many women to stand for the fast-approaching elections on their behalf, the series of training was much welcomed and its results surpassed the expectations.

ECN first organized in January 2017 a training/orientation programme for its officers from some selected districts, one from each of the seven provinces. ECN officials drew up draft session plans for the local-level training which were finalized by the trainees during the orientation.

It, then, rolled out a two-day training in each of those districts, where the newly-trained election officers, along with other experts in areas such as gender equality and election campaigning, taught local political women cadres, with apparently clear ambitions to stand for elections if given a chance, who learnt how to prepare enough to turn themselves from potential candidates to nominated candidates for the elections, representing their respective parties.

## ALL-PARTY PARTICIPATION

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Much enthusiasm, more than expected, was palpable among the participants that the parties registered in the district had sent to the training. The training saw participation also by 18 other parties, which sent trainees from its 61 branches cumulatively from the different seven districts.



***Simulating and Learning:*** Potential women candidates at the training in the remote mountainous Kalikot district, in Province 6, learn about voting through a mock exercise.

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As an aside, it is to be noted that the trainees had such high motivation to learn despite the fact that these trainings did not offer any “allowance”, not even one related to transportation, to the trainees, unlike the usual practice with such training – a fact that surprised the ECN officials who said they invariably saw organisations offering one or more kinds of allowances to ensure participation.



***West to East:*** Trainees in Bajhang...

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Trainees in general, during the discussions at the two-day training, expressed their strong hopes of being picked up as candidates, so that they could enter the electoral field and prove their mettle. They



were eager to learn what do the laws say about the new local bodies, what were the elected officials' responsibilities and the canvassing skills they need – all the information, armed with which, they could lobby with their respective parties' district committees to give them “tickets” for candidacies. Post-training, in one-to-one interviews and in evaluation forms, they gave thumbs up to the contents of the training and the way it was organized. District election officers, trained in Kathmandu, had taken most of the sessions, with a constitutional lawyer and two experts from DIPD serving as resource persons.

The chance to participate in elections itself of course was greatly empowering for women as they aspired to be leaders in their communities. But even if winning is everything at the elections, a number of them did well. With the local elections over in September 2017, the results of the elections pointed to how worthwhile the training had been for these aspiring women candidates in the seven districts of Panchthar, Bara, Nuwakot, Syangja, Palpa, Kalikot and Bajhang districts – from parties just established to parties long in the scene.

## TICKETS AND WINNERS

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In total, 24.55 % of participants were successful in their efforts to receive the “tickets” from their parties, and a similar percentage – 24.63 % - of the contestants emerged winners, in the districts.



*... and in Palpa...*

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Among the winners are seven deputy mayors/vice chairs. A few of the elected members went on to win the subsequent elections for membership of the local body's Executive, whose office-bearers (other than Mayor/Deputy or Chair/Vice Chair) are elected by the Village or Municipal Assemblies (legislative) which comprise all the just-elected position-holders – mayor/deputy mayors, chairs/vice chairs, ward chairs and ward members. Respective assemblies

elect four and five women to the Village (rural municipality) and Municipal Executives, respectively.



*...and in Panchthar, the selected districts of Provinces 7, 5 and 1, during exercises at the training.*

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No less notable, but unintended, result was the fact that a number of participants of the training, as part of their party responsibilities, were reported to have in different places of their district trained hundreds of women at the grass-roots on some of the contents they learnt at the training.

Limited though in scope, the results of this programme have also contributed in general to promoting women in leadership positions in Nepal. This outcome has a direct positive correlation in contributing towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 relating to gender equality and empowering women.

Obviously, the results of the training go beyond the numbers of contestants and winners, where many factors other than the training also played a part. But what seems to be undisputable is the learning that took place during the training and which provided some help. Interviews of all the participant-winners of the elections indicate that they unreservedly gave good marks to the training, expressions going beyond ritualistic polite answers to training organisers' usual questions. Excerpts from some of the interviews are below.

## VOICE OF THE VICTORIOUS

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**KALPANA TIWARI of Nepali Congress**, who won the Deputy Mayor position in Waling municipality in **Syangja**, in the first-phase elections, said the training was “timely” and it “enhanced my knowledge” on overall electoral processes. A youth leader who is president of the district women’s association affiliated to the party,



Ms. Tiwari said: “It helped me to understand various important provisions and processes of local election which was useful for me in the context of the election. Also useful was learning about the various techniques of campaigning which I also shared among the other Nepali Congress candidates in the district”. She found all

the topics “very relevant” especially those relating to constitutional and legal provisions on women and the structure of local entities. Increased knowledge on these topics enhanced my capacity to contest election, she said.

Appropriateness of timing of the training was something **Tiwari’s district party colleague BIMALA SHRESTHA** too stressed. Ms. Shrestha, who was elected as the Deputy Mayor of Chapakot Municipality in **Syngja** found the training “quite useful, relevant and organized in appropriate time”. It helped, she said, to understand the legal provisions on women for local election. It also taught us about leadership qualities, which gave us more confidence to contest election. A teacher by profession, Ms. Shrestha said the “topics on raising funds for election and election campaigning, including publicity and promotion during election, which emphasized on interacting with public, were very helpful for me”.

**PAUSARA DEVI THAPA of CPN UML** who got elected to Vice Chair of Khaptadchhanna Rural Municipality of **Bajhang** said the training helped her to understand the possible political challenges that women might face during her political career. In politics since 1995, Ms. Thapa thought it was an important training to take part in prior to the election, and said her knowledge about the electoral process, election code of conduct and how to raise fund effectively during election was enhanced by the training.

**DEVI KUMARI THAPA of CPN-UML**, who has been elected to Vice Chair of Niruwa Rural Municipality of **Syangja** said that through the training she became aware about the ways of collecting funds for election, including how to approach people, and about how to get to media (print and visual) to help one’s election campaign. In politics since 1996, the mother of three said she took what she learnt at the training also to *Aama Samuha* (mothers’ clubs): how a woman can play an important role in addressing the development issues of a place, why women should be encouraged to participate in politics and how it will make a difference in the society.



**RITA GABEGU of CPN Maoist Centre**, who won the women ward member position in Ward No. 8 of Phalelung Rural Municipality of the district, said the training was a “good learning opportunity”. “It enhanced my knowledge on how women should be aware and updated about political rights along with social and economic rights”, she said. “Men’s roles are equally important to encourage women and increase their participation in politics.” A 33-year-old mother of two, Ms. Gabegu found all the topics very relevant. “Sessions on Election Act enhanced my knowledge on overall electoral procedure and other sessions taught me the importance of women’s participation in politics”, she pointed out.

For Gabegu's party colleague **SHARADA DEVI BUDA**, who won the women ward member position in one of the wards of Chabispathivera Rural Municipality in **Bajhang** district, found the training very



relevant as it helped her to understand the electoral procedures “which motivated me to contest election with more confidence”. A member of district committee since 2015, Ms. Buda said: “Among the sessions, those on electoral process, the local bodies’ roles and authorities as per the new constitution, and ways to raise funds for election were more useful for me”.

**MANSHOVA SHAHI of Nepal Majdur Kisan Party**, who got elected to as a woman ward member of Ward No. 6 of Kalika Rural Municipality in **Kalikot** district, found the training “very useful for women like us who are trying to make meaningful representation in politics”. Ms. Shahi, who also went on to win a seat in the Executive organ of the rural municipality, said all the topics and sessions over the two days were quite relevant, especially the topics regarding structure, roles and authorities of local bodies and how to raise funds from our close people and others for contesting election. “As we (women) don’t have much financial access, (the presentation) guided us to plan and generate financial support for contesting election”.

## 3

# AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

NEW LEGISLATIONS, LOCAL  
AWARENESS-RAISING AND PARTY  
POLICY CHANGES

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Ever since JOMPOPS decided to work together on ending violence against women (EVAW), the issue has remained close to its heart. Working to promote women in politics, JOMPOPS concluded that political parties must take the initiative to fight increasing VAW, since as long as women continued to be victims of widespread violence, the initiatives to promote gender equality and encourage them to take up leadership positions would not be successful.



**Dowry Cruelty:** JOMPOPS SC members Khimlal Devkota and Arjun Thapa, and UML leader Garima Shah visit Rihana, a victim of heinous domestic violence, as she lies at a Kathmandu hospital with severe burns in early 2014.

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Considering the magnitude of the issue, therefore, even when other prominent political issues such as implementing the Constitution and restructuring the state came to dominate the politics of Nepal, JOMPOPS did not ignore its commitment to address this persistent bane of Nepalese society and continued to carry out the multiparty campaign through various activities.

If on the one hand it worked to bring the issue to the fore in party organisations, it also contributed to legislative efforts that resulted in Nepal's parliament in 2015 passing two bills related to violence against women. As a platform, it "took" the new Acts to the grass-roots political party members through dissemination events, and brought to the public and political attention incidents of violence against women.

## MULTI-PRONGED EVAW STRATEGY

To start with, on International Women's Day in March 2014, all JOMPOPS' Steering Committee members publicly committed to collaborate, on both multi-party and intra-party basis, on ending violence against women.



**Word from Govt:** Praising JOMPOPS for their work, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam expresses his commitment to support the campaign against VAW at a national workshop on 7 March 2015. Others on the dais are JOMPOPS SC members Binod Bhattarai and Jeetendra Narayan Dev, and former DIPD Director Bjørn Førde.

A workshop finalised its Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) strategy that would guide its activities. As one of the first public awareness events on the ground, in September 2014, the district of Banke, which reports high incidents of violence against women, saw JOMPOPS members organising a multiparty meeting where district level leaders of all major political parties committed to a joint action plan on ending violence against women.

Earlier, Banke had become a theatre for a terrible case of domestic violence suffered by Rihana Sheikh Dhaphali, a seventeen-year Muslim girl, who was burnt alive on 17 March 2014 by her husband and in-laws for dowry. She was seven months pregnant. JOMPOPS members along with other Members of Parliament visited Rihana, who was brought to a hospital for her treatment.

JOMPOPS members took a multiparty delegation to the Home Minister to request the government to bear expenses of Rihana's treatment as well as to punish the culprits. Though the absconding perpetrators could not be prosecuted, Rihana received some state and civil society support as JOMPOPS ensured a follow-up, including that from the Social Justice and Human Rights Committee (SJHR) of the Parliament.

A series of activities over the years culminated in a workshop on 7 March 2015 where Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, Mr. Bam Dev Gautam, praised the six-party platform for having decided to work on the issue of violence against women, and he expressed his commitment to support its campaign.

As part of further implementing its EVAW Strategy, JOMPOPS reached an understanding with the UN Women, National Women's Commission, Inter Party Women's Alliance and Federation of Women's Entrepreneurship and collaborated together on the campaign activities.

## ACTS 2015

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JOMPOPS members who also served as parliamentarians took initiatives inside the parliament to pass necessary legislation on ending violence against women. As a result of these initiatives, the Parliament passed two laws namely – Anti-Witchcraft Act 2015 and Sexual Harassment in Workplace (Elimination) Act 2015.

JOMPOPS SC members felt that dissemination of information – in all the regions – on the newly-passed laws to the district party leaders as well as to other concerned stakeholders such as government and security officials and civil society members were needed.

With support from DIPD and in collaboration with organisations like UN Women, JOMPOPS members implemented multiparty campaign activities related to the newly passed legislations at the local level which resulted into signing of a joint commitment by around 480 influential local people – political parties' members, civil society members and government officials – in different districts like Kailali, Jumla, Palpa, Taplejung, and Rautahat – to take necessary actions to reduce violence against women in respective regions.

Federation of Women Entrepreneurship's Association of Nepal (FWEAN) was roped in to link the fight against VAW with women's economic empowerment. During the programmes, JOMPOPS

members talked about the importance of multiparty collaboration at the local level to address the issue of VAW. Representatives of UN Women provided its expertise on the two Acts, while representatives from FWEAN presented on economic opportunities for women, including for victims of violence such as rape and trafficking.



**Palpa Pledge:** Political party members, civil society activists and government officials at a discussion in the western district of Palpa – one of the venues for regional-level dissemination events on two new women's rights Acts – working on their text for "Our Collective Commitment against Violence against Women".

This series of regional-level dissemination events – under the banner of *Mahila Hinsā Biruddha Hamro Samuhik Pratibaddhata* (Our Collective Commitment against Violence against Women – spread the word about the two Acts significantly, JOMPOPS felt, and a central-level workshop – participated in by central level leaders of JOMPOPS parties and other relevant stakeholders including security officials – in Kathmandu on 9 January 2016 shared the findings of these workshops and discussed the way forward.

As part of the continuing multiparty campaign on EVAW, JOMPOPS coordinated with the National Women's Commission, to conduct on 18 May 2016 a public hearing on violence against women attended by around 118 participants in Itahari district in which concerned officials committed to take necessary actions to address the problem.

Just as during other events, this gathering also saw JOMPOPS members emphasizing the importance of the multiparty collaboration at the local level in eliminating violence against women.

## PARTY POLICY CHANGES

The issue of violence against women is a continuing concern in Nepal. The JOMPOPS campaign has contributed to put it to the forefront of public consciousness and to legislative attention.

More importantly, efforts of JOMPOPS, a political platform, in this respect have helped the issue to be placed on the political parties' agenda, whereas earlier it seemed to be confined to the work areas of non-governmental sector only. Consequently, political parties have brought in policies to address the issue, with all that it implies in terms of the impact it can create in the society because of the parties' reach.

Policies like those adopted by Nepali Congress during its 13<sup>th</sup> National Convention in March 2013 – for example, putting in place a provision to prohibit active membership of the party to any perpetrators of any kind of gender-based violence during its – send a strong deterrent message to the public. UML – for another example – passed a four-point policy in March 2014 on ending VAW.

More recently, the government of Province 2, which includes a JOMPOPS SC member, has introduced a campaign against the dowry system, a cause of much suffering for many women in that region. Given the deep-rooted causes of this societal malady, the battle against violence against women requires a lot of political and social actions, and JOMPOPS plans to continue their collaboration to fight it.



## 4

# BUILDING UP A CADRE OF TRAINERS

## TOT HELPS POLITICAL PARTIES CASCADE DOWN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Engagement of JOMPOPS in strengthening political parties at the local level presupposed that, first, a clutch of trainers, who are well-versed in various dimensions of party building at the grassroots, is produced.

One of the key highlights of the JOMPOPS project during the 2014-17 phase is, undoubtedly, nurturing a group of party leaders from across the political parties into competent trainers who can hold trainings on political party development. With the nation going into federalism, strengthening local party units and doing other local level reforms in party structures were indispensable tasks.



**Local a Focal Point:** DIPD Board Chair Henrik Back Mortensen speaks about Danish experiences of local party branches at the inauguration on 8 March 2016 in Kathmandu of the four-day Training of Trainers on Guide for Political Parties Strengthening at the Local Level.

Because this realisation was strong among JOMPOPS parties, they all engaged in the endeavour to successfully hold a four-day Training of Trainers (ToT) in April 2016 with support from DIPD. This marked in a way a logical conclusion of a step – that JOMPOPS Steering Committee members had started with writing a Guide, “Strengthening Political Parties at the Local Level”, in collaboration with their Danish political party counterparts, and some Nepalese and Danish consultants.



**Danish Line-up:** Resource persons from Denmark – Rasmus Falck Ostergaard from the Red-Green Alliance, Leon Sebbelin from the Social Liberal Party, Kisser Franciska Lehnert from the Liberal Alliance party and Rolf Aagaard-Svendsen from the Conservative Party – jointly interact with the ToT trainees in one of the sessions.

Despite their then ongoing political differences on constitution-making, the JOMPOPS parties were of one mind on this endeavour, and successfully organised the ToT for their local level party members, following a series of consultations earlier in February that saw through the finalisation of Trainers’ and Participants’ Manuals based on the Guide. To facilitate these consultations, each JOMPOPS party had designated a training coordinator.

## DETAILED GUIDELINES

The Trainers’ Manual contain detailed guidelines to the trainers of the central-level training and the master trainers on delivering training at different levels on how to strengthen democratic functioning of political parties by learning how to gain local support based on lessons from Danish experiences; how to enhance understanding and skills of political party workers to develop a local programme; how to promote democratic decision-making, transparency and accountability; and how to lobby, advocate and campaign effectively for winning elections.

The four-day ToT workshop in Kathmandu, with 27 participants from JOMPOPS parties, also benefitted from the four visiting Danish politicians – Kisser Franciska Lehnert, Leon Sebbelin, Rasmus Falck Ostergaard and Rolf Aagaard Svendsen – who shared their Danish experiences on strengthening political parties at the local level.

The ToT had kicked off with an inauguration that saw attendance of some 75 senior leaders of the political parties in Nepal, as well as the visiting DIPD top duo – the Chairperson and the Director – who spoke on the importance of strengthening political parties at the local level, and the background that led to the focus on local level party strengthening work in Nepal.



**Sharing Sessions:** One of the ToT sessions saw Danish Conservative Party politician Rolf Aagaard-Svendsen talk about the Danish Experiences on Parties and Local Democracy.



**Pumping It Up:** A Nepalese facilitator Sahadev Mahat jumps on to a chair during a session, as he tries to liven it up and teach about energisers as part of the facilitation skills.

Following that training, JOMPOPS integrated some of the training modules based on the Guide in their internal training activities. Such

modules would be facilitated either by the ToT-trained trainers, Steering Committee members or other experts, including from DIPD.

Many of the trainers from different parties, following the ToT, used their newly-acquired knowledge and skills for training of the rank and file of the parties in different districts. While some of these training sessions at the intra-party level were conducted with technical support from DIPD, many more were organized by the parties as part of their party training schedule, more particularly as the country moved closer to holding elections following the promulgation of the new constitution in September 2015.

## TAKING IT TO DISTRICTS/MUNICIPALITIES

As an example of the expected cascading, the Federal Affairs Department Secretary Mr. Shiva Gurung, the ToT-trained trainer, utilized his skills at two-day trainings (in Dang and Janakpur) in January 2017 on “State Restructuring in Implementation of Constitution” that saw participation of over 140 key district-level leaders from all the seven provinces of the country that Nepal had constitutionally become.



**Thumbs Up:** ToT trainees, Danish experts, and Nepalese resource persons, including JOMPOPS members, seem to give their OK to the training event.

As another example, a ToT-trained trainer from Nepali Congress, Mr. Basanta C.K. from Parbat district, engaged in training a couple of hundreds of cadres from Modi, Bihadi and Painyu rural municipalities of the district, soon after the ToT training. He was also in action at the party-organised training in Panchkhal, Kavre, on 22-23 September 2017, targeting some 45 newly-elected deputy mayors, chairpersons, vice chairpersons, ward chairpersons, women members, Dalit women members and other members.

For yet another example from another party, Maoist Centre, its Kathmandu district trainer Ram Kumari Chaudhary, was active prior to local election in training approximately 300 party cadres, both women and men, in various municipalities and rural municipalities of Dharan, Itahari and Inaruwa, especially on election-related topics



such as electoral procedures and ways of election campaigning. (In March 2018, she became State Minister for Agriculture, Land Management and Cooperatives in the new government after elections).



**Knowledge Transfer:** A ToT-trained Trainer from Nepali Congress party, Basanta CK, taking a session for newly-elected local representatives in September 2017 in Panchkhal, Kavrepalanchok, a district in Province 3.

For this report, the above trained trainers were asked what the ToT meant to them and whether what they learnt was useful to them in their work as trainers. Here are some excerpts from the interviews with them.

### SHIVA GURUNG

TAPLEJUNG DISTRICT, SECRETARY, FEDERAL AFFAIRS  
DEPARTMENT, CPN UML



After participating in the Training of Trainers (ToT) on Strengthening Political Parties at the Local Level, I have utilized the knowledge and skills in organising regional-level training programmes for party members in various locations such as Dhanusa for representatives from Province 2, Kathmandu for those from Province 3, Taplejung for those from Province 1 and Dang

for those from Provinces 5, 6 and 7. Trainings were provided for both men and women party workers on topics such as how to strengthen the local level, how to make elections successful, and how to make elections free and fair.

During the training programme, I focused on issues such as implementation of the provisions of the constitution at the local level; roles, responsibilities and functions of the local level; and how to manage funds for elections. The ToT was practical and taught us new training

methods. These turned out to be very useful for conducting trainings at the local level as they encouraged participants to actively participate, and hence making the trainings lively.

The reference materials, including the guidebook, that we received at the ToT were very useful. Denmark's local level political party experience, shared at the ToT, helped us to learn of new issues. We understood and agreed that some of the Danish practices that are relevant to Nepal's context could be replicated here.

The learnings and knowledge gained from ToT were shared with other party members. It was emphasized that regular trainings including trainings for women empowerment need to be conducted in order to enhance the knowledge and capacity of fellow members.

### **BASANTA C.K.**

PARBAT DISTRICT, MEMBER, GENERAL COUNCIL  
(MAHASAMITI), NEPALI CONGRESS



I have been serving Nepali Congress from the year 1975 till now in different capacities. I was district president of Nepal Teachers Association for four terms from 1973 and also served as national vice president in the year 2065 B.S. for four years. Now I am actively serving the party as General Council (Mahasamiti) member and trainer.

After participating in the Central Level Training of Trainers (ToT), I organized several trainings in Modi rural municipality, Bihadi rural municipality, and Painyu rural municipality of Parbat district; these municipalities are now under Province 4. Approximately, 300 participants benefitted from the training.

What I acquired during the ToT helped me to impart knowledge about the parties' roles and authority, the importance of elections, ways to campaign during elections, and winning elections.

As I was serving the party as a trainer already, the ToT helped me to boost my facilitation skills which helped me to organize trainings more efficiently. I learnt various techniques of facilitation. I took initiative in this respect by approaching the party president for more focus on strengthening the local branches and units of the party for their effective performance.

Though we cannot fully exercise all the political practices of Denmark that we learnt at the ToT, we can consider issues and practices for their possible inspiration in helping strengthen our political parties. More political trainings are necessary to motivate more people to join politics.

**RAM KUMARI CHAUDHARY**SUNSARI DISTRICT, MEMBER, CENTRAL COMMITTEE,  
CPN MAOIST CENTER

My coordination and management skills sharpened with what I learnt at the ToT, which was useful while coordinating various activities during the local elections. Though I could not organise any training as such immediately after the ToT, I am happy that I could make some contributions to the local election campaign where the learnings from the ToT were applied.

Prior to the local elections, I trained approximately 300 party cadres (both women and men) in various municipalities and rural municipalities of Dharan, Itahari and Inaruwa, especially on election-related topics such as electoral procedures and ways of election campaigning. Facilitation skills acquired during ToT helped me to effectively and efficiently organise, coordinate and implement the trainings.

The training methodology that I learnt from ToT was a good help. The materials and documents provided during the ToT were very useful. I utilised the information and contributed to creating reference materials in all the trainings that were organised.

The ToT also helped me understand and realise the importance of strengthening local branches of the party, which are essential for building a solid foundation of any party. With my fellow party cadres, I shared the procedures of forming local branches; importance of forming various local units with their clear roles and functions in the federal setup; and ways to generate and manage financial resources. In addition to that, the knowledge gained during the training helped to keep myself motivated during the elections.

Besides practicing good time management, I could also identify my voters and could convey my messages more clearly, during the national elections.

## 5

# COALITION SOLUTION

## DIALOGUE AND NEGOTIATION CULTURE IS KEY

When some members of JOMPOPS Steering Committee were on a general study-tour in Denmark in June 2014 and had an opportunity to get familiarized with the country's coalition culture, they wondered whether DIPD could produce material that helps others understand what makes coalition approach there an enduring solution to the politics of governing.

After all, no party in Denmark has enjoyed a majority on its own since 1906, and it had uninterrupted coalition government since 1982. The Danish practices of building and managing political coalitions, Nepalese politicians thought, could be an “idea that can inspire”, as DIPD's strategy goes.



**Here is the Guide:** A row of dignitaries, including three ex-PMs, releases the Coalition Guide in Kathmandu on 11 January 2016.

The Nepalese visitors made the request and DIPD was happy to oblige. Thus was born a Reader, that contains Danish experiences with coalition government and coalition governance, among other things, including practices of coalition-building elsewhere.



The Reader, in English and its translated version in Nepali, was launched on 11 January 2016 in Kathmandu with a seminar attended by over 100 key Nepalese leaders, including three former Prime Ministers. The Reader had been launched earlier in Denmark in late 2015.

The attending politicians heard from the speakers at the Kathmandu seminar, both how Denmark deals with coalition-building as well as how Nepal has witnessed the politics of coalition for much of its democratic era since 1990 and even more so since the successful second people's movement in 2006. Mr. Khimlal Devkota, Co-Chair of JOMPOPS which organized the event with DIPD support, stressed on the importance of discussing coalition-building in Nepal's context. He was part of the Nepalese delegation to Denmark in 2014 where two of the eventual authors of the DIPD coalition Reader were present and where a ground was established for the production of book.



**Useful Guide:** *Sharing his experience of heading several coalitions, former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba of Nepali Congress hoped the Guide would be very helpful for politicians.*

At the Kathmandu event, the Danish Ambassador Kristen Geelan and DIPD Director Bjorn Forde shared their Danish perspectives on coalition-building. Member of Parliament Rasmus Nordqvist from the new Danish Party "Alternative" highlighted how he and his party believed new global challenges also called for new ways of looking at and practicing politics. He stressed on the importance for parties of creating stronger coalition with people outside Parliament in order to practice bottom-up approach to democracy.

## COALITION-BUILDING PRIME MINISTERS

In addition to sharing experiences from Denmark, three former Prime Ministers from the three largest parties – Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and UCPN-Maoist – shared their experience of managing coalition governments. They also reflected on the importance of the

topics covered by the Reader – not least in that post-constitution phase where Nepal had to develop a new multiparty democratic culture requiring consensus and coalition-building. Nepal had promulgated a new constitution in September 2015.

All the three former heads of government, who had all managed coalition governments, underlined the need of parties in Nepal to find solutions together – also the subtitle of the DIPD Reader. Former Prime Minister Jhal Nath Khanal (CPN-UML), in his presentation, argued for the need to redefine the electoral system in Nepal which he found to be the biggest obstacle to the stability of governments. Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai (UCPN-Maoist) shared that he saw two kinds of political coalitions in Nepal – “forced marriage” and “marriage of convenience”. He said that during his time as prime minister he had to enter a “forced marriage” – simply to create a majority. The three-time Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (Nepali Congress) also shared his experience of running several coalition governments in Nepal and said that the coalition guide launched by DIPD would be very helpful for Nepalese leaders.

A lively discussion followed the presentations. Several participants asked Mr. Nordqvist questions about how his new party had come into existence. Others commented on what they saw as critical aspects of the political system in Nepal, including its implications on coalition politics, and what they could learn from experiences of other countries.

Many politicians much appreciated the fact that the Reader was available also in Nepali language, as it helped increase its access to more Nepalese audience.



**Alternative Ways:** Danish MP Rasmus Nordqvist of the new Party “Alternative” stressed on new ways of practising politics.

## 6

# JOINING HANDS WITH PARLIAMENT

## SOCIAL JUSTICE AND GENDER EQUALITY IN A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The cause for gender equality that JOMPOPS has long embraced found a prominent ally in a parliamentary committee of the country: Social Justice and Human Rights Committee. The Committee, joining hands with JOMPOPS, hosted in September 2016 an international conference on Gender Equality and Social Justice, attended by over 120 parliamentarians, political leaders, civil society activists, and gender and social inclusion experts from Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Denmark.

The conference participants gathered in Kathmandu on 22 and 23 September 2016 to discuss gender equality and promotion of women in politics and their intrinsic, inescapable relationship with social justice, and they all felt that: “Issues of gender equality are not only related to women, but are fundamental to the success of democracy and social justice, and therefore (they)... express their commitment to ensure full gender equality.”



**Setting the Scene:** Chair of Social Justice and Human Rights (SJHR) Committee of the Parliament Sushil Kumar Shrestha delivers the inaugural address to the conference.

In committing themselves to full gender equality through the Kathmandu Declaration, the participants, including the majority of members of parliament from Social Justice and Human Rights (SJHR) Committee of Nepal's Legislature-Parliament, were emphasizing that the issues of gender equality and social justice were inextricably linked.



**Interview Slot:** Former Minister for Equality of Denmark, Manu Sareen fielding questions from moderator DIPD Representative to Nepal Shrishti Rana and audience on how men should engage on gender issues.

The two-day conference saw about two dozen speaking slots/sessions with more than 40 speakers, moderators and chairs contributing their views, perspectives and remarks on specific topics or themes related to gender equality/women in politics. Question-and-answer sessions following panelists' presentations helped learn and share. Multi-speaker panel sessions were chaired by a member of parliament from the Social Justice and Human Rights Committee.

## EXPLORING PRACTICAL WAYS

The high-level visiting delegates, who participated in the conference as speakers, were the Bhutanese Minister for Works and Human Settlement and Chairperson of the country's National Commission for Women and Children Ms. Lyonpo Dorji Choden, the Chair of Women Children and Youth Committee of the Bhutanese National Assembly Mr. Tshewang Jurmi, the Chair of Women and Children Rights Committee of Myanmar Parliament Dr. Mya Thauang, former Minister for Equality of Denmark Mr. Manu Sareen and former Danish Member of Parliament Ms. Lone Loklindt.

Renowned Nepalese experts on gender issues also shared their insights at different panel sessions. They included former Regional

Director of UNIFEM (now UNWomen) Ms. Chandni Joshi, UN CEDAW Expert Member Ms. Bandana Rana and former Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel. Addressing the conference were also Chief Election Commissioner Dr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav, Member of National Human Rights Commission Ms. Mohana Ansari and UNWomen Country Representative for Nepal, Ms. Wenny Kusuma.

The main aim of the conference was to explore practical ways of encouraging more women to enter leadership roles in institutions of multi-party democracy and, generally, to promote the participation, representation and recognition of women in the political arena.



**Equality a Priority:** Former Danish MP Ms. Lone Loklindt takes to the podium as part of the panel that included JOMPOPS SC members Chitra Lekha Yadav and Jeetendra Narayan Dev, and other delegates from Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal. Gender equality, participation and recognition was a priority in Denmark.

The final session of the conference – where the participants were divided into five groups – explored five questions: 1) How to make political parties gender-equal? 2) How to encourage the participation of women at the local level? 3) How to enhance regional co-operation to promote gender equality? 4) How can the Social Justice and Human Rights Committee promote gender equality? 5) How to ensure gender equality measures in parliament?

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The conference made a number of recommendations, among which some of key ones were:

- Initiate amendments in the political parties' internal Constitutions as per the spirit of the new Constitution of Nepal that stipulates full gender equality.



- Ensure that meetings and activities of political parties are responsive to the needs of women (e.g. avoid too early or too late time for meetings/activities).
- Allocate budget inside the parties for enhancing the necessary skills for women politicians.
- Sensitize men on the importance of women's participation in politics at the local level.
- Introduce easier entry criteria for women members at the local level vis-a-vis men.
- Train women candidates at the local level to compete in the elections.
- Create a cross-country internship programme for women's capacity building.
- Create a platform to share the necessary experience with each other and give continuity.
- Instruct the Government of Nepal to enforce provisions relating to women's rights in the new Constitution.
- Ensure 33 per cent women's representation in all the committees of the parliament.
- Effectively implement Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Declaration 1997 and the SDG Goal No. 5.
- Introduce more gender friendly practices in the parliament.



***Question from the Floor:*** A delegate poses a query to a panel.

If the enthusiastic participation in the conference of Nepalese parliamentarians and other political and civil society leaders; thoughts of speakers and panelists from Bhutan, Myanmar and Denmark; remarks from invited guests and dignitaries; audience participation during question and answer sessions; lively deliberations during plenary sessions; the practical recommendations from the participants at the five parallel sessions in the last slot of the conference; or the letter and spirit of the Kathmandu Declaration – are any indication, the conference was largely successful in achieving its objectives, and in setting up a conducive atmosphere for the necessary follow-up by the SJHR Committee to push for further reforms. Many of the

dignitaries, during the delivery of their remarks, made it a point to pronounce that the deliberations were fruitful and that the conference was a success.



***Justice and Equality:*** Participants and resource persons from Bhutan, Denmark, Myanmar and Nepal in total attended about two dozen sessions during the international conference on Gender Equality and Social Justice.

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## 7

# LOBBYING MP'S THROUGH FOLLOW-UP

## ENHANCE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Scores of MPs gathered on 19 December 2016 to discuss the follow-up to the International Conference on Gender Equality and Social Justice that had taken place earlier in September. The Social Justice and Human Rights Committee (SJHR) of Nepal's Parliament organized the follow-up in which around 75 participants including the members of the SJHR Committee, Steering Committee members of the JOMPOPS as well as parliamentarians from other parliamentary committees attended the programme. The meeting reflected on the main recommendations of the conference and discussed the strategies for implementing them. The published report of the conference was also shared with the participants.



**Assessment Points:** At the interaction on follow-up to the Conference, JOMPOPS SC member and SJHR Committee member Asta Laxmi Shakya, with her JOMPOPS and parliamentary colleagues, listed topics, experts and experience from other countries as the three good elements of the conference.

Seizing the opportunity to spread the message of gender equality among the other MPs present who had not been able to participate in the September event, JOMPOPS members lobbied with the legislators to take a parliamentary leadership on the issue. They presented the outcome of the event, talked about how the gender equality campaign is unfolding internationally and regionally, and where in this field Nepal should focus on.

## EMBRACE FULLY 33 PER CENT

The programme started with welcome remarks from Sushil Kumar Shrestha, the Chair of the SJHR Committee. The Chair pointed out that the mere increase of women in Parliament is not enough, it is equally important for those women to have an influential role. In Nepal's particular case, more needs to be done to enhance the influence of women in politics. He said political parties are still far behind to embrace the essence of the new Constitution which ensures at least 33 per cent representation of women in all state bodies.



**Reforms Now:** Chair of the Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee of the Parliament Ranju Jha thought parties should now change their gender equality practices according to the spirit of the new Constitution.

Murari Shivakoti, who wrote the Conference report, shared the highlights with the participants, summarizing the essence of each session. Drawing particularly from speakers Om Kinley from Bhutan, Cherry Zahau from Myanmar, and Chaya Jha from Nepal respectively, he stressed the following points:

1. Women need coaching and mentoring to be successful leaders.
2. Women should not only look for role models from the elite background; a new type of role models for leadership is required.
3. There should be gender mainstreaming in all committees of the political parties at all levels.

Similarly, Shrishti Rana, main coordinator of the Conference, presented the main conclusions of the event, drawing from the discussions during the sessions. She highlighted five key points:



***From the Audience:*** One of the members of Parliament gives her view during the interaction.

1. Engagement of men is indispensable for gender equality.
2. Women need special support/programmes for building leadership skills.
3. Women should have influential role inside political parties to be effective leaders in the Parliament and in the Government.
4. Experiences from Bhutan/Myanmar point out that they are better than Nepal when it comes to the social status of women but Nepal is better in regard to political representation of women.
5. Parliament and political parties can play a very vital role in ensuring gender equality in practice.

## NOTEWORTHY PARTICIPATION

The SJHR Committee member as well as Steering Committee member of JOMPOPS, Asta Laxmi Shakya presented a few assessment points of the Conference. She said that the good part of the Conference was that it covered wide-ranging topics pertaining to gender equality within a short time. The Conference also managed to involve good experts and influential speakers with noteworthy participation from the parliamentarians and political leaders. Sharing of experiences from other countries including Bhutan, Denmark and Myanmar also added an interesting flavour to the Conference.

Ranju Jha, Chair of the Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee, emphasized that now political parties should reform their internal structures and practices according to the spirit of the new Constitution.



Likewise, most commentators pointed out that the Conference brought out contradictions between high female political representation and low social and economic development of women in Nepal. MPs stressed that these contradictions must be resolved.



**Conference Highlights:** DIPD Senior Adviser Murari Shivakoti presenting some key highlights of the two-day event based on the conference report.

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## 8

# ADVANCING THE CAUSE THROUGH POLITICS

## DALIT WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES GEAR UP FOR NEW ROLES

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It was a case of Dalit political sisters, irrespective of which political party they belonged to, reaching out to each other to pose a joint question to themselves: now that we have assumed the mantle of local political leadership at the lowest unit of local government, how do we perform our role effectively?

Some 135 Dalit women, most of them recently-elected representatives of local municipalities, came together on a hilly setting near Kathmandu to discuss the question. They came from five political parties, including the top three which swept most of the local seats.



***Under One Sky:*** Dalit political sisters from five parties gather in Chandragiri, near Kathmandu, in December 2017 to learn how to be effective as local leaders.

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They were participating in a JOMPOPS-organised multiparty workshop on “Empowerment of Dalit Women Representatives Elected to Local Government”, supported by DIPD. The workshop on 29 and 31 December 2017 was also attended by other Dalit women leaders – Dalit candidates who had lost in the elections or those who were active in district Dalit women committees of respective parties.

The national index of empowerment and inclusion show the Dalit women to be the most marginalized, much worse off than Dalit men. As women, they have no control over resources such as land, housing or money.

## 6645 IN 753

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With a whopping 6645 Dalit women now having been elected to local government across the country’s 753 local bodies – thanks to a constitutional provision that stipulates that at least one of the two seats for women members in a ward (lowest unit) has to be reserved for a Dalit woman – the JOMPOPS parties’ focus in this respect after the local-level elections shifted to the challenge of bringing them up to speed with the tasks they have to carry as the people’s representatives, including the advancement of the Dalit cause.



***Making a Point:*** A young participant expresses her view during one of the sessions in Chandragiri.

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And their unprecedented presence at the local municipalities has enhanced the potential to provide better services to and ensure rights of Dalits as enshrined in the constitution, what with some 22 powers now going to the local government. To realise that potential also required that women Dalit members in these bodies, as well as their sisters in the wider political circle, enhanced their leadership skills and became aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Following a request from sister organizations of three mainstream political parties viz. Dalit Mukti Morcha (Maoist Centre), Nepal Utpedit Jatiya Mukti Samaj (UML) and Nepal Dalit Sangh (Nepali Congress), the workshop was held to address this demand for learning opportunities.

JOMPOPS SC member Parsuram Meghi Gurung, a Central Committee member from UML, in his welcome speech mentioned that now it was even more important that discrimination issues across men and women, among women in general and Dalit women, and even within the Dalit groups, are comprehensively addressed. There have been noteworthy legislative moves on the elimination of caste-based discrimination, but effective implementation is still lacking.

The elected Dalit women representatives must be aware of the specific provisions in the constitution and laws that promoted and safeguarded the rights and interests of the Dalits, he advised. It is also advisable to be aware of the probability of Dalit elected women's agenda being generalized and overshadowed in the broader women's agenda.

Chairing the workshop, well-known thinker on Dalit issues Mr. Krishna Bhakta "Ahuti" shared the statistics on the realities of Dalit women reflected in the national census, where some 48% are still illiterate, 46% are landless and 49% are victims of social discrimination. Mr. Ahuti in his remarks cited different forms of pain, stigma and disparity faced by the Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular across the nation. It is not possible to improve women's position without challenging the mindset and social taboos and without fighting against the values set by the patriarchal society, he said.

## BEYOND PARLIAMENT

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He pointed out that past experiences have shown that it is relatively easy to select Dalit as a parliamentarian, but further nominating them in the party's working committee is always difficult. Boosting representation of Dalits beyond parliament and at parties' working committee level as per their population is the crux of the matter.



**Task at Hand:** Newly-elected Dalit women representatives do an exercise in pairs in some of the sessions during the training in Makawanpur, Province 3, in December 2017.

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A documentary, screened in the evening of the first day, of JOMPOPS SC member Asta Laxmi Shakya's long and arduous political struggle was viewed with interest by the participants. The documentary acted as a role model stimulus to the upcoming and young emerging women political leaders.

Another resource person, political analyst CK Lal, spoke about quadruplet jeopardy in the case of Dalit woman, namely: the caste and creed division; seen as subject for sexual abuse; lack of education; and considered as a weaker or inferior section of the society. Rights, he said, had to be claimed and exercised; one must be proactive and should identify one's role within the party with continued commitment.

In another session, advocate Govinda Bandi pointed out that in the past the state had been discriminatory and the rule of law was non-existent. This promoted structural violence and discrimination as per gender, caste, ethnicity, geographical location and economic status of the individual/community.

He said that, in principle, the person who discriminates must be penalized by the state and the person who faces discrimination must be compensated. The penalty must be serious and substantial to discourage this inhuman behavior. The state must be bold to take action seriously and also promote affirmative action for equitable representation, he stressed.

Giving practical tips, another resource person Mr. Shadev Mahat explained to the Dalit women the importance of prioritization. To perform effectively as local representatives, he said, it was necessary to know which tasks are less important and which more.

Relatively young and educated, the participants found the training helpful for the elected representatives as they gear up for their new roles, according to a quick evaluation at the end of the training. Many would welcome more of such opportunities to learn, as they found it "useful and relevant for capacity enhancement".

## BOOSTING COMPETENCE

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Earlier in the month, CPN-UML conducted training for the elected Dalit representatives in Makawanpur district of Province 3. Given that women from the Dalit community are highly disadvantaged, the training particularly focused on the elected Dalit women. Around 63 elected Dalit representatives including 52 women and 11 men participated in the training.

The key objective of the training was to support them to perform in their jobs more effectively so that they can deliver better services to the people at the local level. The training, held on 10-11 December 2017, aimed at boosting their competence to perform their roles as elected representatives at the local level.



The training sessions included those on Local Level Governance Act; constitutional provisions specifically related to Dalits; roles and responsibilities of the local elected representatives; communication skills; budget formulation; and women and Dalit rights framework. DIPD provided technical support on some of these modules as requested by the party officials.



***Exchanging Notes:*** Dalit women leaders get to know each other during breaks at the training in Makawanpur.

Senior party leaders were involved in coordinating the training as well as taking some relevant sessions. After the closing, participants were given a questionnaire to assess their evaluation of the training sessions. Their feedback indicates that they, on the whole, found the training useful and relevant for their new job. Such trainings not being very common, they requested similar types of leadership and follow-up trainings also at the ward level.

## 9

# WOMEN FROM THE MARGINS

## BE ACTIVE IN POLITICS, NOT JUST BE VOTERS

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JOMPOPS has run campaigns on promoting women in politics since April 2013, during the pilot phase, a forerunner to the 2014-17 first phase project. As part of this campaign, JOMPOPS parties organized both multiparty and intraparty programmes at the central level as well as at the local level to promote women in politics.

In a programme in this vein, in early January 2017, one of the JOMPOPS members, Tarai Madhesh Democratic Party (TMDP), organized a mass public meeting to empower women from one of the most marginalized communities in Nepal — Dalit. The Dalit communities, treated as *untouchables*, are still socially discriminated and are considered among the most deprived in terms of access to resources and power.



**Attentive Listening:** Dalit women come out in their finery in Bara, southern Nepal, in January 2017, to listen to, and be inspired from, leaders' speeches and exhortations, one of which was: *Be active in politics, not just be voters.*

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According to a Dalit-based organization, almost half of Nepal's Dalits live below the poverty line. Their life expectancy and literacy rate are way below the national average. Despite constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination against Dalits, they continue to face multi-faceted discriminations in practice such as prohibition to enter into religious places or to touch water in public places.



**Felicitating Dalits:** JOMPOPS SC member Jitendra Sonal of TMDP felicitates a Dalit woman leader as the party Chair Mahanta Thakur looks on.

Women from the Dalit community face additional discriminations. Dalit women have been deprived from access to education, health and other resources. Often, it's Dalit women who are victims of accusation of practicing witch-craft. Such women are often tortured and even killed. In December 2016, a Dalit woman called Laxmi Pariyar, near the capital Kathmandu, was beaten up, fed feces, and finally killed on accusation of witch-craft.

Against this background, JOMPOPS Steering Committee member from the TMDP party, Jitendra Prasad Sonar (who was later in the year elected as a Member of Provincial Assembly of Province 2), came up with a proposal to empower Dalit women to participate actively in politics so that they can influence the political process. DIPD provided some technical support with other local organizations.

On 7 January, around 2500-3000 people including nearly 50 per cent women particularly from the Dalit community, gathered in Kalaiya in Bara district in the southern plains of Nepal. TMDP President Mahanta Thakur was the chief guest of the programme and his presence gave a strong message for the importance of men to engage on women's issues.

## WOMEN'S JOURNEYS

In addition to political speeches appealing to women to participate actively in politics not just as voters but as leaders, two successful

women leaders shared their personal journeys, talking about the key barriers they faced and the ways they overcome those barriers. The main objective of this sharing was to inspire Dalit women to strive for leadership positions.

Among the two key women speakers, one was Ms. Sheikh Chand Tara. Ms. Chand Tara is the former Chair of the National Women's Commission, appointed from the quota given to the political parties. Ms. Chand Tara emphasized on education and appealed to Dalit women to prioritize education. She also pointed out that gender equality is the cornerstone of overall economic prosperity.

The second woman speaker was a local community leader, Ms. Pinky Yadav. She shared her experiences and said that the situation for Dalit women has remained the same despite massive socio-political reforms in Nepal. She concluded that Dalit women should come forward and take active participation in politics - not just vote.



**Come Forward:** JOMPOPS SC member Suresh Mandal addresses the gathering, urging Dalit women to come forward, as another SC member Jitendra Sonal and his party colleagues sit on the platform.

In addition to sharing of the personal stories by women leaders, the programme also focused on emphasizing the need for men to engage on empowerment of women. Both the Steering Committee members from JOMPOPS, Jitendra Prasad Sonar and Suresh Mandal, said that Dalit women should be empowered. They also spoke against the caste system and appealed to Dalit women to come forward without any hesitation.

Since very limited political party programmes focus on marginalized groups such as Dalit women, this programme generated a lot of enthusiasm among the Dalit women in the area, and which found expressions during the programme.



## 10

# LEARNING THE ROPES FOR THE NEW JOB

## NEWLY-ELECTED “CITY MOTHERS” GET READY TO SERVE PEOPLE

The way JOMPOPS and DIPD saw it, the quick demands from the new local representatives – the first elected in 15 years – for training for the new job, were partly a natural corollary to the series of pre-election activities that the political platform had been engaged in. The request to acquire some knowledge and skills to tackle the local government tasks came particularly from the new “city mothers” – also an expected development, as training for potential women candidates was what the two had focused on during the three-phase local elections that were held between May and September 2017.



**Congratulatory ‘Tika’:** JOMPOPS SC member Asta Laxmi Shakya offers a red ‘tika’ (vermillion and rice grains) on the foreheads of women winners (mostly deputy mayors) of local elections at the start of a training on 2 June 2017 in Kathmandu.

And partly, these demands were a result of the trust that JOMPOPS and DIPD enjoyed as an organizer of training and seminars over the years within the framework of promoting women in politics.



The JOMPOPS Steering Committee members felt they had to support without delay the newly-elected women with necessary training so that they could play their leadership roles effectively. Women were elected in significant numbers in the local elections, that occurred after 20 long years, with the last local bodies elected in 1997 and dissolved in 2002.

## THE 40 PER CENT

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The new Constitution of Nepal, a result of Nepal's peace process, brought a number of governance reforms, including state restructuring. Nepal now has three tiers of government viz. national, provincial and local. The Constitution has also empowered the local level of government, which now has many important rights related to education, health, infrastructure and cooperatives, among others.

The leaders of Nepal envisaged increased representation of women in the new governance structure, particularly at the local level, with the Constitution guaranteeing around 40 per cent women representation at the local level. Moreover, the Local Elections Act, finalized on the eve of the elections, required that one of the candidates for mayor or deputy mayor needed to be a woman.



**Challenging Job:** A newly-elected Deputy Mayor of a municipality near Kathmandu gives a run-down of the challenges representatives like her face in meeting people's high expectations.

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A large number of women got elected in the local elections, because of the above mayor-or-deputy-mayor statutory obligation for candidacy as well as the seats reserved for women at the wards, the lowest level of local government. Nepal's female representation in local bodies can be considered as a remarkable achievement for the overall representation of women in leadership positions – also in a global perspective. (With 33 % women's representation in national and provincial parliaments after the November and December 2017 elections for those bodies, Nepal's overall situation in this respect looks quite respectable).

Even as the results of the first phase local elections on 14 May 2017 were coming out, the Steering Committee member of JOMPOPS from the CPN-UML party, Asta Laxmi Shakya – Vice-President of the party as well as in-charge of Province 3 – was consulting with DIPD for technical support on a training for the newly-elected representatives.

She chose that the first training programme targeted the deputy mayors, since as the highest-level local government women leaders they had to take care of a lot of tasks – not least as the heads of the Judicial Committees in their municipalities, which settle disputes under their respective jurisdictions.

## ENERGISING THE ELECTEES

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Ms. Shakya had strongly promoted selection of women candidates in her province during the local elections. Now that women had come in to local body seats, she was keen on energizing and empowering them so that they could be effective in their leadership roles and be role models for other women.

Thus, on 2 June – soon after the final election results of the first phase were out – the first such training was held for the newly-elected women deputy mayors along with a few other elected women officials from municipalities in that Province which also includes the Kathmandu Valley.

Due to the already busy schedule of the deputy mayors, the training programme was one-day-long only. Nevertheless, the full-day training covered important topics such as roles and responsibilities of the elected representatives, the legislative-executive-judicial structure of the local government, relevant legal frameworks, and communication and networking, among others. Necessary materials – including the latest rules for new municipalities and the just-formulated details of municipal powers – were handed out.

In a session, a DIPD expert shared Danish experiences on the effective local governance particularly drawing on practical insights from the locally elected officials in Denmark and the approaches and measures of the Danish municipalities to serve the citizens. Another DIPD expert also gave a presentation on various dimensions of leadership, emphasizing the importance of women in leadership positions, particularly at the local tier, where the deputy mayors will have to lead many initiatives to deliver services to the citizens.

## RAUTAHAT REPS

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Rautahat was the venue for another similar training by CPN-UML for the newly-elected representatives of that district, which is one of the politically sensitive districts in Province 2. Most of the eight districts

of the Province figure in the bottom part of the socio-economic index. And women, mainly from the Muslim community, are highly marginalized in the district.



**South Nepal:** An elected representative registers her name for the training in Rautahat, a southern belt district, of Nepal, held in October 2017.

Some Members of Parliament and senior party leaders were involved in coordinating the training as well as in taking some relevant sessions. Forty-eight elected representatives including 40 women and eight men participated in the training.

With the objective of enabling the representatives to learn as much as time allows so that they can perform their jobs more effectively and efficiently, the two-day training, on 28-29 October 2017, had a number of sessions, which included those on *Sthaniya Sarkar San-chalan Ain, 2074* (Local Level Governance Act); roles and responsibilities of the local elected representatives; communication skills; budget formulation; women rights framework; and leadership skills.

Technical briefs prepared by DIPD's experts were also disseminated to the participants on topics such as International Local Government Experience: Denmark and Elsewhere; Conducting Effective Meetings; At the Starting Block (of an elected rep's job); Communication; Facilitation Skills; and Time Management.

Going by the comments of these mostly women representatives, overall the training was well worth it. All those who filled out the evaluation said the training had helped them to orient themselves to perform effectively in their local government roles. About 58 per cent of participants termed the training "very useful" and about 40 per cent "useful" to perform effectively in the new public roles they were embarking on.

## KAVRE TRAINING

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A month earlier, some 45 elected representatives of Kavrepalanchok, a district adjoining the Kathmandu Valley, had also gathered for a two-day training organized by the District Training Branch of Nepali Congress. The two-day training on 22-23 September 2017, held in the highway-side town of Panchkhal, saw the newly-elected deputy mayors, chairpersons, vice chairpersons, ward chairpersons, women members, Dalit women members and other members from the party sitting together to orient themselves on the new jobs.



**Central Nepal:** Elected representatives make their points during sessions at a training in Panchkhal, Kavre district, a central Nepal hilly district, in September 2017.

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Like the Rautahat training, the training was held to help them function effectively in their new roles at their respective municipalities and wards. Some 40 per cent of the participants were women. Some senior party leaders were involved in coordinating the training including taking some relevant sessions on topics they were well-versed in.

The training was divided into various sessions that focused on: need and importance of local level; relevant legal acts; roles, responsibilities and authority of local level; importance of and effective utilization of media and effective communication/networking; and the desirability of multiparty collaboration and its possible challenges.

Mr. Basanta C.K., General Committee Member of NC and Trainer from Parbat district who was also one of the participants of Training of Trainers on the local Guide in early 2016, delivered a session on the importance of local level, where he emphasized effective party-building from bottom-up.

During the two-day training, some elected representatives were randomly interviewed to get a sense of their response on the training. The interviewees said what they learnt there have made them more confident and more competent to perform what is expected of an elected local representative. It helped to enhance their leadership skills. They thought such programmes also served as a place to share learning and experience with and from fellow local leaders. More such discussion sessions were necessary, they said.

## QUICK DELIVERY OF SUPPORT

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Given that a large number of young people and women have been elected at the local level, many of whom have been elected for the first time, there was a huge demand for training these elected members especially on their basic roles and responsibilities. The demand particularly from women representatives has been more. Quick and quality technical support for these trainings, therefore, have been highly appreciated by Nepal's political parties. For DIPD, it was a great opportunity to lend a helping hand in such needy times.

Considering that the provincial assemblies, elected in November and December 2017, also include 33% women and many first-time women and men MPs, demands for relevant trainings on provincial governance and leadership are expected, as JOMPOPS and DIPD look forward to the new phase of the project.



## 11

# WOMEN WEIGH HURDLES TO JOINING POLITICS

‘WE NEED EDUCATION,  
RIGHTS, ECONOMIC SUPPORT AND  
COURAGE’

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Nineteen kilometers south of Lahan town in Siraha, on a wintry day towards the end of December 2017, some 125 local women gathered to discuss why they find it difficult or why they hesitate to take up local political leadership. Assembled at a local secondary school premises in Fulbaria of Nawarajpur rural municipality, they first discussed the most prevalent problems in their area: Illiteracy, violence against women, unemployment, and child marriage.



**Story for Inspiration:** JOMPOPS SC Co-Chair Chitra Lekha Yadav of Nepali Congress tells women of her political journey to inspire them to take up local political leadership during a programme at a school premises in Siraha in December 2017.

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Then they discussed how they can support each other and the few women leaders they have in their midst to advance different causes:

women empowerment; the kind of development that matters to them; the need to raise voice when faced with injustice, and so on.

The event on 28 December 2017 was organized by JOMPOPS Steering Committee member Chitra Lekha Yadav, a native of the district and one of the highest ranking women leaders of Nepal. Assisted by a local woman politician, the newly-elected deputy mayor of the municipality, Shobha Kumari Yadav, Ms. Yadav decided to organize a programme to promote awareness of the increased possibility for female political leadership in the country post-election.

DIPD provided technical support for some relevant sessions for the event, one among many such initiatives by political parties at the local level that it supported.

Shobha Kumari Yadav, deputy mayor of the municipality, kicked off the programme by explaining why development should be in the hands of women as well. She asked why, if women have the right to come forward to lead their communities, they still hesitate to do so. To appreciative applause from the attendees, she said as women are the ones who mainly look after their household and children, they are most likely to know what is required and lacking around the house and their community for development.

## HER STORY

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In order to further excite them to the possibilities of political leadership, Chitra Lekha Yadav shared her story about the hurdles she had to face while trying to get an education. Stressing on the importance of education, overall and to join politics, she said that kids who get to attend school will always have an advantage over those who have to stay busy with chores of cattle raising and farming.

She asked what the requirements are for women to run for a ward office and why they haven't run for one except when receiving a token position based on the quota provided by the government. Finally, Yadav stressed on what women require to join and to succeed in politics, such as education, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

Yadav's father sent her to Kathmandu to study in a boarding school. When her grandmother protested saying that it was too far away and that it was not safe, Yadav kept persisting and was eventually allowed to continue studying there. She said that she knew that standing on her own feet would allow her to avoid being suppressed.

She said that people back then used to say that the more educated the woman becomes, the more dowry their family has to pay. She told the participants that rather than giving sofas, TVs, horses, etc. as dowry for their daughter's marriage, to give them an education instead. She asked them that if they could send their sons to school then why couldn't they send their daughters as well when there should be no difference between the two.



***Hear Me:*** A participant tells her own story to the gathering. Another one speaks about their basic needs. Through their life stories, they analyse what needed to change in order for them to join politics to transform the society.

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During discussions that followed, one woman urged others to stop staying at home and to come out and participate in empowering activities whenever they were available. Most attendees shared the same sentiment that women have to be united in order to raise their voice and status. Sakunti Devi, another attendee, urged the women to remove all fear from their hearts once and for all. She told them that if they hadn't done anything wrong, then they shouldn't let any man suppress them.

## RECURRING COMPLAINTS

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One recurring complaint that came up during the introductions was the serious lack of toilets and access to water in their communities. A lot of the women spoke about the need for toilets and 'kal' (public well or tap).

One woman questioned why those who were stronger, more influential, or were willing to argue loudly and fight with the government officials were spared and allowed to keep their land, whereas the weaker and meeker locals' lands were being taken for public works.

Another woman spoke about how violence against women was a big issue in their community – especially cases of husbands coming home drunk and then beating their wives and cases of rape.

To more methodically advance the discussion, everybody split into groups of about 10-20 participants per, each one led by one of the SLC graduate women, who numbered about 11, and who had to note down group members' viewpoints.

After the group activity, the group facilitators took turns to present their group's views and suggestions.

What became clear as the women started sharing their woes and demands was that there were three immediate needs that were going unfulfilled: toilets, access to water, and affordability of education for their children. Every participant also mentioned education; some women shared how they were unable to continue their education after getting married off.

Ram Kumari Yadav bemoaned that because she needed to take care of food, clothing, and shelter for her family, she could only afford to send her children to school up to 10<sup>th</sup> grade and not any further. However, one woman mentioned that there were even some financially well-off families in her village not sending their children to school. All the women agreed that discrimination between sons and daughters had to be gotten rid of.

One woman talked about how poor people in her village, especially of the Dalit caste, are shunned by the rest of the community and how leadership development programmes specially targeting them are necessary to help move them forward. She also commented that it was mainly lack of money and awareness of opportunities that prevent them from joining politics.

## MAIN INGREDIENTS

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One woman asserted that a man does not let a woman out of the house to be a politician because he himself wants to be one and thinks of it as a man's job. Education, intelligence, economic support, women's rights, equality, awareness of their rights, abolition of violence against women, confidence, and courage to fight for all this were unanimously selected as the main ingredients to make it possible for women to join and succeed in politics.

A couple of the SLC graduates were briefly interviewed to learn of the state of more educated women in their community and what they thought of the programme.





***Time to Write:*** Supporting each other in filling out a questionnaire during a session.

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A second-year student receiving her bachelor's in health and population from J.S. Lahan Campus, Shobha Kumari Mahato said these programmes were important to slowly bring about change in women's attitudes towards one another and that it could help increase women's support for one another.

The only female worker in the entire school where this event was taking place, Urmila Kumari Yadav, who worked as an accountant there, believed that women should start providing support to other women so that they could become capable of fulfilling those very demands.

As the programme neared its conclusion, Chitra Lekha Yadav drew attention to the fact that there is now a provision for granting citizenship to widows. She explained that with a written recommendation from their municipality office, widows could easily obtain their citizenship cards. One participant was unaware about the seat quota available for Dalit women in local level politics, which Yadav informed her about.

During the 2014-17 project period, DIPD supported a number of such initiatives taken by Nepal's political parties. Nearly 4000 local women were oriented on various political issues. Through these kinds of programmes, DIPD's technical assistance has reached the most marginalized.



## 12

# ENERGISING YOUTHS FOR POLITICS

## YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN LEARN ABOUT LEADERSHIP

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With over forty percent of the population of Nepal falling in the age group of 16 to 40, its youth could play an important role in politics, whether as voters, citizens, or politicians. They can become a crucial part of politics, which is necessary for the youth themselves to be made aware of.



**Generation Gab:** JOMPOPS SC Chair Dina Nath Sharma, a senior politician with long innings in politics, gives an inspiring 'gab' to potential youth leaders at the Youth Leadership Development Training in Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu, in December 2017.

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Realising this, after the completion of the national and provincial elections late 2017, the two biggest parties which swept the polls on a leftist alliance wished to prioritise training events for promoting youth leadership. The CPN-UML and UCPN-MC parties wanted to start with organizing joint leadership development training programmes for local young politicians from districts in the Kathmandu

Valley. JOMPOPS agreed to the parties' request and three such programmes were conducted within December 2017 in two locations in Kathmandu district and one in Lalitpur district with support of DIPD.

In the programmes, attended altogether by around 210 youths from these two biggest parties, various high-level politicians, including senior leader of Maoist Centre and JOMPOPS Chair Dina Nath Sharma, gave short talks to inspire the attendees before the start of the training.

Ms. Asta Laxmi Shakya, Vice Chairperson of CPN-UML, stressed the importance of cooperation among youth members of different parties. She also highlighted other things that young politicians need to be mindful of: staying updated on and participating in matters of justice and development in the country, being self-reliant for employment, and not forgetting familial duties while practicing politics.

## NOT ONLY ABOUT AGE

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She also mentioned that youth is not only about age but also refers to being enthusiastic and energetic no matter how old one is. She said that young politicians need to learn from the experiences and wisdom of older politicians.

In all the three programs, a senior politician from Maoist Centre, Mr. Khim Lal Devkota, gave a session on Nepal's constitution. At the outset, he stated the legal principle that "ignorance of the law excuses no one" and exhorted the participants to have sufficient knowledge of the laws in Nepal's constitution. His presentation gave a snapshot of youth in governance in the world, special features covered by the Nepalese constitution, its youth-related legal provisions, and contemporary controversies regarding the constitution.

He mentioned that the youth can get a citizenship at the age of 16, but gain voting rights only at 18. They have to be at least 21 to compete in local level elections, 25 to fight for seats in the House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly, 35 to be a National Assembly member or Chief of State, and 45 in other high-level state levels, including presidency. This triggered a lot of participant disgruntlement at what they saw as unfair age restrictions of the law.

In the programmes, Mr. Sahadev Mahat, a facilitator, gave a presentation on characteristics required to be an effective leader. He covered qualities of an effective learner, listening skills, collaboration and cooperation among parties, and communication skills as essential for becoming a successful leader. As a practical exercise for co-operation- and gratitude-building, participants put forward positive aspects of other parties present at the training and walked around expressing gratitude to one another. For enhancing communication skills, participants walked around with a list of characteristics and tried to find fellow attendees possessing those traits (for example, finding someone in the room with a certain blood group).



**Leadership Sessions:** Youths in Budhanilkantha event take part in group exercise to learn different leadership skills like those related to listening and communication.

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He also gave another presentation on effective time management practices. This included the time management matrix promoted by Stephen Covey. While speaking about active listening skills, Mr. Mahat provided a handout of a Nepalese translation of a famous writing on the same topic by William Stringfellow.

Evaluation forms were handed to the participants at the end of the programme in which they shared how the training has started helping them, and recommendations for future programmes of this nature. Common suggestions included conducting longer training programs to avoid rushing through the sessions and to allow more interactive activities.

The participant reviews showed that they thought that the training had been very relevant to their political careers, had increased their knowledge of the law and of qualities required to be an effective leader, and had motivated them to be more skilled and cooperative politicians in the future.

## REFRESHING

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The participatory atmosphere was also found refreshing as a contrast to events where only the main guests speak, where they don't receive any practical advice or the chance to express their own views, and where there is very little interaction among attendees. In post-event interviews, some of the participants also shared stories of their own political journeys and how they hoped the journey would be smoother from then on with help of what they had learnt at the training.



**Youthful Energy:** Enthusiasm was much in abundance at youth leadership development programmes including in the Godavari, Lalitpur district, event (top), whose participants gather out in the open for a group photo (above).

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The first training, participated in by 77 youths from the two parties, took place from 23 to 24 December in Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu. In one of the sessions there, Ms. Nirmala Sharma, president of Sancharika Samuha (Forum of Women Journalists and Communicators) gave an overview of types of media and how to properly utilize them to inform and gain support from the public regarding various national issues and goals.

Similarly, in the training in Lalitpur district, held from 28 to 29 December, there were altogether 71 participants. Well-known political analyst Mr. C. K. Lal, one of the resource persons, gave a verbal

presentation on leadership types and styles. Participants were asked to form groups, elect a group leader, and discuss skills, knowledge, and information that leaders need. Mr. Lal followed with a talk on the same topics after the groups had presented their notes.

An entrepreneur, Ms. Anjana Tamrakar, spoke about who entrepreneurs are and shared the challenges she had to face as an entrepreneur. After the participants presented their beliefs about the benefits of entrepreneurship and the qualities of a successful entrepreneur, Ms. Tamrakar added her own points to these. The next day, one of the interactive sessions consisted of participants being asked to note down attitude and skills that they believed were characteristic of effective leaders.

The third programme also took place on 28 and 29 December in Kathmandu. There were 60 youths altogether in the training, where Ms. Tamrakar, Mr. Lal and other resource persons took different sessions.





