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**A Plan of Action for Promoting Grassroots Advocacy
for Women's Rights as a Mass Movement in Rural Nepal**

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INTRODUCTION

The scope of work for my USAID WorldWID fellowship in Nepal (February - May 1997) was defined by the Empowerment of Women (SO-3) team of the USAID Mission in Nepal as follows to develop and propose a plan of action for promoting grassroots advocacy for women's rights as a mass movement in rural Nepal. It was proposed that I spend my first few weeks travelling with TAF and CEDPA staff on their field trips, following which I would engage in discussions with Kathmandu-based women's groups and advocates, following which I would prepare a Situation Analysis of the Advocacy Status in Nepal. With feedback from TAF, CEDPA and USAID on this analysis, I would then proceed to prepare a Plan of Action for grassroots advocacy in Nepal. I have completed the scope of work, as proposed, and I want to thank the SO-3 team, CEDPA and TAF for their hospitality during my stay and for their assistance in my work. I now offer a Plan of Action as contemplated, with the following reservations and preliminary comments

A plan of action for promoting grassroots advocacy for women's rights in Nepal should be prepared and implemented by Nepalis, both as a matter of principle and as a matter of political sensitivity. I have drawn heavily on my discussions with many Nepali women's rights activists in this endeavor, but my efforts to integrate formal Nepali participation in this process were unfortunately unsuccessful. I would like to express my appreciation to the SO-3 team, and particularly to Nancy Langworthy, for working with me to try to establish a small Nepali working group on short notice and in the face of numerous, primarily administrative obstacles. I hope that this working group will yet be established, as suggested in the Next Steps outlined in this Plan.

My three month stay in Nepal coincided with a significant review in March 1997 of SO-3 interventions which have been carried out by the USAID partners to date, with the object of preparing a scope of work for the period FY97-98 through FY99-2000. An outcome of this review, following extensive discussions among three teams of consultants focusing on the three intermediate interventions (literacy, legal rights/advocacy, and economic participation), was the elevation of the importance of advocacy. Advocacy was seen to be the new "engine" of SO-3, based on its potential to achieve results within the necessary time frame on the SO-3 indicators. These indicators are 1) the number of collective actions for social change initiated by women, and 2) the percentage of women who increase their influence over household decision-making. Advocacy in the community and advocacy in the household are intrinsically linked to these indicators, as the review concluded.

With advocacy having been newly elevated as a critical component of success for SO-3, as the program moves forward the importance of a plan for sustainable advocacy is also heightened. Serious concerns have been expressed about the sustainability of the advocacy work that has already been done. At the same time, the energy that has been unleashed through this work is extremely powerful. If properly channelled, it could be the beginnings of a mass movement of women in rural Nepal which would as a matter of course be actively engaged in collective action for social change and which would inevitably increase the decision-making power of women, not only in the household but in the community as well.

Now is the time to make adjustments to the SO-3 program to ensure that the indicators are realized and to ensure the success of SO-3 as an innovative approach that could serve as a model for development in other countries. While there are many apparent successes already, there are many apparent shortcomings as well. In my view, I would like to address these openly, hoping that my comments will be taken in the constructive spirit in which they are given. Only by honestly addressing the concerns can we strengthen the program for the future and ensure that it produces the results we are looking for, which is a collective goal.

In this same spirit, I have drawn heavily in preparing this Plan of Action on my experience with CEDPA. Within its SO-2 mandate of reproductive health, CEDPA has engendered more synergy than any other program I have seen. Linkages have been forged between health and literacy (HEAL), and between health and economic participation (IIDS). These linkages can be seen as models of substantive integration of women's empowerment issues, and such linkages could also be forged between reproductive health and legal rights. Similarly, in its advocacy efforts for safe motherhood, CEDPA has built into its program a national/local coordination which supports advocacy in rural areas and which could be instructive in and even linked to other advocacy initiatives. I am deeply grateful to Nancy Russell for all of her efforts not only to brief me on but to involve me in CEDPA programs, and for all of the time she spent with me discussing many of the ideas which are incorporated in this Plan of Action.

ESTABLISHING A STRUCTURE FOR COORDINATION OF ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Sustained grassroots advocacy requires coordination and support. The advocacy efforts engendered to date by SO-3 interventions have been coordinated at the local level by TAF-funded NGO staff, and at the national level by TAF program officers. At the local level, NGO staff working with newly formed advocacy groups organize rallies and support other advocacy-related activities. At the national level, TAF program officers collect and circulate information on advocacy-related activities in different districts. The support structures currently sustaining advocacy in rural areas are temporary. When they are dismantled, as they presumably will be shortly, it is unlikely that activities will continue without any kind of substitute support structure in place. To sustain and build the momentum that has been created, some kind of organizational structure must be established. This structure should have the capacity to recruit participants as well as support from the local community, to establish priorities and set strategies, to organize collective action, and to sustain and build momentum created by collective action. It should also include a reporting mechanism, so that activities undertaken and progress made can be monitored, reviewed and evaluated, and shared with other similarly situated advocacy groups.

The structure created for building a mass movement can start with individual advocacy groups at the local level, but these groups must be seen as first components of a larger single structure which facilitates the exchange of information, ideas and support among individual advocacy groups. The structure should be designed for expansion, so that local initiatives can be coordinated - at the ward

level, the VDC level, the district level and ultimately the national level. A structure which grows from the grassroots upward will naturally position rural women as the driving force behind the movement, and could eventually add a strong rural women's voice to the national Kathmandu-based women's advocacy movement. The way to build this structure, in my view, would be to bring together the leaders of advocacy groups that have been created, and from among them recruit (or ask them to select) volunteer leaders who would assume coordination responsibility for each VDC. Regular meetings among VDC coordinators within each district could lead to the evolution of district coordinators. As the program areas shift and expand over the next three years, this structure could be established and consolidated in the past program areas. The districts of the new program areas could then be easily incorporated into the structure, which would be strengthened by the expansion and which in turn would support the advocacy initiatives in the new program areas.

ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY OF THE COORDINATION STRUCTURE

In a country like Nepal where poverty is so great, particularly in rural areas, it is highly unlikely that an effective coordination structure for advocacy can be sustained on a zero-cost basis, i.e. through purely volunteer leadership. It is clear from SO-3 interventions to date that interest in and commitment to women's empowerment issues is strong enough to draw active participation by rural women, on their own time. However, with the heavy workload they bear and their long hours of work, these women do not have the time required to take on full responsibility for coordination of, in addition to participation in, advocacy-related activities. Nevertheless, I believe that a low-cost structure which is highly dependent on volunteer activism could be developed and would be both effective and sustainable. Such a structure would not necessarily have to depend on USAID funding.

There are certain functions, such as keeping track of the advocacy groups - where they are located, who is participating in them and what they are organizing - which are currently being discharged by the local NGOs contracted by TAF to implement the legal rights and advocacy training program. These NGOs are also actively involved in the planning of advocacy-related activities carried out by the newly formed local advocacy groups. At a meeting held in Kathmandu in April 1997, attended by several of these NGOs, I asked about the future of these local advocacy groups once the formal TAF program had been completed. The consensus was that these groups would not survive on their own. The manifestations of advocacy in TAF program areas over the past year are clearly the result of intensive investment of human resources. Each local NGO is funded to hire approximately eight full-time staff, two of whom (Advocacy Coordinator and Community Motivator) are exclusively devoted to organizing advocacy efforts. In addition, TAF has hired its own District Coordinators. This structure is too elaborate to be sustainable over the long term. However, a more sparing use of full-time activists on a longer-term basis, even as little as one or two per district, might be sufficient to keep a volunteer leadership structure alive and to ensure the flow of information, including reporting on activities so that SO-3 indicators can more easily be measured.

CREATING PUBLIC AWARENESS

The impact of small-scale local initiatives can be greatly magnified by public awareness of them. One person's story or one group's rally can inspire other people and other groups elsewhere to similar activities. Public awareness also tends to strengthen the work of individuals and groups within their own communities. The media is a critical component of public awareness and provides a channel for the spread of news and ideas relating to advocacy for women's rights. Training on how to use the media and the establishment of media contacts should be an integral component of a rural women's movement. It seems there are some regional radio and television broadcasting mechanisms which have covered some of the advocacy activities to date. Systematizing regional coverage and expanding to the national level will strengthen advocacy-related activities of rural women by letting other rural women know that a movement is emerging, and by highlighting substantive issues of concern to rural women.

Communications in rural Nepal are extremely difficult, and the media may therefore also play a role in facilitating coordination of advocacy initiatives in various parts of the country. One of the first steps in creating a sustainable advocacy movement would be the establishment of some system of communication, which might by necessity rely to some extent on the media. The Kathmandu-based NGO SUSS used to do regular radio broadcasts on legal rights, paying for the air time. If written material (i.e. a newsletter) would be too difficult to circulate and read, establishing a similar weekly or monthly radio broadcast to serve as a channel of communication for the rural women's movement might be explored.

STRENGTHENING RURAL/NATIONAL COORDINATION

While rural advocacy groups are intended to identify their own priorities for action, a number of common priorities have emerged in activities to date including child marriage, bigamy, and alcohol abuse. Anecdotal reports of activities suggest that these issues are often addressed through direct intervention in response to individual incidents, and through the organization of public protest rallies. However, with regard to many of the critical problems rural women want to address, it appears that effective solutions would probably require systemic changes, if not through law reform than through major policy reforms which would necessarily involve a national component. Bigamy, for example, is currently punishable under the law by a maximum two month sentence of imprisonment, and a maximum fine of Rs 2,000. In the property bill that was submitted by the last Government to the recently concluded session of Parliament a proposed amendment would have increased the maximum sentence to three years and the maximum fine to Rs 25,000. What many rural women told me they want, however, is that in cases of bigamy the second marriage be considered null and void, as it is in many other countries. Without some national coordination, there is no way to bring the voices of rural women into the legal debate over reform of the law on bigamy, and many other laws relating to the rights of women.

From the moment of my arrival, I was advised by many in the donor community to avoid the NGOs and activists commonly referred to as "the Kathmandu elite" While I was glad, retrospectively, to have first had an exposure to the rural women's advocacy program, I have since met with many Kathmandu-based groups and individuals I recognize the validity of some of the concerns which were conveyed to me, but I would suggest that the current TAF/USAID framework, which dismisses any role for these activists, be reviewed. Firstly, there are many individuals who do not fit the negative stereotypical description in circulation. Moreover, there is a wealth of resources in Kathmandu that could be drawn on for the benefit of rural women. Many of the most educated and sophisticated women in the country are in the capital. To completely bypass them and the work they have done already to build a movement in Kathmandu would be to lose out on a pool of great talent, which if selectively and carefully marshalled into service, could be extremely empowering to rural women. To exclude any connection between the activism in Kathmandu and the activism in rural Nepal will foster isolation and greatly handicap the development of a rural women's movement

Finally, for purposes of coordination, a national component of a rural women's movement is the only way to keep track of advocacy-related activities that have been initiated. Currently this function is being performed by TAF. When TAF moves into new project areas, unless there is a substitute centralized structure, it will be difficult to monitor the progress of advocacy efforts. There will be no entity responsible for maintaining records of local advocacy group coordinators, of the location or even the existence of local advocacy groups. A national structure would assume these administrative responsibilities and could support local advocacy efforts by circulating success stories and ideas among regions, by channelling information to and from the regions, and by creating public awareness at the national level.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR EFFECTIVE ACTION AND FOLLOW-UP

The types of activities that have been undertaken by advocacy groups to date can largely be classified as "one-off" initiatives. A group may learn of an impending child marriage and intervene to rescue the girl involved. It may learn of a domestic violence incident and insist on the arrest of the batterer. These direct action initiatives can be immediately effective in addressing a crisis situation and creating a sense of empowerment. Like the rallies that have been organized, they represent a source of energy that can be channelled into a more systematic effort to improve the status of women. Many of the problems advocacy groups are addressing in their work to date, such as child marriage and domestic violence, can only be solved over the long-term through such a systematic effort.

In building a movement of rural women whose advocacy will have a long-term impact, the immediate actions taken should fit into a broader strategic plan. Rescuing girls from child marriage, for example, could be used to raise public awareness of the problem of child marriage and to lobby for policy and legislative reforms that will better protect girls. To do this effectively, media and legislative strategies have to be in place, and there has to be an articulated understanding of the primary obstacles, i.e. inadequacies in the law or ineffectual law enforcement. An individual incident can then highlight

the need for reforms and be used to advance the campaign for such reforms, as well as benefitting the individual involved. A strategic plan would help advocacy groups focus their actions and use the momentum they create effectively. Every action should have a series of follow-up actions designed to build the movement and further its agenda.

SUPPORTING THE INDEPENDENCE OF ADVOCACY EFFORTS

An effective mass movement of rural women could fundamentally change the status of women in Nepal by engaging in collective action for social change. Collective action for social change, however, can (and should) be threatening to the status quo. Sensitive issues relating to the traditional social role of women in Nepal cannot be raised lightly as they are generally quite controversial. Moreover, these are not issues which can be effectively addressed by international institutions and organizations, unless these institutions and organizations are clearly functioning in a supportive secondary role, as opposed to a primary leadership role. Otherwise, efforts which genuinely are initiated by rural women become vulnerable to charges from reactionary forces that they are instigated by foreigners who are imposing their own cultural values which are alien to Nepal. Women in rural Nepal may need help in building a mass movement, but such help must be in the nature of technical assistance and financial resources. Even the use of the term "mass movement" by USAID could fuel a backlash. The mass movement, and the building of the movement, must be Nepali-directed.

The risks of direct INGO and foreign donor involvement in the promotion of women's rights are evident in the experience of NGOs working to change the property law in Nepal, which explicitly discriminates against women. An initial involvement by USAID and its INGO partners to change the law was clearly detrimental to the process. This involvement was used by opponents of equal property rights to dismiss calls for legal reform as "foreign-controlled", and it is now seen by some Nepali women activists in Kathmandu as essential to keep foreigners out of the campaign altogether. In the ongoing effort to organize rural women, the active role of TAF is highly visible and may well result in a similar backlash. Action now to transform the INGO role to a less active, more supportive role would be timely. Rather than functioning as a centralized coordination structure, if TAF supported a Nepali coordination structure, not only would the structure be more sustainable, as noted above, it would be more effective in its efforts to promote social change, and more empowering to the Nepali women and men in the structure itself.

An independent Nepali advocacy structure would also be more effective in promoting synergy among the SO-3 IRs and between the mission SOs. A single advocacy structure could integrate the various components of women's empowerment, working with the various INGOs engaged in strengthening economic participation and promoting literacy, reproductive health and agricultural development. In each case the advocacy structure could channel information and concerns from the rural women's movement to INGOs and in turn work with the INGOs to channel their expertise and assistance to the rural women's movement. CEDPA, for example, is currently exploring ways in which it can strengthen advocacy for reproductive health. A woman may know, thanks to CEDPA's safe

motherhood program, that she needs iron tablets during pregnancy, but when she goes to the health post, iron tablets may not be available. The CEDPA Safe Motherhood Network wants to help women organize around these needs, moving beyond its advocacy role to date, which has focused primarily on awareness-raising activities. It does not make sense to build a grassroots advocacy movement around the single issue of medical supplies at the health post. If there were an active Nepali rural women's advocacy movement, however, with a structure that could interact with CEDPA, the movement would then be able to incorporate safe motherhood issues in its work and link these issues to legal rights issues and other aspects of women's empowerment. A Nepali rural women's movement could serve as a prism for synergies among the various USAID programs.

Finally, in relation to sustainability, while it is noted above that an advocacy structure cannot be effective on a zero-cost basis, a wholly Nepali structure would be extremely low-cost. My very rough estimate, assuming a paid full-time district coordinator with expenses for VDC coordinators, would be on the order of \$3-5,000 per year per district. CEDPA recently convened thirty-three rural women in Kathmandu for its *Women on the Move* launch. The entire cost of their three-day visit was \$800. A Nepali rural women's advocacy NGO with a lean staff structure and regular coordination meetings for staff and volunteers could be very cost-effective.

CONCLUSION

The USAID SO-3 funded program on legal rights and advocacy has great potential and could facilitate change in the status of women in Nepal by supporting the creation of a mass movement of rural women, as it intends to do. Unfortunately, while it is clear that great effort has gone into the program to date, it seems that insufficient long-term planning has been done to ensure the sustainability of the program. The ambition of the program is laudable and extremely innovative, but its contents as currently configured will not, in my view, bring about the intended results, as set forth in the SO-3 indicators. The TAF curriculum is designed to convey information about the law. It is fairly problematic even in this regard as the format and in some instances the content could actually be regarded as disempowering to women.¹ Moreover, there is very little in the formal training component of the program on advocacy - nothing on group formation and process, membership recruitment, campaign planning, and nothing on the concept of advocacy as an agent of social change. Most importantly, it seems that no plans have been made for the 87,500 women who are going through the six month TAF program once it is finished. It appears that the intensive resources invested in the program areas will simply be withdrawn, leaving the 87,500 women with no support structure for continuation of the activities that have been initiated.

Despite these significant shortcomings, impressive efforts have been made by NGOs and participants in the program to address issues of importance to them. With more effective preparation and a long-term plan for a sustainable support structure the energy that has been unleashed could be

¹ See Memo from Mike Gill to Andy Andrews & Taufiqur Rahman, 'The Legal Literacy Materials Suggested Revision Strategies' dated March 28 1997

extremely powerful, leading not only to collective action for social change but to social change itself within a relatively short time frame. I have met many dedicated Nepali women - in rural areas and in Kathmandu - who will undoubtedly change the status of women in their country. They are already doing it, and in fact there are many NGOs and individual activists outside the TAF structure who have undertaken similar efforts. Given the opportunity and necessary support, they could collectively build the mass movement I have been asked to help plan.

NEXT STEPS

The next steps I would propose for the development of a plan of action for promoting grassroots advocacy for women's rights as a mass movement in rural Nepal would be as follows:

1. Convene a non-partisan, multi-disciplinary Nepali working group to review this plan, revise it as necessary and propose a structure for Nepali rural women's advocacy. The structure should facilitate coordination and should incorporate rural women from around the country into the decision-making process (e.g. an NGO composed of volunteer members representing each ward or VDC, with regional board members, a reporting and communications mechanism, and regular annual or semi-annual meetings). The working group would evaluate the financial costs involved in setting up and maintaining such a structure, and the potential for sustaining these costs, even without ongoing support from USAID.

Had I been able to convene a Nepali working group during my stay, I was hoping to include the following women's rights activists, each of whom has contributed greatly on an informal basis to my thoughts on advocacy in Nepal.

Namrata Sharma As a program officer with TAF, Namrata is intimately familiar with the rural advocacy efforts that have been organized to date through the SO-3/TAF program. She was my guide to the activists and activities in Nepalgunj on my one TAF field visit. Namrata is also very familiar with the Kathmandu women's movement, but from a former journalist's perspective. This perspective gives her, I believe, a certain distance/objectivity which I have found extremely helpful. Most importantly, Namrata is completely devoted to her work and to the empowerment of rural women. In the field, her ability to communicate effectively with and motivate the women and NGOs is extraordinary.

Vijaya Laxmi Aryal Vijaya is President of the Center for Social Awakening Campaign, one of the TAF-funded NGOs in Nepalgunj, Banke District. I met Vijaya in Nepalgunj, where she had organized an impressive rally in Bankatuwa. When she subsequently came to Kathmandu for a TAF workshop, I met her again several times and had a chance to discuss the sustainability of the advocacy program with her. I found Vijaya to be extremely thoughtful. She is one of the three women lawyers in Nepalgunj and is clearly very highly respected in the community. She brings a rural perspective to the planning process and, like Namrata, is very

familiar with the rural advocacy efforts that have been organized to date through the TAF program.

Manjula Giri I have only just met Manjula Giri within the last week, but I am including her name on this list as her work is so central to the ideas underlying SO-3. Manjula is from the village of Bastipur, in Siraha District. After getting a PhD in the US, she returned to her village in 1993 and was asked by the women of her village to help them with the problems they were facing. She stayed in the village and started a local advocacy effort. 200 women - almost the entire village - came to the first meeting, where literacy was identified as a priority. Manjula set up a group called the Rural Development Women's Center in the village, and they started organizing literacy classes, and subsequently income generating activities (basket weaving). The group meets regularly and often intervenes in individual situations such as domestic violence to help women in the village. Recently, legal literacy has been identified as a priority, and Manjula is hoping to organize legal literacy classes for her village. She has just the experience needed to help organize sustainable rural women's advocacy as that is what she has been doing since 1993. She lives in Bastipur, but left me with Kathmandu contact information which can be used to reach her (tel. 413238, fax. 220143).

Sapana Malla Pradhan Sapana is President of the Kathmandu-based Forum for Women, Law and Development. Unlike many of the other Kathmandu-based NGOs, the Forum appears to be a self-sustaining entity without an elaborate and costly infrastructure. Sapana is one of the few Nepali women lawyers in practice, and she therefore has an especially well-grounded understanding of the realities women face in the legal system when they try to enforce their legal rights. Sapana has done numerous *pro bono* cases, both on constitutional issues of national importance to women in the Supreme Court and in rural areas on behalf of individual women in local courts. She is also closely involved in national law reform efforts, and could therefore, in my view, play a critical bridge role in facilitating the participation and integration of rural women in Kathmandu-based activities.

2. Support the Nepali working group to convene a meeting of leading rural activists including those who have emerged from the first generation of the TAF legal rights and advocacy program and the many other programs working in rural areas to promote advocacy (e.g. IIDS, SUSS, Didi Bahmi). At this meeting, a review of activities to date could be undertaken, and proposals from the above-mentioned working group could be aired for discussion. Ideally, a rural advocacy structure could be finalized and initial plans made for its launch. This meeting could even serve as a founding meeting for such a structure where volunteer leadership responsibilities could be identified and allocated, and planning for future activities could take place.

3. Once a rural advocacy structure is established, the first generation of TAF program participants (the 87,500 women) and other rural women activists should be made aware of it and channelled into it. At the same time, plans should be made to ensure a smooth hand-off transition in the new program areas. This would allow new activists emerging from the second generation of the legal rights and

advocacy training program to bring their energy and ideas into the existing structure and to extend the structure to incorporate their areas and activities

4 Ensure that the new structure is actively documenting its work, so that collective actions for social change, as well as any other indicators that might seem useful, can be easily tabulated and reviewed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, during and at the conclusion of the USAID three year time frame

ATTACHMENTS

- Annex 1 Situation Analysis of the Advocacy Status in Nepal
- Annex 2 The "Adarsha Byakti" ("Guiding Lights") Program. Building Grassroots Advocacy and Community Leadership (written for CEDPA/Nepal)
- Annex 3 Coalition Building for Community Outreach The Role of Advocacy in the Promotion of Reproductive Health (written for CEDPA/Nepal)
- Annex 4 Schedule of Meetings

SITUATION ANALYSIS OF THE ADVOCACY STATUS IN NEPAL

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27 March 1997

Introduction

I have spent the first few weeks of my fellowship travelling with TAF and CEDPA staff on field trips to Nepalganj (TAF) and Janakpur (CEDPA). In each case I had the opportunity to witness the respective programs "in action" and to speak with participants, mainly the local NGOs and TAF district coordinators in Nepalganj and the local and national staff of FPAN (Family Planning Association of Nepal) in Janakpur.

Prior to my field visits, I met with each of the SO-3 INGO partners (PACT, World Education, CECI, IRIS, Save the Children), and since my return I have been meeting with Kathmandu-based women's rights and human rights NGOs (SUSS, LACC, INHURED, INSEC, ILRR, Didi Bahmi) and individual activists (Indira Rana, Sapana Pradhan-Malla). I also had the opportunity to interact with the Safe Motherhood Network of NGOs and INGOs organized by CEDPA. I attended several network planning meetings, a press conference, and the rally on International Women's Day (March 8th). I also attended a rally organized by the Security Pressure Group on International Women's Day, and a forum organized by Amnesty International Nepal on women's rights.

With this background, I am putting some preliminary thoughts in writing on the status of advocacy efforts in Nepal relating to legal rights and political representation as well as population and safe motherhood. I have also included some thoughts on the inter-relation of SO-2 and SO-3 with respect to advocacy.

The Role of Advocacy in USAID's Strategic Framework

Advocacy is a term which is broadly used here, to cover a range of activities, including general awareness-raising. The goals of advocacy vary widely. In Nepalganj, one rally I attended called for an end to child marriage and bigamy. Another rally called for construction of toilets and prohibition of alcohol. In the promotion of safe motherhood, advocacy goals include public education on family planning and health practices, as well as effective access to needed services and medical supplies. In the context of women's empowerment, advocacy cuts across all these issues with the common goal of increasing the control women have over their lives - to refuse forced marriage, to ensure safe delivery, to have access to a toilet during daylight hours. Advocacy is, regardless of its specific goal, the mobilization of people and resources to effect social change.

Legal rights and political representation are both tools of advocacy which can be used to empower women - through enforcement and expansion of their legal rights and through participation in the decision-making structures of the community and the country. Advocacy is a broader concept than either legal rights or political representation. Presumably in replacing

“political representation” with “advocacy” for the language of IR-2, USAID intended to recognize that the empowerment of women should be seen in this broader context where effective advocacy skills can be used by women for the achievement of whatever priorities they set at the local level.

It is unclear to what extent legal rights are intended to remain the exclusive substantive focus of advocacy. With regard to the construction of toilets, the reduction of alcohol use, or even the sending of girls to school, use of the law or legal principles would play a minimal role in the achievement of these goals. Even with regard to child marriage and bigamy, the law and the state of the legal system in Nepal is such that unless the goal is law reform at the national level, the most effective strategies to end child marriage and bigamy might well rely as much or more on advocacy techniques such as the mobilization of public pressure rather than advocacy techniques which involve the legal system.

Focusing primarily on advocacy as the framework for IR-2, using legal rights education secondarily to raise awareness, instill confidence and reinforce the concept of equality, would best enable women to determine locally what the most pressing priorities are, without restricting the scope of their activities to legal rights. This focus also enhances the potential for linkage between IRs and SOs. Advocacy skills can readily be applied to the substantive areas covered in economic empowerment and reproductive health, which do not rely primarily on legal rights.

The Status of Rural Advocacy

There is a tremendous amount of raw energy among women, both in Nepalganj and in Janakpur, who are motivated to take action for social change. The rallies I saw in Nepalganj were well attended and highly spirited, and the commitment of participants to the issues they had identified was clearly very strong. Similarly in Janakpur, although advocacy *per se* is somewhat less structured, the women recruited by CEDPA/FPAN to serve as Adarsha Byakti (“Guiding Lights”) are actively working in their communities to change patterns of behavior. They too have organized public events and rallies which are successful in drawing public attention to the reproductive health issues they are working on. There is abundant evidence of grassroots leadership, and in both the TAF and CEDPA programs a number of “natural-born organizers” have emerged.

The challenges of effective advocacy include the sustaining of energy and momentum that are created and the channelling of this energy into strategic action that will have an impact. Too often, spontaneous bursts of energy demonstrate strong emotional commitment to change the status quo, but lack of follow-up prevents this commitment from leading to real change. In this way, important windows of opportunity are lost. The rural advocacy effort initiated by TAF is such a window of opportunity. The call is there in that a number of issues important to the community have been identified, and women have shown that they are willing to put the time and energy into these issues. Ensuring that the leaders who have emerged have the necessary skills and resources to continue what they have started is a prerequisite to sustainability. Although advocacy has not to date been as much of a focus for CEDPA training activities at the local level,

the integration of more structured advocacy is on the immediate horizon, and so I will try to apply my comments to local CEDPA (FPAN) structures as well as the TAF structures

A critical component to the success of sustained advocacy is a structure which generates support and coordinates planning and implementation of initiatives. Legal literacy groups in the case of TAF, or community volunteer groups, in the case of CEDPA, could serve as the nucleus of advocacy efforts provided there is continuity and some form of functional group process (i.e. organization of meetings, division of responsibilities, reporting mechanisms, etc.) Groups play an important role in supporting initiatives of individuals in the group, organizing collective group initiatives, and creating a presence which raises awareness in the community and attracts newcomers who strengthen the group. Without some growth mechanism, it is very difficult for advocacy groups to sustain energy over time. Moreover, the nature of advocacy is dynamic - momentum builds as participation expands and vice-versa. Many advocacy goals are not immediately attainable and require the mobilization of forces orchestrated by but significantly larger than the advocacy group itself.

From my brief experiences in the field, I have seen the potential for advocacy groups, but not (yet) an existing structure. In Nepalganj, the focal point for organizing the rallies and other activities was clearly the local NGOs, which did an excellent job. However, it is unclear to me what, if any, role is envisioned for the local NGOs to sustain advocacy groups. If the NGOs are not to be used as a structure, some other structure should be found or created. If the advocacy groups are to emerge from the legal literacy classes as independent and self-sustaining entities, at the very least they must be trained in group formation and process, as well as strategic planning and effective outreach. Learning how to identify and prioritize needs that are not being met and then learning how to make the community respond to those needs are advocacy skills distinct from legal rights or any other substantive area of expertise. Once an advocacy group has these skills and is functioning, it can address a broad range of substantive needs, including reproductive health and economic opportunity.

The Status of Kathmandu-Based Advocacy

Many of the Kathmandu-based NGOs I have met with described to me their activities outside of Kathmandu. What I gather, from others, is that this type of regional work is generally undertaken by Kathmandu-based NGO staff going to the field. My impression is that there is no national organization of women which has indigenous rural components, although I understand that some NGOs (e.g. SUSS) do have regional offices, which are presumably staffed locally.

With regard to advocacy at the national level, much of the current discussion seems to be focused on the property bill which has been introduced. As the bill does not grant women equal rights to property (e.g. married women are excluded), there is a divergence of views on the extent of compromise that should be accepted to gain some improvement in the legal status of women. It does appear that there is some coordination among representatives of different NGOs with

respect to the bill. I witnessed one meeting at which several of these representatives met with a Member of Parliament and discussed various provisions of the bill, as well as strategy for its amendment. In the past, there have been several efforts to spark a coalition effort for revision of the property law, but the meetings have not been followed up by concerted action and coordination at a formal level.

What is most striking to me about Kathmandu-based advocacy is the apparent absence of a mass movement mentality. There are many active individual organizations, but I do not have a sense that they are focusing on outreach to the general public. Much energy goes into training and seminars, but the end goal of these efforts does not seem to be mass mobilization. I learned of one public meeting reportedly attended by 700 mostly rural women, which took place in Kathmandu shortly before my arrival. The meeting, entitled "The Mimi Beijing Conference," was organized by the Beyond Beijing Coalition (described as an NGO coalition c/o INHURED) to follow up on the issues of critical concern identified at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. I have reviewed the documents relating to this meeting, including the Declaration which was adopted by it. The call for action in this Declaration is clear and strong, but I do not know what, if any, concerted follow-up is planned to carry the specific demands forward. The "Mimi Beijing Conference" was clearly not a broad-based coalition effort and does not seem to have widespread support in the NGO community.

The Security Pressure Group rally which I attended on International Women's Day seemed to have a broader NGO base and was quite energetic, but again I don't know that there was or will be concerted follow-up to channel this energy into strategic action beyond an event. As the focus of the movement seems to be the property bill, I would have expected petitions, public statements by NGO activists and other more visible campaigning activities to build support for the bill. I believe that extensive lobbying is taking place, but it is being conducted by a handful of individuals and does not, as far as I know, draw on the strength of mass mobilization, even in Kathmandu.

TAF/CEDPA Advocacy Models

The activities of TAF, in its legal rights and advocacy program, and CEDPA, in its Condom Day and Safe Motherhood networks, represent very different models of advocacy. The CEDPA model promotes grassroots advocacy through a nationally coordinated coalition effort involving NGOs and INGOs which have local rural representation (e.g. Nepal Red Cross Family Planning Association of Nepal). Condom Day, and Clean Delivery Day which was modelled on it, are event-driven. A public awareness event is conceptualized by the coalition at a national level, materials are developed and distributed to the districts by the member NGOs/INGOs, and parallel events are organized in Kathmandu and at the local level around the country. After several years, this model has evolved into a potentially sustainable process that is increasingly being handed off to national NGOs, particularly Red Cross Nepal, to assume a leadership role and responsibility for coordination of the coalition.

Although the CEDPA model does seem to integrate a very strong rural component, in contrast to the TAF model, it is a top-down structure, with a grassroots base which receives direction and implements initiatives formulated at the national level. The TAF model starts with the grassroots component, a local advocacy group, which is designed to set its own priorities and take action on its own initiative. The advantage of this approach is that it creates more ownership at the local level, which contributes to a greater sense of empowerment. It also allows for greater flexibility in the determination of priorities which may differ from village to village, or region to region. However, as currently envisioned, the TAF model is yet to provide a structure of any kind for advocacy groups, which would otherwise be isolated in their activities and might find it difficult to sustain energy and cohesion.

Sustainability

I do not believe advocacy can survive in a meaningful way, which produces measurable results, on a zero-cost basis. The manifestations of advocacy emerging from the TAF and CEDPA structures is in each case the result of intensive full-time investment of human resources. A lower-cost model of advocacy (e.g. the CEDPA Adarsha Byakti program) would be more sustainable at the local level. The resources have already been invested in advocacy, and advocacy is increasingly seen to be a central component of SO-3. For these reasons, the emerging Nepali grassroots activists in rural areas should be given an opportunity to build a movement of their own, with a sustainable indigenous structure supported by start-up funding and technical assistance clearly programmed to phase out on a gradual basis.

Conclusion

There is great potential for coordinated advocacy in Nepal and for the evolution of a mass movement. Identification of clearly defined groups and training in group formation and group process, as well as strategic planning, are critical components of advocacy. Also critical is a support structure which can channel ideas and energy back and forth - between local advocacy groups within a VDC, among districts, and ultimately between districts and the national level. Whether the model is top-down or bottom-up, there should be a long-term strategy for building a movement which gives individuals, wherever they are, an opportunity to participate equally in and to interact effectively with the community at-large and with the structures of governance which have an impact on their lives.

The "Adarsha Byakti" ("Guiding Lights") Program Building Grassroots Advocacy and Community Leadership



Kalpana Karki Adarsha Byakti

When I took my baby to the health post I saw that they were not sterilizing needles. Hundreds of people were there, and I knew that these people could die if the needles were not sterilized. I told them it was dangerous to use unsterilized needles. They said they could not ignite the stove and so they could not sterilize the needles. I went home and got my own stove and brought it back to sterilize the needles.

This young Adarsha Byakti took quick action in response to a hazardous situation and her action may well have saved many lives. One year ago she would not have known that the situation might be life-threatening and she would not have had the confidence to intervene and take action to solve the problem.

The Adarsha Byakti program

- ⇒ empowers women at the grassroots level by turning them into community leaders
- ⇒ creates a local community resource of information and advice on reproductive health
- ⇒ provides economic opportunity for women through training and job opportunities
- ⇒ generates a talent pool of trained, experienced women health workers for employment

Overview of the Adarsha Byakti Program

The Adarsha Byakti ("Guiding Lights") program was created by CEDPA Nepal working with the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) as a pilot project in Dhanusa District to encourage and strengthen grassroots community leadership by women to promote reproductive health. The first thirty Adarsha Byakti were chosen in March 1996, one for each ward, from among 270 women who were serving as community volunteers in thirty wards near Janakpur. The Adarsha Byakti were trained by CEDPA/FPAN and encouraged to provide information, advice and leadership to women and men in their villages - to serve as "guiding lights" on an array of health issues including reproductive health.

Just one year after the creation of the pilot project, the Adarsha Byakti program has already been deemed a success by FPAN, which has replicated the initiative in Dhankuta District. Of the thirty original Adarsha Byakti who are actively working in

their communities, six were promoted by FPAN after six months to serve as Assistant Supervisors. Two of these six women were subsequently further promoted six months later to the senior position of Supervisor based on the strength of their performance. In Dhankuta already five Adarsha Byakti have been promoted to the position of Assistant Supervisor. The Adarsha Byakti have created a presence in their communities. They are looked to for advice, they organize events and other activities to raise awareness of important health issues, and they intervene in individual situations to help solve problems.

The Adarsha Byakti have empowered their communities with information and assistance. They have themselves in the process become empowered with a newfound ability to improve the quality of health care and play a leadership role in their communities. Collectively the Adarsha Byakti constitute a newly created talent pool of women who have proven their abilities through experience and who are already in some cases embarked on an ascending career path in FPAN.

Selection of Adarsha Byakti

The Adarsha Byakti are chosen from among the community volunteers recruited by FPAN to promote family planning. They provide non-clinical contraceptives and make referrals to government health facilities for clinical contraceptives and for any complications which arise. 270 community volunteer women in Dhanusa District, one for each ward, were selected by FPAN in May 1994 in accordance with established criteria seeking literacy, community residence and leadership potential. These community volunteers were provided with basic training in family planning and AIDS/STDs, and with annual refresher trainings. In March 1996 FPAN selected 30 women, one for each VDC (9 wards), to serve as Adarsha Byakti. The Adarsha Byakti were chosen on the basis of their demonstrated capability as community volunteers.

Training of Adarsha Byakti

The Adarsha Byakti training program is designed to develop the selected community volunteers as mentors within their community who can provide information and counselling on contraceptive methods and reproductive health and who can support other community volunteers. The Adarsha Byakti training curriculum reviews the various temporary and permanent methods of family planning - how each method works, advantages and disadvantages, indications and precautions, side-effects and warning signs, as well as common rumors and misconceptions which should be dispelled. The training includes an orientation and introduction to the safe delivery kit. Through role play and group work, the training also develops counselling skills. The first three day training was held in February 1996 for the thirty community volunteers who had been selected to serve as the first generation of Adarsha Byakti.

When FPAN decided to replicate the Adarsha Byakti program in Dhankuta District, a training was organized for the second generation of Adarsha Byakti in

December 1996 Six of the original Adarsha Byakti who had been promoted to the position of Assistant Supervisor participated in this training, to share their experiences and help the new Adarsha Byakti understand the program The five day training focused on contraceptive updates counselling ante and post-natal care, safe delivery and AIDS/STDs The program was extended from three to five days to allow for the inclusion of training in the anatomy and physiology of human reproduction and to provide administrative training - on coordination with various agencies at the grassroots level (e.g. government health facilities NGOs and INGOs) and on the role and responsibilities of the Adarsha Byakti

A questionnaire designed to measure the knowledge gained during the Adarsha Byakti training in Dhankuta documented a significant improvement by the participants as follows

TEST SCORES	Performance Before Training	Performance After Training
80%	1 woman (3.7%)	11 women (40.8%)
70%	5 women (18.5%)	8 women (29.6%)
60%	4 women (14.8%)	5 women (18.5%)
50%	4 women (14.8%)	2 women (7.4%)
40%	7 women (26%)	1 woman (3.7%)
30%	6 women (22.2%)	-

Activities Undertaken by Adarsha Byakti

The Adarsha Byakti serve as "guiding lights" of their communities They are a source of information and advice on reproductive health, and each Adarsha Byakti supports the other eight community volunteers in her VDC The Adarsha Byakti organize meetings for the community volunteers to discuss issues and concerns with them and serve as a channel of information to Assistant Supervisors and Supervisors of FPAN They organize events to raise public awareness and they intervene in individual situations to help solve problems and improve the quality of health care in the community The fact that Adarsha Byakti have been trained and have useful information and advice moves them into a leadership role Increasingly they are becoming important focal points within the VDC and advocates for the health needs of their community

Compensation and Promotion of Adarsha Byakti

Community Volunteer → Adarsha Byakti → Assistant Supervisor → Supervisor

Community volunteers of FPAN from which the Adarsha Byakti are selected receive nominal remuneration for their services Initially they were given Rs 300 per month which after two years was reduced to Rs 100 per month owing to financial constraints They are provided with the trainings outlined above and they receive

recognition in the community for their services. The Adarsha Byakti were provided with additional training but do not receive additional remuneration for the additional responsibilities they undertake. However, as the program has evolved, the Adarsha Byakti have been given employment opportunities within FPAN. Six Adarsha Byakti in Dhanusa have been promoted to the position of Assistant Supervisor, a full-time job with a salary of Rs 1500 per month. These six Assistant Supervisors were also invited to participate in the training of the second generation of Adarsha Byakti in Dhankuta in December 1996. Since then, five Adarsha Byakti in Dhankuta have been promoted to the position of Assistant Supervisor.

FPAN is currently in the process of promoting two Assistant Supervisors from Dhanusa to the senior position of Supervisor with an anticipated salary of approximately Rs 4 000 per month. These promotions would be implemented by FPAN on the basis of exceptional work performance, whereby the experience of the Adarsha Byakti would be accepted by FPAN as an equivalency for the educational qualifications normally required for the position of Supervisor.

Through this process, in effect, a career path has been created for community volunteers who previously had no opportunity for advancement. The Adarsha Byakti program gives these volunteers an opportunity to develop leadership skills and to prove themselves capable of handling greater responsibility with each stage of advancement. In addition to greater responsibility comes greater remuneration, and for those women who can establish their capability, there is the possibility of integration into the full-time permanent work force of FPAN. For FPAN, in turn, the process generates a pool of qualified women for recruitment which facilitates their efforts to increase the representation of women in the organization.

Future of the Adarsha Byakti Program

The future of the Adarsha Byakti program looks very promising. A structure has been created which can continually recruit, train, and promote women from the grassroots level to professional, paid full-time positions in the reproductive health field. CEDPA is currently exploring the possibility of adding a more structured advocacy component to the Adarsha Byakti program, to strengthen the capability of the Adarsha Byakti-led community volunteer structure to address problems of concern to the community. The availability of tetanus toxoid boosters or iron tablets, for example, has been raised as a concern in some areas. With a stronger advocacy training component, the Adarsha Byakti program will enable participants not only to identify reproductive health needs but also to take effective action to ensure that these needs are met.

Gender Analysis of the Adarsha Byakti Program

The recruitment, training, and promotion of Adarsha Byakti has a multi-dimensional impact within the framework of women's empowerment. The work of the

Adarsha Byakti promotes reproductive health and enhances the control women have over the number and spacing of their children. The program is also empowering to the Adarsha Byakti themselves by making them leaders in their communities and offering them opportunities for advancement. Their evolving role, with increasing responsibility and income potential, has an impact on the way they are perceived by the community at large and helps to redefine gender roles which have traditionally excluded women from the opportunities available to them through the Adarsha Byakti program.

GENDER ANALYSIS MATRIX

	LABOR	TIME	RESOURCES	CULTURE
WOMEN	employment opportunity	more time outside the home	training & income better repro health	raised status in community
MEN	greater share of work at home	more time to home and child care	family planning & repro health	men see women as more independent
HOUSEHOLD	alter division of responsibility	greater gender equality	more income to family & control	breakdown of stereotyped roles
COMMUNITY	more women in the work force	women involved in community affairs	improved access to family planning	traditional role of women expanded

COALITION BUILDING FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY IN THE PROMOTION OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Introduction

Increasingly, advocacy has come to be seen as an integral component of development efforts to increase contraceptive use, to lower maternal mortality rates and more generally to improve reproductive health. Over the past few years, CEDPA/Nepal has undertaken several initiatives which are designed to promote grassroots advocacy for condom use and safe motherhood through nationally coordinated coalition effort. In this way, CEDPA/Nepal is working to build the institutional capacity of national NGOs to work in coalition - with each other and in partnership with INGOs - and to strengthen their ability to develop sustainable advocacy programs for the promotion of reproductive health. The first stage of this new advocacy-oriented approach has focused on raising public awareness. As the coalition efforts evolve, the need for a new form of advocacy is also emerging which could change the fundamental nature of the movement for reproductive health in Nepal, as it has traditionally been conceived.

Condom Day

Condom Day began in 1995 as a collaboration of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and national NGOs, led by CEDPA/Nepal and the Nepal Red Cross Society Family Planning Project. October 14th, the first Saturday after the holiday Dasham, was chosen for Condom Day so as to reach migrant men while they were home for the holidays. The idea was to spark low-cost local initiatives combining education and entertainment to raise awareness of the importance of using condoms for family planning and prevention of STDs/AIDS. Twenty-six organizations participated in the preparation and distribution of a Condom Day Information package to districts around the country, with ideas and supporting materials such as posters, leaflets, comics, stickers, badges etc. In each district, NGOs and local community groups, health centres and government officials were encouraged to organize activities such as rallies, street dramas, puppet shows and fairs with educational games and competitions. Radio and television broadcasts were used to disseminate information at the national level, and a public event was held in Kathmandu, organized by the national coalition. The national theme chosen for the first Condom Day was responsible fatherhood.

The first Condom Day reached over 50,000 villagers in thirty districts across the country. Widely deemed a success, it has become an annual event. In 1996, the theme was broadened from responsible fatherhood to the responsible male in an effort to reach more people, particularly young men. Again, NGOs and INGOs led by Nepal Red Cross and CEDPA/Nepal coordinated the coalition at a national level, involving thirty organizations, and Condom Day events were organized at more than three hundred sites in fifty districts across the country. The Ministry of Health strongly supported Condom Day by providing materials and participating in planning, logistics and events. A greater effort was made to focus on more action-oriented activities and to organize publicity for Condom Day. Three regional troupes for actors and actresses to do street dramas were organized for a total of sixty-one participants, who then staged public performances in their district for Condom Day. The Red Cross also trained thirty-nine "Roving Educators", to

circulate through the crowds providing information and engaging in one-on-one discussions with members of the public. Greater publicity, resulting from a press conference prior to the event, led to many offers of help, including the donation of 10,000 condoms.

National Clean Delivery Awareness Day

In 1996, based on the model of Condom Day, CEDPA/Nepal organized a coalition effort to promote safe motherhood, using the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8th). Twenty-six NGOs and INGOs participated in the coalition effort, as well as the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health. The Nepal Red Cross Society volunteered to mobilize its district chapters, and promotional materials for distribution including posters, stickers and flashcards were provided by UNICEF. Along with the promotional materials, an activity guide was prepared and distributed, suggesting various events and activities that might be organized at the district and local level, such as street dramas, puppet shows, discussions and demonstrations of the Safe Motherhood Kit. Events each involving hundreds of participants were held in forty-one districts around the country, and materials were widely distributed within these districts. At the national level a press packet was put together, resulting in a number of articles and editorials, and the event organized in Patan Square, attended by four thousand people, was covered by national radio and television. The media was also used for special advertisements to draw attention to safe motherhood issues.

The Safe Motherhood at the Community Level Network

Following the success of National Clean Delivery Awareness Day, the members of the coalition which organized the event decided to form an ongoing network to promote Safe Motherhood at the Community Level. Follow-up actions to be undertaken by the Network included training programs and workshops, additional events, circulation of materials, integration of safe motherhood issues into ongoing programs, and the initiation of joint meetings at the local level to improve coordination among health post personnel, trained traditional birth attendants (TBAs), and family planning volunteer workers. In June 1996 the Network convened a joint workshop with the Ministry of Health to discuss collaboration on safe motherhood initiatives. The workshop included representatives from TBA programs, family planning programs, non-formal education programs, hospital programs, the commercial sector, mother's group programs, income generation programs and nutrition programs, as well as the Ministry of Health, international aid agencies, bi-lateral development projects, NGOs and INGOs. Following presentation of government and NGO activities relating to safe motherhood, areas of collaboration were identified, including awareness-raising, program coordination to prevent duplication, standardization of safe motherhood messages, common statistics and standardized data collection.

The breadth of participation in the workshop was apparent in its results. A discussion on strengths and weaknesses which identified problems at the family and community level resulted in a broad perspective. Included were not only health issues but issues relating to the status of women, lack of transport and access to services, and lack of awareness or education. The Action

Plan developed by the workshop consequently included as components, along with more traditional health-related initiatives, the promotion of safe motherhood messages for the home and community through folk, modern mass media and non-formal education, and the raising of the status of women so that maternal and neonatal morbidity/mortality will be reduced, through girls' education, income generation, and law reform on age of marriage and abortion. In this regard, specific actions to be taken as a first priority included the development of female role models from the community, pressuring the media to promote the status of women, incorporation of gender sensitisation training for male groups, and work for the abolition of discriminatory laws against women.

Safe Motherhood at Teej

Building on the success of its 1996 International Women's Day event, the Safe Motherhood at the Community Level Network decided to undertake a similar initiative at Teej. Teej is a major women's festival in Nepal which takes place in September. Women gather to fast and pray for the health and welfare of their husbands. Teej is also a time of singing and dancing, and reflection. After much discussion as to whether it was appropriate to use a religious occasion to promote women's health messages, the Network decided to organize Teej-related activities in 1996 only in Kathmandu on an experimental basis. Eight NGOs and INGOs participated in the Teej program, which included the use of songs especially developed to highlight safe motherhood issues and promote the status of women. The Network decided that several critical messages should be particularly promoted and conveyed in a more permanent manner. The three messages chosen for promotion were that pregnant women should 1) seek antenatal care from their local health posts, 2) eat more and nutritious food during pregnancy, and 3) have a trained birth attendant assist with delivery or go to a medical facility. These messages were printed on banners and on five thousand handkerchiefs which were distributed. The event was successful, and in 1997 it will be implemented on a larger scale.

The Evolution of the Safe Motherhood at the Community Level Network

On March 8, 1997 the Safe Motherhood at the Community Level Network organized its second International Women's Day event, called "Safe Motherhood Begins at Home." The Network has grown to include more than 50 NGOs and INGOs, and the 1997 nation-wide event reached all seventy-five districts of Nepal. Materials distributed included posters, brochures and guidelines for activities such as discussion groups, street dramas, games and puppet shows. After choosing its theme - the role of the family in safe motherhood - the Network devised seven messages as to what the family can do to assure safe and healthy pregnancies. These included providing extra and more nutritious foods, taking the pregnant woman for check ups, ensuring that she takes daily iron tablets, preparing for a safe and clean delivery, taking her for tetanus toxoid immunizations, and recognizing danger signs and life-threatening emergencies which require immediate action. Around the country, these messages were highlighted through the events organized for International Women's Day. In Kathmandu, the Network highlighted these messages through a "Health Mela" at the Jawalakhel Zoo. Thousands of people participated in the rally, led by an elephant displaying the safe motherhood messages, which ended at the zoo.

where booths were set up, each promoting a different activity for the family to ensure healthy pregnancies

Following the success of the 1997 International Women's Day safe motherhood events, the Network held a meeting to review activities to date and discuss next steps. Greater coalition work at the district level was identified as a goal for the future. A need was also recognized to move beyond the now established awareness raising activities to the next stages of advocacy. The concern was that a new understanding of safe motherhood needs would generate a greater demand for services that are not readily available. A need was also articulated to reach a broader community base with safe motherhood messages. The Network decided to organize a one-day seminar on "Understanding Safe Motherhood," to be held on May 28, 1997. Participants from various sectors, including agriculture, education, and law enforcement, will be brought in to learn about safe motherhood and to think about ways in which advocacy for safe motherhood can be incorporated in their ongoing work.

Conclusion

Condom Day has been institutionalized as an annual event throughout Nepal, and replicating the model has brought a new level of public awareness to safe motherhood issues which were previously addressed exclusively through service delivery. Coalition activities initiated by CEDPA/Nepal to promote safe motherhood have also led to institutionalized national events, on International Women's Day and at Teej. The Safe Motherhood at the Community Level Network has also evolved into a growing movement which is creating and implementing strategies to promote safe motherhood on a collective basis. With each event and its aftermath, the Network has looked for ways to improve its work and to address new challenges as they are identified. Increasingly, advocacy is playing a more central role in these efforts, and the need to bring in other sectors of the community has been identified. As the reproductive health movement continues to move in this direction, its role will presumably change. It is too early to say exactly how this will happen, but it is an exciting new development that could fundamentally change the traditional conception of what work for reproductive health involves.

JESSICA NEUWIRTH - SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

USAID SO-3 TEAM

Jane Nandy, Team Leader
Nancy Langworthy
Josefina Dhungana
Shubha Banskota

USAID INGO PARTNERS

CEDPA
The Asia Foundation
PACT
World Education
CECI
IRIS
Save the Children
NDI

TAF-FUNDED NGOs IN NEPALGANJ

Nari Kalyan Samaj (NKS) - Kirin Koirala, President
Center for Social Awakening Campaign (CSAC) - Vijaya Laxmi Aryal, President
Women Welfare Front - Radha Mahdh, President
Nawjeet Karmachary, TAF District Coordinator
Sawanta Thapa, TAF District Coordinator

NGOs IN KATHMANDU

Forum for Women, Law and Development - Sapana Malla-Pradhan, President
LACC - Shanta Thapalia, Director
INHURED - Anjana Shakra, Director of Women's Program
SUSS - Silu Singh, President
INSEC - Krishna Upadhyaya, Programme Coordinator
ILRR - Yubraj Sangrola, Director
Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) - Puspah Lamunchane
Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) - Durga Sob
Didi Bahini - Saloni Singh, Director
Institute for Integrated Development Studies(IIDS)-Indira Koirala
Saathi - Manisha Singh, Madhuri Singh, Pramada Shah (Board Members)

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISTS, LAWYERS & CONSULTANTS

Indira Rana - Secretary, Judicial Council

Anne Kaufman, CEDPA Consultant

Aruna Upreti

Kusum Saakha - Assistant Dean, Nepal Law Campus

Helen Sherpa, CEDPA Consultant

Kusum Shrestha, Senior Advocate

Ruth Finney Hayward - Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF

Ramesh Singh - Country Director, ActionAID

Mike Gill, TAF Consultant

Socorro Reyes, TAF Consultant

Manjula Giri - Rural Development Women's Center (Bastipur, Siraha)