



## In-person Workshop “Women’s Empowerment” May 26th, 2022



### ATTENDEES

- Lorène Tonati- [LP4Y](#)
- Maria Hitang- [LP4Y](#)
- Rita Thapa- [JCYCN](#)
- Gopal Thapa- [URJAA](#)
- Dilli Prasad- [REED Nepal](#)
- Saru Parsai- [C.A.P Nepal](#)
- Elina Guesnon - Youth 4 Change Network ([Y4CN](#))

## OBJECTIVE(S) OF THE WORKSHOP

Exchanged best practices and potential solutions regarding the topic: “Women’s Empowerment”.

To do so, the workshop took place from 2 pm to 4 pm on May 26th.

We started the meeting by introducing Youth 4 Change Network, the mission, the vision, and the team. Then, all participants introduced themselves and their NGOs. After that, we brainstormed on challenges about the workshop topic.

The workshop was divided into 3 parts each directed by a question:

**-What are the social barriers employed women faced when coming back to their village?**

**-What solutions could help the youth to face their community?**

**-What are the solutions to raise awareness within their community?**

## DETAILED NOTES

During this workshop, one example, in particular, was used during the discussion, the example of the Chhaupadi in Nepal. In order to better understand this report, a short explanation of the example is needed.

In some rural parts of Nepal, following Hindu tradition, women during their menstruation are secluded and banished to stay in a makeshift hut or sometimes cowshed. Women and girls going through menstruation are deemed impure to be in contact with the rest of their family and to touch things in the house. A girl going through her first menstruation has to stay for a period of 14 days. The tradition also applies to women just having given birth, with the mother and the newborn having to stay alone in the shed for 10 to 14 days. This banishment led to the death of 18 women between 2005 and 2019 (according to the National Human Rights Commission<sup>1</sup>). This practice has been deemed illegal since 2005, but a lot of rural villages especially in the west still follow it.

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<sup>1</sup> [Everything you need to know about Chhaupadi, the taboo ritual of banishing women to period huts](#)

- **FIRST PART OF THE WORKSHOP**

**What are the social barriers employed women faced when coming back to their village?**

**-First social barrier: cultural shock and religious belief**

**Rita Thapa-JCYCN:** From personal experience, there can be a very important cultural shock when coming back to the village when a woman lives in a big city (here Kathmandu). In her case, she explained that during her Bachelor's degree she used to give orientation/training to people on menstruation, but when she came back to her village, like every other woman, she has to isolate herself, during her menstruation, from the rest of the village, in a shed. This explains the big shock because she did not follow this tradition in the city. It is not here a problem of education of the population, but a question of religious belief. The fear of what the gods will do if this tradition is not respected. She expressed the need to reconcile women and religion.

**-Second barrier: women against women**

**Rita Thapa-JCYCN:** In the case of the chhaupadi, lots of women, and even educated women in the villages, do not see this practice as a problem. There is a clear difference between the women in the village and the women coming back from town. This means that the women coming back into the village, often cannot count on the support of other women.

**-Third-social barrier: the pressure of the family and the pressure of the community**

**Rita Thapa-JCYCN:** In the case of the Chhaupadi, families that are willing to no longer isolate the women of the family, are afraid of the society, afraid of what the community will say about them. So they do not implement change, because they are afraid of the reaction of society.

**Maria Hitang-LP4Y:** Young women that finished the program, that come from rural areas, and managed to find a job in Kathmandu are not always supported by their families. Sometimes the men of the family do not want them to work, because if they work, it will be difficult to find them a husband.

**Gopal Thapa-URJAA:** Added in complement, that most parents in Nepal want to see their daughters married before their 20's. And if they are working, then you cannot marry them.

#### **-Fourth social barrier: Gender role**

**Dilli Prasad-REED Nepal:** Especially in rural areas, it is seen as not acceptable for women to work, because they should depend on their husbands. Another dimension, the taboo regarding money, the fact that a woman could earn more than her husband is often badly seen because the man is losing his influence on his wife.

#### **● SECOND PART OF THE WORKSHOP**

#### **What solutions to help the women face their community? (for employed and unemployed women)**

#### **-To dare**

**Lorène Tonati-LP4Y:** The solution would be for women to dare. But it is always complicated to be the first one to dare, to put into question traditions and religion. The question would be, how to be the first one to dare?

**Suggestion from Y4CN:** For women to dare be the first ones, they need to be supported (by family members, by an organization, by friends), and they need to know that they won't be alone in their fight. That is why the role of organizations in the field is so important because they will give the necessary support, be it emotional support or else.

#### **-To compromise**

**Rita Thapa-JCYCN:** In the case of the Chhaupadi, and in similar practices linked to religion, the first step is to start small, to compromise with the family, and sometimes use emotional blackmail. For instance, instead of staying 5 days out in the shed, to only stays 3 days, if not then she will no longer tell her family that she is menstruating. Another example, instead of being in a shed (a practice that is very dangerous for the health and life of the women) having a room specially built inside the house for the women, a safe room with all necessary comfort. It is not a solution, but it is the first step toward bigger changes.

#### **-To advocate the community**

**Rita Thapa-JCYCN:** For women to go and meet with the community (not only men but also women) and explain why menstruation is a natural part of life, and should not be considered as something impure, to discuss with the community.

**Dilli Prasad-REED Nepal:** Change, unfortunately, cannot happen in one day, education and protest are useful to change step by step the mentalities.

### -To stay positive

**Rita Thapa-JCYCN:** There is room for change because in her case, the community does not care that she is not following the tradition of the Chhaupadi in Kathmandu. They only care that she is not doing it in the village.

**Maria Hitang-LP4Y:** People can be resilient to change, but they are also adaptive. For instance, if a family in a village sees the daughter of their neighbor succeeding in the program (LP4Y), then they will have the tendency to want the same for their own daughter.

#### To think about:

**Rita Thapa-JCYCN:** Unfortunately change is taking a lot of time, the real question should not be about, how can women face their community, but how can society accompany these women. Because it is a problem for the society in its entirety and not only women

## ● THIRD PART OF THE WORKSHOP

### What are the solutions to raise awareness within the community?

#### -Use the media

**Dilli Prasad-REED Nepal:** Already there is a lot of news coverage about the issue of the Chhaupadi in Nepal but also internationally. This is useful to raise awareness of the situation and to be able to create change. It is also important to focus on social media, because while not everything is good on the internet, social media, and new platforms can be useful in spreading awareness for women's empowerment. Nowadays kids have access to it at a young age, and it could be a good way to educate them.

**Suggestion of Y4CN:** Organizations could raise awareness online thanks to a good and efficient digital strategy.

These articles allowed to shed light on rape cases and the death of women because of the practice of the Chhaupadi:

\*[The menstruating Nepalese women confined to a cowshed - video | Global development | The Guardian](#)

\*[Nepal's Deadly Chhaupadi Custom – The Diplomat](#)

\*[Abolishing chhaupadi, breaking the stigma of menstruation in rural Nepal | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

### **-Raising awareness among women**

**Maria Hitang-JCYCN:** To raise awareness inside the community and most especially among women, the goal is for women to be strong together (whatever the struggle is about). There is a need to install new good practices.

**Everyone:** it is true that economic growth tends to autotomize women. For instance, in a village, if one woman owns a beauty parlor, she is busy with clients, as such she cannot follow all the rules imposed on women, because she has work to do.

In short, what is needed is for women to have access to economic and political responsibilities, if women are in positions of power then women will be able to dictate the rules. But not only, what is needed is to reconcile religion and women's empowerment, as such awareness should be raised within the religious community, with priests.

**Suggestion of Y4CN:** Organizations working on the professional inclusion of women should continue their work and effort. Thanks to their work women can tend to gain more power not only in their households but also inside the community.

### **-Role of the institutional level**

**Everyone:** In the case of the Chhaupadi, but also in everything regarding gender inequalities, restrictions should be narrowed down at the state level.

## NEXT STEPS

Here are some ideas for the implementation of the next steps:

- The attendees of the workshop can **get in touch** to lead the discussion further on specific topics and keep sharing good practices.
- The attendees are invited to complete the **survey** regarding the workshop that took place.
- Y4CN is always willing to organize future events on the topic of Women's Empowerment if motivated the participants of this workshop and the members of the network should not hesitate to contact us.