

SDG 5: The Role of a Progressive Women Group for Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in Nepal

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The progressive women group, “*Pragati Nari Samuha*”¹ lead by single women in Khasure village in Lamjung district, Gandaki Province of Nepal is a unique example to show how indigenous single women at the local level have been contributing to the global agenda of gender equality and sustainable development.

In our patriarchal society, women are often given a second position both at home and in the community level while making any decision. The trend of choosing the son-in-law by the parents of a daughter is quite common in Nepal. There are many proverbs in Nepal that would discourage women to speak or play leading an active role. The more women listen to her husband and in-laws the more humble and ideal women they become. This is what has been expected by most of the families in Nepal. The situation of single women is even worse. They are looked at differently by the society as helpless people. People think that indigenous families in Nepal are matriarchal but in reality, indigenous women are not free from the main stream of patriarchal society. This has been one of the reasons why, despite the population of women is higher than men in Nepal, women are still far behind in all areas. Only few women are lucky to be out of the home to explore the world and live with their voice.

The single women of Khasure village in Lamjung district of Gandaki province of Nepal have similar stories. Before they got the opportunity to join in the women leadership training in 2008 followed by home stay and cooking trainings in 2009 and 2010, they could hardly speak in front of their elders of their village nor with outsiders. After the training, slowly they build their confidence to speak about their concerns among themselves and to their families.



Photo by Jivraj Ghale

In Khasure village, 16 single women who never got married because they chose to be either single or never found the suitable partners have decided to form a group in 2007 as alternative to *Rodhi ghar*, the traditionally selected home for young men and women, to share their stories and sing their songs after their day to day work. This has given space for them to share their concerns and stories. After a few years that group has decided to turn it into a formal institution and formally registered as *Pragati Nari Samuha*, Progressive Women Group. They began their new journey of working for themselves and for girls and women of the village. They encouraged and helped every girl and boy to

make sure they go to school on a regular basis. They motivated families when they had a baby girl and celebrated for having a girl baby at home as was traditionally celebrated only when a son is born in the family. This has created confusion among the elders who never valued women in the village. Later, they also began welcoming every woman who came to village from abroad as traditionally only men were welcomed. Although initially they were not accepted by elders of the village, slowly after seeing the dedication and commitments of the group to empower women, elders of the village also supported them.

The group developed their level of confidence after the establishment of the *khaja ghar*, a small restaurant in the village by repairing an abandoned house in the village followed by lodges by repairing another 2 houses in the village. The regular income of the group has built their further confidence that women are able to change the perception towards themselves that women can be independent and support the families and communities. The roles and contributions of the group has helped to change the mindset of many families in the village and started respecting women in the village. Husbands no more suspect their wives when they come home bit later from the meeting.

¹ *Pragati Nari Samuha* means Progressive Women Group formed by single women in Khasure village.

If any villagers see women walking even in the middle of night, he would greet her and say, “your meeting must be till late today”. This shows the trust for women, who have brought the changes in the village and become the model for more women. They have played crucial role in the village to empower women and also contributed to meet the global agenda of gender equality and sustainable development. Therefore, the role of indigenous women is pertinent for their meaningful decision-making process at all levels to bring the changes in the society both at national and global levels to meet the SDGs.