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Carleton
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Working Toward Women's Equality in Nepal

Research Report



Compiled by the SOCI 3210A class
with contribution from Dr. Deborah Connors, PhD

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Introduction

We are SOCI 3210A; a group of undergraduate students from Carleton University and we conducted a qualitative research project in collaboration with Nepali activists and academics about gender norms and gender inequalities in Nepal. This project allowed us, as students situated in Western society, to get a more in-depth understanding of the gender rights and norms in Nepal. Our research question was “What would be a made-in-Nepal approach to women’s equality?”. Significantly, this question allowed us to explore how Western actors can approach working relationships in other countries, encourage equitable discussions and be a part of the solution. Women’s empowerment in Nepal deserves a future, and we feel privileged to contribute to it.

A few words from the course instructor

I am pleased to add a few words of introduction to this research report presenting our research process and my students’ varied and fabulous knowledge dissemination projects. This course emerged from misfortune. In spring 2020, I was to take 15 students to Nepal. By the time covid-19 sadly put an end to that plan, we had developed connections in Nepal, so we leveraged them to create a research course. It has been a delightful journey of discovery – of getting to know each other and 5 women activists in Nepal, of exploring how to work together online, and of learning how to generate insights from primary data. We have had fun as well as creating a useful distillation of how these activists approach their work and how Westerners can best support them.

Deborah Conners, PhD

Overview of the project

Purpose

The purpose of our research project was to hold space for Nepali activists and academics in the field of women's empowerment to share their approaches to social transformation regarding the status of women in Nepal. By listening and cross-referencing our interviewees' insights with analyses from our literature review we were able to generate findings with the potential to improve allyship and strengthen relationships between Nepali women and international activists working towards women's equality in Nepal.

Research question

The focus of this class being to get a better understanding of what equality looks like for women in Nepal, we studied and analyzed journal articles that detailed different aspects of life in Nepal — ranging from the history of Western involvement in the country of Nepal, to some of the struggles women face as citizens in Nepal. We wanted to shape our project in a way that would promote the voices of Nepalis women and what they require from Western organizations to help further their cause of gender equality. Informed by our research, we developed the question, "What would be a made-in-Nepal approach to women's equality?"

Significance/contribution

Through this research, we aim to convey the needs, wants and priorities of Nepalis women's equality activists to a Western audience. Ultimately, our goal is to amplify the voices of Nepalis activists to ensure Nepal's gender equality journey and the help they may receive from Western organizations and activists is equitable, helpful and desired by local populations.

Research design

Methods

A research methodology is the standardized tool used to collect data or information. The research methodology selected for this project was semi-structured interviews because it allows the flexibility for the interviewee to engage with the prompt or question or ask any additional questions without following a rigorous script. Semi-structured interviews are a type of interview where the interviewee is provided with prompts or questions and can answer the question, and the interviewer is allowed to ask follow-up and clarifying questions and explore how the interviewee ascribes meaning to the question. Due to constraints of the ongoing pandemic we used the video calling application Zoom to conduct our interviews. We were divided into five teams with each team responsible for conducting one interview and transcribing the recording for their respective interview. The roles of team members were as follows: an interviewer to ask the interviewee each question, a timekeeper to monitor the pace of the discussion and ensure all questions were discussed, and a person to record the interview. All of the students who were able to attend turned off their cameras and muted their microphones to ensure a stable internet connection. This was important because we didn't want to unduly tax our Nepali interviewee's bandwidth. This was an important consideration because in Nepal electricity and internet outages are common. Additionally, there is a nine and a half-hour time difference between Ottawa and Nepal creating constraints to conducting our interviews comfortably. When creating our interview schedule, we had to consider the time in both Ottawa and Nepal to provide a viable interview time for all parties.

Ethics

Our professor Dr. Connors applied to the Carleton University Office of Research Ethics for approval to conduct our research project. It was necessary to consider the risk involved for our participants. An informed consent letter and interview guide were crafted and sent to the participants prior to their interview to ensure they understood their rights and had an opportunity to ask questions or request more information. The consent letters were returned to Dr. Connors prior to the interviews and the interviewer verbally confirmed consent at the beginning of the interview giving the participant the option of choosing an alias and ensuring the participant was aware they could remove themselves from the project if they decided to do so.

Sampling

Sampling is a step in a research project where you determine which group you will be collecting data from. We interviewed a sample of five women with different academic and professional backgrounds with personal and professional experience in women's empowerment in Nepal. The interviewees were initially directly contacted by a Canadian scholar, Diane Denis, who is working in Nepal. The group of women who were interviewed were voluntary-purposeful samples. Sampling in interview-based qualitative research requires coherence and transparency which is why Dr. Connors chose purposeful sampling.

Interview questions

We formulated our interview questions as a class, with Dr. Connors finalizing them. These questions supported and elaborated on our research question "What would be a

made-in-Nepal approach to women's equality?". We started the process by separating into small groups and contributing 4-5 interview questions informed by our literature review and pertaining to our research question. Each small group submitted their ideas to be reviewed. Once all groups had posted their potential questions, Dr. Conners went over the questions with the class and divided them into themes. The themes we chose were women's equality, women's activism in Nepal, women and development, a made-in-Nepal approach to women's equality, cultural understanding between Nepalis and Western women, and interaction of Westerners with development in Nepal. We also included opening and closing questions to help facilitate the interview process and learn about the interviewees. The finalized interview guide and interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Literature review

The fight for women's equality in Nepal is a battle that is long and continuous. There have been many efforts put forward towards educating women, allocating resources towards them and having NGOs work with feminist activists to work towards a shared goal of overall equality in Nepal. However, these efforts seem to have not been very fruitful. Despite these efforts, Nepalis women still do not have access to the same rights, treatments, freedoms and resources that their male counterparts have. For the women of Nepal to achieve equality in their society, there are three major themes that stood out in the readings that prevent the accomplishment of this goal. The lack of properly allocated resources, the laws and policies that are upheld in Nepal's justice system and the heavy involvement of Western countries all contribute to the prevention of women's empowerment and movement towards equality. By controlling and limiting how much involvement is allowed from Western countries, implementing changes to the Nepalis justice system and allocating resources equally to both men and women, this will allow for huge changes and developments towards making Nepalis men and women equal in the eyes of society.

One key factor that prevents Nepalis women from achieving equality is the lack of access they have to resources. Conflicts have arisen with women's development in Nepal due to women being excluded from the development plans and processes of society (Sen & Grown, 1987). The denial of fundamental resources such as education, food, financing and property further perpetuates the marginalization of women. Women are seen as outside of society and are not included in the discussion or implementation of development plans (Bhadhin their caste-based categories instead of unifying and fighting issues as a collective (Tamang, 2009). In addition, this furthers the tokenistic approach that determines which groups receive more resources from foreign donors and denial of important issues that need to be addressed within non-governmental organizations to improve equality for Nepali women.

Another key factor that prevents Nepalis women from achieving equality are the laws and policies that are in place within the Nepalis judicial system. As previously mentioned, access to resources for women in Nepal is dependent on their caste group. This is rooted in Nepal's historic, social and geographical tensions with India (Grossman-Thompson and Dennis). This conflict has made its way into Nepali laws as well. An example of this is the topic of children and citizenship. To illustrate, in 2006, there was a law implemented that allowed for children born to at least one Nepali parent to claim Nepali citizenship. However, in 2014, there was a possibility that this newly created law would be changed so that Nepali citizenship could only be inherited if either both parents *or* the father alone was of Nepali descent. It was thought that allowing Nepali women the right to pass citizenship onto their children would risk the "Indianization" of Nepal (Grossman-Thompson & Dennis, 2017). Despite this law not being enacted, due to the persistent activism of feminist groups in Nepal, this is a strong example of how Nepal uses its laws and policies to prevent Nepalis women from achieving equality. These laws police the bodies of Nepali women and their reproductive rights. Another example is the women's involvement in the political community of Nepal. Even in positions of power, women are marginalized in Nepal. Despite efforts to ensure women are in power, like the 1990 constitution which detailed at least 5% of seats in each political party are reserved for women, they seem to find little success. Women in power have had to deal with men in power not taking them seriously and intentionally being placed by parties in locales that were known to lose elections (Tamang, 2009) (Quataert, 2013) quotes Georgina Ashworth, a radical feminist, "All state benefit from the violation, abuse or neglect' of their female citizens since collectively they 'fail... to create real and

realizable equity and equality of the female sex.” (page 211). As long as women are politicized and their bodies treated as political tools, the battle for women’s equality will be a slow and frustrating one for the women of Nepal.

The final factor that is preventing Nepalis women from achieving equality is the over-involvement of Western countries in Nepal. Influential Western countries, just like Nepal, have their own strong political and economic beliefs which drive their values and ways of life. This strongly influences their involvement and agenda in global development. The nationalization of the Nepalis forests is a key example. Beginning in the 1950s, power over the Nepalis forests was put in hands other than Nepalis citizens themselves. The “Bara Forest Management Plan” was a plan enforced by the Finnish where, in the 1990s, the Finnish entered Nepal and privatized the forests. Over time, the privatization of the forests led to a decline in its health. Eventually, ownership was back in the hands of the Nepalis and Westerners never involved themselves in their forests again (Gyawali, Thompson, & Verweij, 2017). While a lesson has been learned about external involvement in the agriculture of Nepal, that does not seem to be the case for women’s rights. One influential Western belief is that the role women can play in development is often ignored due to women being viewed primarily as housewives (Bhadra, 2001). This belief originates from many economic and political processes being exclusive of the interests and needs of anyone who is not represented in positions of power and is further perpetuated through the large disconnect between women’s well-being and the role they can play to further development plans and processes. In 1946, there was a group formulated under the United Nations (UN), called the “Commission on the Status of Women” (CSW) that worked to bring greater attention to women’s life situations on a global scale. This group worked to help women globally achieve equality in all walks of life and focused a lot of their time on promoting women’s rights, drafting new international laws and pushing for programs geared towards women’s interests. Unfortunately, it would come to public attention that woman-oriented programs, such as CSW, received less funding than other UN development programs. In addition, organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) worked to enforce gender divisions, where they had programs that “benefited men over women” (Quataert, 2013).

In conclusion, while the quality of life for women in Nepal has improved, the fight for women’s equality for Nepal is far from over. While Western involvement through dedicating resources, financial aid, and education has helped to further the movement, more needs to be done to further improve equality in Nepal. As seen from Nepal’s history, Western involvement, which may seem well-intentioned, can cause more harm than good. Giving resources, to then direct individuals how to use them, supporting and influencing political parties that are not always well-intentioned and educating individuals in topics that are furthering the division between genders are all ways that work towards regression, not progression, of a movement pushing for equality. Instead of giving foreign aid and imposing Western ideologies onto other countries, Western countries should look into alternative methods for how international development can be implemented to further the work that needs to be done in Nepal. By limiting how much involvement is allowed from Western countries, working towards implementing changes to the Nepalis justice system and allocating resources equally to both men and women, these steps can make huge changes towards the push for women’s equality in Nepal.

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The interviewees

Renu

Established nearly 30 years ago, Renu and her sister Tara founded the Women's Foundation Network (WFN). Renu has been working full time within the organization since she was 15 years old, she is now involved with other human rights organizations in Nepal, alongside the WFN. Renu considers this network of organizations a federation, which deals with similar tasks. Specifically, she focuses on working with women and children through empowerment, whether that be through a microfinance program, counseling or education about women's rights. Her involvement in this research project is based on her desire for spreading the message about the situation of women in Nepal. She is currently working to have similar conversations with families in Nepal through a gender equality program sponsored by the WFN. She believes that as the familial unit is representative of society's structure, if women can gain more equality and decision-making powers within the home, it will translate into the community. In terms of government support, Renu recently spoke with the Prime Minister about the issue of police brutality towards women, hoping to generate funding for training the authorities and spreading the message about women's equality on a societal level.

Rama

From a young age, Rama was orphaned and raised in the WFN children's home. Growing up, she started working with the organization to help female survivors of various kinds of violence. Her unique upbringing has influenced the way she sees gender bias in Nepal, noting that if she would have been born a male, there would have probably been a family member to care for her. Her insight and experience with gender biases informs our study and provides us with detailed examples of differing practices for a boy or girl child. In addition to sharing her personal experiences, Rama was involved in helping domestic abuse survivors who come to the center, providing free legal counsel, shelter and support. Through their stay, the women are provided with tools to make her an independent individual. As well, Rama was the coordinator for international volunteers, seeing firsthand how Westerners deal with the culture shock when arriving in Nepal. Rama's currently taking a bachelor's degree for psychology in the United States, she is planning on returning to Nepal and using her education as an example for other children and women who have the same goals.

Aadhira

Working as a professor of religion at Tribuvhan University in Nepal, Aadhira focuses on Buddhist teachings and the philosophical background of Hinduism related to gender issues. Working with multiple NGOs advocating for human rights and economic rights for women, Aadhira started an organization which educates illiterate women up to a primary level in a non-formal setting with the goal of getting jobs. Aadhira feels that being a woman with a higher education, it is her duty to uplift poor and illiterate women's statuses. She works alongside them without any financial gain to accomplish this. Aadhira is able to recognize her contribution to the discriminatory practices towards young girls in Nepal, noting that she carries such discrimination with her daughters. She demands they do chores such as cleaning the house as they will have to do so after being married. The public discrimination faced by women such as questioning her ability to work is an example of the societal constraints placed on women. Aadhira details the lack of friendly female work

environments, stating that equality means not discriminating on the status of rights and having equal opportunities on the basis of sex. Aadhira is interested in solving similar issues so the new generation, including her daughter and daughter-in-law, will not face such problems.

Tara

Tara has been an advocate of women's equality for as long as she can remember. Working alongside her mother and helping other women, she was inspired to raise awareness to issues surrounding women's equality. At the age of nineteen she started the Women's Foundation and she continues that work today. Although her work does not focus on one specific group, she is involved in helping victims of domestic violence, supporting missing girls, assisting women fight for citizenship rights, and providing access to resources to those living in rural areas and to Indigenous women. In terms of promoting and raising awareness, she has written articles and conducted research related to Women in Power in Nepal, Women and Education, Violence against Women and Human Rights violations, as it relates to Indigenous women, women living in rural areas and impoverished women. She was also involved in drafting legislation related to women's rights. Her interest in this project is her belief that women's equality is "everybody" issue that needs to be delivered around the world. That a bottom to top approach that incorporates cultural, spiritual and education support of women will be helpful in attaining and sustaining women's equality.

Lakshmi

Lakshmi is a member of the LGBTQI community and an advocate for issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation. She has been actively engaged in raising public awareness to such issues since 2002 and brings a wealth of knowledge to the field. Her personal experiences have inspired her to help others maneuver their journey while facing similar struggles related to family acceptance. Such challenges have allowed her to speak openly to others about sexual orientation and gender identity issues with an aim to bring awareness and help others in her community. She has used her personal struggles as motivation to create a safe environment for others facing similar situations by opening a small swing shop with her partner. She then formed the Mitini Nepal Organization where she offers various types of training and programs to empower members of the LGBTQI community to speak up and stand up for themselves. Her interest in this project was borne from her passion and experience in these issues as it has the potential for national and international exposure. Lakshmi continues to raise her voice both at the community and governmental levels as the policies surrounding women's equality, gender identity and sexual orientation exist but have not been implemented.

Findings

Through our detailed analysis of the interviewees' responses, we have identified a number of themes in two areas. The first set of themes represents the characteristics of the Nepalese approach to work towards women's equality. The second set of themes identifies various ways Westerners can support the advancement of the women's equality movement in Nepal.

Nepalese approach to women's equality

Works from bottom up/grassroots

An important theme on viewing a Nepalese approach is the significance of understanding human rights from a bottom up and grassroots perspective. By working with those who are on the frontlines of a cause, we are able to understand the direct needs of a population.

Includes men

Nepali society is patriarchal; therefore, men hold a privileged power women are often excluded from. Inclusion of Nepali men means the proactive use of male privilege to challenge and dismantle toxic masculinity resulting in the transformation of power dynamics that empower women. Engaging men in the design, implementation, and delivery of programs will ensure sustainability as a result of their sense of mutual ownership and benefit.

Addresses intersectionality

Women's equality work in Nepal is not a singular approach as there are many different ethnic and cultural groups who may have a different societal experience based on their ethnicity, culture, location, etc. It is important to consider multiple perspectives when talking about women's equality in order to maintain intersectionality.

Integrates culture

Culture helps to mold the way Nepalis live with each other and influences their understanding and approaches to women's equality. Although often used to justify denying women their rights, integrating culture can produce a positive societal shift through dynamics specific to the culture. Cooperation with Nepali cultural norms and customs can help to smooth the process of adaptation to human rights.

Integrates spirituality

In Nepal, spirituality is important in education and culture and informs the population on different styles of knowing and understanding.

Integrates ethnicity

In Nepal, they still use the caste system. Both high and low caste women need to be working together so that everyone is included in the change. The women living in the villages need to be recognized for all their hard work and they need to be empowered with other skill sets and knowledge of their rights.

Recognizes importance of employment

In Nepal, women must have access to paid skilled and unskilled employment in the formal sector. Employment leads to greater autonomy for women because they are able to support themselves, thus decreasing dependence on patriarchal systems that disempower

and discriminate against them. Equal compensation and access to employment between the genders is paramount towards achieving women's equality.

Affirms need to put policy into practice

The idea of policy into practice is the emphasis on the importance of how different notions, in the forms of laws and policy, are upheld in society. In order to have full systemic change, the policies made in regard to women's equality must also be enacted and implemented in everyday life, decision-making, and more.

Focuses on importance of education

Lack of formal education will decrease the likelihood the inequality gap will narrow between women and men. It is also important to note that education also includes knowledge about how to advocate and manifest enjoyment of human rights for women.

Works toward women's empowerment

The women in Nepal need to be empowered at the economic and educational level. When they are empowered that way the women in Nepal will be able to become more independent. There also needs to be empowerment through the community so that everyone is holding each other up. Once the women are empowered through education they will learn about their rights and will start to fight for women's rights in Nepal.

Desires agency, voice and representation

It is very important for the women in Nepal to have their own agency voice and representation. There has to be more women representation in power and in the public sector. We need to help the women of Nepal get their voice out there so they can be heard. With their voice the women in Nepal will be able to say what they need in order to thrive and they can promote the women's right movement in Nepal.

Identifies the need for systemic change

The systemic change that is needed in Nepal is deep rooted in their culture and the societal standards in their country. Nepal is a patriarchal based country that puts a lot of priority on the men rather than the women. If we are able to help improve these systemic standards in Nepal women may feel as though they have more power to fight for their rights within their families, work and everyday community.

Claims importance of familial relationships and support

Familial support is extremely important in order to incite real change in Nepal. The men in Nepal need to begin to see the women in their communities as equals in order for their fight for change to be productive and meaningful. A way this can become a reality is by having support groups for families or men who want to help and inviting them to work with these women's foundations, shelter, etc. To give them an understanding to the women of Nepal in regard to the struggles and inequalities they face.

Uses a relationship-based model

Nepalese culture emphasizes communal values and goals. Taking care of relationships is highly valued in work to address women's equality.

Ways Westerners can help

Respecting Nepali women's agency

Many Nepali women have few opportunities to make choices about their lives. Respecting women's agency through centring women in planning processes is an important way that Westerners can support movement toward women's equality.

Understanding differences among Nepali women and listening to the needs of the community

Oftentimes, Westerners who want to help inadvertently overlook the biggest challenges and issues that a country is facing. In order to avoid this, it is imperative to listen to the community. Listening will ensure you are understanding the community and that you are doing the right thing.

Holding governments to account at the International level

International cooperation towards achieving women's equality is necessary. Westerners must hold their own governments, and the international community accountable for human rights violations. Accountability looks like the international community applying proportional pressure to deter future transgression. This would increase the likelihood that human rights norms will be acknowledged and implemented internationally.

Building relationships of trust with communities

Building relationships of trust with the communities will give Westerners more standing with the people of Nepal in regard to helping them. By respecting their culture and understanding their spiritual beliefs we enact trust which allows the goals of aid projects to align with the needs of communities.

Immersing oneself in the Nepalese culture

In order to provide sustainable and applicable methods of helping, it is important to be immersed into the Nepalis culture. This will help Westerners to not impose Western views and instead to come from a place of respect. By immersing oneself into the culture the internal biases we have can subside and the issues can be seen from a Nepalis perspective which incorporates the different cultures and understandings.

Supporting Nepali researchers and Nepali women who hold positions of power

Nepali women who have achieved professional success should be supported so that they have the capacity to open further opportunities for other women, especially those on the margins.

Sharing Nepali women's stories, insights and experiences globally

Nepali women's stories, insights, and experiences are unique. Sharing their insights outside of Nepal has the potential to bolster closer bonds with women's equality movements globally.

Sharing the Western experience of women's rights with Nepali women

By sharing the Western experience of women's rights with Nepali women, we are able to collaborate and share knowledge and skills amongst each other. This allows us to abandon the singular approach to women's equality and allow for multiple solutions that can be intersectional and adapted for cultural sensitivity.

Providing sustainable funding for programs

Providing sustainable programs for Nepali women will give them access to education and better career options for the long term.

Planning with Nepali women

Western organizations need to listen to the women in Nepal in order to feel empowered. We need to work with Nepalese women instead of for Nepalese women so that their voices get heard. Western organizations should not be pushing their own agenda onto the women in Nepal. We should be helping them push their own agenda forward. In order for westerners to give the best aid to improving women's equality, Nepali women need to be

involved in the planning of projects. This will ensure that the projects meet the needs of the people they are intended to serve.

Providing funding for the goals set by Nepali women and communities

In order to ensure the project meets the needs of the intended beneficiaries, it is important to include them in the crucial step of setting the funding goals. Including Nepali women in the decision-making process of how funds are allocated is imperative to ensure projects have the greatest impact and sustainability.

Providing support and resources

Western organizations can provide technical support to the women in Nepal. We use their knowledge and help them improve what they already have. Through the help of technology and media we can provide them with the necessary support and resources to get their message across within Nepal and around the world. Rather than bringing projects that are important from a Western perspective (which happens too often), people who want to help can ask Nepali women what they desire and need and work to find resources to address these needs.

Establishing appropriate and sustainable goals alongside the community

By listening to Nepalese people, we are able to address the basic needs of the population and incorporate those goals before moving on to other areas of development. In terms of sustainability, it is important to provide a population with the resources and basic needs to be able to tackle more projects.

Working toward sustainable change

Sustainable change comes from building sustainable processes. Projects that people in communities can use and maintain as part of a sustainable process are more likely to create sustainable change than large projects that require external resources.

Discouraging foreign organizations that support Western imperialist agendas

Western imperialism agendas usually do not include the community they're helping. They tend to push their own agenda onto the community even though it might not be what the community needs. This pushes the idea that the East is inferior to the West. That they are underdeveloped even though that might not be the case. This can do more harm than good.

Limitations

Due to the short-term nature of this research project, in that all aspects of the process were confined to the span of six weeks, the general scope of the project, including sample size, participants, and topics covered, were quite limited. This is not to say that the data collected in the interviews did not yield an abundance of insights. Within the specific framework of this project, a point of saturation was reached in the data analysis process as the specific cohort of women being interviewed represented relatively the same values (with Lakshmi existing as an outlying representative of the LGBTQI perspective) when it came to answering the question of what a Nepalese approach to women's equality would look like. The knowledge these women shared was beyond helpful, however, had the time frame been extended our sample and the subsequent data collected would most likely have encompassed a broader depiction of Nepalese attitudes towards equality.

When approaching any qualitative research, one must understand that their data set and ultimately the knowledge being produced, is in no way all-encompassing. In other words, the research at hand is only representative to the bodies reporting on it, and those within their social context. As a result of the limited scope of this project, the vast diversity and bountiful cultural identities present within Nepal could not be accounted for. The majority of the women interviewed (with the exception of one), represented the cis-female perspective which adheres to binary gender relations. Although this is helpful in addressing the approach to *women's* equality in Nepal, it fails to account for the more nuanced representations of gender identity that are present even though the broader culture may not overtly display them. Additionally, the women interviewed represented only a portion of the ethnic variations in Nepali society, and although many have had experience working with Indigenous women, none represented these communities personally. As such, a research project to validate the applicability of these findings among a broader range of women in Nepal would be recommended.

As qualitative researchers, we acknowledge the importance of building trusting relationships with our research participants. In this project we relied on connections that were created before the beginning of the course and extended those relationships in the best that we could in the limited time we had. If we had the time to further extend these relationships, the interviewees may have felt more secure to open up to us. The time constraints of this project also restricted our opportunity to send the interviewees the written transcripts of their interviews for consideration, as well as to address further questions we had. This acts as a limitation as we had to rely on our singular interactions with the interviewees rather than taking the time to dive deeper into certain topic areas or to ask for clarification. If not for our professor, Dr. Deborah Connors and her contact in Nepal, Diane acting as a gatekeeper to these women, our access would have been quite limited and our ability to form said trust would have been greatly diminished.

Also exacerbated by the short timeline of this project, is the cultural barrier between the interviewees and interviewers. Inherent to any research project of this nature is the cultural as well as language barriers that occur. This can often present limitations in the interpretation of data as the interviewees message may become lost in translation.

Overall, the research that we produced, while small, displays informative data about equality in Nepal and the ways that westerners can help. As a class we feel we were able to successfully answer our initial research question despite the limitations listed above.

Knowledge dissemination projects

Westerners in Development: Unpacking Perspectives

Team: Caitlin Beaton, Angelle Bourdon, Margaret Warrick

Our project explores the landscape of how westerners can best support Nepalese women in meeting their goals. It consists of a self-guided interactive presentation that demonstrates several understandings of the lives of Nepalese women and ensures an appreciation of the westerner's position when engaging in global initiatives. We disseminated our project to undergraduate students who are interested in working with local and international communities of which they are not actively a part. Our aim was to share the importance of listening to the communities they are interested in supporting, what it means to think reflexively, and what roles we can and should play as outsiders providing support. We hope our audience will be able to mobilize this knowledge in their studies and work.

Link to presentation: <https://share.nearpod.com/vsph/qElf2p2dMu>

To start the presentation, input your name in the *Name* field. You do not need to create an account to participate.

Screenshots of a few slides:

Intersectionality

The interconnections a group of individuals share forms their primary identity. Personal characteristics such as race, class, and gender often create overlapping discrepancies. The Nepali women experience intersectionalities which construct a complexity when implementing gender equality.



"Women are talking about women's equality when they are united together, but among them there are still differences due to intersectionality. We are trying to find the solution for this problem. When we talk about women's equality and gender identity, we are all working together with a huge movement, but there has also been a conflict amongst us and that creates some kind of problem for us. If we are going to solve this problem then the intersectionality of the women should also be talked among groups such as the LGBTQ, disabled, and the lower caste people. If we carry all of them together then a solution will be there for us."
-Lakshmi

Listening and working with the Nepali movement

"The first priority is addressing what the problems are and that people get their basic needs met, then the next step is to move on to issues of equality."
-Aadhira

"If there is no food, what is health? Planting rice would be health."
-Tara

Needs identified by the interviewees:

- Formal and informal education (Aadhira, Lakshmi, Renu)
- Income generation (Aadhira)
- Family planning education (Aadhira)
- Build trust (Rama, Tara)
- Technological support (Renu)
- Share and learn from each other, knowledge and skills (Renu, Tara)
- Health support (Renu)
- Financial support (Renu)
- Access to water (Aadhira)
- Sexual consent education (Tara)
- Food as a means to address health (Tara)
- Literacy (Aadhira)
- Proper care and attention through love and support (Rama)
- Support at international level to give voice to Nepali women (Aadhira)
- Focus on policy level work (Lakshmi)

In practice: education initiatives

The participating women [provided birth control pills]...but there is not an issue of birth control pills. They are having sexual relationships without consent and it's rape. So we have to educate "What is a relationship? What is consent?"
-Tara

In the school they have to have a computer; but we do not have a computer so we are using our cell phone to give children classes so it was such a great project to getting 14 computers. We are so excited and everyone was so happy. A small thing can make a huge difference if this is really bottom-to-top.
-Tara

"They were a really good team, but because of the pizza, because of that misunderstanding, they gave a very bad message to most of the people, from our supporters in Italy."
-Rama

Tara shared of a group of Western women who thought the Nepali community needed birth control pills, but after creating a safe space for the women to share their stories, it was determined that the community really needed education on safe, consensual relationships.
Outcome: Room for improvement

Tara also shared of the initiative of a previous Carleton University class which provided computers to girls to help enhance their schooling which has since helped the girls continue classes during their COVID-19 lockdown.
Outcome: Success!

Rama shared that a group of Italian supporters made a police case because they thought the children were not being properly given food, because they didn't know what pizza is. In reality, Rama explained that the children actually prefer their own Nepali dishes over pizza, but this experience was not a positive one.
Outcome: Room for improvement

What can we learn from this?

Effective approaches:

- Practicing humility - a willingness to listen and learn
- Grassroots, bottom-to-top led project development
- Understanding differences among Nepalese women
- Working with communities to build relationships based on trust
- Making an effort to understand and appreciate cultural differences
- Respecting Nepalese women's agency
- Immersing oneself in the Nepalese culture

"It's important to build trust between, and understand their cultural situation. I think it works both ways."
-Tara

"The objective should be decided by the residents, not the donors."
-Aadhira

"If you want to empower a woman in Nepal, if you want to throw them a positive message, all you have to do is give positive love and support to them... Trust and love, is what I think."
-Rama

"If we have a common language then it could be easy to share the feelings, the problems that Nepalese women are facing."
-Lakshmi

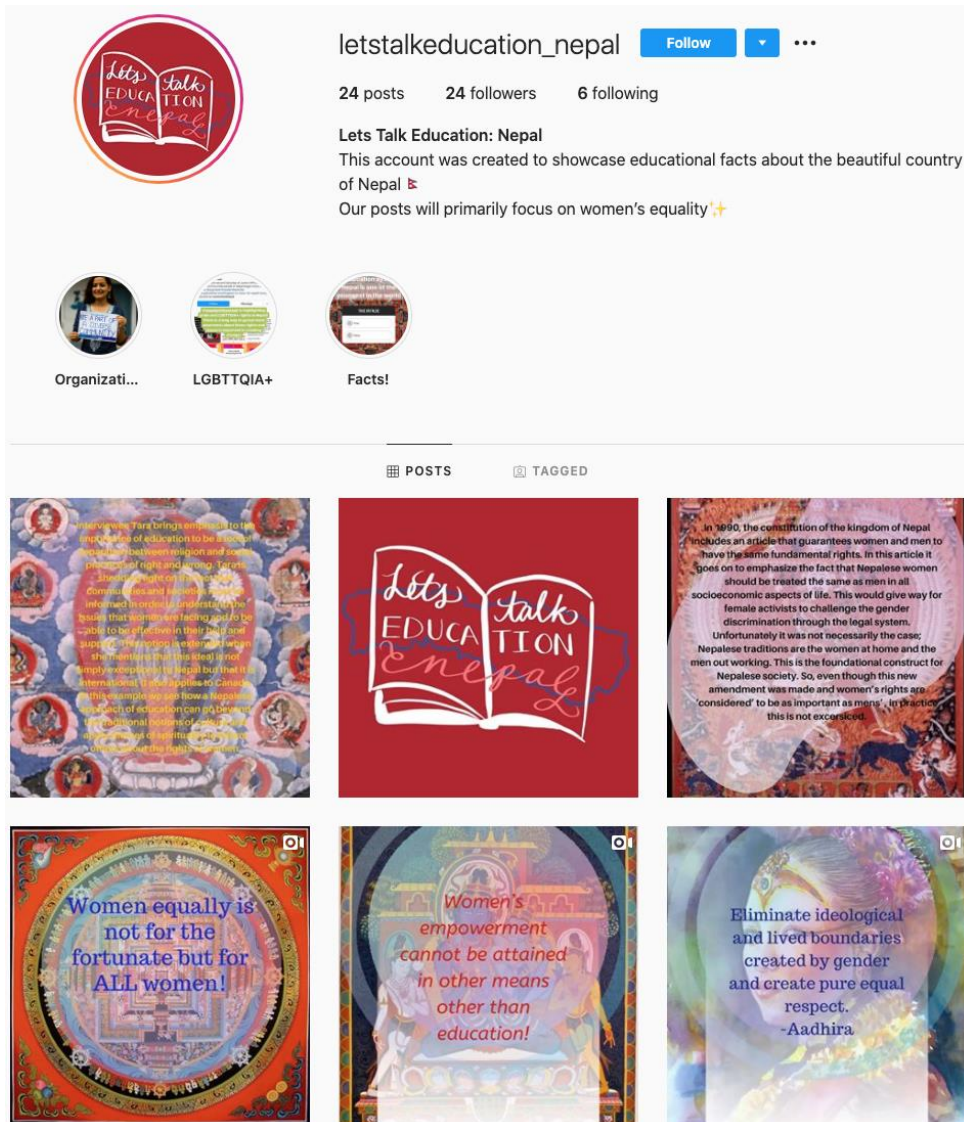
"Sharing, networking, taking the issue up, women... so many are continuing [the work] in Nepal."
-Renu

Let's Talk Education: Nepal

Team: Lis Neylla Nzoyihera, Saivani Sanassy, Lisa Fitzpatrick

For our knowledge dissemination project, we created an Instagram page to share informative, creative information about women empowerment in Nepal. We chose this platform because it allowed us to be creative with our posts and interact with our audiences. In addition, our target audience was university students and since Instagram is a popular social media platform amongst the younger generation, we thought it was the perfect place to share, highlight and educate individuals about women equality in Nepal.

Link to Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/letstalkeducation_nepal/



The screenshot shows the Instagram profile for 'letstalkeducation_nepal'. The profile picture is a circular logo with the text 'Let's Talk EDUCATION nepal' around an open book. The bio states: 'Lets Talk Education: Nepal This account was created to showcase educational facts about the beautiful country of Nepal 🇳🇵 Our posts will primarily focus on women's equality ✨'. Below the bio are three category icons: 'Organizati...', 'LGBTQIA+', and 'Facts!'. The main content area shows a grid of posts. The first row includes a post with a colorful background and text about the importance of education, a red post with the 'Let's Talk Education nepal' logo, and a post with a historical document snippet. The second row includes a post with a circular graphic and the text 'Women equally is not for the fortunate but for ALL women!', a post with a woman's silhouette and the text 'Women's empowerment cannot be attained in other means other than education!', and a post with a woman's face and the text 'Eliminate ideological and lived boundaries created by gender and create pure equal respect. -Aadhira'.

Policy into Practice

Team: Katherine Sanders, Madison Pate-Green, Victoria Fruci

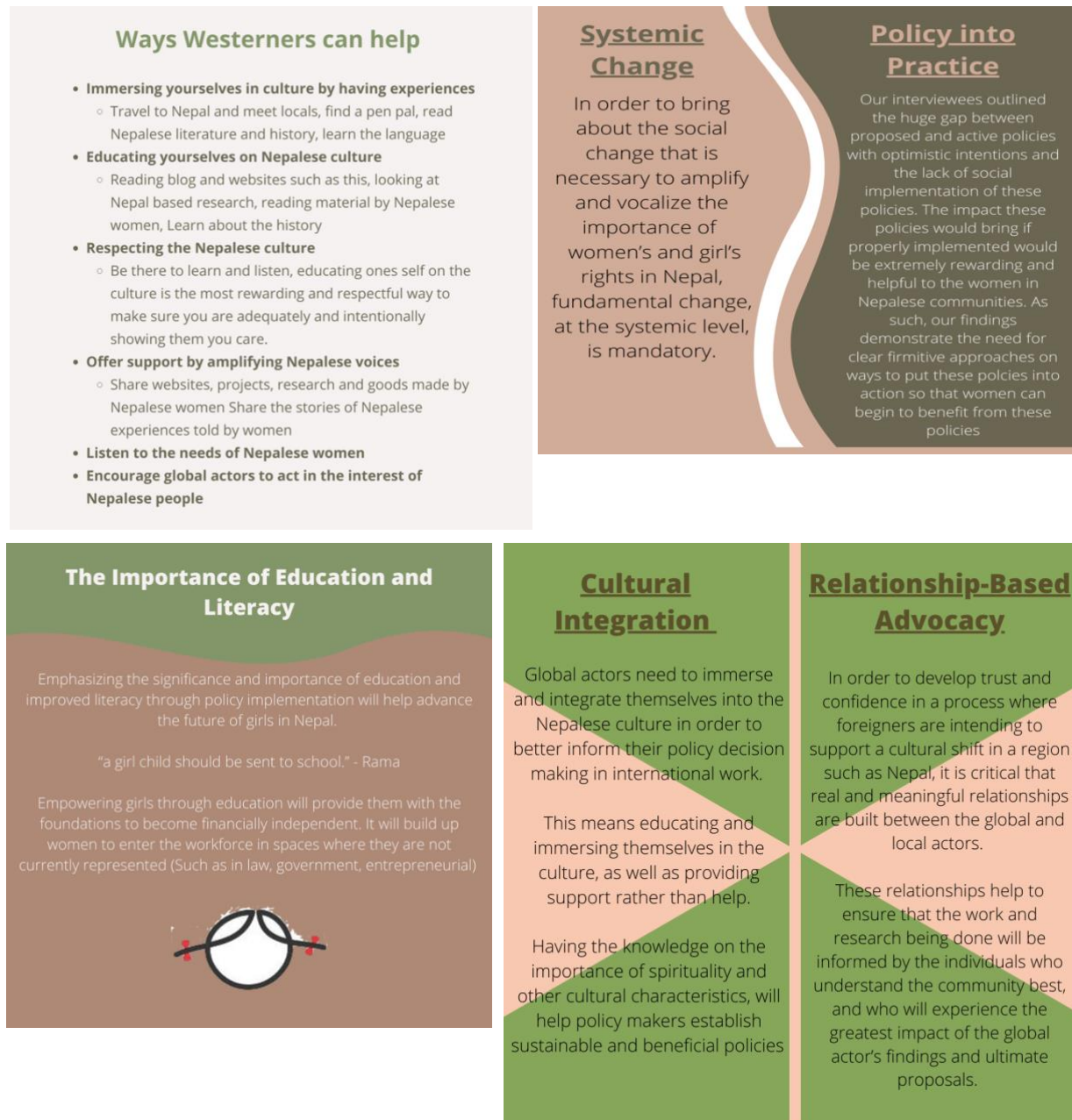
For our knowledge dissemination project, we created a blog using the platform Wix. Our home page is creative and provides a brief introduction about the project. The blogs main focus is on systematic change as our target audience is individuals and organizations at the policy making level that can effect change. We discuss six of the themes from the research and outline how they are imperative to foster equality in Nepal. We also included a section of resources where we outline how westerners can help, organizations that support Nepal and some readings for further interest. By using the blog style, we were able to aesthetically present our findings in a way that is easily accessible and informational.

Link to blog: <https://policy2practicenepal.wixsite.com/website>

Screenshots of blog:



Promotional infographics:

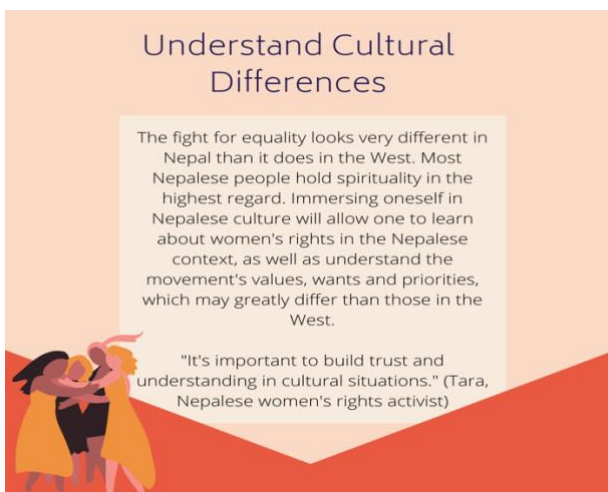
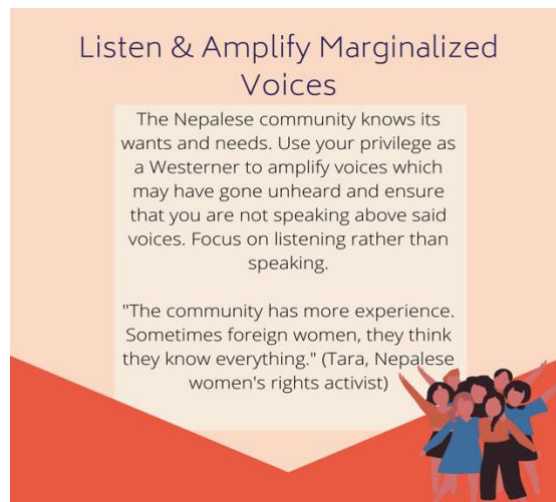
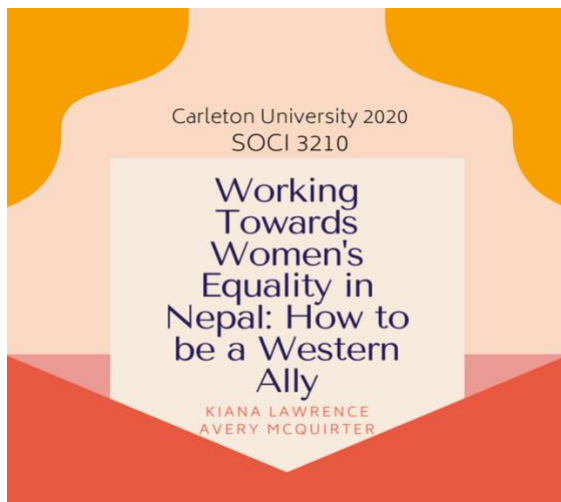


Working Towards Women's Equality in Nepal: How to be a Western Ally

Team: Kiana Lawrence, Avery McQuirter

For our knowledge dissemination project, we decided to post a series of Instagram content to our personal profiles. This content included a post, an animated IGTV video, and an infographic. We also included a Highlight on our profile with links to all the content for continued viewing. The topic we decided to focus on for our project is how Westerners can best help support Nepalis activists in their fight for gender equality. We really wanted to focus on allyship and solidarity as these are important issues for us.


The link to view our animated IGTV video: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CBlpnG_HJur/



Understand the Impacts of Western Aid

Western organizations have been known to often do more harm than good in many developing nations. Understand that these organizations continue to have an impact on local communities and emphasize your willingness to fulfill the wants of the community rather than corporations.

Many of our interviewees spoke about the lack of consultation between Western aid organizations and local communities. "Most of the NGOs...they do not research." (Aadhira, Nepalese activist for LGBTQ+ rights)



Learn more

Read our full class report (link in bio).

Special thanks to our interviewees and Professor Deborah Connors. Learn more about the fight for women's equality in Nepal at www.womenepal.org



Instagram highlight cover:

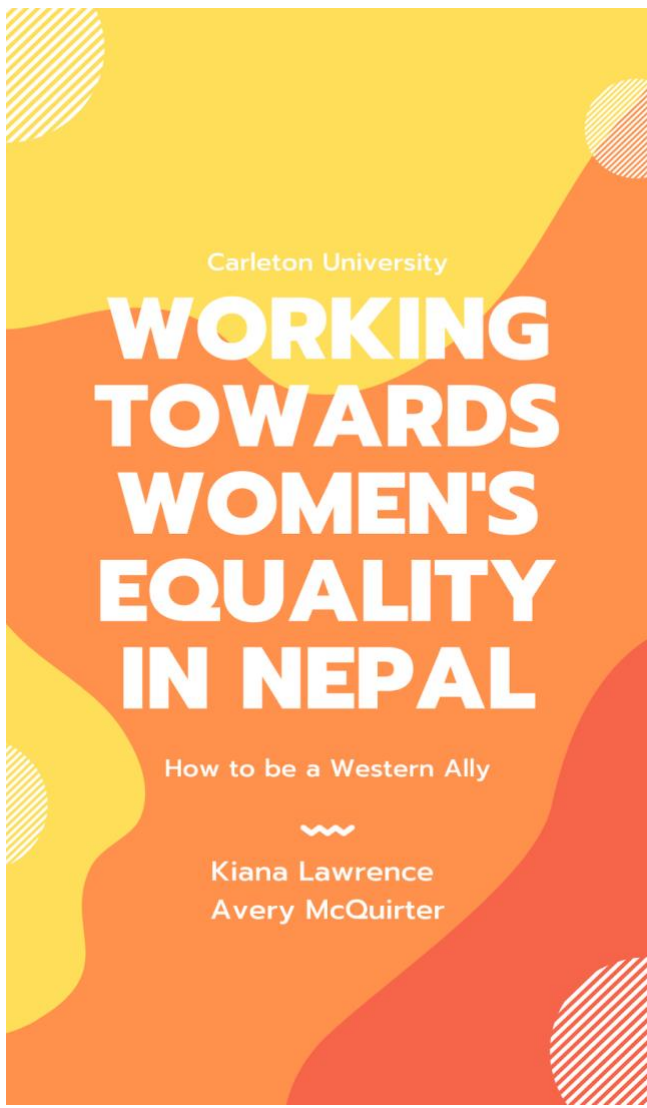
Carleton University

WORKING TOWARDS WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN NEPAL

How to be a Western Ally

~ ~ ~

Kiana Lawrence
Avery McQuirter



Infographic:

Carleton University 2020

Working Towards Women's Equality in Nepal: How to be a Western Ally

Kiana Lawrence & Avery McQuirter
SOCL 3210 A – Carleton University

Understand Cultural Differences

The fight for equality looks very different in Nepal than it does in the West. Most Nepalese people hold spirituality in the highest regard. Immersing oneself in Nepalese culture will allow one to learn about women's rights in the Nepalese context, as well as understand the movement's values, wants and priorities, which may greatly differ than those in the West.

Listen & Amplify Marginalized Voices

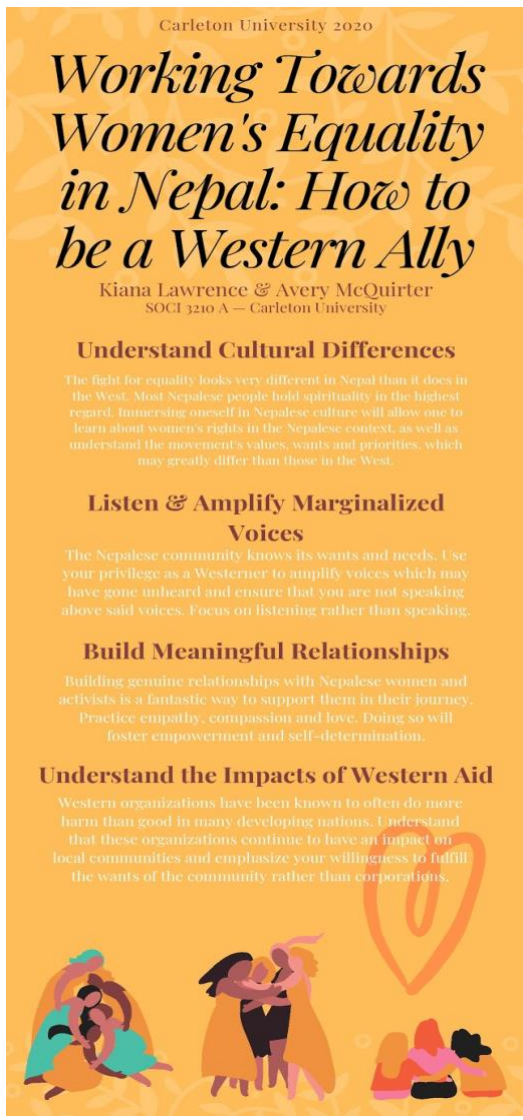
The Nepalese community knows its wants and needs. Use your privilege as a Westerner to amplify voices which may have gone unheard and ensure that you are not speaking above said voices. Focus on listening rather than speaking.

Build Meaningful Relationships

Building genuine relationships with Nepalese women and activists is a fantastic way to support them in their journey. Practice empathy, compassion and love. Doing so will foster empowerment and self-determination.

Understand the Impacts of Western Aid

Western organizations have been known to often do more harm than good in many developing nations. Understand that these organizations continue to have an impact on local communities and emphasize your willingness to fulfill the wants of the community rather than corporations.



Working Toward Women's Equality in Nepal Podcast

Team: Shanaya Armstrong, Cassie Racicot, Brooke Toutant

For our Knowledge Dissemination Project, we decided to create a podcast to project to the world what findings we found crucial to working toward women empowerment in Nepal, as well as what elements are important to sustaining women's equality in Nepal. In order to successfully create the podcast, we each focused on writing a different piece of the podcast script that was recorded. Cassie Racicot wrote the introduction, as well as the analysis on the political involvement and governmental contribution and education regarding the government to women's equality and to women's empowerment; Brooke Toutant wrote the conclusion, as well as the analysis on what roles cultural integration and education play in the context of sustaining women's equality and empowerment in Nepal; and Shanaya Armstrong wrote the analysis on the importance of familial support and education in regard to women's empowerment and the women's equality movement, as well as produced and recorded the podcast.

Links to listen to the podcast:

Anchor: anchor.fm/shanaya13

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/3YKArKQOnPfvhLBfqJH8h1>



An Honest Discussion: How Western Organizations in Nepal Can Help Moving Forward

Team: Hannah Braha, Monique Mcneil, Sampavy Satkunarasa

We wanted to create a podcast to share our experience from the course and to inform future volunteers or western organizations who want to work in Nepal within the situation of women's rights. Specifically, the goal of the podcast is to create a conversation about how these western organizations can work within the context of Nepalese culture, education and representation of the women to sustainably fund projects within the communities there.

Influenced by SOCI3210 at Carleton University, we are three students who discuss women's rights in Nepal, the podcast is informed by 5 interviews, completed by the class throughout the term. The women interviewed are activists in their communities. To discuss the situation of Women's Rights in Nepal, we want to share the experiences of these women. We hope that this podcast will allow any listener's the opportunity to learn more about the culture and to expand their knowledge on how volunteers and organizations going into the country can sustainably fund projects within various communities.

The Carleton University newspaper, the Charlatan, interviewed our group and wrote an article about our podcast. You can read it here: <https://charlatan.ca/2020/06/carleton-students-podcast-promotes-womens-rights-in-nepal/>

Target audience: Academics in the Carleton community who:

- Are interested in volunteering or working with organizations abroad
- Want to know more about women's rights on a global scale
- Are interested in understanding the context of Nepalese women's rights and their experiences with western organizations

Links to listen to the podcast:

Anchor: <https://anchor.fm/anhonestdiscussion>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/4aY0iwEZLC80hVHmXRqbqE>

The image shows a screenshot of a podcast player interface. At the top left is a cover image of three women in traditional Nepalese attire. The title 'An Honest Discussion: How Western Organizations in Nepal Can Help Moving Forward' is displayed in a dark red box. Below the title, it says 'By Hannah Braha, Monique Mcneil an...'. A short description follows: 'Influenced by SOCI3210 at Carleton University, we are three students who discuss women's rights in Nepal, the podcast is informed by 5 interviews, completed by the class throughout the term. The women interviewed are activists in their communities. To discuss the situation of Women's Rights in Nepal, we want to share the experiences of these women. We hope that this podcast will allow any listener's the opportunity to learn more about the culture and to expand their knowledge on how volunteers and organizations going into the country can sustainably fund projects within various communities.' Below the description are two buttons: 'Listen on Spotify' and 'Message'. Underneath, there is a section titled 'WHERE TO LISTEN' with icons for Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Amazon Music. At the bottom, there is a smaller version of the podcast player showing the title, a play button, and a 'Share' icon.

A Made-In-Nepal Approach to Women's Equality

Team: Sami Amiran, Charysse Griffith-Rowley, Shiwa Tawakoli

The overall project included sending out emails to various NGOs working in Nepal detailing our research findings using a brochure / article. We also shared the brochure online through Instagram with our peers, family and friends. Snapshots of brochure were posted in parts on Instagram to allow accessibility.

For our knowledge dissemination, the target audience we have chosen is our friends and family; change starts from within and that includes our inner circles, the people we interact with at work, school, home and other common settings. We believe that it's important that people know about the issues that are happening abroad. When the average citizen is made aware, they can work towards pushing for change. By educating our friends and family, we are sharing our experiences and solutions with those around us and opening up a dialogue that can often be uncomfortable. We can reach a wide network of people who have a great power within themselves – the power to instill change. One of the best approaches is to start conversations about improving equality for Nepali women in our own communities and families. Of course, to be more effective our message needs to reach those with resources and influence such as NGOs as they ultimately hold more power. This can have great potential in changing the on-ground approach or simply just spreading information to urban regions. Individuals have the power to make a change, both here in North America and overseas in Nepal (and elsewhere). However, we need to start by educating and informing those close to us.

Letters to NGOs template: [Letters to NGOs template](#)

Screenshots of brochure:

The screenshot shows a brochure with three columns of text. The first column is titled "Introduction and Brief Overview" and discusses a qualitative research class (SOCI3210A) focused on women's equality in Nepal. It mentions a "made-in-Nepal approach" and references a Winter SOCI3220C class. Below the text is a photograph of two women sitting on a wooden bench, one holding a sign that says "EQUAL?". The second column is titled "Data Collection from Research" and describes how multiple journal articles were analyzed to find common themes like the lack of resources and foreign aid. It mentions that the first issue was the lack of access to resources. Below the text is a photograph of the Nepalese national flag. The third column discusses inequalities found in the law and the government's attempt to limit rights, such as passing citizenship to offspring. It mentions that the second common issue was the impact of foreign aid, and that Westerners were mentioned most often in relation to financial and political support. It also discusses the over-involvement of Westerners in privatizing natural resources and imposing their views on politics and life in Nepal. The text concludes by mentioning a list of questions created to ask women working within organizations fighting for Nepalese women's perspectives on the movement and its progression.

Data Collection from Interviews

Summary



Among the interviews that were conducted, common themes surrounding gender roles, education and Western aid were frequently mentioned. Interviewees mentioned that gender roles provide the cultural framework that individuals worked with to navigate life. The roles prescribe responsibilities, accountability, access to resources, education and opportunities and proposed that gender discrimination needs to be expelled through discourse and action within the community to ensure policies and laws that strive for equality are enforced. The second issue that was brought up by our interviewees was the lack of access to equal education. Education for girls and women is critical for the development of society; women who have the necessary knowledge are able to access resources and empower others to fight for change. The third common issue found was the impact of western aid. The approaches that have been taken by Western organizations have not been culturally sensitive. In order for Western countries to understand the needs and wants of a society they wish to help, such as its efforts in Nepal, it is necessary for these organizations to understand and respect different cultures, beliefs and norms.

After analyzing the information gathered from the articles and interviews, the solutions presented are as follows: an in-depth analysis of Nepalese gender roles, strong efforts dedicated to education Nepalese women and for Western organizations to be more culturally sensitive when working with Nepalese women and organizations furthering their movement in the future. For the first proposed solution, an approach to gender equality that starts analyzing gender roles is necessary. This starts in the household with families and eventually moves to judicial, political, economic, and other administrative structures. It is important that gender equality becomes a practice in everyday life. Gender discrimination needs to be discussed action within the community needs to be taken to ensure the government changes policies and laws to empower women. Putting more women in higher positions will allow for women to have a voice, which will allow them to speak for themselves and the support they need.



For the second proposed solution, education for girls and women is important for the development of society. Women who have the necessary knowledge are able to empower others to fight for change. Men must also be educated and held accountable on their impact on gender discrimination.

For the third proposed solution, higher degree of cultural familiarity and respect for the family unit dynamics will change the conversations between organizations and citizens to help close the large disconnect between policy and practical disconnects. Westerners must ensure that they provide space and access to resources so that the Nepalese people can speak for themselves and help share in the empowerment of women.



Thank You

The creators of this pamphlet would like to thank the SOCI3220C and SOCI3210A classes for the extensive research they have accomplished on the women's movement in Nepal. We would also like to thank the interviewees for the time and energy they dedicated to the SOCI3210A class towards answering our questions and allowing us to obtain a better understanding of the quality of life for women in Nepal and efforts being made to improve their lifestyles. Lastly, we would like to extend a thank you to Dr. Conners, the professor who guided and taught us everything needed to complete this project.

Ethical Interning: How to have a meaningful impact abroad

Team: Felicity Hauwert, Claudia Rutherford, Jessica Campbell

For our knowledge dissemination project, our group created a nine-minute audio-visual media production to convey to western students the unconscious biases they may have when approaching international volunteering positions, and how this can impact the success of their projects and the meaningful relationships they form. As a collective, we agreed that we wanted to create something that would have longevity beyond the timeline of this course, and that replicated the experience of gaining understanding for the audience that we experienced in the research project. The Nepali women we interviewed utilized storytelling to convey their insights and this inspired us to go outside our academic comfort zones by using art, both visual and literary, to convey meaning and reach our audience emotionally. For us, this heightened the stakes and we felt a responsibility to accurately portray the views of the women we interviewed even if this challenges the norms of our intended audience. We suppose, that in fact is the point. We hope that our work may support well-meaning student volunteers in preparing to dismantle their unconscious biases and facilitate their integration into the receiving context. We developed a strong story that impacted us all uniquely and that was brought to life by a talented artist and the voices of strong women. We hope we've done the interviewees justice. In our combined data analyses from the interviews we found that recurring themes referencing community engagement and active listening were omni-present, and so we chose to target the audience of young university students hoping to volunteer and/or intern abroad. Our video follows the trials and tribulations of a young, educated, Canadian university student (Zoey) who considers herself socially conscious and aware. We explore the ways in which we as Westerners inflict our implicit biases upon the communities we seek to help. Zoey's journey, similar to many in the West, highlights the essential component in ensuring sustainable and equitable work: that of active and engaged listening.

Our video can be viewed on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/ZQ4aviNGrxc>



Working Towards Women's Equality in Nepal Website

Team: Alexandra Robinson, Taib Boyce, Thomas Connolly

For our knowledge dissemination project, we created a website using the platform Wix to share our findings of what a Nepalese approach encompasses and how Westerners can help, some contextual information about our project, and a summary of the existing women's movement in Nepal. We also included many pictures from the Women's Foundation Nepal. Our website has many sections as pictured below.

The link to our blog: <https://soci3910.wixsite.com/nepal>

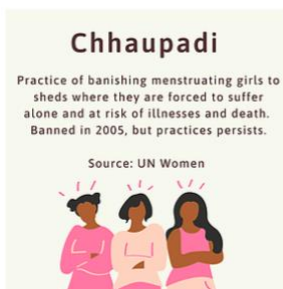
Homepage of our blog:

Section discussing the existing women's movement in Nepal:



An infographic:

Many of the new laws and amendments that have been passed since 1990 are weakened by a lack of accountability mechanisms in their implementation, and many discriminatory legal and constitutional provisions remain. The latter includes provisions meant to ensure that women hold positions of power within the political process in Nepal such as the 1990's constitutional provision that stipulated that a minimum of 5% of seats in each political party are to be held by women, and the 2003 provision that was supposed to guarantee the representation of women in Nepal's constituent assembly (Tamang, 2009). While Nepal's political parties may have met the quotas set out in the 1990's constitution, the women candidates were often placed by their respective parties in locales where they were expected to lose elections, and successful candidates rarely held positions with real decision making power (ibid). The 2003 provision that was supposed to guarantee that women represent 33% of Nepal's Constituent assembly ultimately failed in its aim - none of the political parties have complied with the Election Commission's directive, with only 70 of the 441, or 16% (vs. the mandated 33%), of the members of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) central committee being women (Giri, 2018). Other examples of Nepal's judicial system's failure to deliver on the promises of equality include the 2006 constitutional amendment that failed to guarantee citizenship rights to the children of Nepalese women (Grossman-Thompson and Dennis, 2017).



The persistence of dominant patriarchal social and cultural norms established under HCHH rule in Nepal continue to have a significant impact on the privileges and opportunities afforded to women in comparison to men (Grossman-Thompson and Dennis, 2017). This is reflected in the unequal access girls and women have to productive resources, exemplified by low levels of educational attainment and political representation (ibid). There is a significant income gap between men and women in Nepal, women earning roughly 51 cents on the dollar compared to men and comprising only 31% of the paid workforce (Bhadra, 2007). This unequal access and control over resources adversely impacts women who bear the brunt of poverty, perpetuating their marginalization in Nepalese society (ibid).

Reflections

Alexandra Robinson

This course was both enlightening and challenging; as a university student, I have completed many different research projects, but never to this caliber. Collecting primary data and listening to people's lived experiences was enlightening and pivotal to my learning as it challenged my positionality as a Western researcher and what I thought I knew about the experiences of people around the world. Moreover, it was challenging to summarize the lived experiences of the women we interviewed, as each woman had such a unique perspective and experience of gender inequality and women's issues. I am very grateful to hear and share these women's stories. I hope to be a part of similar projects in the future.

Angelle Bourdon

Working Towards Women's Equality in Nepal has been a journey that I have continuously participated in over the last year. As I continue to explore the lived experiences of Nepali women, I discover that research is a project that is always evolving and is never fully completed or understood. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in Dr. Conner's class because I have realized that she always strives to expose her students to experiences that can be taken to a higher level of education or seen as an asset to a prospective employer. This course has advanced my personal development as a researcher. As a very inexperienced researcher, I learned that it is necessary to accept that our findings will only illuminate a very narrow understanding of a sociological lens explored. However, these small findings can be a powerful tool in cultivating perspectives amongst the individuals receiving this new knowledge and the lives of our participants. The Nepali community has been incredibly welcoming to us as westerners. The willingness of the women who affiliate with the Women's Foundation Nepal have been instrumental in our learning while allowing us to explore the ways to best position ourselves and better assist when undertaking global initiatives. This alliance has been an opportunity that will strengthen collaborative relationships between international participants and the future students who participate in global initiatives in the future.

Avery McQuirter

I thoroughly enjoyed this course as it gave me first-hand experience in many areas that I had not explored prior. From conducting and transcribing interviews to coding information and creating a research project to put out into the world. I really valued being able to show our findings to our friends and family. The topic of our research course was also extremely important to me, as I am very passionate about social issues such as gender equality, and even more so in places other than North America and Europe. I also really valued speaking to our interviewees. I really enjoyed listening to their stories and felt very privileged to be hearing about their experiences and the incredible work they're doing for the women's movement in Nepal. I also felt this was an opportunity for me to learn about Western allyship and how to help and support women in other countries in their struggles. All in all, I very much enjoyed taking part in this research project and am grateful for the many things I have learned.

Brooke Toutant

Having the opportunity to take part in this class was one of the highlights of my year so far! I have thoroughly enjoyed learning and collaborating with my peers, our interviewees, and professor this term. I found the project to be intriguing and important. This project also provided me with a lot of material to reflect on and appreciate how far equality for women has come, but still how far there is to go. This course took on different

kinds of meaning when we really began to dissect the information. I feel that as students this course has given us a strong set of skills in the way of collaboration, knowledge dissemination methods, and research methods. I am also very glad that I was put in a group with Cassie and Shanaya, they were excellent to work with and truly cared about our project working with them was great! I feel very grateful for all of the hard work that was put into our course by all of my peers and our professor that made this phenomenal end result.

Caitlin Beaton

Participating in a qualitative research study at this level was new for me, so I feel particularly lucky for the opportunity. I am eternally grateful to Aadhira, Tara, Renu, Rama, and Lakshmi for choosing to take the time to share their thoughts and experiences with us. I often found myself feeling pressured, in a positive way, to honour the words and messages of the interviewees as accurately as possible. It has been a privilege to meet them, hear their stories and those of the women they work with. I've learned more about the women's movement in Nepal and Nepalese culture than I would have had access to in any other class. I'm also grateful to Deborah and Diane for making this class possible. I hope the participants enjoy the work the class has put together, that it reflects their intentions, and that they are encouraged by it.

Cassandra Racicot

This course allowed me to learn about the unique experiences of Nepalis women and reflect upon my positionality as a woman living in a Western society. Before taking this course, I did not know anything about the women's equality movement in Nepal. In all honesty, I did not know much about Nepal in general. This course helped me to learn about Nepal's unique culture, their spirituality and their government. I learned about the obstacles Nepal faces in achieving women's equality and what we as Westerners can do to help. My favourite part of this course was listening to the interviewees and hearing about their personal experiences. I found it very enlightening to be able to actually talk to these women as opposed to just reading about them. This course strengthened my understanding of women's equality movements around the world and since taking this course, I have started to learn more about other countries as well. I am a social work student and know that I can take this experience with me into my future work.

Claudia Rutherford

Coming into this class, I thought I had experience conducting research because I had prepared a research proposal and an observational study for two previous classes and I had done well in both. However, this course challenged that confidence because I was not just reviewing journal articles and writing a submission on them for marks. Rather, the exercise became more personal because the information shared by the Nepali women carried such an important message that I felt obligated to disseminate it in a way that others felt the same way I did, and continue sharing so that Nepali women's efforts for equality can be recognized. Among the many lessons this project taught me was, when volunteering, here or abroad, is to do so by respecting the individuals and their communities. To really help and advance the communities' efforts for change, we cannot do so by imposing our views on the communities welcoming us into their world. Rather, we should first acknowledge our biases that may prevent us from sharing ourselves and being a true partner and not a hindrance to their efforts. I feel honoured and privileged to have been part of this journey and I thank Tara, Rama, Renu, Aadhira and Lakshmi for sharing their wisdom and making me a better person and student.

Emily Loeven

Prior to this course, I have studied several research projects and learnt how to conduct them although I had never participated in a qualitative research project like so. I am very grateful for this experience as directly participating in this project has allowed me to understand what goes on behind the results. This includes all the cooperation and even the relationships made with the interviewees! Qualitative research projects aren't just about the results you obtain but who you are helping and how your work will make a difference. I have also learnt about many social and women's issues in other developing countries however not specific to Nepal. I now have much more knowledge and interest on these issues in Nepal and the country itself. More specifically, I understand from my Western perspective how culturally different Nepal is and how important it is to take these differences into account when working with a foreign country. This project has helped expand my global knowledge as well as qualitative research knowledge!

Felicity Hauwert

Taking part in this course at first presented itself as a consolation to our initial plans of working with the Women's Foundation this summer but turned out to be a unique and vital experience in and of itself. This course not only allowed me to obtain tangible research experience in the international as well as virtual context, but also challenged many of the implicit biases I hold as a Westerner that I myself was not aware of. I am extremely grateful for this course as it has taught me to take a step back and challenge that which I hold to be true, whether it is something as simple as the language I choose to employ in describing my findings or that which is used to relay interview questions. Hearing from these women on their approaches to equality work in Nepal, and the essentialism of relationality through communitarianism, refocused my approach when wanting to work within Canada and address the many injustices that happen in our own backyard. I have been taught the importance of actively making space for, listening to, and hearing the words of those I am working with rather than presuming their needs based off of my own presumptions.

Hannah Braha

The format of this course is a wonderful experience for gaining real life perspectives, it has influenced my career path and moving forward I hope to work more on social development. The women we interviewed were so influential, the work they are doing demonstrates the importance of approaching other countries with an open mind and an inclusive project goal. My eyes have been truly opened to the influence that western organizations carry, their ability to sustainably fund a project is meaningless without community involvement. I plan on continuing work with different cultural contexts and utilising this experience to practice human rights from a mutualistic approach.

Jessica Campbell

Participating in this research course was the logical trajectory for myself after wrapping up the Nepal prep course. As undergrads we spend inordinate amounts of our degree reading other people's research, but rarely being able to participate in knowledge production ourselves. This is unfortunate because I found that through the process of interviewing for primary data, I experienced a level of compassion and understanding of the phenomenon and people involved that reading material alone can't supply. This compassion and admiration for the work the women we interviewed are doing is energizing and motivated my group mates and I to share our findings in a format that would have longevity and reach. With this connection also comes a deep sense of responsibility and concern for the authenticity of the stories we share, and I hope to carry these principles into future projects I'm a part of.

Katherine Sanders

I think that this course and research project were extremely interesting and beneficial to both my learning and development as a professional. After talking with the Nepali women, I felt like I was going in the right direction in the sense that I want to keep hearing people's stories and learn about what I can do to help. This type of work is really important because we were able to share the stories of five amazing women in both creative and traditional ways of research and provide public audiences with more information about the Nepalis movement to equality. This project allowed me to apply my academic knowledge in a way that could affect positive change to a wider audience of people which is very important as I finish my degree.

Kiana Lawrence

With completing this course, I was able to benefit from all the course learning objectives. I am grateful for being able to have the experience to conduct an interview with one of the interviewees. The interviewees truly helped reflect the understanding of social issues overseas and truly what a Nepalis approach includes. Overall, this course was like no other and helped expand my knowledge on addressing international development issues.

Lis Neylla Nzoyihera

I loved every moment of this class; I was not a fan of research classes when I first joined the course. However my perspective has changed and it is all because of the amazing experience I had in this course, Dr. Connors's course enlightened my perspective on the world and exposed me to fruitful information about the world, Nepal, and amazing strong willed women in Nepal fighting to provide inclusivity to other women and teaching the next generation the importance of both genders in society. The interviewees were amazing women whose stories have touched me profoundly and helped me gain diverse perspectives on "women equality". Furthermore, the course allowed the students to practically apply the skills we were learning, oftentimes university courses focus heavily on theory however the process of the course integrated both theory and practice which helped me learn and understand the process of research.

Margaret Warrick

I found this experience to be enlightening and challenging. Being able to participate in a collective research project where we got to conduct interviews with Nepali women was a unique and privileged experience that I am grateful to have been a part of. This project has been an important learning opportunity in that I am coming away with more understanding, compassion, respect, and admiration for the experiences and strength of these women. Although this is my last undergrad course before graduating, I have learned many valuable lessons through this project that will be useful in my career. Teamwork, conflict management, collaboration, and especially cultural sensitivity are just a few of the skills I will take with me. I would like to send a big thank you to all our participants for sharing their insights and allowing us all to learn and grow as people and researchers. And a thank you to my fellow classmates and our professor for organizing such a powerful project.

Saivani Sanassy

Coming into this course I had very little experience creating and working on a collective research project. However, I was extremely interested due to my little background in women's equality work. The course itself exceeded all of my expectations and expanded my understanding of what is women's equality work. I am grateful for the unique experiences in conducting and witnessing the interviews and learning firsthand from influential Nepalis activists. I have gained a lot of respect for the process of qualitative research and have learned that cultural awareness is needed in intersectional work. I have

also learned the importance of straying away from Western conceptualizations of human rights, especially women's rights. The course has made me extremely nostalgic and ignited my passion for working in the field of women's rights and research. I am thankful for the unique and rewarding experience, especially amidst a global pandemic, and am excited to see where this work will lead us.

Sami Amiran

This type of project was very new to me, but I feel like I had a really good experience with it. I learned useful skills I can always carry with me throughout my academic career like how to conduct a proper interview, working in teams online and culture sensitivity. Prior to taking this class I did not know much about the situation in Nepal. This class really opened my eyes on the reality these women face and to hear these interviews it was a big learning opportunity for me to understand their culture, society, and their overall experiences living in Nepal as a woman. What I really like about this project was that we got to apply everything we have learned and actually use it in the real world instead of just learning about it from a textbook. I believe that with this project we are progressing and making a difference by spreading this information to people in our community it pushes individuals to engage in this conversation for women equality in Nepal.

Sampavy Satkunarasa

This project was an amazing experience. I'm glad I got to work with a wonderful group of people. I learned a lot from this course. I was so happy because this meant our research and podcast will be out there for anyone to see and learn more about the Women's Foundation of Nepal and how to actually help them. Right after we finished recording our podcast, I felt a sense of accomplishment and I felt proud. Our conversation flowed and we all got the important points across. The information we talked about was important and relevant because there are many people who believe that western organizations who volunteer in Nepal and other countries only do good, which is not true. By listening to our podcast and reading through our final project the listeners and viewers will understand that. This impacts my undergrad career because it gives me a whole new perspective to see and it makes me critical think every time someone says they volunteer with a western organization.

Shanaya Armstrong

When committing to this course, I had no previous knowledge of different cultural backgrounds from countries of the global south, nor did I have previous knowledge on how to conduct an interview for research purposes. Regardless of my lack of knowledge, the course content caught my eye, so I pursued it. By committing to this course, it has allowed me to successfully abide by research ethics while analyzing collected data. Apart from the research component, this course has also allowed me to understand and acknowledge that different cultural backgrounds have different needs, and it is crucial for us to ask and actively listen to one another before we assume what those needs are. I am very fortunate to have had this qualitative research experience and am also very fortunate to have had the opportunity to listen to such wonderful women who are working toward women's equality in Nepal.

Shiwa Tawakoli

I have never been part of a qualitative research project nor have I previously taken any research methods class. Although my academic background thus far has taught me to remain objective this course proved that emotional aspects in research are inevitable. I have done numerous papers on war and conflict, oppression, discrimination and other subjects along these lines. It is easy to become discouraged and develop negative thoughts

such as 'nothing I do will actually make a change', however, I've learned that the smallest of things can have a huge impact. We interviewed five different women and they all taught me something new but most importantly I learned that having discussions even with your peers can have an impact. I enjoyed the collaborative portions of the project and overall expanding the little knowledge I had of Nepal both through the literature and our research findings. This course was definitely unique in that we were able to remotely complete our project. A bonus was earning the CORE ethics certificate!

Taib Boyce

The experience gained from participating in this project is priceless. The push factor for me joining this research project was to gain a more in-depth understanding of how to do qualitative research. At each step of the research projects I've improved is some capacity. Though I found it challenging at times finding the balance between not take up too much space as a cis man and contributing constructively during our team deliberations. This project has inspired me to pursue qualitative research on other topics that I am interested in such as LGBT refugee access to housing and protection against forced eviction.

Thomas Connolly

I found the course to be engaging, insightful and unique. This project offered a rare opportunity to learn about Nepal and the women who are leading its equality movement, while at the same time earning practical experience conducting qualitative research. Over the course of this term, I have gained new perspectives on global development, interviewing and the qualitative research process, Nepalese culture, and the Nepalese women's movement. I am Incredibly grateful to women leaders who offered their time and insights to our project, and for the inspiring work they are doing for women in Nepal.

Victoria Fruci

Coming into this course, I had little experience in conducting and working on collaborative research, however I was drawn to it because of the topic of women's equality work in regard to development. This course far exceeded my expectations and I feel as though not only have I gained knowledge to take with me in my educational and professional life, but I also have gained hard skills of collecting and delivering data. This project was rewarding in many ways. I appreciated the creative freedom we were given to deliver our data and even more so, I am appreciative to have been given the opportunity to participate in and listen to the incredible five women who opened up to us about their personal experiences and work. Thank you to Dr. Connors, and all the wonderful interviewees.

Conclusion

As outlined in the introduction, the purpose of this research endeavor was to help us as members of a Western society, comprehend and learn a more in depth understanding of what gender norms and gender inequalities look like in Nepal. The research question presented at the beginning of our report addressed our intentions of gathering data to help contextualize a “made-in Nepal” approach to gender equality and development through the conducting of interviews with women involved directly with gender equality and Nepal. Each interviewee provided us with a different perspective on the current position of women in Nepal, for example Rama addressed the specific policies put in place to help send more girls to school while another interviewee, Renu addressed the significance of women in positions of power, specifically within the Nepalis government. Listening and learning about the range of different narratives and examples of what gender looks like in Nepal, provided us with a fluid and diverse concept of how women’s equality is addressed, a concept shaped from primary research and not shaped by the influence of our westernized nature. Upon gathering this range of data, we as a team were able to identify and solidify major “meta topics” that helped us draw conclusions on the gender equality climate in Nepal as well as what our actions as Western society members should look like in order to be most helpful in development projects. Approaches like grassroots/bottom-up structures and emphasis on education and literacy outline that require the most support and the techniques they would appreciate the most. While the integration of spirituality, intersectionality, and relationship-based advocacy outline the significance of culture in Nepal and provide a deeper understanding of the society so that projects and collaborations can occur as respectfully and sustainably as possible.

We are so grateful for the opportunity to take on responsibilities that some of us have never had before. The experience we acquired while taking part in a qualitative research project will enrich our abilities for future research projects, especially those regarding women’s equality. We gained invaluable experience and knowledge about how to focus on a specific geographical location and its people. Beyond that, we were taught to make an effort to understand differences between people in an area that are fighting for the same cause. It is important to keep intersectionality in mind when thinking of the Nepali women working towards women’s equality. How varying aspects of their identities lead to a difference in how they are treated is important. It allows us as researchers to learn about different issues in Nepal that some women face while others do not. This helped us understand that every place has different solutions that work best for their specific issues. As foreigners to Nepal, it was important that we listened to solutions from Nepali women themselves. In the future, when involved in social justice projects elsewhere in the world we will be equipped with the skills to be attentive and offer help when needed and asked. We have learned that no one knows better about issues in any given area than the people from there who are affected by the issues.

Appendix A

Interview guide

Carleton University SOCI 3210A Summer 2020

Interviewee: _____

Interviewer: _____

Timekeeper: _____

Things to have:

- Interview guide
- Computer – charged or plugged in
- Head set and web cam
- Watch/timer
- Paper and pen for notes
- Course syllabus

The research question to be answered: “What would be a made-in-Nepal approach to women’s equality?”

Opening script

- Hello / my name / thank you for joining us
- How are you today?
- Introductions / Welcome
- As you know, we are doing a project investigating Nepalese women’s views on what a Nepalese approach to women’s equality would be
- I would like to review the consent form with you:
 - We will be recording and transcribing this interview
 - You can refuse to answer specific questions or withdraw from the study until 3 days after your interview
 - We will be using your name/using a pseudonym
- Give the timing of the interview: 1 and a half hours

Content questions

A. Opening questions:

About the interviewee (Approximately 8 minutes)

1. Please tell us about your connection with women’s and gender equality work.
2. Do you focus on a specific group in your work? (Age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity or other?)
 - a. What are the specific issues you address?
3. What interested you about our research project?

Thank you for telling us a bit about who you are.

B. Themed questions (1 hour)

Women’s equality (Approximately 8 minutes)

We would now like to ask some questions about women’s equality and activism in Nepal.

4. What is your experience of talking about women's and gender issues with your family or in public?
5. For you, what would equality between women and men in Nepal would look like?
 - a. What would equality look like for transgender people?

Women and development (Approximately 8 minutes)

Next, we would like to think about Nepalese women in relation to development.

6. How important do you think women's contributions to Nepal's development efforts are?
7. What government policies support or challenge women's equality in your experience?

A Nepalese approach to women's equality (Approximately 15 minutes)

Now we would like to hear about how Nepalese women approach women's equality work.

8. How do you see Nepalese women promoting equality for women in Nepal?
 - i. What would you say are some of the ways that women in Nepal can advance women's equality?
 - ii. What areas of life are important to women's equality? Some areas you might talk about are family, work, or the country.
 - iii. We understand that spirituality is very important in Nepal. How do Nepal's spiritual values apply to work on women's equality?
 - iv. How do Nepalese women who are working on equality, address differences among them in their circumstances and their priorities?
9. What things are important to sustaining work on women's equality?
10. Do you think there is a Nepalese approach to women's equality?
 - i. Could you describe that?

Understanding between Nepalese and Western women (Approximately 15 minutes)

Now we would like to talk about understanding between Nepalese and Western women. Western women and NGOs have tried to help in Nepal. Sometimes they have made things better. Sometimes they have made things worse. We are interested in knowing how we can avoid past mistakes.

11. What common misunderstandings about women or women's equality in Nepal are made by Westerners?
12. Is there a message that you might have for us as newcomers that could help us understand women's equality in Nepal?
13. How do you think Westerners could best help Nepalese women at this time?

Women's activism in Nepal (Approximately 8 minutes)

Finally, we would like to ask you about the women's movement in Nepal.

14. How large is the women's movement in Nepal?
15. What are men's overall responses to this movement?

- i. Are they involved or not?
16. What are some of the greatest obstacles to achieving women's equality that you see?

C. Closing questions (5-7 minutes)

Those are all the questions we had prepared for you about your work. I would like to ask the students if they have questions now? If so, you can say that you have a question in the chat and I will call on you.

17. Is there anything else you would to say about the topic before we finish?

We would like to finish by asking you for your thoughts about this research project.

18. What benefits do you think could come from this research project?

Closing script (2 minutes)

Thank you for your time. We appreciate your willingness to talk to us about your experience from the other side of the world!

- We will send you the recording and transcript if you are interested
- We will also send you links to our final writing and any social media posts