

## **The power of a woman's voice against discrimination**

"As we will be paid based on the volume of the work done, we should not include women in the construction works. Every household should send a man to do work as women will slow down the work," said a man during a Water Users' Association (WUA) meeting for Thulo Khola Dodela Irrigation Scheme in Diktel Rupakot Majhuwagadi Municipality. While most of the men and women quietly agreed, Ms. Laxmi BK, the treasurer of the WUA raised her objections and reminded everyone that the program did not discriminate against women as mentioned during the trainings.

Supporting Laxmi BK, Ms. Bishnu Maya who is also the secretary of the WUA said that, "Our aim is to complete the construction work successfully. As women we will work to the best of our capacity and with full honesty. And for this we should be paid equally as the men. If you do not let us work and give us equal wages, we will file a complaint at the Palika."

Hearing these two women from the committee, gave confidence to other women present in the meeting and they also started raising their objection. After a long discussion, the WUA agreed that each construction group will have compulsory participation from women and they will be paid equal wages as the men.

"Do you know that we were paid the same amount as the men, 900 rupees per day?" happily said Laxmi BK when the project team met with her after the completion of the scheme. Against the assumption of few men, women in Thulo Khola Dodela Irrigation Scheme proved that the construction could be completed on time and successfully with the active participation of women. Laxmi's courage to raise her voice against women discrimination in public works has paved way for other women to do the same.

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In Okhlahunga, when Ms. Dhukuri Maya Magar showed interest to run for the Water Users' Association (WUA) chairperson position, majority of the participants of the meeting, mostly men, resisted. However, she persisted and stood her ground and was successful in being elected as the chairperson of the WUA. Not only her, but all the other members of the WUA except for the treasurer are women in Dhadkhola irrigation scheme in Sunkoshi Rural Municipality.

"Nobody in the community supported me initially after being elected as the chairperson of WUA. The institutional development training really strengthened my confidence," says Ms. Magar. She not only took up the managerial role in the WUA efficiently but also actively participated as construction worker.

Her work was well appreciated by the local government as well. "The timely and successful completion of the irrigation scheme under the leadership of women is a good example for our community. Women can do any work if they have the right opportunities," said Mr. Bishnu Bahadur Magar, ward chairperson during a visit to the site. The community is also happy with her efforts and she has now been elected as the treasurer of a farmers' group.



*Ms. Dhukuri Maya (in pink) documenting the meeting minutes of Dhadkhola Irrigation Scheme. Okhaldhunaa*

She knows that she has a long way to go and says that "my struggle has not ended; it has just started. I will now work dedicatedly to promote commercial farming in the coming days".