

International Women's Day FEDO, Nepal

Each year, the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) in Nepal celebrates International Women's Day. This year is all the more important as Nepal is in the middle of its Constitution-making process and it is a big opportunity for women to go forward for their rights! Thus, FEDO, an organization for Dalit women, victims of caste- and gender-based discrimination, puts its struggle forward both in Kathmandu and at the district level on this special day.

Each district involved in this organization (45 out of 75 in Nepal) organizes an event on this occasion: Rallies, interaction programs, workshops... any means will do to make people aware about the situation of women in Nepal. One example is a workshop entitled "Women-Friendly Constitution: International Women's Day Workshop," organized in Dailekh District by FEDO jointly with Women Alliance for Peace, Power, Democracy and the Constituent Assembly (WAPPDCA). During the first day, women from different backgrounds (Muslim, Janajatis, Dalit and widows) gathered together to prepare an agenda about their concerned rights. The day after, an interaction program with 85 participants (stakeholders, government officers, social leaders) was held. The agenda was shared with the public, in particular with two members from the Constituent Assembly, Ms Kunti Shahi and Ms Bharat Kumari Sharma, in order for it to be heard for the upcoming Constitution. The two Constituent Assembly members committed to "include local issues in making the new Constitution."

This year, FEDO's Central Office in Kathmandu changed its own habits on March 8. To celebrate the 101st International Women Day, FEDO did not hold a rally, but participated in a program at Alliance Française (a French cultural centre). This whole-day program held both by Alliance Française and FEDO gathered together photo and painting exhibitions, documentary films, artists and NGOs.

In the morning, the movie "Women are Heroes," directed by French artist JR, was shown. JR travelled across Africa, Asia and South America, and in this movie, he recounts personal interviews with women victims of violence, discrimination and injustice. Following their painful past, the women share their fights, hopes and wishes to build bright futures. JR took pictures of their faces then he and the townspeople put them up on huge canvasses in their neighborhood streets, villages, buildings and trains. The result is a cooperative effort and it promotes a powerful artistic and social message through these gigantic humorous portraits.

Next, eight artists began to paint on an eight-meter long canvas. Through this painting, the artists expressed their wishes for social change for interconnecting for equality and justice. At the end of the day, people added their messages to the canvas.

All day, NGOs were attending the program to present their work at stalls. Their common point: They all work for marginalized women. Present were disabled women with the National Women's Association, Muslim women with the Nepal Muslim Women's Welfare Society, Madhesi women with the Videh Foundation, indigenous women with the National Indigenous Women's Federation and our own stall for Dalit women.

Particular attention has been given to disabled women through the Kritika Campaign. Disabled women, even a one-legged person, danced, spreading a message of hope for change in behavior towards disabled women, and women in general.

Another event, the 2nd Social Women's Forum, was planned in the capital for the actual International Women's Day. But the government declared three days of mourning from March 6 to 8 after the death of former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, requiring programs to be postponed. The Social Women's Forum was finally rescheduled and held on March 15 and 16.. WOREC (Women's Rehabilitation Centre) coordinated the event by bringing together the main NGOs of Nepal supporting women. Altogether, a lot of issues were represented through the various NGOs: women suffering uterus prolepses, Dalit women, landless women, lesbians, disabled women, etc. This event is essential to strengthen their network, celebrate women's voices together, and support each other to keep going with the struggle. A rally, movie, drama, dances, workshops, and stalls were set up to make the forum special. As regards FEDO, a fruitful workshop was organized on Dalit issues. Two Constitutional Members and the co-founder of FEDO Ambika Gajmer conducted a discussion focused on the topic "How to get access to the government."

One thing is sure: If discrimination against women in Nepal does not end, there are plenty of women ready to change this!