



EMPOWER
DALIT WOMEN OF NEPAL

Taklung Reproductive Health Workshop, September 2012



Gita and Sonu belong to the Jagaran women's Group in Taklung, Gorkha. They have practiced micro savings since 1999 and gained respect and influence in their community. But they had no influence to prevent the death of three of their group members, who died young in childbirth.

Rural women are petrified of childbirth - yet they cannot choose not to get pregnant. The government promotes access to inexpensive

contraception, but has failed to inform women where to get it. Few women can plan their families. Nepal has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world - a woman dies every four hours from pregnancy-related causes, contributing women's low average lifespan. For Dalit women, it is just 42 years.

For 15 years, EDWON has focused on empowering women through micro finance, livelihood and rights education. Till now we have been ignorant of the extent of the maternal health crisis also in the midst of our women 's groups. The situation is glaringly at odds with their empowerment. But Gita, a community health worker, and active in our partner organization ADWAN, was instrumental in brining attention to the problem. EDWON is so excited to introduce this new initiative in partnership with Nidan ("Cure"), a public health NGO.



Dr. Aditi Giri with Taklung Women



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As a first result of the partnership, women in Taklung could welcome three young doctors from Kathmandu in September 2012. Remarkably, this was the first time ever a doctor had set foot there. During the 3-day visit, the Nidan doctors and trainers from Marie Stopes International (MSI) a family planning agency, conducted a “Train the Trainer” workshop for 28 community health workers and women chosen for their leadership and influence. Together, they learned how to train an additional 150 women.

The combination of partnership and the “Train the Trainer” approach bring health care knowledge to women in a highly cost effective way. In addition, it connects women to local agencies, so they can obtain services on their own in the future.



Lack of trust and poor communication are enormous obstacles in dealing with ingrained cultural practices. Mothers-in-law, shamans and unskilled traditional midwives wield huge power over young women. It takes great skill to change minds and habits.

However, the easy and friendly manner of the Nidan doctors quickly won the women’s trust. They in turn opened up and shared their most intimate problems in the group. In discussions and exercises women were able to absorb information, which could save their lives: How to care for oneself during pregnancy, danger signs, the importance of check-ups, and issues around labor. Another unit dealt with birth spacing, the advantage of small families, and family planning options. Since uterine prolapse is so prevalent among rural women, the trainers explained ways to prevent and manage this condition.

After two full days of training, participants and trainers agreed this first workshop had been a resounding success. Women assured the doctors and nurses that they understood the material and looked forward to teaching other women. A planned follow up visit has not yet taken place.