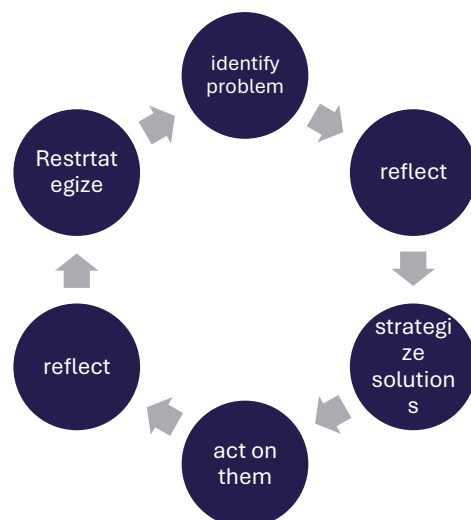




Adolescent Girls Empowerment through Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Overview:

Women and Girls' Empowerment; a core program focused by CARE Nepal aims to support women's and girls from vulnerable and excluded communities to overcome poverty and social injustice. The program assumes that girls should be empowered to exercise their rights and identity which leads to the increased women's leadership and decision making power. With this vision different program were run by CARE Nepal in Western part of Nepal esp. Rupandehi and Kapilvastu district. The program focused on strengthening girls's empowerment in a collective way through identifying their issues, preparing and implement action plan based on their issues. This process is known as participatory action research (PAR). The process has been implemented jointly by CARE India and Nepal for number of years. Based on the experience it was found to be one of the best approach for empowering adolescent's girls in identifying their collective issues and



put forward for their solutions with concerned stakeholders, government, community leaders, and parents.

Why Girls Empowerment through PAR

In Nepal, the children from poor, Dalit communities, especially girls, experience discrimination in several ways. This discrimination reflects deliberate exclusion and denial of rights to several opportunities and resources including the right to education, child early and force marriage and access to adolescent's friendly health services. Persistence of harmful traditional practices such as physical exclusion of girls and women when they menstruate, controls over their mobility, early marriage, early pregnancy and practice of dowry has deemed them from getting various opportunities. Women and girls do not have much space in decision making at their private and public life. Our society is governed by patriarchal norms that limit women's opportunities for self-determination and empowerment as women and girls family honor is linked to their sexuality. Mostly they are engaged in unpaid care work and excluded in financial decision making.

The girl's statements below demand need for PAR Approach

In places like ponds, forest, market, India border, we face harassments. The violence we face in these areas are eve teasing and inappropriate touch. We are afraid of boys, and are also scolded by parents for going out to these areas if we complain about it to them. (FGD with adolescent girls, Rupandehi).

In school, there is toilet available, but toilets do not have lock. For girls, there are no proper facilities during menstruation. Some girls don't go to school. We might go to school if their proper facilities like available of pad, clean toilet, and separate toilet with lock for girls. (FGD with adolescent girls, Kapilvastu)

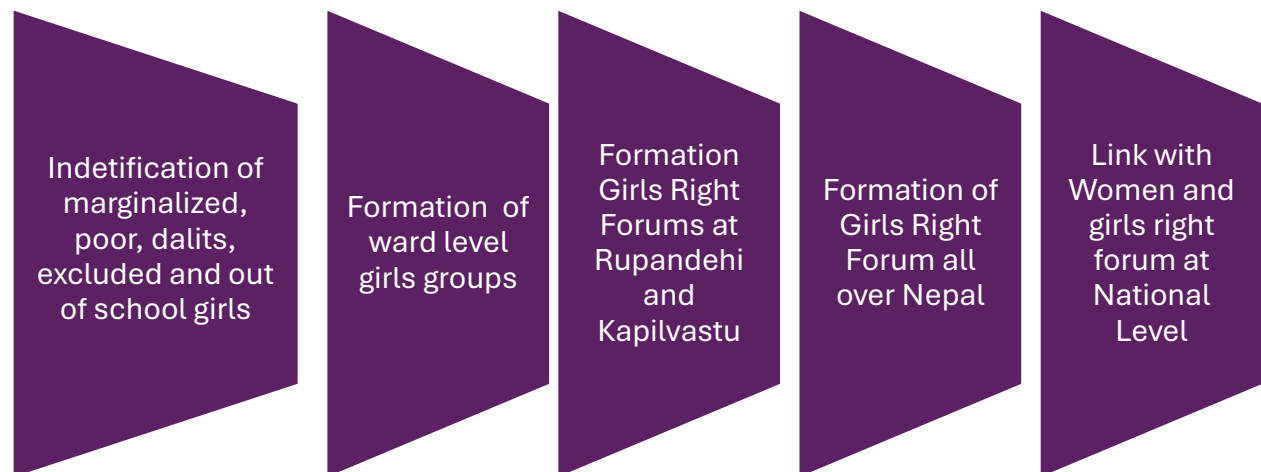
*Hausala Baseline Survey,
2017*

What is PAR?

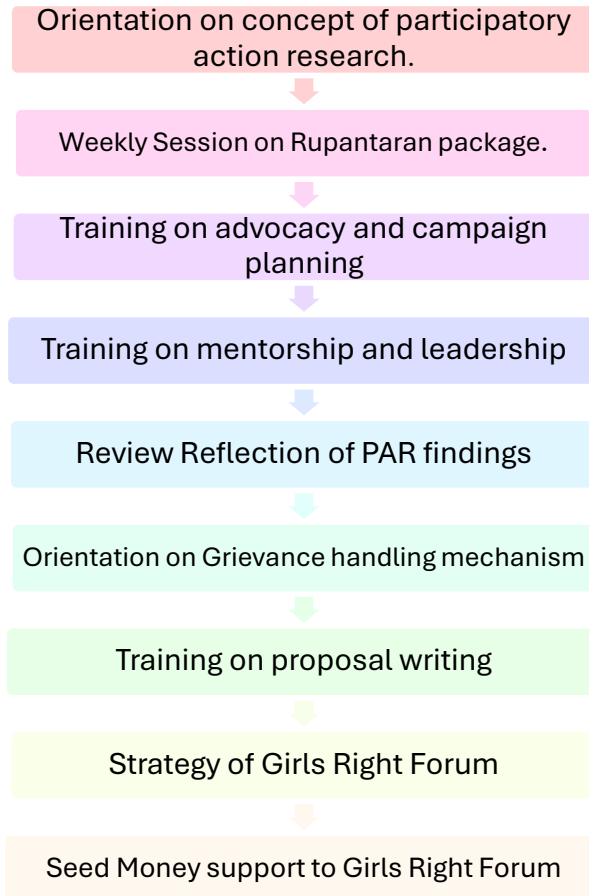
Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach to conduct research in the communities that emphasizes participation and action. PAR design is conceptualized as one of the collectively empowering tools for the adolescent girls. This tool enables them to collect evidence as part of the cycle of R-A (Reflection-Action). Once girls are united then they start process of discussions in identifying their collective issues for finding solutions on those issues. At the beginning, girls had some problems to visualize their issues and differentiate individual and collective issues. Both partners and CARE staff had facilitating to ease their discussions through some practical examples from life skill packages connecting with their constitutional rights.

Once the girls from marginalized, poor, Dalits, minorities and excluded community are were aware about their rights then they started raising their voices for using those rights. Their key concerns were associated with right to education, safe school environment, school based Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and harmful social norms (CEFM, discriminations against women and girls, right to mobility and ASRHR). In this process more than 2750 girls are collectivized in 97 girls' groups.

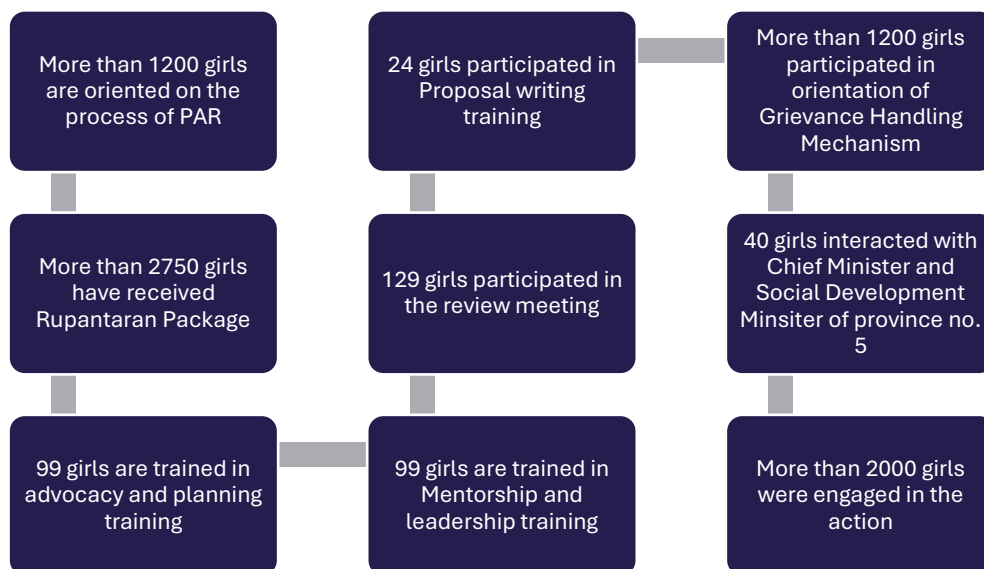
Process of Strengthening Girls



Capacity Building



Key Programmatic achievement



Issues raised by Girls



Girls Progress in Action

- Ten girls of Kotahaimai Rural Municipality, Bhaisahawa village were able to carry out survey in 49 households to find out the reasons for girls drop out from school. The age of sampled girls were 2-18 years and many of them were discontinuing education for a year. As a result of their survey findings, they were able to facilitate 98 adolescents' girls to go back to school, 174 adolescents girls are processed for the citizenship and 52 adolescents girls marriage were postponed.
- 608 girls were trained on making home-made sanitary pads by the mentors.
- Girls conducted rallies to mark the 16 days of Activism against Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Conducted Inter group dialogues with parents and drama event on issues of girl's education, safety and security of girls, menstrual hygiene and girl's dreams.
- Conducted the interaction program with Rural Municipalities and Municipalities representative on the issue of child marriage, violence against women and girls education
- Girls advocated for the establishment of class 9 in their school.
- Interaction program was conducted with police in presence of ward chairperson of ward no. 3 of Sammaraimai RM and school teachers to stop child marriage at the village.
- Girls are raising issues of lack of infrastructure in school like fan in class room, unavailability of dust bin in toilets, sports materials, unavailability of pads in school, lack of teachers and dirty toilets.
- Provided self-defence training to the girls at school and at community level
- Two Girls Right Forums established in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu Districts. These forums are registered in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law of Provincial Government.
- Girls presented 8 points memorandum to Chief Minister and Social Development Minister of province no. 5.

Some initiatives carried out by Stakeholders and through programs

- Girls were able to mobilize resources from government for conducting different activities to challenge the negative social norms like anti-child marriage campaign, drama show on negative consequences of child marriage, education and dowry.
- On the behalf of the program teachers of government schools of Rupandehi and Kapilvastu were trained on Grievance Handling mechanism for easy to girls to raise issues at school level.
- On the behalf of program: representatives of the local government, school head teachers and the local CSOs were oriented on policy provisions related to the Sustainable Development Goal 4, School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), child rights and education rights, quality and equitable education for the betterment of girls education.
- Conducting programs like public hearing, policy dialogue in presence of adolescent's girls, the local government were able to allocate some resources like Chief of Education Development and Coordination Unit (EDCU) of the Kotahi Mai Rural Municipality expressed for the allocation of NPR 500,000 (Approx. 3500 USD) to each schools of the rural municipality to ensure the child, girls friendly, disable friendly schools infrastructures. Similarly Chairperson of Mayadevi Rural Municipality of Kapilvastu expressed his commitment in ensuring the provision of fans in each school and also taking action against the teachers who discriminate against girls in sports, or in any other types of learning activities in the schools. In the same way NPR 232,000 (Approx 1650 USD) and NPR 120,000 (Approx. 860 USD) has been allocated for managing drinking water and dustbin in girls' toilet and sanitary pad respectively by the Sammaraimai RM of Kapilvastu.
- The Girl's Right Forum were supported with NPR 405,000 (Approx. 2900 USD) as a seed money for institutional capacity building to continue the group actions. The amount was supported on the behalf of the program for their sustainability.

Challenges

- Due to mobility restriction girls are not able to reach the girls across each district. Therefore, all members of the forum are not actively engaged in policy and advocacy forums. That is hindering in the expansion of Girls Right Forum in outer areas beside program focused areas.
- There is a huge chance of girls dropping out from the groups as parents are not allowing girls to participate in social actions due to their elder age. Parents are still afraid that if the girls of elder age are engaged in social action, they might elope and engagement in such activities will befoul their prestige. The parents always link their prestige with girl's sexuality. So during the program parents are not supportive and the community people are also not showing interest on girl's action. The community people always consider girls as others property.

- The girls cannot conduct the action uniting only few girls from the community as their voices will be suppressed with majority of girls not being in the campaign.
- The program has supported in strengthening girls from the group formation and they were part of the program. But in short span of program it is difficult to fully strengthen girls to lead on their own way. The linkage part is missing in the program which might withheld girls to continue the form and the groups.



Learning

- The concept of mentorship has been implemented at the group level to capacitate certain group members. The concept suggest that the mentors are supposed to transform their leadership and mentor ship with other group's members. As like VSLA process the concept of transferring the leadership should be implemented at collectives' level as well. This will help in transformation of leadership capacity to other group members and there will be less chance of drop out from groups.
- The engagement with parents should be increased as they are main barriers for girls' empowerment. There is a need to change in the mind-set of parents especially fathers as they always think girls as other property so not want to invest on them. So until and unless the mind-set of male members are not changed, the girls will always face challenges in changing deep rooted norms that is harming girls aspiration.
- The girls should be linked with Local government in planning process, and preparation of strategies to support those girls who are conducting social action and further strengthening them for the long run of girl's activism. The local government has resources to uplift the girl's status by supporting them on their roadmap.
- The girls are established in their local community but for mass advocacy on girls issyes there should be established linkages with women and child right organization along with school level child clubs for creating space for advocacy at local and national level.

"The program has helped us a lot in continuing our education through UALC and capacitated us through the girl's collective's forum as now we are able to raise our voice on different issues without hesitation. The only problem we are facing is to convince parents to participate in the event and contribute from their side in the girls issues. Our future focus will be engaging parents and community people in the action of girl's issues."

- Girls from the Forum

- Media engagement can play a vital role in showcasing the efforts carried out by the girls at the grassroots level and flourish the campaign at national level reflecting as voice of all adolescents' girls across the country.

The only and for most possible way of sustainability of the girls' collectives is the ownership of girls themselves, parents and by the local government.

8 points delegation submitted to Chief Minister and Social Development Minister of province No. 5

1. Initiate campaign for functioning local levels to end and eradicate child early forcefully marriage, prioritize it at provincial level planning process.
2. Ensure expenses of the budget through girls' entities (Girls' Right Forum, child club, child right coalitions etc.) that associates with planning and availability of the budget allocated for empowering girls by provincial to local level government structure.
3. Work together with girls aligns, girls right forum, to declare child marriage free zone and ensure meaningful participation of girls for developing girls' empowerment strategy.
4. Ensure girls secondary education to save the girls from victim of child early forcefully marriage. Address secondary education through special program package for the marginalized girls.
5. Develop indicators for empowering girls, include the provisions against violence against women and girls to save the girls.
6. Develop zero tolerance environment to eradicate child abuse and violence for secure girls' education.
7. Restrict the campaign that associates against legal provision of child marriage, for e.g.; parents are in campaign to reduce the age of marriage by 20 to 16 which campaigning steps should be restricted by provincial government.
8. Assign focal person at provincial level for enabling environment to end child early forcefully marriage and violence against women and girls.