

## 3.7 Child Marriage: A Case of Baitadi District

### Definition

There is varied definition of children across the globe defined on the basis of age, maturity, family situation, environment, ability, experience and their access to opportunities. However, according to World Health Organisation (WHO), everyone below 16 years of age is children. Nepal has also established citizen's rights at 16 years old. The Constitution of Nepal, however, has guaranteed that person can exercise their electoral franchise only when they reach 18. Likewise, the law of Nepal determines 20 years as the legal age for marriage. Prior to the promulgation of Constitution of Nepal in 2015, the legal age to marry was 18 and 20 for girl and boy respectively. However, this contravened with the United Nations conventions and as a result Nepal amended its relevant legislation to establish that a girl and boy can get married legally after they turn 20. As Nepal is a member of the United Nations, it is binding that it ensures that its laws and policies in are line with the UN conventions. Though anyone between 16 to 40 years has been defined as youth, the law of Nepal regards a marriage of a person below the age of 20 as child marriage, which is a punishable act.

### Background

Baitadi is a hilly district of province 7 in the country. The total population of the district stands at 250,898. Among them, 62,772 people occupy the age group between 10 to 20 years. Grippled with various social norms and superstition, child marriage has remained as a major challenge in the district. According to Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011, Baitadi is one among the six districts with high number of child marriage in Nepal. As per the survey Saptari, Rautahat, Kaplivastu, Bajhang and Dailekh are other districts with the highest number of child marriages.

A survey conducted by a national network called 'girl child is not a bride' in then five Village Development Committees (VDCs) of Baitadi districts in 2014 showed that 59.5 per cent had got married before turning 20 years old. The same survey also found that 12 per cent tie the nuptial knot when they were not even 14 years old. Likewise, the survey found that the rate of girl child marriage was higher than that of the boy child.

As per the data of the UN, Nepal ranks seventh in the world and third in Asia among the countries with child marriage. Bangladesh tops the ranking fol-

lowed by India in terms of child marriage in Asia. Nepal's Demographic and Health survey, 2011 states that 41 per cent of female population between 20 to 24 years got married before they reached 18. On the other hand, only 11 per cent of the male population of the same age group got married below 18 years of age.

Child marriage in Nepal varies on the basis of development region, settlement area, socio-economic situation, ethnicity, religion, community and educational status and other differences. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) states that 43 per cent women residing in rural areas and 27 per cent living in urban areas get married before they reach 18 years old. Girl child from illiterate and low-income families are more vulnerable to child marriage. It has been found that women who have completed secondary education or higher get married when they turn 22 years while women who have not gone to school marry at the age of 17 years. The average marrying age of women in Nepal is 17.2 years. The District Health Office Baitadi reports that at least 576 married girls below 20 years carried out pregnancy test in Fiscal Year 2017/18.

### Legislation Related to Child Marriage

The United Nation had identified child marriage as an obstacle worldwide in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, it has prioritized ending child marriage in the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (2016-30). In September 2013, the United Nations, through its human rights committee, tabled a proposal on prevention and abolition of child and forced marriage and their challenges, good practices and obstacle in implementation. Two months later in December, the 68<sup>th</sup> the General Assembly of United Nations endorsed a resolution on child marriage and forced marriage. Since then programs against child marriage have received high prior-

ity across the globe. The Constitution of Nepal Constitution also establishes child and early marriage as punishable crime.

### Provision in Constitution of Nepal

As per the Article 39 (5) of Part 3 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015), 'No child shall be subjected to child marriage, transported illegally,

- Abducted/kidnapped or taken hostage.'
- The Act designed to amend and annul some Nepal Laws, 2072 B.S. amends the Civil Code 2020 B.S. to establish that 'the minimum age for marriage is 20 years'. Those violating this legal provision are sentenced to a maximum three years in jail and slapped with a fine up to Rs 10, 000.

### Punishment Based on the Age

- Six months to three years in jail and fine of Rs One to ten thousand to those who marry/cause to marry children who are below ten years old.
- Three months to one year jail term and fine up to five thousand rupees to those who marry/cause to marry children who are between 10 -14 years old.
- Six months jail or fine of Rs 10 000 or both for those who marry/cause to marry children who are between 14 to 18 years old
- Six months in jail or fine up to Rs. 10,000 or both for those who marry/cause to marry a woman or man who has not reached the age of 20.

### National Laws and Policies

- National Policy related to children 2069 B.S. has identified child marriage as an obstacle in the practice of child rights.
- The strategy 8.9 of the Policy has emphasized the coordination between government and non government actors to formulate Mobilize community-level organisations, to give urgency to the complaints against child marriage

and take required action, and also states to give additional responsibility to the local level government to stop child marriage.

- Likewise, strategy 9.3 states that media and other relevant medium shall be mobilized to generate awareness against child trafficking, transportation and child marriage and raise awareness for the protection and promotion of child rights at the village level.
- The thirteenth Plan (2070-71/2072-73 B.S.) has set the goal to end various social abuses including prevention of child marriage.
- Likewise, the Overall National Action Plan for adolescents (2070/71-2074/75 B.S.) states that the policy measures shall be taken and guidelines shall be developed to end and minimize traditional harmful practices and discrimination that especially affect marginalized communities. In addition, it also states that open education and alternative education would be provided to bring the adolescents, especially the girls (who were involved in child marriage) into the mainstream of formal education.

### **The Objective of the Study**

1. To inform the stakeholder agencies about the state of child marriage and and encourage them to undertake steps to stop it.
2. To inform about the cause of child marriage and its impact.
3. To make all concerned accountable in the promotion and protection of child rights, and put an end to child marriage that stands as the major challenge of human development.
4. To give the message that every side has a role to put an end to child marriage and inform about its legal remedial measures.
5. To mount pressure on the concerned authority/stakeholders for effective

implementation of legislation related to child marriage.

6. To bring to public the opinion of the stakeholders in the district about child marriage.
7. To encourage the organizations working to bring an end to child marriage and motivate the ordinary citizens to involve themselves against this harmful practice.

### **Significance of the Study**

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 has defined child marriage as a crime. Hence, child marriage continues to exist in the society despite being illegal. Marriage before the right age will have a negative impact on the individual as well as the society. Due to physical, psychological, economic and social impact, its effect will run through generations among the offspring, according to the experts. Furthermore, early marriage is found to lead towards problems like malnutrition, anemia, abortion, and birth of child with disability, stunted growth. Child marriage is also one of the major reasons for gender-based violence. Therefore, since it affects every sector, a study on child marriage is important from the perspective of its solution.

### **Methodology of the Study**

While undertaking the study, several communities of Baitadi district were visited to obtain the first hand information. In addition, the study team attended the local based workshops, interaction and meeting to gather the information. Likewise, it also visited the local based government and non government institution working against child marriage, and interacted with the concerned officers soliciting their ideas and insights related to the child marriage in the community. The data from the relevant literature in the district have been included as secondary source in the study. Attempt has been made to make this study consolidated

through deliberation with all stakeholders active in minimization of child marriage.

### **Limitation of the Study**

Child marriage stands as the biggest social development challenge of this province as a whole. Child marriage has had all-side impact on human development. Of them, an effort has been made to study the prevailing situation of child marriage and the steps taken against superstitions.

### **Major Reasons**

#### **1. Religious Faith/Superstition**

Majority of the incidents of child marriage take place as a result of the superstition that one will go to heaven after their death if they marry off their daughters before their first menstruation. Though such practice is gradually declining in urban settlements, it continues to exist in the rural areas. Hari Prasad Joshi, president of the traditional healers group in Patan municipality, states that such belief and practice is still deeply rooted in the rural areas.

#### **2. Poverty and Financial Problem**

Poor and financially weak community and families often tend to engage in marrying off their children at the earliest as compared to others. Unable to bear the education cost and upbringing like others, the parents tend to get their children married early. . A local journalist, Khagendra Awasthi, said that the situation of child marriage is worst the in Dalit community in compared to other communities.

#### **3. Lack of Awareness and Education**

There is lack of education and awareness among the people in the rural parts of the district. As a result, child marriage is on the rise, as people are not familiar about its negative impact. The 2011 Census shows that the literacy rate of the district is 63 per cent. Despite im-

plementation of various programs aimed at raising awareness, the as programmes have not been organised in a way that would make the parents in the rural areas understand, consciousness about the issue is yet to develop in the villages. Nisha Bhatta, president of child children's network says that lack of awareness is still encouraging child marriage in the villages.

#### **4. Misuse of Technology**

In recent past, the misuse of technology especially mobile phones and social networking sites like face book is contributing to increased cases of children eloping, thereby leading to rise in child marriage. The parents are in constant fear that their children will elope with people outside their caste, culture and religion that will affect their culture and social structure Due to this, parents marry off their children at an early age. . In 2016/17, the District Police Office records say that it handed over 40 couples who married on their own by eloping. Likewise, as of mid-January of the year 2017/18, 11 couples were held and handed over to their respective parents, the Office said.

#### **5. Gender Discrimination**

Preference of son over daughters is still prevalent in the district. Many daughters are born in the hope for a son, and girls are considered as a burden as it is difficult to bear their upbringing and parents marry of their daughters at early age. Ganesh Shahi, a district-based officer of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), said even educated parents give birth to many daughters with the hope for a son.

#### **6. Effective Implementation of Laws**

As the law enforcement agencies take action only after a complaint is filed and even when a case is registered, the concerned law is not effectively enforced,

thereby encouraging the practice of child marriage. Though the number of child marriage is high in this district, only one case related to child marriage has been filed so far. As child marriage in the district takes place with the involvement of distinguished personalities of the society, reports of child marriage do not reach the police, Heramba Sharma, Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) at the District Police Office, Baitedi said.

### **7. Weakness of Educated Personalities**

There are educated persons as well in the society and village. But they are involved in the protection and promotion of child marriage. Teachers talk against child marriage in the school but fail to stop child marriage that involves their relatives. Sadly, they remain silent and do not inform the concerned authority when they know about such incidents.

### **8. Social Disharmony**

The people fear dire social consequences if they report against the child marriage. They are intimidated and threatened by the parents and other concerned and even receive backlash. As a result, the cases against the child marriage do not reach the law enforcement agencies. Kashi Singh Bista, who works for the women upliftment society, Baitedi, said fear of social disharmony discouraged even the educated to stand against child marriage in the community.

## **Effects of Child Marriage**

### **1. Education Interrupted**

The biggest problem of child marriage is that it effects in the education of children, especially the girls. Due to household responsibilities, a different identity after marriage and the norm that daughter-in-law should not be sent to school, the girls will have their education discontinued. . According to Shankar Dutta Bhatta, information officer, District Education Office, 2.5 % girls between one

to 10 grades discontinued their school in the past academic year. He further added that the rate is highest among the students of grade 8 to 10. Last academic year alone, among 78,549 enrolled students, 1,960 students of grade 1 to 10 dropped out from the school.

### **2. Child Mortality**

Due to early age pregnancy, there is always a danger to the life of both mother and child. According to District Health Office, in the Fiscal Year 2017/18, among the babies who were born in health centres, nine died within 28 days of their birth. Dr Gunaraj Awasthi, medical superintendent of district hospital, said pregnancy at an early age affects the mother and child in one way or another. He said that 59 still births were recorded in the F/Y 2017/18.

### **3. Malnutrition**

Child marriage and subsequent pregnancy results in physical problems in the mother and offspring. The district health office identified that the rate of malnutrition is high among the children born to mothers below the age of 20. Stunted growth and anemia causes physical and psychological impact on the mother and child.

According to the District Public Health Office in the fiscal year 2017/18, malnutrition was reported in 1,300 children. Majority of them were born to young mothers, Santosh Pandey, a contact person at the office said. According to him, among 3,877 babies born in the F/Y 2017/18,, 242 babies weighed less than 2.5 kilogram, while 27 babies less than 1.5 kgs while and four were born with disabilities. Medical superintendent, Dr Awasthi, says that the average weight of a normal baby should be 2.5 kgs or more at the time of birth.

### **4. Abortion**

The rate of natural miscarriage is high among the young mothers who

are not adequately developed in terms of physical growth. According to District Public Health Office, the number of those coming for abortion at the Office is lesser in compared to those coming with post-abortion problems resulting from abortion carried out in the local private clinics or in India. In the fiscal year 2017/18, the district health offices registered four cases of abortion carried out by married women who were below 20 years old. The immature pregnancy often leads to miscarriage, said Dr Awasthi.

### 5. Uterus Prolapse

Multiple abortion and immature pregnancy are the major causes of high rate of uterine prolapse among the women in the district, reports the Baitedi hospital. Due to social stigma and fear of social discrimination, women do not share their problem related with uterus prolapse. They become the victim of gender-based violence and also impact their physical and mental health. Mamta Joshi, a nurse at district health office, Baitedi said the multiple pregnancies for want of son are the major culprit behind uterus prolapse among local women.

### 6. Financial Problems

Many people have been facing financial problem due to child marriage. The couples are deprived of their education when they marry at very tender age and eventually unable to earn their livelihood with dignity. The uneducated couples are not aware about their physical health and impact of multiple pregnancies and to sustain large families. Consequently, they have to witness financial obligation. Owing to poverty, nearly 1,500 young local people are working in Pithauragadh of India as migrant worker to meet their ends meet, said Shankar Bista, 18, a local of Bijayapur in Puchaudi Municipality-11, who is working as a migrant laborer in Pithauragadh India.

### Madhavi, a Victim of Child Marriage

Along with her one-year-old baby, Madhavi sometimes visits the local police station or district police office. She has no interest to visit these offices on a regular manner. However, she is compelled to visit them expecting justice at the earliest. Few years ago, she was compelled to tie the nuptial knot under social and family pressure when she was merely 17 years old. Now, she is twenty two years old. However, she cannot unveil her actual age while seeking justice as she is aware of the fact that child marriage is illegal offence in Nepal.

She got married when she was 17 and her spouse was 22 years old. Few months after the marriage, her husband went to India in search of better opportunities. While her husband was in India, Madhavi was tortured by her in-laws for several reasons and endured gender-based violence silently. Unable to bear the pain and suffering, she decided to take shelter at her maternal home. After one year, her husband returned home and Madhavi expected better days ahead.

However, this did not happen. Even her husband started scolding her citing several reasons. According to Parvati Awasthi, officer at women cell, district police office, Madhavi had visited her four times seeking help and demanded that the culprit should be brought to book. She further added that Madhavi neither can reunite with them nor can live in separation.

Due to lack of marriage certificate, the situation has become worse for Madhavi. The police however, held her in-laws four times in the recent past but they are released after mutual agreement to maintain cordial relation. On the other hand, Madhavi's father is now regretting over his decision to marry off his daughter when she was just 17 years old. My past decision not only ruined her education but also destroyed my daughter's life, narrat-

ed Madhavi's father with the police officer at the district police office.

Now, Madhavi is much worried about her son who is seemed to be abandoned by his father. As a result, she cannot file for divorce fearing her son will be in problem. At times, she expresses her agony against her father's decision that compelled her to marry at such tender age. She also said that her husband, Deependra, is having an illicit relationship with a local girl.

She also expressed her dissatisfaction over the social customs in which female is looked down upon if she decides to remarry while male enjoys second marriage and no finger is raised against him. She has no option that to suffer silently and she attributes the pain and sorrows to her early marriage. I used to think that wedding will bring happiness and joy and as such I accepted his decision without any hesitation. Wiping her tears, Madhavi said, I have now realized that it was a blunder to marry at the age of 17 years. Meanwhile, Madhavi's father Devdutta is also regretting the decision and says, 'Then I was just concerned about getting my daughter married, but now I fear for her life'.

### **Adolescent Daughter in Law's Sorrow**

Physically, they seem to be merely a student of grade five or six. A group of teen age girls were exchanging their pain and sorrows keeping aside the load of firewood- a source of energy at the villages. At a time when they should be in school, the teen age girls were compelled to carry out their household chores from dawn to dusk. It was unacceptable to accept that they were married but their attire and typical vermilion powder on their forehead under the Hindu custom suggest that they were married. Laxmi Karki, a resident of Dograkedar rural municipality-6, was one among them.

Laxmi, now turns 18 years old. She is the elder sister of three brothers and

two sisters. While studying in grade eight in a local school, she got married at the age of 14 years. She really felt bad as she was unable to continue her education due to early marriage. There are 21 families of Sarki Communities in Dol village of the district. Alike Laxmi, there are 12-13 girls including her best buddies Hajari Sarki, 13, and Kalawati Sarki, 15 who are also married. All were studying in grade six.

Adults of these communities who earn their livelihood as daily wage laborer and farming are illiterate. As a result, they are ignorant about the significance of girl child education and ramification of child marriage in the education of girl child. The child marriage has become a kind of bad precedent among the people of Sarki community, said Kamala Sarki, a local resident. She also said the children are compelled to discontinue their education due to rampant child marriage in the community.

It is a common scene at the community where such married girls are killing their time in non productive activities. Alike Laxmi, Hajari and Kalawati in Dol village, there are many girls who want to pursue their education but unable to do so. Such girls are yet to realize this bitter reality that they have already lost this opportunity due to forced child marriage.

Human rights activists say that teenage married girls are overburdened with household related chores. They are not exposed to the outer world and limited within the four walls of the house. This can be well reflected during the INSEC team's visit to the village. The teenage married girls, who were talking about their internal issues after heavy work, did not pay any heed to visiting team and their cameras. Instead, they focused on their discussion related with their daily activities such as cooking, washing cloths and utensils and declining fodder in the forest.

There is a belief among the local people that early marriage of girl child

will reduce the economic burden of her parents and at the same time the newly bride can help her in laws in household chores, said Lalu, a local senior citizen. He also said that due to weak economic background, parents want to marry off their children at the earliest possible. It has been found that very few teenage married girls pursue their education after their marriage. Unable to meet the both ends with their century old traditional leather related occupation, the male are compelled to work either in India or Middle East as a migrant labor, added the locals.

Remarkable decrease in the arable land and shortage of leather compelled the youths of Sarki community to seek better opportunities abroad. In recent times, the trend has increased as they are not able to help their families in terms of financial aspects. Despite the fact that a higher secondary school is located within thirty minutes distance on foot, there are very few who has completed the primary level of education. Drop out among those regular to school is also high. A survey conducted in 2014 by a network called girl children are not brides found that 59.5 per cent of the marriage that took place in Baitedi were held in an early age.

In other community, there are some cases reported where married girls continued their education even after their marriage. But this does not happen in Dalit community. Though the government and non government actors claims that the child marriage has decreased as a result of their programs, there are still large number of girls who fall prey to child marriage .

It has been a common practice to collect fodder for cattle in collective manner as they can make some merry making with their peers forgetting their pain and sorrows resulting from child marriage. Despite best effort to appease their in-laws in all aspects, daughter in laws

are accused of doing no productive work, verbally abused and mentally tortured. In many instances, they are charged for not collecting enough fodder for the cattle. To avoid such nuisance, daughter in laws prefer visiting grassland and collecting fodder for their cattle even when it is not deemed necessary. This minimizes their presence at home and do not have to listen to any derogatory remarks under various pretext. They have lost the hope that better days lie ahead.

### **Danger of Activists being Caught in Between**

The social and human rights activists face several challenges. Two years ago, Sita Bhatta, the then president of child club, reported and filed case against the growing cases of child marriage in and around Dashanand Municipality of the district. Since then the child marriage practice was stopped to large extent. After that, , the president was threatened, intimated and received backlash from the parents and relatives of the children for advocating the case of the adolescent. They even gheraoed the house of the Sita Bhatta, accusing her of anti social and cultural practices. The relatives and parents sacrificed animal especially he-goat in the temple to woo the goddess urging her to bring pain and sorrows to the anti child marriage supporters.

In Margha 2073, with the support of the adolescents circle , at least three-four child marriages were stopped in now Sunarya Rural Municipality. Following the incident, the parents and relatives prayed, and sacrificed animal especially he-goat in the temple to appease the goddess urging her to bring pain and sorrows to the anti child marriage supporters. Local people are against our role in bringing down the child marriage in the villages. The relatives and parents pledged to god to sacrifice animal especially buck if they can us suffering. They regular torment

us saying something bad will befall them hereafter, said Janaki Chanda, adolescent centre. Though we do not believe that something bad will befall after sacrificing animals in the temple, our parents will tend to worry about us when they come to know about such situation, she further added. The growing cases of animal sacrificing in the temple have certainly emerged as a new problem in the village, she argued further.

With the support of the adolescent centre, the Siddeshwar VDC has been declared first child friendly VDC of the district. Madan Singh Mahara, Health coordinator, Patan Municipality said that the mitigation of the child marriage is one of the indicators of child friendly local governance. The support of the adolescent girls 'centre' has helped to make such declaration. Initially, the parents and relatives embraced religious tool to threaten anti child marriage supporters. However, the situation has changed in the present context. After realizing the ramification of such ill practice, the parents and relatives have joined hand against child marriage, he further added

### **Active Involvement of Teenage/ Adolescent Groups.**

With an objective to mitigate child marriage, the adolescent children are being urged for their active involvement in the past three years. After their involvement as a group member, the child marriage is seen to be declining in the recent past. The UNFPA district office found that more than 50 child marriages were prevented with the support of the adolescent groups' active in 33 areas of the village. There is an increasing number of movements in different parts of the village after realizing the adverse effects of child marriage.

A 21 members district based adolescent groups network was formed to make the anti child marriage movement

more effective. Sita Bhatta, President of the network, said that the network will work towards mitigating the century old practice- child marriage in the district. We will have been trying to mitigate child marriage using different approaches such as religious, social and cultural. We will continue our struggle against child marriage, the president added further.

### **Religious Leaders Joined the Bandwagon**

The concerned stakeholders have taken the local religious leader on board the anti child marriage movement after some superstitious beliefs and faith were posing a problem in the mitigation process of the child marriage. A network comprising the traditional healers, pundits and astrologers have been forged to make the movement effective and a success. They have been oriented about the adverse effects of child marriage, legal provisions and punishment.

With the support of UNFPA which has been working in the areas of protection and promotion of child rights, an orientation program was organized in 15 VDCs of the district. Altogether 45 participants including traditional healers, pundits and astrologers took part in the event.

The involvement of religious leaders, traditional healers, astrologers and pundits has resulted into positive outcomes. People are now being oriented about the negative effects of child marriage. Hari Prashad Joshi, Secretary, traditional healers groups, Patan, said that he was not aware about the consequences of child marriage in his initial days. Moreover, due to lack of awareness and superstitious belief, there was a custom and practice of child marriage in the community. In addition, the villagers believed that they will go to heaven after death if they marry off their children at adolescent

Now the religious leaders have also agreed that blind faith and superstitious belief was one of the major causes behind child marriage. Joshi argued that it is a religious crime to involve and support child marriage. We should join our hands to mitigate the problem once and for all. As it is necessary to get approval of the religious leader in the process of marriage, the prospect of mitigating child marriage seems to be positive, further added Joshi

### **Technology is Equally Responsible**

In recent times, the pattern of child marriage in the district has shifted. The remarkable emergence of mobile and social networking has become the new and affordable medium among the adolescents to befriend in the changed context. With mobile and social networking sites like face book, they communicate on regular basis and eventually reach a stage where they agree to get married, said Binod Kunwar, Health Post Office in charge, Puchaudi Municipality -1. According to him, among 30 couples who tied the nuptial knot in then Hatt VDCs (now Pichaudi Municipality) in 2073-74, there were 27 cases of eloped child marriage reported. He further stated that they fall in love with the support of face book and marry in due course of time.

While several programs were underway to orient parents about negative consequences of child marriage, the young children started to embrace elope marriage, he further added. However, the program targeting both children and parents played a crucial in bringing down the child marriage in the district in 2073-74. The health post in charge said that very young couples visit to the hospital complaining their reproductive and pregnancy related issues. In recent past, the government and non state actors such as UNFPA, Nepal Red Cross Society and OXFAM Nepal have jointly launched program to raise awareness level among peo-

ple especially children about technology with respect to mobile and social networking site such as Face book. They have also initiated women empowerment programs.

### **Support of District Administration Office**

As there is blatant disregard of laws against child marriage, the District Administration Office has also agreed to extend its support to end child marriage. The office has agreed to provide security support to the individual and adolescent's led organization advocating against child marriage, said Chief District Officer, Deepak Acharya. He lauded the role of adolescents in bringing down the child marriage.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Surendra Bam, Baitadi said that he has already directed all the district police office to act immediately when they encounter any cases related with child marriage in the district. The Government alone cannot bring any substantial changes. To end child , the role of all stakeholders is vital, he further added.

### **Commitment of Local Government Institution**

Soon after the just concluded local election, the elected representatives were invited to attend the program aimed at mitigating the child marriage, held at the district health office. The elected representatives in the event vowed to end the child marriage within two years in the district. To this end, few programs have already been implemented in several areas of the district.

In many areas, the participation of concerned stakeholders has increased in movement against child marriage. The elected representatives carried out door to door program aiming to end child marriage in Puchauda Municipality-1. The child clubs, women's group, health volunteers active in the district have also ex-

tended their support for the benevolent cause. They have been imparting the lessons on adverse impacts of child marriage among the local people.

Ganesh Bahadur, Ward Chairperson, Puchauda Municipality-1 said child marriage has posed a serious threat to the society. Such social evils should be ended, he stressed. Further, the first meeting of the ward committed has already decided to work for ending child marriage in the district. We are conducting door to door program to implement the decision, the chairperson added. The inter generational dialogue as part of the decisions are held in many places. The events bring senior citizens and adolescents together, and acquaint them about the adverse effects of child marriage.

As Baitadi is considered as a district with high cases of child marriage, the government and non government actors have launched several programs aimed at its mitigation. The recently elected representatives have also prioritized fight against child marriage as their major agenda. Some of the elected representatives have even committed to make their wards and areas as 'no child marriage' zone within one year. The children convention held nearly one and half years ago committed to make Baitadi a 'no child marriage district' by 2075.

### **Views and Opinions of Stakeholders Sidharaj Joshi, CDO, Baitadi**

An individual cannot make any changes with respect to child marriage. The role of collective voice is very essential. Further, it is important to raise awareness among people than their empowerment. The religious belief and faith will change with change of time and we should not view it as an obstacle. As a responsible citizen, the local people should report the cases of child marriage at district administration office, district police office and other concerned organization.

Education is inalienable right of the children. Hence, they should not be deprived of education. Likewise, children should not be over burdened and conducive environment should be created for their recreational activities.

### **Heramb Sharma, DSP, District Police Office, Baitadi**

Few cases related with child marriage are reported at the district police office. Though we are uniformed government servant, the sensitized citizens are non uniformed government servant. It is thus the role of every individual to raise the voice against the social evils. We will take immediate action as per the legal provision if we receive any cases related with child marriage. It has been found that the adolescents are attracted towards marriage. They are enticed when they see newly bride and groom. Unable to control their feelings, the adolescents consider elope marriage as way forward. Under such circumstances, we have to be formal and tackle the situation in diplomatic manner. At the same time, we are not adequately strong to deal with the cases of elope marriage due to our limited jurisdiction. Therefore, there is dire need to increase awareness level at the grassroots and disseminate the information about child marriage. Finally, we urge people to inform the police if they come across any child marriage in the community. We will bring the culprit into justice and punish them as per the law of the land.

### **Ganesh Shahi, District Officer, UNFPA**

I have been actively involved in ending the child marriage in Baitadi district. The cases of child marriage are on the rise for some reasons. It seems people from all quarters have been directly or indirectly supporting child marriage. The adolescent's led initiatives have played a significant role in mitigating the child marriage in the district. However, politi-

cal and social pressures are mounting on them to weaken their praiseworthy initiation. The members are intimidated, threatened by anti social elements that are hell bent against their movement. The effective implementation of law and order is central to this end. The parents are the avid violators of the law as they are often involve in child marriage by producing counterfeit birth certificate. Some parents even send their children outside the district to marry them off. If social activist, local elites, teachers, students, employees and other concern raise collective voice against child marriage, it can become a thing of the past.

**Lokendra Panta, Project Coordinator, Multipurpose Development Society, Dadeldhura**

There is dire need to sensitize parents in ending the child marriage that has remained as a major obstacle in the human development index of far western districts of the country. The conducive environment should be developed where children can involve in marry making, peer to peer knowledge exchange and talks about the pros and cons of the technology. For this, the role of parents is very important.

It is also important to visit the illiterate parents and advocate for ending the social evil in the society. The adverse effects of child marriage should be imparted to people section of the society s. Over the past decades, gender disparity, which is viewed as a major cause behind child marriage, should be ended by sensitizing the parents. Likewise, several income generation activities should be initiated at the community level to make people self reliant and improve their socio economic status.

**Hari Prashad Joshi, Secretary, Faith healers Groups**

The role of sensitized citizen is vital than literate one in the society. In the present context, we including traditional healers, pundits and astrologers have to disseminate the information related with religion in massive scale. The violence meted against a small girl by her in laws after the marriage is truly a crime against humanity. Such in laws will go not go heaven but hell after their death.

Brushing aside the past culture and custom, he said it is really a social, religious and legal crime if they torture a small girl after her marriage citing several reasons. As people such as traditional healers, pundits, astrologers and others are directly involved and support child marriage, there is a dire need to inform the district based astrologers, pundits and traditional healers about the adverse effects of child marriage. It is also important to impart them that child marriage is criminal offence and perpetrators will be booked as per the law of the land.

**Relevant Sources/ References**

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- District child marriage mitigation strategy 2074