Role of Women in Anti-Alcohol Campaign: Women empowerment for Peace

Kanchanpur district is plagued by alcohol abuse. This abuse results in domestic violence, fatal accidents, decreased family and social harmony and the destruction of lives. Sadly many cases in Kanchanpur illustrate the difficulties brought upon families by alcohol abuse. To combat this local women have formed an Alcohol Control Management Committee and have gained support from local police, district level stakeholders, social leaders and non governmental organization. The women enforced a code of conduct for alcohol consumption and this code of conduct has resulted in positive changes for the community. With so many changes coming about in Nepal we must examine the root cause of alcohol abuse and recognize its consequences. The activity seen in Kanchanpur against alcoholism is an inspiration and the way the women of Kanchanpur are taking control of this new direction, can teach us there is nothing impossible and we can start making good and effective decisions

Alcohol consumption is a leading cause of domestic violence against women and children. Those who are addicted to alcohol are not only ruining their own life and damaging their status in the society but adversely affecting the lives of those around him or her.

Two weeks ago, a man named Kiran Singh Bista accidentally killed Shambhu Prasad Bhatta on the road to Mahendra Nagar from Jhalari in a terrible alcohol related accident. At the time of the incident, Kiran Singh was drunk and is now being held in police custody. He realized his mistake, if he had not been drunk at that time, than this incident would not have taken place. According to the Police Inspector of the District Police Office, Deepak Regmi, a similar incident took place last year too. Nara Bahadur Bista of Badaipur killed Pramod Bista over a financial dispute between that intensified as they consumed alcohol. These types of incidents, accidents really, have been devastating to the people of Kanchanpur, yet the people cannot be assured that these terrible alcohol related incidents will stop in the future. Although some incidents have been brought to the attention of the police there are many more cases related to domestic violence that are not known to everyone. There are accidents taking place in which drivers are known to be drinking and driving but in most cases, the drivers are not held responsible because the police run short of evidence. In the current fiscal year, the police have arrested around 300 of these culprits and have punished them for disturbing the peace while consuming alcohol.

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Five months ago in Gowaraiya, Mahendra Nagar Municipality, Bir Bahadur (name changed) crossed the line. He sold his children’s uniforms and some household utensils because he was so desperate for alcohol. Not before long he sold everything in his house that could be sold. The actions of Bir Bahadur, who is the caretaker for his four children and wife, were not at all acceptable and eventually his wife left him and moved to her parents home (maiti). The women active in the Anti-Alcohol Campaign counseled Bir Bahadur helping him to understand the consequences of alcohol consumption. Today Bir Bahadur is leading a normal life and is much happier than before. At time when the nation is stepping forward to build a new Nepal moving towards sustainability and social harmony, Kanchanpur, a district in the far-western region is being disturbed by alcoholism. Bir Bahadur and his family are only one example of the consequences of alcoholism; unfortunately there are many more families who have been ruined because of addiction. In municipal areas, when a person is killed there many more people who lose their precious lives due to the alcohol. The nation has distinguished this region as the Far Western region and already the numbers of problems arising in this region are numerous. Among the various districts in this region, Kanchanpur tops the list of districts where the trading and misuse of different alcoholic products takes place. With regard to alcohol consumption, the local alcohol produced in Kanchanpur is consumed the most of anywhere in the region. The home production of alcohol is also very high. Since Kanchanpur lies on the Indo-Nepal border, there is also illegal importing of alcohol to Nepal.

Generally, poor and marginalized people have been the worst affected by this addiction but that doesn’t mean that the prosperous and elite are unaffected. Although it is mostly men who fall victim to alcoholism, children and women suffer the most. Alcoholism has deprived many
families of the things they deserve and brought tragedy to the lives of those affected. There is a high probability of domestic violence caused by addiction and also the possibility of a person turning to criminal activities. All these lead to a breakdown of peace in society.

Earlier, Kanchanpur was declared an alcohol-free district but when the pressure from people consuming alcohol increased, neither the police, the administration or society were able to help regulating the law. Now that local women are Anti-Alcohol campaigning, there is a light of hope about controlling the situation in Kanchanpur. Apart from Kanchanpur municipality, the Nepali Dodhara-Chadani area is much more affected by addiction as shown by the women active in the campaign.

Women active in the Peace Promotion Center like Suda, Daiji, Dodhara, Chadani, Pipladi and Jhalari organized and formed a district level alcohol control and management committee. This committee was made possible through the inspiration and support provided by the local political parties, district level stakeholders, social leaders and non-government organizations and management committee members. For the purpose of controlling and managing alcohol, the ACMC initiated an advocacy campaign in the district. Furthermore, the Alcohol Control and Management Committee formed a total of 28 local level advocacy committees in 19 VDCs (19 committees) and Municipalities (9 committees). These Alcohol Control and Management Committees organize interaction programs every month with the representatives of each VDC, various social leaders and local Government and Non-Government institutions. They have also made a code of conduct for the Anti-Alcohol Campaign and it was made public after political leaders, administrators, police, internal revenue, hotel entrepreneurs, local government & non-governmental institutions and VDC and DDC members signed the code of conduct. It was another step taken against alcohol consumption. The various programs are conducted through a partnership between CARE Nepal, Forum for local development and Tharu Mahila Manch. Like the Ujyalo program, the Power Balbachau Project and Shelard have given a helping hand in the campaign, according to the municipality level women’s body head Bhagwati Thapa. She also adds that after the creation of the code of conduct, the Inland Revenue Office and the administration has been able to punish 50 culprits. Since the release of the code of conduct, no new licenses have been issued to promote and distribute alcohol. There have also been threats while moving forward with the Anti-Alcohol Campaign by people who are connected to the illegal distribution of alcohol. The women say the police administration and Inland Revenue Office has supported them in the campaign. The Chief District Officer Netra Prasad Sharma says the steps taken by the women have helped establish peace in society. The release of the code of conduct is not a single person’s effort but is a decision reached by the whole group. A collective understanding that is taking society in the right direction. Similarly, the Local Development Officer says that the steps taken by the women of the district are very much appreciated. He adds that the code of conduct was released in Bhadra last year and was reviewed in Poush. The code of conduct has been followed since then and noticeable changes in the society have taken place. The number of alcohol shops reduced around district schools and program revenue has improved remarkably.

According to the internal revenue, the VDC and the Women’s Group must now approve licenses for alcohol. Min Bahadur Kathayat, staff from the Inland Revenue Office says that 150 licenses were distributed last year, in which 80 of them were accepted. In the current fiscal year, only 15 licenses were given out. The acceptance and license charge costs NRs. 2,250 by the Inland Revenue Office. According to him, the control of alcohol consumption has increased. Nandi Bohara, a hotel entrepreneur says that not only is the control of alcohol consumption necessary but the illegal distribution alcohol market should also be controlled.
The Yagya Raj Chaut of Forum for Local Development says that the women are doing a great job and that we can expect the consumption of alcohol to continue falling.

The code of conduct has not only helped in controlling alcoholism in Kanchanpur but has increased awareness in society too. The code has helped the local police punish the guilty ones. The code of conduct states that alcohol cannot be consumed within 200 meters of public places, alcohol cannot be distributed without the permission of the Alcohol Control and Management Committee, alcohol can only be sold between 3 in the afternoon till 10 at night, alcohol cannot be sold to people below 18 or above 60 years of age and can only be sold within the defined area and the traders need to put up a copy of their license and display a big banner with the message “Alcohol Consumption is injurious to health” outside their shops. According to the code of conduct, the ones who do not follow the code of conduct will pay a penalty of NRs. 200 to 1000; the people who disturb the peace after consuming alcohol will be punished as per the decision of the Alcohol Control and Management Committee. The illegal production, transportation, selling, consumption of alcohol are strictly prohibited.

Since the publication of the code of conduct, the local police have already arrested 50 people who have been caught in violation of the code of conduct. The Alcohol Control and Management Committee say the police have been very helpful.

Even though alcoholism is a leading cause of domestic violence and battering of women and children, no one has discovered the root cause of this problem or attempted to eliminate it. This is the reason why the problem grows and continues to do harm in our society. Unemployment in our country is a major cause of the problem. The country should help produce capable manpower and help find proper employment and earning opportunities for its people. The state has to be serious about the problem and make a responsible decision to solve the problem. When there is peace in a family, then we can expect peace in the society. Similarly, if there is peace in the society then there is peace in the nation. This is a fact that must be taken to heart by the government actions to solve the problem must begin. The activity seen in Kanchanpur against alcoholism is an inspiration and the way the women of Kanchanpur are taking control of this new direction, can teach us there is nothing impossible and we can start making good and effective decisions. This would ultimately help in making the right decisions in creating a new Nepal.