

BPW New Zealand and BPW Nepal

When Pauline Gapper, a past BPW NZ President and a member of Hibiscus Coast Club, met with BPW members in Kathmandu in 1988 she was asked if the New Zealand Federation could help financially with the literacy classes the Nepali clubs wished to set up for illiterate women. At that time Nepal had the lowest literacy rate for women in the world. There were a number of reasons for that:

- Until 1951 no girls were permitted to attend school
- School attendance is not compulsory
- There was a school entrance fee to be paid annually
- Children had to have suitable clothing. Sometimes this meant buying a school uniform
- Stationery had to be paid for
- If a family could afford to send anyone to school the boys had priority because they were the parents' insurance for old age
- Girls were needed for minding younger siblings
- Girls were needed to help with farming activities, to gather grass or leaves for fodder or to watch over stock foraging for food, or to gather wood
- Girls were usually married off early so why waste money educating a girl who is to become some man's chattel?

Our Federation in New Zealand decided clubs would be asked to contribute on a voluntary basis to this project.

All BPW Chapters in Nepal have been running these classes. When the first class opened the response was poor so the women were offered a few rupees 'tea money' for each attendance. There has been no problem filling classes from that time.

The women attending classes have probably been up since 5 am to feed the family and do household chores before starting work. After finishing work at 5 pm they would have fed the family before attending class at 7 pm for a 2 hour session. Classes are held 6 nights a week.

Classes have been held for women butchers, those working as labourers on construction sites, factory workers, farmers, domestic workers and housewives.

BPW Nepal wanted to extend classes to areas of the Kathmandu Valley which were not accessible by road. It was impossible to send tutors to these areas so they visited villages, found girls who had completed their secondary school, were keen to teach and had the right personalities. They brought these young women to Kathmandu, gave them a 'pressure cooker' course in teaching, provided them with the necessary teaching aids and also a small wage. The girls returned to their own villages to set up their own classes. BPW monitored the situation to see all was going well.

Originally the girls and women were taught to read and write simple Nepali and also the mathematical skills they would need in everyday life. When the course was completed after 6 months, or longer if necessary, a certificate was presented to each woman. This became her CV if she was applying for a better job.

At the present in addition to literacy and mathematical skills life skills are taught. These include:

- Legal literacy
- Gender and human rights
- Nutrition

- Child care
- Reproductive health (HIV AIDS) and reproductive rights including contraception

Often some home or other work skills are included e.g. home preserving and pickling, better farming practices, for example obtaining better seed and use of fertilisers. Sometimes they are taught a craft that they can sell locally. These improving skills bring in more money to the family.

Chapters running the programme have to pay the tutors (unless it is a club member who is working voluntarily), provide teaching aids such as blackboards, chalk and charts, as well as stationery and text books.

At first BPW Nepal wrote their own textbook as the texts suitable for young primary school children were not suitable for adult women but now the Ministry of Education and Culture has issued textbooks suitable for more mature students and requires these to be used. Every woman is supplied with one of these and it becomes her personal property.

Advantages of the Literacy Programme Are:

- Women grow in self esteem
- They can obtain a better job
- They can even break the caste barrier
- A woman discovers it can be worthwhile to educate a girl and if she cannot afford to send her daughters to school she can teach them at home.

Today the government is waiving the school entrance fee for children in the cities for 2 years and in rural areas for 4 years. However that does not guarantee that a girl will be sent to school.

The literacy programme run by BPW Nepal Chapters can have such an effect on the lives of underprivileged women and their families. Education more than anything else can help empower Nepali women.

Pauline can assure us that no money we raise for the scheme is spent on administration. **All is spent on running the literacy classes.**

OTHER PROJECTS AND ACITIVITIES

At Federation level

1. Polytechnic Training Centre courses include Secretarial and Office Management, Marketing at 3 levels – professional, short term and intensive, Vegetable growing, Computer training.
2. Project 5-0 BPW Nepal along with Nepal University Women's Association runs training courses for housewives and maids in
 - a. Literacy, numeracy, food processing, preserving, food hygiene, sanitation
 - b. Cutting and sewing and a 6 months dress designing course
 - c. Mushroom cultivation and organic composting.
- 3 Women's Employment Exchange Service Centre for placing educated women and girls.
- 4 Business management for young entrepreneurs.
- 5 Nepal Water Partnership Programme BPW Nepal was invited by the government to join a body they set up to solve the drinking water problem and to provide safe water for all.

At Chapter Level

1. Literacy Classes (as first page) - about 2000 girls and women become literate each year.
2. Micro Credit Loan Programme. All chapters run this programme which is set up in urban and village areas. Women work in groups usually or sometimes as individuals to perfect a commodity and market it. The small loan enables the women to purchase articles needed for their scheme e.g. chickens, cows, goats, seed, craft materials, preserving and mushroom growing requirements.

Every month they meet with BPW and have to pay back a portion of their loan over 2 years. No woman has ever reneged on the payments. Each time they come to repay they have to renew some promises

“I will keep my house neat and tidy”

“I will send my children to school”

“I will not do any harm to another person”

There are more such promises.

Now this extends to design work in Kathmandu which is more upmarket than basic sewing and may extend into fashion.

Patan (pronounced Parton as in Dolly!) Club applied to become their own bank and received Government approval to run their own bank following on from the Micro Credit programme.

Thimi Club outside of Kathmandu is a lively group of mainly of younger women who are mostly in business. There is a very active YBPW group of women under 40.

3. Day Care Centres These were setup and run by BPW in industrial areas. Except for one which is still run by a chapter, the others are now under the control of local boards, but still supervised by BPW chapters.
4. Scholarships to secondary schools for girls who would not have the opportunity to further their education beyond primary level. The girls are orphans or from very poor families. They are provided with tuition fees, books, stationery and uniform costs.
5. Chapters run a variety of workshops, seminars, talks, demonstrations and rallies.

Federation and chapters celebrate annually International Women's Day, World Water Day, World Consumer Rights Day and World Environmental Day by activities such as those mentioned in 5 above. Conferences, festivals, fairs and competitions are held. Exhibitions are about health and diet relating to Nepali food and of local craft.

Awareness programmes on cross border trafficking of girls, sexually transmitted disease, education on the deficiency of Vitamin A, and parental education programmes are run. There are leadership training programmes for members and non-members.

Kathmandu headquarters have their own building from which they run conferences and courses. They run secretarial courses including computer skills and other secretarial skills and including oral and written English. The girls are trained there along with work experience with importers, embassies and hotels.

They run marketing courses at 3 levels.

Vegetable gardens have been formed for instruction in agriculture
BPW have their own employment agency to place these girls.

Ambica Shrestha, a prominent Nepali business woman, the current president of BPW Nepal, is the moving force behind many of these projects. All 9 chapters in Nepal are involved.

This is all against a background of mountainous terrain, unforgiving monsoons. The hydro dam project built by the Austrians was washed away by the monsoon waters.

There are many orphans. It is currently the third poorest country in the world. The others are in Africa. There is little education, sanitation or transportation. There is outward migration as many perhaps 800,000 or even more work in Korea, in Japan as carers, in the Middle East or even in India. The range of crops grown is limited by ignorance or tradition as well as the climate. There is malnutrition and 28,000 children annually die of diarrhoea. Babies do not cry and protest like here. I wonder why. Is it the different religion or are they too hungry and feeble to bother.

Christine Pelosi and Rhyll Bramley-Miller.
Katikati Club visited Nepal March 2008 with Pauline Gapper, from BPW Hibiscus Coast, and others.