



# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

## A Project Review and Learning Report

**GAGGA** GLOBAL ALLIANCE  
FOR GREEN AND  
GENDER ACTION





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## Acknowledgement

The project review and learning report is an outcome of the project ‘Increasing Women’s Influence in Local Governance for Gender and Climate Smart Plans and Programmes’ implemented by Prakriti Resources Centre. We would like to put on record our gratitude to Both Ends and Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) for their grant assistance for the project, and the women’s groups, whose commitment and effort led to the success of this project. All those, who have been directly and indirectly involved in this project, and the municipalities, other government agencies and officials, who have contributed to the project, deserve our sincere thanks.

Prepared by: **Binay Dhital**

Coordination: **Pradeep Bhattarai**

Advice: **Prabin Man Singh and Raju Pandit Chhetri**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	Beyond Beijing Committee
C&D Dialogue	Climate and Development Dialogue
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DAEs	Directly Accredited Entities
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
GAGGA	Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action
GCF	Green Climate Fund
LGOA	Local Government Operation Act
MoFE	Ministry of Forests and Environment
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NAP	National Adaptation Plans
NDA	Nationally Designated Authority
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NPC	National Planning Commission
OECD DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development- Development Assistance Committee
PRC	Prakriti Resources Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SFDRR	Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
USD	United States Dollar

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Prakriti Resources Centre (PRC) implemented a 30 - month project (February 2018- August 2020) in partnership with grassroots women's groups in five municipalities (hereinafter referred to as palikas and local government interchangeably) in Bagmati province to contribute to strengthening environment and gender considerations in local government's development policies, plans and programmes. The project worked in alliance with Climate and Development Dialogue (hereinafter referred to as C&D Dialogue). It was an informal platform created by a group of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) including PRC working in the areas of climate change, environment, disaster risk reduction (DRR), women's rights and sustainable development for collective learning and exchange of experiences. The idea was to educate themselves about each other's areas of work, and draw the government's attention to the interactivity among the areas. In alliance with C&D Dialogue the project also intended to make Green Climate Fund (GCF) process in Nepal more inclusive and gender responsive.

The project was implemented in two phases with the grant assistance of Both ENDS as part of Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA). This review is an attempt to assess the achievements of the project and document lessons learnt in three key areas: project performance, project implementation strategy and cooperation between PRC, and Both ENDS and GAGGA. This report is primarily meant for PRC, the women's groups, C&D Dialogue members, and Both ENDS and GAGGA for their own reflection and learning. Experience and learning from projects of this kind can be used to build a link between gender-just climate change policy processes at national and international levels. The project supported women to enhance their agency that led to their increased engagement with the palikas, their negotiations with the palika officials with strong logics, and gradual access to palika funds for women-led environment and climate actions. This model can be replicated by other environment justice and women's rights groups including GAGGA partners working or willing to work together with the local governments for strengthening environment and

women's rights considerations in local development plans and programmes. The achievements and learning can become motivating factors for the palikas to institutionalize gender-responsive environment and climate actions by making necessary legal and policy arrangements.

PRC commissioned an external resource person to conduct the review and document learning (over a period of three weeks between 17 July and 20 August 2020) with the purpose of bringing to the table objective observations through unbiased assessment of the project. The review drew on the discussions with the PRC team members, eight representatives of the women's groups engaged in both phases of the project and Tewa, two C&D Dialogue members, three palika and provincial government representatives and one local FM radio station. The review process was also informed by a review of project documents, reports and other relevant materials.

The project performance was assessed based on the OECD DAC criteria for evaluation of development assistance. The criteria included relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

This report is structured in three sections. Section 1 describes the purpose of the review, and provides an introduction to the national context including project context, objectives and strategies. Section 2 briefly assesses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project. Section 3 focuses on the cooperation between PRC and Both Ends/GAGGA.

## 1.1 NATIONAL CONTEXT

**Climate change and gender:** Nepal is one of the countries, most vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters. Floods and landslides occur every year, claiming hundreds of lives and causing widespread damage to infrastructure, land and livelihoods of the poor and excluded, in particular. Water sources are drying up fast due to the changing climate, increasingly causing water scarcity. Women, who make up the majority of the country's agriculture labour force,

shoulder all the household responsibilities including collecting fodder and firewood, and fetching water, are hardest hit by the impacts of climate change. They are dependent on climate-sensitive livelihoods and resources. However, low literacy rates and different forms of discrimination continue to block women's meaningful participation in civic processes and their equal say in decision making including in the areas of climate change, environment protection and natural resource management. Although the Government of Nepal has recognized gender equality as a most important inclusive development imperative, gender inequality persists as the country's socio-economic and human rights challenge.

**Political and policy environment:** The country's transition from a unitary to the federal system of government led to the election of three tiers of government—federal, provincial and local or municipalities and rural municipalities (palikas) in 2017. There are now seven provinces and 753 palikas with over 35,000 representatives elected to the palikas, of which 41% are women and 20% Dalits or the so called “untouchables”.

Under the federal structure the palikas have both exclusive and concurrent authorities to formulate and implement policies, laws and plans. This is an unprecedented moment for the palikas to institutionalize democratic processes, right the wrong notion of “development” as synonymous with infrastructure building and initiate environmentally balanced and gender-responsive development activities. It is also an opportunity for the palikas to contribute to the country's commitments to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), Paris Agreement etc. However, most of the palikas are in initial stages of internalizing the centrality of environment conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and gender equality in sustainable development.

Responding to the context PRC came up with several recommendations on different occasions. Some of the key recommendations urged the government to encourage development and implementation of a national plan for promoting green and low carbon economy to curb the use of fossil fuel and thereby combat climate change. It also repeatedly emphasized that climate change issues cannot be dealt with in isolation; rather they should be integrated into the overall development planning in conformity with

SDGs and SFDRR. Given the current acceleration of environment degradation and the growing frequency and magnitude of disasters in the country PRC also advocated for a mechanism that places equal weight on environment and disaster as in other five priority sectors in local government plans, programmes and budgets. To some extent these recommendations have been reflected in some of the key government documents such as the National Climate Change Policy, the 15th Five-Year Periodic Plan and the government policy and programmes for fiscal year 2020/2021.

The country's constitution guarantees clean and healthy environment as one of the fundamental rights of the citizens and describes the protection, promotion and sustainable use of natural resources as the duties of government. According to the Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017, conservation of environment, biodiversity, disaster risk management, conservation of watershed and wildlife, promotion of renewable energy and small hydro projects etc. fall within the domain of the palikas. Similarly, the National Climate Change Policy 2019 aims at socio-economic prosperity through development of climate resilient society. It provides for mainstreaming climate change (mitigation and adaptation), and gender equality and social inclusion into development policy, plans and programmes. It has also provisioned investment of over 80 per cent of climate funds in community level activities. The policy also mandates the palikas to implement mitigation and adaptation activities, and formulate and implement necessary laws, strategies, policies and guidelines for this purpose.

The current 15th Five-year Periodic Plan of the government is committed to ensuring citizen's right to live in a clean and healthy environment through pollution control, proper management of solid waste and promotion of greenery. The government policy and programmes for fiscal year 2020/2021 has emphasized environmentally balanced development projects and programmes. It has encouraged palikas and provincial governments to implement adaptation pilot programmes and prioritized promotion of renewable energy, climate adaptation and resilience, and disaster management programmes.

Nepal's climate change programmes and projects are funded through both international financing and domestic revenue. Quite sizeable chunk of the national budget is transferred to the palika and provincial levels as part of inter-governmental fiscal transfer. The budget



preparation guideline for the palikas requires that environment and disaster be made part of the criteria for selecting new programmes and projects. However, climate, environment and gender issues are yet to find adequate priority in the palikas' programmes and budgets.

**Project intervention:** In this context PRC implemented the project (phase 1) entitled "Strengthening CSO Engagement in Nepal's Climate Finance Debate" from 2018 to 2019 in partnership with 20 grassroots women's groups, which were long-time grantee partners of Tewa. It was a mutually benefiting collaboration as these groups and Tewa wanted to add environment and climate change perspective to their activities focused primarily on women's rights and empowerment, while PRC needed to strengthen gender aspect of its work in the areas of climate change and environment.

The project support in this phase focused on, among other areas, enhancing the women's knowledge of climate change, climate finance, environmental justice, palika level planning and budget preparation processes, and the women's advocacy skills to demand a say in the processes. The project also worked together with C&D Dialogue in organizing multi-stakeholder discussions on climate finance, particularly GCF process and collective advocacy for environment and gender responsive public policies and plans. In this phase the project envisaged that grassroots women understand climate change and climate finance issues, become able to bring their needs and initiatives and gender perspective to climate finance debates and contribute to dialogues on devolution of climate resources to local government level. The project also intended to work together with federal level civil society networks for effective participation in national policy dialogue on climate finance, particularly from GCF and for building macro-micro linkage through which to collectively influence the government and policy makers to make climate finance gender-responsive, transparent and accountable.

In the beginning, PRC's sole focus on research and policy work made efficient project management quite hard to come by. It was learning by doing while implementing the project phase 1. However, the experience and learning from this phase taught PRC a lot about the art of project management. Phase 2 (2019-2020) of the project was built on the experience and learning, and project cycle has been managed more effectively.

In the first phase, the project supported 20 women's groups from different palikas across Nepal. Experience from phase 1 taught PRC that it was beyond the project's capacity to provide quality support to such a large number of groups spread over many palikas, and conduct adequate field monitoring. Therefore, in consultation with Tewa and HIMAWANTI, an organization working in both women's rights and environment protection, PRC selected some groups from among the existing 20 and the HIMAWANTI grantee partners, which aspired to lead the agenda of women's rights and environmental justice in phase 2 of the project entitled 'Increasing Women's Influence in Local Governance for Gender and Climate Smart Plan and Programmes'. The groups, all in Bagmati province, included Ojashwee Women's Group, Nagarjun municipality; Pragatisheel Women's Multi-purpose Agriculture Group, Kageshwori Manahara municipality; Saraswoti Nari Chetana Saving and Credit Cooperatives, Bhethanchowk rural municipality, Maiti Manch Dolakha, Bhimeshwor municipality; and Karambot Krishak Mahila Samuha, Manthali municipality.

The groups received dedicated support for initiating constructive engagement with the palikas advocating for climate and gender responsive development policies, plans and programmes, and transparent and accountable local governance processes. This phase aimed at effective engagement of women's groups in planning and budget preparation processes at palika levels, and consequently strengthened climate and gender aspects in palika level policies, plans and budget. Similarly, more effective advocacy at federal level for actions to address gender concerns in climate change plans, programmes and financing, and increased engagement with the GCF accredited entities and Nationally Designated Authority (NDA) seeking inclusive and gender responsive GCF process were also part of the expected results.

**Project implementation strategy:** While working in the areas of research and study, building awareness, knowledge and capacity of CSOs and policy intervention in the areas of climate finance, climate resilient development practices etc, PRC was considering strengthening gender aspect of its work. Around that time PRC and Tewa came into contact and learnt about each other's work. PRC learnt that Tewa was looking for an opportunity to collaborate with an organization or group that could support their grantee partners (women's groups) working in women's

rights and empowerment to build their knowledge of environmental justice. The mutual interest led to organic relationship and collaboration between PRC and Tewa, which is now one of the active members of the C&D Dialogue.

It was for the first time that PRC was working directly with grassroots level women's groups. The issues of climate change, climate finance, GCF, environmental justice, disproportionate impact of climate change on women's lives, palika level planning and budgeting process etc, could easily be complex and too technical for them to understand. What transpired from PRC's formal and informal interactions with the women's groups that natural resource management was part of their day-to-day life. They were experiencing problems such as drying up of water sources, degradation of arable land, waste management, decrease in agricultural yield and over use of chemical fertilizers etc. But they were not able to link these problems to the impacts of climate change and environment degradation. That is why they wanted to build knowledge and work in these areas as part of their regular activities. PRC, therefore, tailored its support closely to their context by, for example, simplifying and explaining complicated issues and concepts in a manner, language and format matching the level of education and awareness of the women.

Likewise, collaboration with PRC benefitted Tewa in terms of the support the women's groups associated with it received. The support served as a spur to the women's increased agency in the areas of gender, environment and climate responsive development through effective

advocacy and lobbying, and their increased engagement and influence in palika level development planning and budgeting etc. Tewa now feels more comfortable and confident to participate in informed dialogues on issues of climate change including GCF and environment linking them to women's rights and empowerment.

Building the knowledge and capacity of the women's groups to add environment and climate change perspective to their ongoing activities at the community level was also the project's strategy. Tewa has already started funding also the projects proposed by its regular grantee partners (the women's groups) using environment lens. Part of the strategy was also to empower the women's groups to engage with the palikas and influence local development planning and budgeting processes with a focus on women's right to clean and healthy environment, livelihoods, water etc.

As policy influencing both at palika and federal levels was central to institutionalization of gender and climate/environment responsive, transparent and accountable development planning, the project needed to work in alliance with other actors. It therefore worked with C&D Dialogue as an ally in federal level policy engagements based on grassroots level realities and learning generated from the women's groups' work at the palika level.

As strengthening the voice of the rights holders (women's groups) would lead nowhere if the voice fell onto the deaf ears of those in positions of power, the project adopted the strategy of working with both sides: the rights holders and the duty bearers.

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## 2. PROJECT PERFORMANCE AND LEARNING

### 2.1 RELEVANCE

**Relevance to federal Nepal:** The project is highly relevant in the context of federal Nepal. As has been discussed in section 1.1 the constitution, the LGOA, the National Climate Change Policy 2019, the current 15th Five Year Periodic Plan and the government Policy and Programme for the current fiscal year emphasize environmentally balanced and, gender responsive development at all tiers of government. The constitution and the LGOA have given the palikas authorities to develop necessary policies, laws, plans and programmes related to environment exclusively and concurrently with other tiers of government (provincial and federal) and make necessary budgetary arrangements to execute them. In a broad sense the project intends to contribute to translation into practice the gender and environment related provisions laid out in the constitution and other legal and policy guidelines existing at the federal level. This is the most critical time to support environment and women's CSOs, and palika representatives to work together for establishment of environment-friendly and gender responsive development as one of the priority agendas at the palika level. This is also an opportunity for the palikas to develop legal and policy frameworks as guided by the constitution, the LGOA and other policy guidelines for this purpose.

In essence, as organization focused on research and policy intervention, PRC was not much into project implementation. It focused more on research-based policy influencing in the areas of environment and climate change at the central government level before the country transitioned from a unitary to the federal system. In view of the newly elected palikas emerging as the locus for political decision-making in several sectors including environment and climate change, PRC took a strategic move to maintain its relevance in the new political system. While maintaining its focus on original research-heavy work portfolio, PRC decided to design and implement the project "Strengthening CSO Engagement in Nepal's Climate Finance Debate". It provided a new impetus to PRC's ongoing influencing work focusing on devolution of climate funds from the federal to the palika level. Meanwhile, the project

marked the beginning of PRC's intervention at palika level in partnership with grassroots women's groups thereby helping it to build a micro-macro linkage. The palikas are now in a position to make necessary legal and policy arrangements based on their contexts for political decision-making that supports resource allocation for areas felt essential by the citizens. This was an opportunity for the women's groups to take up the issues affecting them with the palikas and demand actions. In this context the groups received project support for their empowerment to engage the palikas in their agenda of climate and gender-just development activities.

The project focused on alliance building, enhancing the women's knowledge of climate change, climate finance particularly from GCF, environmental justice, and palika level planning and budget preparation processes. The project also enhanced the women's capacity to participate in informed dialogues on these areas and equipped them with advocacy and leadership skills to claim space in the local governance processes. Building on its experience and learning during the first year (2018-2019), the project made some adjustments in its approach during phase 2 (2019-2020). The project support was directed to further strengthening the voice and influencing role of the rights holders and interacting with the duty bearers on the importance of integrating women's rights, and climate and environment considerations into palika level plans and programmes. C&D Dialogue platform, which has emerged as an organized platform at the federal level, was able to conduct several events facilitating policy dialogue on climate change and development among diverse actors from the federal as well as palika level.

**Relevance of project objectives:** The two objectives of the project sit in a hierarchy where achievement of the first phase objective leads to the achievement of the one in phase two. The objectives are:

- *Phase 1 objective: Nepali environmental and women's civil society organizations along with their grassroots constituencies contribute to making climate finance equitable, gender responsive, transparent and accountable.*

- *Phase 2 objectives: Environment and women's civil society organizations influence government's obligation to make development policies, plans and programmes climate and gender responsive thereby contributing lessons learnt to relevant regional and global forums.*

In principle, the political transition, the constitution and other guiding policies developed by the federal government, which can be used as references by the palikas to develop their context-specific legal and policy frameworks, are highly in favour of the project focal issues. But in practice, climate change, environment, climate finance, women's rights and gender and climate responsive development practices are yet to find due priority at all levels of government. This testifies to the relevance of both the objectives of the project. Phase 1 of the project focused on building CSO alliance and empowering grassroots women's groups, building grassroots-federal level linkage and rapport building with the palika elects and staff. This paved the way for productive engagement between them and the women's groups in the second phase. The intention was to enable the women to confidently engage in dialogues with palika office bearers as well as at the community level, effectively advocate for gender and climate-responsive development planning at palika level, hold the duty bearers to account and input the policy influencing work at the federal level through the C&D Dialogue platform.

The project also intended to contribute to GCF process that has just started in Nepal. International Economic Cooperation Coordination Division in the Ministry of Finance has started functioning as NDA and GCF Readiness Programme has begun its work. The NDA has started selection of Directly Accredited Entities (DAEs). Majority of stakeholders were yet to properly understand GCF and its financing modalities and priorities. The project's contribution centered around this area.

## 2.2 EFFECTIVENESS

The review finds the project effective and in the right trajectory. Particularly central is the empowerment of the grassroots women to exercise their citizenship and advocate for women's rights and environmental justice at the palika level. Project's work with C&D Dialogue as an ally helped in linking the grassroots voices and learning to advocacy and influencing work at the federal level. As a strong demand side is all without purpose in the absence of a responsive supply

side, the project engaged the palika elects and staff in the project activities, where possible. This helped create opportunity for rapport building and seeking their commitment to environment-friendly and gender responsive development plans and budgets at Palika level.

Building on the achievements and learning from phase 1 the women's groups have been able to secure a say in palika level planning and budgeting processes. There is growing realization among palika office bearers that as development priorities skewed more to infrastructure building has negatively impacted on the environment they need to be more sensitive to gender and environment aspects in their development planning. Some of them have already started incorporating climate and gender considerations in their policies, plans and budget. The actions are complemented by policy influencing work primarily at federal level for addressing gender concerns in climate change policy and making GCF process inclusive and gender responsive.

This following section reviews the achievements of the project along with challenges and lessons learnt.

### A learning sharing platform evolving into an effective policy influencing forum

The C&D Dialogue is emerging into a well-organized platform for advocacy and influencing work in the areas of shared concerns. The project contributed to C&D Dialogue members' increased understanding of the GCF process, kept them updated on the latest developments in GCF's Board meetings and the progress in Nepal's accreditation processes. They were invited to participate in several interaction programmes organized as part of the project such as the one which analyzed climate finance in the country's national budgets by engaging wide range of government and civil society stakeholders. The C&D Dialogue as a platform is found to have integrated gender aspect in its actions and policy works. It has been able to organize quarterly meetings in a more planned and focused manner and regularly review its work and plan for the days ahead. PRC collaborated with the C&D Dialogue platform and other CSO allies in organizing a national round table on 'building global cooperation for enhancing climate actions in Nepal'.

With increased knowledge and confidence C&D Dialogue as a platform and its member organizations actively interacted with the Ministry of Finance,

Nepal's Nationally Designated Authority (NDA) of GCF, organizations preparing to seek GCF accreditation and other relevant stakeholders. They advocated for more transparent, participatory and inclusive process of developing proposals for GCF, strong gender considerations in such proposals and CSO engagement in such process. The Dialogue is now recognized as a vibrant CSO platform by the government and other CSOs working in climate change, environment and development sectors. It has started receiving invitation also to government programmes such as the GCF readiness project of the government. Its input in the programme was highly appreciated by the government representatives.

Devolution of climate finance from the federal to the palika level in the changed context was another advocacy issue pursued by C&D dialogue. In collaboration with PRC it organized a National Roundtable focusing on three important themes: mainstreaming gender in climate actions, financing climate and development actions; and building adaptive and resilience capacity – related to climate change. It was participated in by civil society representatives including those from women's groups associated with the project and C&D dialogue member organizations, senior government officials, and independent experts. The recommendations of the event, which were informed by the practical experience of the women participants, were submitted to, among other organizations, MoFE and National Planning

Commission (NPC). MoFE was at that time in the process of reviewing the National Climate Change Policy 2011 and NPC was drafting the 15th five-year development plan. Some of the key recommendations have been reflected in the revised policy and the 15th five-year plan as described in section 1.1 above. It also organized a day-long National Conference of Practitioners on Climate Change: Linking Policy to Practices. Also at the conference, C&D Dialogue developed and released a call for action coinciding with the UN General Assembly and Climate Action Summit 2019. About three dozen CSOs endorsed the 'Nepali CSOs' Call for Action: Building Global Cooperation for Enhancing Climate Actions in Nepal' urging the government to strongly demand urgent and ambitious actions to address climate change in the UN General Assembly and Climate Action Summit 2019. Some other key actors like Nepal SDGs Forum led by NGO Federation of Nepal and Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC) also joined hands in organizing the event. It is organising webinar series on GCF to facilitate discussion among NDA, DAEs and other stakeholders on various aspects of GCF and its relevancy in the national context. Mainstreaming gender in GCF funded programmes and projects; strengthening MSMEs in GCF financing; relevancy of climate financing and GCF post COVID are some of the webinar topics. C&D Dialogue is currently contributing to the revision of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and formulation of National Adaptation Plans (NAP).



*Figure 1: Speakers in an event organized by C&D Dialogue (From left to right): Shanta Laxmi Shrestha, Chairperson, Beyond Beijing Committee; Dr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Former UN Under Secretary General; Min Bahadur Shahi, Member, National Planning Commission; Dr. Maheshwor Dhakal, Head, Climate Change Management Division, Ministry of Forests and Environment and Gehendra Gurung, Climate Change Expert.*

## Challenges:

- GCF process did not gain expected momentum during the project period in Nepal. Only recently, Nepal secured its second GCF funded project and one of the four prospective DAEs got accreditation. The project started discussion on important agenda such as gender, participation and inclusion in GCF discussions. However, results in this area are not as encouraging as in other project focal areas.
- C & D Dialogue members are busy with their own organizational priorities despite their commitment to engage in and support the Dialogue activities. Often it is difficult to implement dedicated capacity building activities for C&D Dialogue members as planned. The C&D Dialogue discussed this and agreed to design frequent short capacity building sessions back to back with the Dialogue meetings rather than long training events.
- Individual passion and commitment to climate, gender and development issues of mostly individual staff members of the CSOs is keeping C&D Dialogue vibrant as a loose platform. All the organizations they represent may not necessarily share the same level of passion and commitment at organizational level. So in general the representation in the platform is more of individual not institutional nature. The vibrancy of the platform may wane, and the knowledge and learning may not remain with the institutions but with the individual staff members, who regularly represent them in the platform, when they leave their respective organizations or dissociate themselves for other reasons.

## Learning:

- Capitalizing on its increased recognition and credibility, it is essential for C&D Dialogue to advocate for a national policy framework for mainstreaming gender in climate change programmes and projects. Such a policy framework will oblige the palikas, and provincial and federal governments to make sure women's interests, needs and aspirations are reflected in plans and programmes on climate change and environment protection.
- The updated National Climate Change Policy 2019 has prioritized mainstreaming of gender and social inclusion in climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes as one of the main objectives. This has opened up opportunities for

women's rights organizations to build on their engagements in climate change discourse. C&D Dialogue will be an ideal platform for supporting the women's rights organizations.

- Due to C&D Dialogue's increased recognition at the civil society and government sectors more CSOs are seeking association with the platform. While it is essential to keep the number of the platform members to a desired limit, the growing interest of other CSOs to join the platform can be capitalized on in terms of seeking institutional level commitment for a sustained collaboration in addressing the issues pursued by the platform. It will also contribute to their institutional knowledge building.

## Women's effective engagement with palikas leads to promising changes

The women's groups were focused more on women's rights and had heard about environmental justice and climate change, and were looking for an opportunity to learn about what climate change and environmental justice are about, what is the nexus between climate change and gender equality, what role they could play in addressing these issues etc. They also wanted to learn about the newly emerged federal system of government, the mandates and functions of the three tiers of government and how people in general like them, particularly women, could engage the palikas in discussions on issues affecting them.

Given the high potential demonstrated by the women's group to emerge as change agents, the project provided tailored knowledge and capacity building supports to them. Training programmes on climate change including the nexus between gender and climate change, palika level planning and budgeting cycle and processes, and advocacy, lobbying and leadership skills etc were organised for them. The project also facilitated the initial trust building and lobby meetings between the women's groups, and the mayors, deputy mayors and senior officials in all five palikas in phase 2. As sensitization was equally necessary for both palika elects and staff on the project focal issues a workshop was organized with the palika representatives on making palika level development plans and budget climate and gender responsive.

Following the workshop the project facilitated series of dialogues between the women's groups and the palika officials focussing on palika level plans and budgets



Figure 2: Members of women's groups participating in the training on the municipal level budgeting and planning process organized by PRC and Tewa.

in all the five palikas. These formal capacity building supports and facilitation were combined with regular follow-up support and coaching via phone calls and they were also provided various relevant knowledge products such as Resource Book on Climate Change and Gender, Briefing Paper on Gender and Climate Change, Information Brief on Harnessing GCF Resources in Nepal etc. As a preparation for their effective participation in community level planning meetings to be organized by the palikas, the project supported the women's groups to prepare project proposals to address environmental problems and climatic risks specific to their municipalities. Restrictions on travels and gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic led to cancellation of some of the remaining capacity building activities towards the end of phase 2 such as training for women in social accountability tools, and implementing new activities such as FM radio programme.

These supports increased the women's confidence to initially talk about climate change and environmental problems and their direct effects on women's lives within their groups and at the community level. They established the practice of sharing the knowledge they gained through participation in the project activities with other members of their groups and their neighbours in the communities. Such sharing led more and more women to coming forward and collectively planning and executing various activities contributing

to environment conservation in their communities. They gradually started actively participating in public forums and advocating for their agenda. They also increased their engagement with the palika office bearers inquiring about the budget and programmes on climate change, environment conservation and women's issues, and demanding transparent and participatory planning and budget preparation processes. Many of the women, who had never before even visited the palika office, described the opportunity to directly interact with the elected officials as a morale booster that has further motivated them to continue their engagement with palikas to address environmental, gender and other issues affecting them.

"I walked through the Palika office very often during the last few years but I had not participated in any meeting in the Palika. Today, I am so happy that I am sitting in the Palika and holding discussion on Palika level plan and budget."

- Ms. Bimala Chadangel,  
a representative of the women's group, Nagarjun  
municipality.

As provisioned by the LGOA the palikas are required to collect community level needs and demands as part of a 7-step planning process. Previously, hardly any women

took part in the process and even if some were present there, they would simply watch and listen, while the males from the community put forth their demands, mostly related to infrastructure, especially, roads building etc. However, the project-supported women's groups, who have learnt about the planning process and how to influence it, started actively participating in it. They participated in the planning meetings with written proposals based on their needs seeking funding for the proposed projects. They themselves wanted to implement the projects and, if not, wanted them to be included as part of the overall plan the projects and, if not, wanted them to be included the palikas. They have now understood that they have full right to make sure that the palika level plans and budgets reflect their needs and interests, and the palikas have to deliver on their duties and responsibilities, and be accountable to the citizens.

The project support that led the women to engaging with the palikas and enjoying initial successes in their work in terms of positive responses and actions from the palikas, has served as an eye opener for them. All the women associated with the project during both phases are working to realise their rights to have a say in local governance through participation in palika level planning and budgeting. They are focussing on their right to food security, water, and clean and healthy environment, while at the same time exploring and translating various ideas into realities.

One of the several examples would be the achievement of Pragatisheel Bahu-uddeshyia Krishak Mahila Samuha (women farmers' group) of Kageshwari Manahara. It is only after their association with the project they understood the inter-linkage between agriculture, and climate change and environment. It prompted them to take measures for protecting natural water sources, planting trees to control erosion caused by a river in their community, stopping illegal excavation of sand in the river and so on. At their own initiative, they recently interacted with an under-secretary of the MoFE, a member of parliament and the palika officials separately, who positively responded to their concerns and ideas about a range of issues including environment protection, climate change adaptation, livelihoods etc. They have not received any concrete support from them yet. However, this shows the women's commitment and their increased confidence to engage with the duty

bearers and claim their rights. The group has recently been able to access NPR 480,000 (App. USD 4,800) from the provincial Ministry of Physical Infrastructure Development. With the money they bought and distributed one baby buffalo each to 22 poor families in the community so that they can produce milk and use buffalo dung as manure for agriculture, and improve their livelihood.

I found the women farmers' group very active. I am particularly impressed by their keen interest in agriculture, environment protection, disaster management and poverty alleviation. Therefore, on behalf of the provincial government, I provided them the budget as a support for improving the livelihoods of poor families through production of milk and manure for agriculture.

*- Rameshwar Fuyal, Minister for  
Physical Infrastructure Development,  
Bagmati province.*

Some of the women's groups have become creative enough to add beautification aspect to their environment protection work. Maiti Manch Dolkha of Bhimeshwar municipality initiated keeping orange coloured big plant pots with ever green plants in front of the houses of the group members. In course of time, as many as 250 houses followed suit completely changing the ambience of the locality. Initially, the project provided a small amount to the group for this initiative. Later, the mayor, who got impressed by this idea, promised to the women's group that the palika office will soon put plant pots along the roads. With the project support, the women's group, in collaboration with the local Kalinchok FM station, ran an awareness (radio) programme on climate change and environment. The programme brought together elected representatives, political party leaders, environment experts, CSO representatives including women on a weekly basis. The programme facilitated discussions among them on climate change and environment issues, their effects on life and livelihood, ways to mitigate such impacts and mainstreaming climate adaptation, environment conservation and disaster risk management in the palika level planning and budgeting.



While this radio programme is contributing to raising public awareness about climate change and environment issues, the palikas seem to be more willing to prioritize these issues in their policy and programmes. Inspired by this programme's effectiveness, we are planning to give continuity to such programme on our own.

- Kalinchok FM station manager Jivan Lama.

The women's groups that the project supported during the first phase are giving continuity to the project initiatives with equal vigour. Janajagaran Women's Group of Badhaiyataal palika, Bardiya is one of them, which provided disaster preparedness training to women representatives from all wards of the palika with financial support from the palika and Tewa. The women's group prioritized this training because the area is highly flood-prone and it is the women who are hardest hit during any flooding events. The trainees are now raising public awareness about preparedness and lobbying the palika for prioritizing disaster preparedness in their plan.

Similarly, the Didi Bahini Women's Group of Jwalamukhi rural municipality, Dhading has demonstrated their entrepreneurship by replacing plastic plates with plates made of saal tree leaves. Initially, their plan to stop the use of plastic in the area gave rise to this idea. The lockdown following the COVID-19 pandemic became a fortuitous moment. Instead of lazing around during the lockdown more and more women took to preparing leaf-plates, while, at the same time, demand for leaf-plates increased for serving food to hundreds of people in the community quarantine facilities as the plates are bio-degradable and easy to dispose of. While it has been a good service, the women engaged in this enterprise are making some income even during the lockdown.

### Challenges:

- Increase in the number (20) of grassroots women's groups involved in this project as against the originally planned seven was a challenge in the first phase. It was challenging for the project officer to meet the groups' needs for guidance, advice and technical supports. In that situation, other staff members of PRC supported the project officer. As it was not practically possible to retain the number, the project brought down the number to five in phase 2 and provided them dedicated support,

while also engaging the other groups occasionally in relevant project activities.

- The women's groups engaged in both phases of the project have taken several inspiring initiatives in their respective palikas. Some of them have been captured in this report. However, visiting the groups and adequately documenting such initiatives as success stories has been a challenge due to limited budget allocated for monitoring and lately, due to travel restrictions following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic also caused cancellation of some crucial activities such as training in accountability tools for the women, which was to lead to the women's groups organizing public hearing on (de) prioritization of gender equality and environment conservation in palika level plans and budgets. These two activities were very important for demanding accountability on the part of the palikas and encouraging the women's groups to use other accountability tools such as community score card and right to information. However, as the training manual is in place, Tewa has agreed to organize the training with the support of PRC once it becomes possible- even after the project closure. Some of the remaining activities have been replaced with other activities such as FM radio programme, which contributed to achieving the project objective.

### Learning:

- It is mutually beneficial if a project and its partners, who take the implementation responsibility on the ground, share objectives and interests, and complement each other. Such partnership enhances ownership and increases the sustainability potentials of initiatives.
- For women's participation and leadership to be more effective focused support is essential to increase their knowledge of existing and other required legal and institutional arrangements and enhance their influencing capacities. For example, instead of engaging many women's groups as in phase 1 the project identified five highly potential groups and provided them tailored support, which yielded better results in phase 2 than in the previous phase.
- Project activities designed to capitalize on opportunities to influence policy and practice mostly take a long time to yield results. However, activities that are well thought out and well-timed will lead

to even immediate results. This project provided a training including project proposal development skill to the women's groups coinciding with palikas' community level discussions as part of their planning process. This led to the women applying the knowledge and skills just after the training to effectively influencing the planning and budgeting process by presenting their need-based proposals and bringing out immediate results as described in this report.

- In the areas with similar context, sharing of one group's success stories explaining practical experience along with potential challenges and solutions with other groups encourages the latter to follow suit and yield results. Under this project some women's groups were able to access palika grants for projects proposed by them in 2019. As part of its planning activities the project facilitated experience sharing among the women's groups. The other women's groups, whose demand for grants was rejected by the palikas previously, tried again in 2020 more effectively and secured palika grant support. The women's groups, which succeeded in the first year continued engagement with the palikas this year also. All the other groups are also committed to continuing their engagement with palikas in the coming years also.
- Empowerment activities and guidance closely tailored to the specific context of project partners and beneficiaries acts as a spur to their enhanced agency. This project's support to the women's groups has not limited them to just implementing the planned project activities. They are rather identifying and deciding their own priorities and taking actions thereby enhancing the sustainability potential of their initiatives.
- For collaboration between two or more organizations (eg: PRC, Tewa, HIMAWANTI) to be meaningful it is essential to make sure they are willing and able to complement each other, there is high sense of mutuality and the collaboration is mutually beneficial.
- A project designed to empower grassroots level women to lead such agenda as gender and environment-friendly local development planning should ensure the capacity building supports, communication and interactions are closely tailored to the context of the women, their needs and interest, and the backgrounds they come from.

### **Increased palika responsiveness towards environment and gender responsive development planning**

Engagement with the project has led the mayors and deputy mayors to realising that more focus on infrastructure development without proper engineering and environmental impact assessment is adversely affecting the environment. They are gradually realising the need to take measures to pre-empt and mitigate such impacts as landslides and droughts, drying of water springs and other environmental problems caused by wishful infrastructure development.

Bethanchok palika's plan for the previous fiscal year included activities such as construction of water ponds, solid waste management, conservation of drinking water sources and disaster risk reduction. Its 'one-house-one-improved cooking stove' scheme intended to reduce firewood consumption and thereby contribute to conservation of forests and reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions. According to Ms. Maya Kumari Karki, deputy mayor of Manthali palika, which is badly affected by drought, the palika has set aside NPR 4,792,000 (USD 45,000) in fiscal year 2019-2020 for climate-induced disaster risk reduction activities including tree plantation, construction and management of parks, water recharge ponds and solid waste management, and plans to continue such activities in the coming fiscal years as well. Meanwhile, Bhimeshwar municipality has started working in adaptation and mitigation by emphasizing conservation and effective management of community forests, according to deputy mayor Kamala Basnet. On the eve of palika level planning for fiscal year 2020-2021 recently, she also asked for input from the women's groups in the palika and other CSOs working in the area of environment and climate change, which is a very good example of consultative planning process.

Apart from mainstreaming climate change and environment considerations in the development plans some palikas have also funded proposals from the women's groups. One of the proposals was funded in 2019 and the concerned palika has also pledged support to expansion of the same project, which is yielding promising results, in the coming fiscal year (Please see the box story).

A big chunk of arable land (2.54 hectares) belonging to 16 members of the Karambot Women's Agriculture Group and their neighbours was lying barren and degrading fast for years due to the lack of irrigation facility despite a big river flowing a couple of meters below the land. The issue was discussed in one of the project-supported training programmes in 2019. After returning from the training the women's group submitted to the palika a proposal for a river water lifting scheme to irrigate the field. After series of discussions the palika provided NPR 100,000 (about USD 1, 000) based on the proposal. Chairperson of the ward committee of the palika, who had also participated in a workshop organized by PRC earlier, also rooted for the women's proposal. As a token support the project also provided a small amount to buy pipes for irrigation purpose. With the money the group bought a water pump set and pipes, and lifted the water from the nearby Tamakoshi river and irrigated the land also by mobilizing some financial contribution from the land holders. The land has now been turned into an organic vegetable farm, which has become a good source of livelihood and income for the involved households. A community member, Chitra Bahadur Magar has become famous in the locality by producing the largest amount of vegetable in the land. Despite the lockdown following the COVID-19 pandemic buyers as far away as the district headquarters are coming to buy vegetables. Inspired by this visibly impressive progress, the women's group has submitted a proposal to the palika for building a vegetable collection centre so that they need not individually carry their produces to the market. If they have the collection centre, they can invite big buyers to purchase large amount of vegetables there and can also negotiate fair prices of the produces. The palika, which plans to support the replication of the water lifting model requested by another women's group, has committed to fund the Karambot Women's Agriculture Group's proposal next year, according to the group chairperson Padma Kumari Shrestha.

### Challenge:

- Working at the palika level has required PRC to meet additional compliance to get the project approved from each of the five palikas to execute the project. PRC with support from the women's groups received the approval letters from each of these palikas. At present, the project is running smoothly in all the palikas.
- The palikas expect external development partner support also in infrastructure development. Since the project focuses on capacity building, advocacy and lobby work it was difficult to convince them in the beginning. But after they saw changes in the women in terms of their increased capacity and confidence, experienced their constructive engagement in planning process putting forward their demands with good logics, and effective implementation of the women-led projects funded by the palikas, they started appreciating the women's groups and the project.

### Learning:

- Rather than focusing only on the women's group it is important to engage with the palikas as well from the very beginning, often supporting them to

build their knowledge and capacity in such areas as addressing climate change, environment protection and women's rights. This will build the palikas' confidence and also encourage them to support the women's groups' initiatives.

"After I participated in the environment related training organized by PRC in Dhulikhel, I immensely benefitted from it. Environment conservation is something that one needs to start by oneself and from one's one surrounding. So I share with every group, not just the members of Karambot Women's Group the insights I gained from the training. I advise them to pursue the issue of environment protection and remind us of the provision for budget for target groups."

*-Janak Khatri, Ward Chair, Manthali Municipality-2, Ramechhap*

- It is essential to put more focus on convincing the palikas to institutionalise the practice of ensuring gender and environment considerations in development plans through certain policy or guidelines rather than funding one off activities in these areas.

- Non-implementation of various policies, strategies and frameworks related to climate change and the absence of policy measure to ensure gender considerations in climate and environment related plans and actions is a big challenge. It is therefore imperative that PRC, C&D Dialogue and the women's groups continue their advocacy at all levels of government for their implementation and for formulation of required palika level policies based on the existing policy frameworks and guidelines.
- Working in collaboration with the palikas provides opportunities for PRC and the women's groups to closely understand their priorities and difficulties in planning and budgeting processes. The palika leaderships are generally interested to work in climate change and environment and some of them have also factored in budget for this purpose. However, they need more technical capacities to detail out programmes and projects on climate change and properly utilize the allocated budget. PRC is well placed to develop close cooperation with the palikas and provide such support.
- Absence of required policy and long-term or periodic plans on climate change and environment has constrained prioritisation and execution of environment and climate actions in a sustained manner at the palika level. There is an opportunity for PRC and C&D Dialogue member organisations to build the capacity of palikas enabling them to formulate relevant legal and policy frameworks related to gender-just climate change and environment programmes.
- Which background the palika elects come from determines largely the areas they are likely to prioritize in development planning. This project has experienced that mayors or deputy mayors, who have a background in environment and gender work have responded more positively to the women's groups demand for gender and environment-friendly development.
- At present when the exclusive and concurrent functions between the three tiers of government (palikas, provincial and federal) also related to environment and climate change are pretty confusing, project intending to contributing to policy and planning in these areas at the palika level should make sure it engages with the federal government, provincial and the palikas.

## 2.3 EFFICIENCY

The project has been able to adapt to the federal context, respond to the challenges it confronted with and build understanding and trusted relationships with both the newly emerged palikas and the grassroots women's groups. The model of knowledge and capacity building of both the women and the palika elects and staff, facilitation for bridging the distance between the palikas and the citizens (women's groups), and constructive engagement with both palika and federal government level has paved the way for gender and environment friendly planning and programmes at the palika level.

The time and money spent on doing all these will leave behind the changed realization and practice of giving priority also to gender and environmental aspects in development planning can be taken forward by the palikas. The project has been able to use external project fund to leverage palika funds and co-investment of C&D Dialogue members in various events. In response to the project support and, the advocacy and lobbying by the women's groups, commendable changes can be seen in palika level plans and budgetary allocations. Although this can be considered to be an indicator of success, it, however, needs to be made sure that the changes are not momentary -- happening just because of the strong influence of the women's groups-- rather they are a result of internalization among the palikas the importance of gender and environment responsive development.

C&D Dialogue member organizations joined hands with this project in organizing several useful events such as National Conference of Practitioners on Climate Change: Linking Practices to Policy and policy dialogue on United Nations General Assembly and Climate Action Summit 2019. Their co-financing enhanced the ownership of the themes of the events, strengthened the alliance and solidarity, and helped invite more and diverse participants to the event. On the flip side, the resource sharing led to a project budget balance a couple of times. PRC addressed the situation by planning and implementing additional activities in consultation with the women's groups and Both ENDS. During the latter half of 2020, the final year of the project, the COVID-19 pandemic brought all project activities to a halt requiring repeated re-planning due to unpredictability of the situation. Finally, PRC and Both ENDS agreed to adjust and modify some of the remaining activities and utilize part of the balance for PRC's institutional development.

## 2.4 IMPACT

It is too early to assess the impact of the project. As already discussed in detail the model of knowledge and capacity building for both the women, and palika elects and staff, facilitation for trust building between the palikas and the citizens (women's groups), and constructive engagement with both palika and federal government level with C&D Dialogue has brought about promising initial results, which are likely to lead to impact.

Already there are clear indications of change in the lives of the women directly involved in the implementation of this project in terms of their increased social status and recognition including the respectful behavior of palika office bearers towards them. There has also been tangible change in the income and livelihood status of dozens of women's group members, for example, those in Manthali, Ramechhap (vegetable farming) and Jwalamukhi, Dhading (leaf plate making enterprise).

However, the women's groups are at early stages of securing meaningful participation in local governance for gender and climate-just plan and programmes. Securing the palikas' full buy-in for institutionalization of gender-responsive and environment-friendly development practice amidst plethora of other priorities takes time. Hence much remains to be done to sustain the initiative, consolidate the initial achievements and further build on the experience and learning.

## 2.5 SUSTAINABILITY

Although it is early to assess sustainability of the project initiatives and the changes that are happening, there are already some indications that the women's groups are likely to continue with the initiatives on their own and through palika support. The trusted relationship that they have developed with palikas through constructive engagement is likely to become a sustainability factor. The knowledge, capacities, and leadership and advocacy skills that the women's groups have gained will remain with them prompting them to give continuity to and build on what they have initiated. As they are long-term Tewa and HIMAWANTI grantee partners these two organizations will potentially be supporting them in their efforts even beyond this project.

As awareness of gender equality, environmental justice and climate change among the palika office bearers and at the community level remains nascent de-prioritization of these issues is always a risk. As there is no particular sectoral committee and any policy or legal instrument at the palika level to address these issues in an institutionalized manner, it is difficult to ensure the palikas' accountability for these areas.

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## 3. COOPERATION BETWEEN PRC AND BOTH ENDS/GAGGA

The cooperation between GAGGA/Both ENDS and PRC is based on their shared vision. This project is well in alignment with the vision of GAGGA, which aims to catalyse the collective power of women's rights and environmental justice movements towards realising a world in which women can and do exercise their rights to water, food security, and a clean, healthy, and safe environment.

The cooperation played a catalytic role while PRC was growing as an organization. At a time when PRC was working to effectively implement its cross cutting theme, which is gender equality, social inclusion and governance, the project acted as a spur to translation of this theme into actual practice. The partnership facilitated the linkage of PRC, primarily confined to the federal level, to the community/palika level thereby supporting the expansion of the horizon of its work and providing the opportunity to develop a crucial micro-macro linkage, and earn rich experience working with the grassroots women and the palika elects and staff.

The project became a medium for PRC to organize national conferences and policy dialogues bringing together multiple actors and facilitating discussion on crucial themes related to climate change, GCF, gender and climate responsive development, policies and practices in these areas etc. Experience and learning from its work with the grassroots women's groups has been made possible by GAGGA/Both ENDS support. It is also the cooperation with GAGGA/Both ENDS, which provided PRC the opportunity to collaborate with different organizations like Tewa and HIMWANTI.

GAGGA/Both ENDS support to PRC is not limited to project implementation. It has contributed to PRC's institutional development in terms of its support for developing this report, reviewing and updating of PRC organizational strategy and policies, and also personnel development. Overall, this collaboration has helped PRC to grow into a more mature and established organisation. Such a support will have a long-term positive impact on the organization's life.

### Challenges:

- Despite the highly inspiring changes that the Both ENDS-PRC cooperation has brought about in the project implementation areas, these changes are yet to be consolidated hence call for continued effort for some time to come.
- Both ENDS' appreciation of PRC's project performance and its coverage in Both ENDS annual publication has tremendously encouraged PRC team to perform better. Meanwhile, it is also a challenge for PRC team to maintain the performance level and work hard to perform even better.
- It appears that initially, limited understanding of GAGGA movement among PRC staff members made it difficult for the project team to connect the project successes to boarder GAGGA achievements and targets.

### Learning:

- Along with designing and implementing projects it is equally important to focus on the implementing organization's organisational development as well. This helps sustain the organisation, become more professional and gain trust of all relevant stakeholders. Not necessarily project-based, but given the organizational compatibility longer-term institutional relationship and cooperation between Both ENDS and PRC would significantly contribute to their shared vision.
- Collaboration with Both ENDS has not only supported PRC's work at country level but has also familiarized PRC with regional organisations and platforms in Asia through webinars and regional activities.



Prakriti Resources Centre (PRC) is furthering the notion of sustainable development and environmental integrity, focusing primarily on climate change, disaster risk reduction & resilience building and environmental sustainability. PRC engages with diverse stakeholders including policy makers, government institutions, NGOs, academia and private sector through research and knowledge building, capacity development, policy engagement and influence.



**Prakriti Resources Centre (PRC)**  
107/22 Aruna Lama Marga,  
Ganesh Basti, Naryan Gopal Chowk,  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
☎ +977-01-4428602 | ✉ info@prc.org.np  
🌐 www.prc.org.np