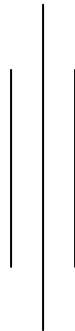


**Supporting Marginalized Ethnic Chepang Community
through Enhanced District Chepang Rights Forum (DCRF)**



**Progress Report
(March - December 2009)**



**Submitted To:
Taiwan Foundation For Democracy**

**Submitted By:
World Vision Advocacy Forum (WVAF) Nepal
Bafal, Kathmandu**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Country:	Nepal
Title of Project:	Supporting Marginalized Ethnic Chepang Community through Enhanced District Chepang Rights Forum (DCRF)
Implementing Agency:	World Vision Advocacy Forum (WVAF) Nepal , Kathmandu in close coordination with Nepal Chepang Association, Kathmandu and its district chapters , from Chitwan and Makwanpur in the central region
Location:	Chitwan and Makwanpur districts
Starting Date:	March 2009
Date of Completion:	December 2009

1.1 Introduction

Chepangs are the earliest known inhabitants of Nepal and one of the most backward indigenous nationalities of Nepal. Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) has categorized Chepangs “as the second most backward/marginalized community” from the bottom list from among the 59 marginalized Indigenous Communities listed by it (Source: Nepal Chepang Association). Total population of Chepang is 52,237 (2001 Census) out of which male population is 26,685 and that of female population is 25,552. Today almost 90 percent of Chepangs are leading life under utter poverty. Further while only 23 percent of them are literates, literacy rate among Chepang women is only 1 percent (Educate Chepang Initiative).

Chepangs live in the wildest imaginable state of nature and many of them still lead a primitive life. Although about 70.5% of Chepang speak their Mother tongue belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family yet they have no written script. Mass illiteracy, extreme poverty, primitive agriculture, lack of food, high incidence of malnutrition, landlessness and living in the vicinity of the dense forest in the isolated rugged Mahabharat range are the major problems faced by Chepang community. Their subsistence economy is based on forest resources. While the Chepangs were living a nomadic life, most of the land good for cultivation was occupied by other communities, leaving them only the sloped, arid and stony land to choose from. These areas are absolutely isolated from the modern developments and are not linked by any motorable roads. During the dry season, because of the frequent famines Chepangs are forced to live on with almost no food every year.

Although many Chepang practice shifting cultivation, but they do not own the land, mainly because they do not have citizenship certificates required for the land ownership papers and lack of citizenship certificates means no rights to own land, secure jobs even in private corporation and no government loan and banking supports as well as no right to vote and protection from the state. Today about 62% of the Chepang people are landless and about 85% of them do not have citizenship (Sixth National Chepang Assembly, Chitwan Declaration, September 2005). Landlessness and denial of citizenship certificate has become a major problem among the Chepang community.

Thus the present programme entitled "**Supporting Marginalized Ethnic Chepang Community through Enhanced District Chepang Rights Forum (DCRF)**" funded by Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) was conceptualized and implemented by WVAF

Nepal with the intention to make them critically aware on the various issues concerning Chepangs such as land, citizenship, human rights, cultural rights etc. through capacity building initiatives such as formation of District Chepang Rights Forum in the districts of Chitwan and Makwanpur where Chepangs are found settled in large numbers having 38% and 37% population respectively and by organization of monthly sharing and interaction meetings among different stakeholders representing Chepang Village Councils, Chepang women, leaders of indigenous communities, political parties, civil society, local authorities, media personnel etc.

1.2 Key Lessons Learned

Positive:

- To make the District Chepang Rights Forum more effective it was learnt that it is necessary to build the capacity of highly backward and marginalized Chepang Communities through the various awareness raising, advocacy and trainings programmes on human rights; citizenship, land rights, political and cultural rights including ILO convention No. 169, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- To strengthen Chepang Communities' involvement in democratic process and participatory constitution making as well as promotion and protection of their human rights, citizenship, and land rights it was learnt that it is necessary to sensitize further political parties leadership, CA members, local government authorities, general public, local community etc. on their obligations to address the issues of Chepang communities in the constitution making process.
- Similarly it was also learned that to make the DCRF (District Chepang Rights Forum) more effective and representative of entire district it was necessary to expand DCRF at the Illaka (sub district)/VDC level.
- It was learned that it is necessary to replicate the project in other strongholds of Chepang like Dhading and Gorkha having 19% and 6% Chepang population respectively.
- It was also learned that the literate Chepangs are very conscious about the plight of their community people and were very cooperative of the project interventions.
- It was also learned that future project should be more focused on increasing the literacy rate among the Chepangs as literacy rate among Chepang stands at less than 10 percent as against 54.1 % of the country, out of which literacy rate among Chepang women is only 1 percent (Educate Chepang Initiative).

Negative:

- It was learned that it is necessary to ensure the effective presence of local authorities in all of the monthly meetings to make them aware on the burning issues of Chepangs as well as ensure their citizenship, land and human rights.
- It was also learned that the members of DCRF lack knowledge in proper accounting or book keeping. Although the problem was solved by organizing some kind of orientation

for them by WVAF Admin and Finance Officer, but for future undertakings trainings in book keeping or accounting seems necessary.

- Geographical remoteness, lack of local transportation, difficult terrain and seasonal occupational engagements of Chepangs in general and women in particular posed a challenge for organizing the meetings in time and ensuring the desired participants.

1.3 Problems Faced and Solutions Applied

- ❖ Formation of DCRF in the initial stage (first month) of the project implementation was challenging when the project itself was yet to make its mark in the society and also in terms of incorporating membership for DCRF. However, in order to solve the problem the help and moral support of Nepal Chepang Association was sought, which had district chapters. Thus it became easy to garner the support and trust of Chepangs for the formation of DCRF at the project districts.
- ❖ The regular strikes and bandhs posed a problem for organizing the meetings in scheduled dates hence often the meetings had to be postponed/ preponed.

1.4 Major Achievements

Launching of the project: It was in the month of March 2009 that WVAF Nepal in close coordination and cooperation of Nepal Chepang Association under the chairmanship of Mr. Govindaram Chepang as well as Nepal Chepang Association District Chapters (Chitwan and Makwanpur), formally launched the programme entitled, "Supporting Marginalized Ethnic Chepang Community through Enhanced District Chepang Rights Forum" in districts of Chitwan and Makwanpur of Central Region of Nepal by organizing a sharing meeting there and briefing about the aims and objectives of the programme.

Formation of District Chepang Rights Forum (DCRF)

Chitwan

It was on 24 March, 2009 that DCRF was formed in the programme district of Chitwan through a meeting held at the District Development Committee, assembly hall at Bharatpur. The meeting was organized by Nepal Chepang Association District Chapter, Chitwan with the technical assistance of WVAF Nepal. The meeting was attended by 36 participants including Mr. Nava Raj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal, resource person Mr. Kunshang Yonzan, representatives of major political parties, local government authorities, local NGOs, Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities and media personnel. The DCRF that was formed comprised of 14 members and Mr. Dal Bahadur Chepang., Ms Sunita Chepang and Mr. Surya Bhadur Chepang were selected in the position of chairperson/coordinator, Vice chairperson and Treasurer respectively.

Makwanpur.

Similarly, it was on 25 March, 2009 that that DCRF was formed in the programme district of Makwanpur through a meeting held at the District Development Committee, assembly hall at Hetauda. The meeting was organized by Nepal Chepang Association District chapter, Makwanpur with the technical assistance of WVAF Nepal. The meeting was attended by 50 participants including Mr. Nava Raj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal, resource person, Mr. Kunshang Yonzan, representatives of major political parties, local government authorities, local NGOs, Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities and media personnel. The DCRF that was formed comprised of 17 members and Mr Khem Bhadur Chepang, Ms.

Sharmila Chepang and Mr. Binod chepang were selected in the position of chairperson/ coordinator, Vice chairperson and Secretary respectively.

The District Chepang Rights Forum both Chitwan and Makwanpur since its inception in month of March 2009 regularly held monthly meetings under the guidance and supervision of WVAF Nepal and cooperation of Nepal Chepang Association to discuss on various burning issues concerning the Chepang Community.

Second meeting (20 and 21 April, 2009):

The second meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum, Chitwan and Makwanpur were held on 20 and 21 April, 2009 at Narayani Training Centre, Hakim Chowk, Chitwan and NGO Federation hall, Hetauda respectively. The meeting was attended by 33 and 32 participants respectively including Mr. Bagh Bir Mukhiya Kumal, General Secretary, WVAF Nepal and representatives of Government line agencies, local journalists, representatives of local NGOs. While the meeting was facilitated by resource person, Mr. Kunshang Yonzan, it was chaired by Mr. Dal Bhadur Chepang and Mr Khem Bhadur Chepang respectively.

The main agenda of the second meeting was "**Land Rights Issues Concerning Chepang Community**". Mr. Yongjan made a power point presentation which contained various data related to the Chepang community. The data showed that today almost about 62% of the Chepang people are landless and about 85% of them do not have citizenship (Sixth National Chepang Assembly, Chitwan Declaration, September 2005). Landlessness and denial of citizenship certificate was a major problem among the Chepang community because for the land ownership papers citizenship certificates are required and lack of citizenship certificates means not only no right to own land, but also no rights to secure jobs even in private corporation and no government loan and banking supports as well as no right to vote and protection from the state. Mr. Yonjan also briefed about various national and international instruments such as UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous people and ILO Convention 169 to which Nepal is signatory and where it is clearly mentioned that the" governments must ensure the ownership and possession of lands and territories of indigenous people by reforming the national legal systems". The meeting concluded with the decision that the Chepang should fight for their land and citizenship rights and secure land and citizenship certificates and Nepal Chepang Association should take the lead for the same.

Third meeting (22 and 24 May, 2009):

Similarly, the third meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum, Chitwan and Makwanpur were held on 22 and 24 May, 2009 at Narayani Training Centre, Hakim Chowk, Chitwan and hotel Snowview, Hetauda respectively. The meeting was attended by 24 and 32 participants respectively. The main agenda of the third meeting was "**Educational Status among Chepang Community**". The third meeting which was chaired by Mr. Dal Bhadur Chepang and Mr Khem Bhadur Chepang in Chitwan and Makwanpur respectively was facilitated by Ms. Sita Gautam Acharya, Senior Programmme Officer, WVAF Nepal. However, Ms Acharya made a power point presentation regarding the topic where she mostly presented data related to the current status of the Chepang community in education sector in the country besides giving a brief introduction about the Chepang community as described/available in various literatures.

The major highlight of her presentation was the literacy rate among Chepang community which stood at 23 % as against 54.1 % of the country. Further her presentation concerning the data of the educated Chepang made Chepang realize that how backward was their community in education sector as according to data presented, till date only two Chepang were able to complete Master's degree and only 21 Chepang including four female were able to complete I.A and 127 Chepang including 27 female were able to complete SLC out of the total population of 52,237 (Male 26,685 and female 25,552).

Having realized their plight in the education sector the meeting in Chitwan decided to start campaigning in favour of education among the Chepang parents, teachers and students through the Chepang Committees at the VDC level. Further the meeting also decided to approach the District Education Office and other like minded NGOs to help Chepang for the construction of Secondary Schools in the nearby areas where there is strong hold of Chepang community because due to lack of schools in the nearby areas many Chepang children had and have been deprived of secondary level education.

Moreover, in Makwanpur district where the meeting was also attended by a local journalist belonging to the national daily 'Kantipur' published the news in the national daily 'Kantipur (Nepali) and Kathmandu Post (English)" about current status of Chepang in the education sector based on the data presented in the meeting which is attached herewith for your information and this succeeded in attracting the general public, politicians and government officials about the plight of the Chepangs in the education sector.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning here that the third meeting was also attended by Ms Reena Rai, Admin and Finance Officer, WVAF Nepal who facilitated on the basics of accounting in order to help them acquire knowledge regarding proper book keeping and accounting with regard to fund disbursement to the DCRF for conduction of monthly meetings.

Fourth meeting (21 and 22 June, 2009):

The fourth meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum, Chitwan and Makwanpur were held on 21 and 22 June, 2009 at Narayani Training Centre, Hakim Chowk and NGOCC Hall, Hetauda respectively. The meeting was attended by 22 and 30 participants respectively including representatives from ethnic communities such as Gurung, Tamang belonging to Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, District Chapters, representatives from major political parties and MS. Sita Gautam Acharya, Senior Programme Officer, WVAF Nepal as well as Ms Neelam Bal Lama, Admin and Finance Officer, WVAF Nepal.

The main agenda of the fourth meeting was "**Status of Chepang Community in State Restructure**". The meeting as usual was chaired by Mr. Dal Bhadur Chepang and Mr Khem Bhadur Chepang respectively and facilitated by Ms Acharya. Ms Acharya made a power point presentation and the major highlights of the presentation were discussion on definition of Indigenous Nationalities as defined by National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act 2001, National Instruments On Indigenous Peoples And Minorities such as: Provisions as mentioned in the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007, Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1992) and ILO Convention 169. Further, the presentation also included a brief discussion on Chepang National Round Table Conference (Chitwan Declaration-2064) where on the basis of the number of population Chepangs had declared Chitwan, Makwanpur,

Dhading, Gurkha and Tanahun districts as "Chepang Autonomous Federal State" in the federal democratic republic state structure of new Nepal as Nepal is currently in the new constitution making process. The meeting in Makwanpur was also addressed by the representatives from Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, District Chapters and representative from Nepali Congress who assured their full support to Chepangs in their fight for autonomous federal state. However, the meeting concluded with the discussion on the capacity of the Chepang Community for self rule and unanimous decision of the Chepang people in favour of Chepang Autonomous Federal State in the new constitution.

Fifth meeting (12 and 13 July, 2009):

The fifth meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum, Chitwan and Makwanpur were held on 12 and 13 July, 2009 at Snowview hotel, Hetauda, Makwanpur and Narayani Training Centre, Hakim Chowk, Chitwan respectively. The main agenda of the meeting was " **The Issues of Chepang in New Constitution Making**" which also had sub agendas such as the current socio, political, economic, civic and cultural status of Chepang, the international and national instruments in favour of Indigenous Nationalities such as UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Nationalities and ILO Convention 169 etc, Constitution and Constituent Assembly, Federal structure and Chepang Federal State and the burning issues of Chepang to be addressed in the new Constitution.

The meeting as usual was chaired by respective chairpersons Mr Khem Bhadur Chepang and Mr. Dal Bhadur Chepang and attended by 29 and 31 participants respectively including representatives from Federation of Indigenous Nationalities District Chapters, major political parties, Mr. Navaraj Adhikari, Executive Director and Ms. Sita Gautam Acharya, Senior Programme Officer, WVAF Nepal. The meeting was facilitated jointly by Mr. Adhikari, and Ms. Acharya who highlighted on provisions as mentioned in ILO Convention 169, UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Nationalities, constitution making and constituent assembly, Federal structure etc

The major issues raised by Chepang in the meeting included that country having decided to go in federal structure on the basis of equal representation; the federal structure should be based either on ethnicity or geographic location and according to them self determination or self rule brings development. Hence Chepang should have Chepang autonomous/federal state to be ruled by them covering in total 29 VDCs from the districts of Chitwan, Makwanpur, Dhading and Gorkha having 38%, 37%, 19% and 6% Chepang population respectively. According to them self rule is important for deciding (self-determination) their own development priorities and to exercise control over ownership and possession of lands and territories as well as promotion of economic, social, and cultural development

It was discussed in the meeting that the social, political, economic and cultural issues of Chepang should be addressed by the new constitution and also all the rights of Indigenous Nationalities as mentioned in the ILO Convention 169 should be guaranteed by the government and the government should also declare a public holiday in the major festivals of Chepang. Further, according to them government must provide opportunities to indigenous peoples for getting education and must incorporate their histories, cultures, knowledge, values, and aspirations in the curriculum and where possible, the children of indigenous peoples must be taught in their own native language.

The meeting was also addressed by the representatives from Nepali Congress and United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) who assured of discussing in their party platforms about the issues concerning to Chepangs and assured of all the help to the Chepangs regarding inclusion of Chepang issue in the new constitution making. The meeting however, concluded with the decision to forward the issues raised by chepang in the fifth meeting to the Nepal Chepang Association as well as two of the CA members belonging to Chepang Community by WVAF Nepal.

Sixth meeting (23 and 25 August, 2009):

The sixth meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum was held on 23 and 25 August, 2009 at Chitwan and Makwanpur respectively. The venue of the meeting in Chitwan was Narayani Training Centre at Hakim Chowk, Bharatpur, while in Makwanpur, it was Office of Chepang Association at Manahari in Hetauda. However, the meeting was attended by 22 and 33 participants respectively including Mr. Nava Raj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal, Ms. Neelam Bal Lama, Admin and Finance Officer (EU project) WVAF Nepal and Ms Soni Lama from National Indigenous Women Forum.

The main agenda of the sixth meeting was "**Economic Rights and Livelihood Promotion of Chepang Community**". The meeting in both Chitwan and Makwanpur was facilitated by Mr. Nava Raj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal. Ms Soni Lama also delivered few words on economic rights related to ethnic communities as provisioned in various national and international instruments such as Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007, ILO Convention 169 etc.

The main discussion point in the meeting was the current status of the Chepang community who are still leading a primitive life and whose main occupations are still hunting, fishing, collecting of edible shoots and roots. Mr. Adhikari discussed that subsistence economy of Chepang is still based on forest resources and during the dry season, because of the frequent famines Chepangs are forced to live on with almost no food every year. According to him today almost 90 percent of Chepangs are still leading life under utter poverty and 62 % of them are landless about 85% of them do not have citizenship. According to him although many Chepang practice shifting cultivation, but they do not own the land, mainly because they do not have citizenship certificates required for the land ownership and lack of citizenship certificates means no rights to own land, secure jobs even in private corporation and no government loan and banking supports as well as no right to vote and protection from the state. Thus Landlessness and denial of citizenship certificate are major problem among the Chepang community today.

He further pointed out that as Nepal has ratified ILO Convention 169 and is signatory to UN Declaration On Rights Of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and UN Declaration On Rights Of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1992) so it is the duty of the government to pursue a policy of making special provision on the basis of positive discrimination for the minorities, landless and help uplift the economically and socially backward Indigenous Nationalities by making reservations in education, health, housing, food security and employment for a certain period of time.” According to him Governments should take special measures to ensure equal employment opportunities for indigenous men and women and in addition, the governments must ensure the ownership and possession of lands and territories of indigenous people by reforming the national legal systems.

Further referring to ILO Convention 169 Mr. Adhikari pointed out that the indigenous peoples have the right to decide (self-determination) their own development priorities and to exercise control over their own economic, social, and cultural development. Thus he urged Chepang to fight for their economic rights by putting pressure on the Government to reform the national legal system in favour of indigenous nationalities as this is the right time as the country is in the process of new constitution making.

Seventh meeting (September 23 and 24, 2009):

The seventh meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum was held on 23 and 24 September, 2009 at Makwanpur and Chitwan respectively. However, while the venue of the meeting in Makwanpur was Office of Chepang Association at Manahari in Makwanpur, the venue of the meeting in Chitwan was Narayani Training Centre at Hakim Chowk, Bharatpur, Chitwan. The meeting was attended by 25 and 31 participants respectively including Mr. Bagh Bir Mukhiya Kumal, General Secretary, WVAF Nepal and Mr. Hom Raj Kunwar, Radio Programme Coordinator, WVAF Nepal.

The main agenda of the seventh meeting was "**Cultural Rights of Chepang Community and Their Access in it**". The meeting in both Chitwan and Makwanpur was facilitated by Mr. Bagh Bir Mukhiya Kumal, General Secretary, WVAF Nepal who also belongs to one of the Ethnic Minority Kumal community and is also General Secretary of the Nepal Kumal Society Improvement Committee

The main discussion point in the meeting was what is cultural rights and what are the existing cultural practices of Chepang Community including their major festivals. In the discussion it was flashed that the most important festival of Chepang is Nwagi and according to them the government should accept it as a national festival and declare public holiday on it. According to Mr. Surya Bhadur Chepang, treasurer, DCRF, Chitwan, Chepangs through Chepang Association are currently fighting for it. In the meeting another point was also raised that the Chepangs for centuries had been living in the forest near river and are originally the worshipper of nature. But now days they have been forced to migrate to other places because of the transfer of forests to the community people by the government without any compensation to them and this has forced many Chepang to become landless. The problem has further aggravated due to the lack of citizenship and voting rights among them.

However, Mr Kumal mentioned about the provisions mentioned in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1992) and ILO Convention 169 to which Nepal is signatory under which it is clearly mentioned that "**States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity**" and also "**persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination**". So according to these provisions the government should take steps for the promotion and protection of cultural rights of Chepang who have their own mother tongue and traditional customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and oral history of their own".

Lastly, the meeting concluded with the decision that the Chepangs should preserve their culture and tradition and that it is the duty of the government to help them preserve their

culture and tradition and also that government should declare Nwagi as a national festival and declare public holiday on that day.

Eighth meeting (October 25 and 26, 2009):

The Eighth meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum was held on 25 and 26 October, 2009 at Chitwan and Makwanpur and attended by 30 and 28 participants respectively including Mr. Navaraj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal, Bagh Bir Mukhiya Kumal, General Secretary, WVAF Nepal, Ms Neelam Bal Lama, Admin and Finance Officer (EU Project), WVAF Nepal and Ms Mayalu Lama Tamang, Radio Programme Presenter, WVAF Nepal. The venues of both the meeting were the same as in the previous meeting. The meeting as usual were organized by District Chepang Rights Forum, Chitwan and Makwanpur and chaired by the respective chairpersons Mr. Dal Bhadur Chepang and Mr. Khem Bhadur Chepang.

The main agenda of the 8th meeting was "**Continuation of the agenda of the seventh meeting on Cultural Rights of Chepang Community And Their Access in it**". While the meeting in Chitwan was facilitated by Bagh Bir Mukhiya Kumal, General Secretary, WVAF Nepal and Mr. Navaraj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal, the meeting in Makwanpur was also addressed by Mr. Buddha Lama, Chairperson, Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, district Chapter and Dr. / Professor Ganesh Lama, first indigenous nationality to complete a Phd degree in Chemistry. The main discussion point of the meeting were regarding ongoing cultural practices of Chepang with regards to their birth, death and marriage ceremony as well as the negative influence of the modern/ other culture among Chepangs which has resulted in many of the Chepangs forgetting their own traditional culture and religion and adopting other's culture and religion such as adoption of Hinduism and Christianity. The meeting concluded with the decision that the Chepang should focus on preserving their religion, culture and tradition instead of adopting other religion and it is the duty of the government to help them in the preservation of the same and Chepang should continue fight for their cultural rights.

Ninth meeting (November 23 and 24, 2009):

The ninth meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum was held on 23 and 24 November, 2009 at Makwanpur and Chitwan respectively. However, the venue of the meeting in Makwanpur was Office of Chepang Association at Manahari in Makwanpur while the venue of the meeting in Chitwan was Narayani Training Centre at Hakim Chowk , Bharatpur, Chitwan. The meeting was attended by 27 and 37 participants respectively including Mr. Surendra Bista, Thematic Leader, and Mr. Hom Raj Kunwar, Radio Programme Coordinator, WVAF Nepal, representatives from major political parties, representatives from local NGOs and members from Chepang community. The meeting as usual were organized by District Chepang Rights Forum, Chitwan and Makwanpur and chaired by the respective chairpersons Mr. Dal Bhadur Chepang and Mr. Khem Bhadur Chepang.

The main agenda of the ninth meeting was "**Chepang Women's Participation in Politics**" and the meeting was facilitated by Mr. Surendra Bista, Thematic Leader, and Mr. Hom Raj Kunwar, Radio Programme Coordinator, WVAF Nepal.

While Mr. Bista made a power point presentation on what is democracy, what are the main pillars, specialties, values and fundamental principles of democracy and division of power etc., Mr. Kunwar made a power point presentation on what is politics, why it is important to

have participation of women in politics and obstacles with regards to the Chepang Women's Participation in Politics' and how the participation of Chepang women in Politics' could be increased. Also what are the ongoing policies of Nepal government for increasing Women's Participation in Politics 'in general and Chepang Women's Participation in particular. The meeting decided that it was due to lack of education, extreme poverty as well as male domination that Chepang women were lagging behind in all the sectors including politics. Thus to increase their participation in politics these three factors had to be done away with. However, as the meeting was also attended by representative from CPN (UML), he made commitment to reserve one seat for Chepang Women at the district level CPN (UML) party committee.

Tenth meeting (6 and 7 December, 2009):

It is to be noted that due to Maoist strike the tenth meeting of District Chepang Rights Forum scheduled for 2 and December was held on 6 and 7 December, 2009 at Makwanpur and Chitwa respectively. While the meeting in Makwanpur was held at the Office of Federation of Indigenous Nationalities at Hetauda in Makwanpur, the venue of the meeting in Chitwan was office of Nepal Chepang Association at Bharatpur, Chitwan. The meeting was attended by 32 and 28 participants in Makwanpur and Chitwan respectively including Mr. Nava Raj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal, Ms Reena Rai, Admin and Finance Officer, WVAF Nepal and Ms Mayalu Lama Tamang, Radio Programme Presenter, WVAF Nepal.

The guest for the meeting in Makwanpur was Mr. Buddha Lama, Representative, Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, District Chapter and Ms Laxmi Chaulagain from Awaz Nepal. While the meeting in both the venue were facilitated by Nava Raj Adhikari, Executive Director, WVAF Nepal, the meeting in both the venue were chaired by the respective chairpersons Mr. Khem Bahadur Chepang and Mr. Dal Bahadur Chepang respectively.

The main agenda of the meeting was "**Political Participation of Marginalized Chepang Community**". Mr. Adhikari pointed out that for political participation it is important to come out of favoritism, Nepotism and it is the right of all the Nepalese nationalities including indigenous nationalities and minorities to equally participate in political process as well as constitution making with other nationalities. The voices of all the communities should reach the 14 sub committees established for constitution making. According to him there should be a district to central level network of Chepang women for inclusion of Chepang Women's voices in the new constitution. Mr Adhikari also mentioned about the need for inclusion of all other rights of Chepang such as cultural, economic, land, housing, food security, educational, employment etc in the constitution making as this is the right time.

It is to be noted that the meeting in Makwanpur was also addressed by the guest Mr. Buddha Lama and Ms. Chaulagain, Mr. Jagat Bajgain, Representative Nepali Congress Area no. 4

According to Mr. Buddha Lama that involvement in social and development field does not lead to political awareness and for political participation one has to be involved in active politics. However, he raised the concern that while Chepang women are not in a position to freely put forward their issues in Nepal Chepang Association due to male domination, how they could make their voices reach the political parties. Hence he also stressed on the need to build a strong network of Chepang women to solve the issues related to Chepang women such as political participation, education etc. Ms Chaulagain also raised concern about the pathetic situation of Chepang women who according to her are very backward and their

condition needs to be improved in all the sectors be it education, politics etc through awareness raising. Similarly, Mr. Bajgain in his speech mentioned the need for inviting all the political parties present in the district in such forums for solving all the problems related to Chepang as well for increasing their political participation.

However, the participants pointed out that the political parties holding strategic posts in the party even if invited never give time or attend such forum/meetings. So including political parties in such forums/meeting is often a challenge for Chepangs. The meeting concluded with the decision that DCRF would give continuity to their monthly meetings as far as possible even if no financial assistance is received immediately.