

**RESTLESS
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**Final Evaluation of Abolition of Chhaupadi in the Far- and Mid-Western Regions of Nepal
Project**

Project Period: From 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2017
Evaluation Period: 3rd week of December, 2017 to 31 Jan, 2018



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This Evaluation Report has been developed by an independent evaluation team. The analysis presented in this report reflects the views of the author and may not necessarily represent those of Restless Development, its partners or the UN Trust Fund

Executive Summary

Restless Development Nepal implemented the project “Towards the abolition of Chhaupadi in the Far-and Mid-Western regions of Nepal” over three years, from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2017. As part of the process of evidence generation and analysis of project implementation and its effects, an external, independent evaluation was commissioned. This document reflects the analysis and conclusions of that external, independent evaluation. The evaluation is based on the five evaluation criteria of the OECD/DAC (Relevance, Impact, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability), with special attention given to learning and potential lessons to make improvements in future actions.

The project's goal was stated as: *“Women and girls experience lower incidence of Chhaupadi, better nutrition and health, social support and access to education during menstruation in the Mid- and Far-Western regions of Nepal”*. 28,000 women and girls (adolescents, young women and adult women from rural areas) were targeted as primary beneficiaries. In addition, 15,262 men and boys (members of the community, community leaders, traditional healers and government officials among others) were targeted as secondary beneficiaries.

To meet this goal, the project proposed 4 outcomes and 9 outputs. In accordance to that particular structure, the intervention was focused on influencing community leaders (especially men and traditional healers) to encourage their support towards ending Chhaupadi practices; to empower young people; to strengthen the capacities of CSOs to take action against Chhaupadi practices and; to advocate for national and local government bodies to take actions to abolish Chhaupadi practices.

The evaluation design was based on primarily a qualitative study with triangulation of quantitative data from the endline survey and the final project report. The evaluation was conducted in three districts: Dadeldhura, Kailali and Kanchanpur to maintain consistency with the endline survey. The following methodologies were implemented as part of the information collection phase for the qualitative study: Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Case Studies. In total, there were 45 KIIs, 9 FGDs and 6 case studies conducted in all three districts. The number of participants was the same in each district. The information was collected in a separate private room or space to ensure confidentiality of the information shared. Verbal consent was taken prior to all interviews and discussions. Similarly, the participants were informed about the use of the information collected and about their right to refuse participation in the process. The information collected through the qualitative study has been triangulated with the data from endline survey, which was a cross sectional household survey with 455 respondents conducted by local trained young enumerators in the sampled districts.

A brief analysis of the project's progress related to the five criteria analyzed in the evaluation is outlined below. For the analysis of the different evaluation criteria, the following scale has been used (the higher the assigned value, the greater the level of achievement):

Low | Medium | Medium-High | High

Relevancy:

According to the information collected, the project was designed in consultation with local stakeholders. The local stakeholders were also involved in selection of the project targeted areas, based on the needs of the women and girls. These pre-implementation actions are considered suitable to ensure the relevancy of the project to the needs of women and girls. For example, it was reported by key informants that before the project a significant number of girls and women had to live in small huts called 'Chhaupadi huts' during their menstruation period (these huts are constructed without doors and locks and exist outside the premises of the main house). Thus, the key informants interviewed corroborated the need for the project found in baseline survey which showed that 19.4% of the girls and women suffered the worst Chhaupadi practices at the beginning of the project (the most harmful form of Chhaupadi practices is considered to be forcing women and girls to sleep in a hut outside of the main house during menstruation). This leads to the conclusion that **the project was highly relevant** to the identified problems and needs of women and girls. One example of this relevancy was provided by a 25 year old primary beneficiary from Samajee Village Development Committee - VDC - (Dadeldhura) who stated that: *"I was facing discrimination in my own house in the name of tradition and culture [before the project]... now my mother-in-law gives me milk and curd in menstrual time"*.

However, the qualitative study highlighted that the project had some limitations regarding including women's economic empowerment as a component of the project. The same beneficiary from Samajee VDC quoted above stated that *"if such awareness program continued also incorporating skill based training for income generation then it will build our confidence and also support us to raise our voice against the Chhaupadi practices and other types of women discrimination and violence"*. However, based on interviews with Restless Development staff and internal analysis of the evaluation team, it can be concluded that the planned project model (based on a holistic involvement of all the relevant stakeholders and players in the community to generate support and changes in the attitude and behavior of all the community members) was the most relevant strategy, given the available budget. On the other hand, a process of empowerment of women and girls is perceived as essential to shift the high level of patriarchal attitudes in the targeted areas, before starting a process of vocational training or income generation.

Effectiveness:

As mentioned above the project goal was focused on reducing the incidence of Chhaupadi practices (especially related to sleeping in a Chhaupadi hut). In this regard, according to the endline study the project has been able to reduce those incidents by 73% (from 19.4% in the baseline to 5.5% in the endline). Similarly, improving the nutrition of women and girls during their menstruation period was also stated as key to the project goal. A remarkable achievement in access to diary products during menstruation has been realized. By the end of the project only 10.7% of women and girls between the ages of 15-49 years old reported having less access to diary products compared to 95.3% at the baseline. This quantitative result extracted from the endline survey concurs with the findings from the key informant interviews during the evaluation. For example, a young girl from Kailali district shared that: *"before the project was implemented, I was afraid to use milk or curd during my period. I had the belief that if I drank milk or milk associated products, harm may be caused to the livestock and ultimately damage their reproductive*

system. However, now after being a part of this project, I am empowered in terms of knowledge on hygiene and SRH. I no longer believe that drinking milk will cause harm to the livestock".

On the other hand, although a significant reduction of girls and women who were prohibited to participate in family/community events during menstruation is reflected in the endline report, the prevalence of this discriminatory practice is still high (46% of the female respondents reported that they are still prohibited to participate in family/community events during menstruation, while in the baseline the prevalence was 65.8%). This highlights that although conditions for women and girls are improving, the perception of 'menstruation as a symbol of impurity' remains deeply embedded in the cultural psyche of the community and requires innovative approaches to directly challenge these social norms.

Similarly, differences were found between the attitudes of some community leaders to others. According to the endline survey, the percentage of male community leaders who agree that Chhaupadi practices should be eliminated increased from 70.8% to 100% at the end of the project. But progress among male traditional healers was not as remarkable (from 75% in baseline to 80.4% in endline). Perceptions of traditional healers towards the importance of hygiene, safety and nutrition of women and girls during the menstrual period improved, but according to the interviews, they will still not allow women to enter the kitchen, perform rituals or touch others when menstruating. Based on interviews with traditional healers triangulated with the perceptions of other stakeholders about them leads to the conclusion that they remain dependent on such practices to keep their social status in the community: their position as a traditional healer prevents them from completely rejecting all the menstruation-based discriminatory practices.

According to the information provided, the project has successfully reached 45,990 women and girls in the community (including 19,347 adolescent females, and 9,066 young women), exceeding the target of 28,000 women and girls. The project staff coordinated successfully with local governing bodies despite the recent restructuring of the country. One example of how this coordination has led to action is that Ajameru rural municipality government allocated funds to fight against Chhaupadi practices. Similarly, three district level "Chhaupadi Abolition Committees" (Kailali, Kanchanpur and Dadeldhura districts) were formed at the end of the project which were active when the evaluation team visited the project area. Also, six VDC level committees have been formed in the same three districts Kailali (2), Kanchanpur (2) and Dadeldhura (2). Furthermore, the CSOs in Dailekh and Kalikot district have also revitalized the dysfunctional district level committees.

In summary, based on the results achieved by the project reported in the endline study and confirmed by the qualitative study conducted by the evaluation team, it can be concluded that **the effectiveness of the project was medium-high.**

Efficiency:

The analysis of efficiency is based on the relationship between the resources (economic, human, material, etc.), the implementing timeframe, the activities and the project scope. As such, it is important to highlight that the project implementation period coincided with one of the most shocking moments of the Nepal's

recent history, the massive earthquake of April 2015, and the subsequent blockade of supplies suffered at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016. Similarly, the project has coincided with structural political changes in the country, beginning with the approval of the National Constitution (September 2015) which led to a structural change in the country (from a completely centralized system to a highly decentralized model set in a federal system). This resulted in elections at all levels of the country (national, provincial and municipal levels) leading to instability at specific periods resulting in strikes and riots. Despite these difficulties the project was implemented in the approved timeframe, without significant differences between the actual and planned activities.

Regarding financial resources, according to the final project report, the planned project has been implemented within 100% of the total planned budget. Accordingly, no significant differences have been found between the budget (the total grant of UN Trust Fund was USD 418,880) and the expenditure (the total expenditure charged to the UN Trust Fund grant according to the final report was USD 418,878). Similarly, at outcome level, there was no significant under/over spend higher than 9% in the case of the first three outcomes, whilst in the case of outcome 4 over spend was 15% higher than the planned budget. The evaluation team assesses this difference as justified as greater effort had to be made by the project staff at national level to influence public policies. This effort contributed to a new legislation by the Nepalese National Government to criminalize Chhaupadi practices. According to the key informants interviewed the project had an influence on the enactment of this legislation.

Regarding personnel, the project was implemented in accordance to the staff structure proposed at the start of the project. Consequently, there are no significant differences between the planned budget allocated for personnel (USD 83,108) and the final expenditure charged to the same budget (USD 83,071).

According to the analysis above, **the efficiency of the project is therefore assessed as high.**

Sustainability:

The project design was based on the idea that strengthening local structures would ensure continuity of actions towards abolition of Chhaupadi practices through commitment to changing harmful social norms, and their strong roots in the community. Accordingly, the project involved 105 local youth clubs, 13 local CSOs and 2 NGOs with a strong presence in the project districts. These groups and their members have been capacitated to advocate against Chhaupadi practices and lobby local governing authorities, as well as local stakeholders such as community leaders. According to the qualitative study implemented during the evaluation, all representatives from those groups who were interviewed stated their commitment to continued action to reduce the incidence of Chhaupadi practices after the project timeframe. These findings correlate with the results of the project's endline survey, in which more than 90% of community leaders and more than 65% of the traditional healers surveyed, said that they would advocate for the end of Chhaupadi practices.

Moreover, during the project implementation, a new law criminalizing Chhaupadi practices has been approved by the Central Government. This new law will help ensure the sustainability of the project results

as it sets up a legal framework for local structures to promote the abolition of Chhaupadi practices. The project's influence on the law's enactment is significant. For example, the treasurer of Shantimalika (one of the project partners at the national level) stated that: *"We have given regular pressure to Women Children and Social Welfare Ministry to pass the bill/act against the Chhaupadi practices. We held discussions with Ministers and head of Women Division to control the women violence and discrimination. Finally, the government has brought the bill/act"*. Consequently, the evaluators conclude that the actions related to the Outcome 4 of the project (National government and local government in project areas take more actions to abolish Chhaupadi practices by the end of the project) will promote the sustainability of the project.

However, one of the limitations of the project has been the limited handover and existence of an exit plan at the end of the project. An exit plan is necessary to ensure continued coordination between project partners and stakeholders and can be an important tool to promote sustainability of the project's results. Project partners including Restless Development, have stated their commitment to keep working to multiply and sustain the effects of the project and to promote further changes in the areas affected by the worst forms of Chhaupadi practices, but there is no formal exit plan in place

Based on the above analysis **sustainability can be considered as medium.**

Impact:

As the evaluation field work was developed just after the completion of the project, the analysis of impact is focused on effects generated and visible in the short term. Accordingly, based on the results of the project endline survey, the reported reduction of the incidence of Chhaupadi is especially remarkable (reduced by 73% from the beginning to the end of the project in the project areas). This is the main achievement of the project and contributed directly to the goal of the project. This achievement has been confirmed through the interviews, focus group discussions and case studies gathered during the evaluation.

In addition, women and girls' access to nutritious food during the menstrual period as well as support from key players in the communities (community leaders and traditional healers among others) and the knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and rights and consequences of Chhaupadi practices has increased significantly. These findings are evidenced by the endline survey and been confirmed by the respondents in the qualitative study. For example, a 45 year-old woman in Gauriganga (Kailali), who, with her family, demolished their Chhaupadi shed as consequence of the project, shared that: *"I learnt about safety of menstrual women and girls after death of my sisters. I am now happy and able to spread the knowledge learnt from this program and reach to many women and girls in her community to advocate against Chhaupadi practice"*.

In summary, the project has brought significant positive changes in reducing traditional Chhaupadi practices. Women and girls can now sleep inside their houses (albeit often in a separate living room during menstruation) and can access nutritious food such as dairy during menstruation. The project beneficiaries have now become change makers and advocate with their neighbors and friends against Chhaupadi practices. **Based on that, the impact of the project is assessed as medium-high.**

Knowledge generation:

The implementation of the project has provided important knowledge to the involved parties. One of the lessons is that even when attitudes (especially those related to the worst forms of discrimination based on menstruation) have been changed, the concept of menstruation as a symbol of impurity remains prevalent in the project communities. This leads to the continuation of discrimination and some forms of harmful practices (such as the prohibition of cooking and prevention of access to some parts of the house during menstruation). The continuation of these harmful practices lead to the conclusion that the fight against Chhaupadi practices is a long-term process that requires a holistic approach and long term commitment to achieve complete abolition of the practice.

In terms of the project's approach, based on the interviews it can be concluded that the peer-to-peer model developed by local young volunteers in their communities, as well as the community and family dialogues is a highly suitable approach as it allows beneficiaries to understand why change is necessary from their own community and neighbors. Consequently, it avoids the perception of "imposition from outsiders", (which has been an identified problem within other projects in which NGOs were directly implementing and aiming to change deep-rooted social norms with outside help, rather than through the community).

Similarly, one of the actions highly valued by the beneficiaries as well as the key informants interviewed has been the "Six 'Sa' Campaign" (a campaign promoting Safety, Nutrition, Hygiene, Rest, Education and Information), as it successfully conveyed a clear message that was understood well by the audience. It promoted key changes achieved under the project, especially in regards to the importance of access to nutritious food for menstruating women and girls.

An important lesson from the endline survey is that mother in-laws are the most common source of information regarding SRHR (according to the endline survey 54.4% of the respondents stated that the information about SRHR they receive is still received from mother in-laws). The evaluation found that in many cases mother in-laws support harmful practices. An important lesson is therefore to ensure mother-in-laws are allies in the process and to promote family and community dialogue. Similarly, the inclusion of sessions led by young volunteers to improve the knowledge of adolescents about harmful practices is also important to ensure relevancy to this age group in the awareness raising process.

Based on the findings described above, the evaluation team recommends:

1. As the social status of most of the women in the communities is still low and in many cases under male members (or the husband's family members) dominance, it would be recommended to include in future actions a component of women's empowerment. In this regard, promoting financial literacy skills and long-term income generating activities for women and girls would be a positive step.
2. Similarly, as there is a new federal system in Nepal, it would be positive to build the capacity of newly elected federal government officials to help them develop the federal development plan which should reinforce the new law against Chhaupadi practices and ensure sufficient allocation of local resources by local authorities to the abolition of Chhaupadi practices.
3. Elderly women, like grandmothers were found to hold considerable influence in the household. As such, promoting grandmothers as role models, as well as community and family dialogues may be a good option to promote changes in the attitudes of elderly women.
4. Innovative approaches that challenge core social norms, values and religious beliefs should be incorporated into any new program designed to shift the perception of the community that menstruation is a symbol of 'impurity'. This could be done in an engaging format such as video forums with active discussions in the community, or media engagement through TV or radio soaps that challenge the beliefs, etc. Religious leaders and traditional healers could be influenced by peers from more progressive districts to promote more substantial shifts in their attitudes and beliefs about Chhaupadi practices.
5. It would be positive to develop campaigns related to debunking the myths surrounding 'touch' and 'impurity'.
6. It would also be recommended to conduct a formative assessment on the barriers and facilitators for implementation of the policy at local level. This assessment would be useful for evidenced based advocacy and local government support. This can promote clearer guidelines to implement the new policy on Chhaupadi practices.