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EVALUATION REPORT



UDF-NEP-09-328 – Advocating for the Rights of Widows in Nepal

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Disclaimers

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF nor of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

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I. Executive Summary

i. Project Data

From 1 April 2011 to 31 May 2013, Women for Human Rights (WHR), headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal, received UNDEF support for work “Advocating for the rights of widows in Nepal”. The work undertaken fitted into a broader strategy to promote change in the status of widows in Nepal, both institutionally and socio-culturally. The project ran for 26 months, and the UNDEF grant amounted to USD 275,000.

The project worked on three levels: grassroots actions focusing on widows themselves and the communities in which they live (particularly in relation to the local authorities in those communities and the services they might provide); sensitization of national stakeholders essential to building the “enabling environment” in which systemic change might occur; and promoting the protection of widows’ human rights in South Asia and internationally.

The project had a large number of intended outcomes, reflecting the diverse range of actions to be implemented, including: empowerment of widows organized in “Single Women’s Groups” (SWGs) and creation of eight new groups; incorporation of widows’ issues into the drafting of the government’s three-year plan; establishment of a social security scheme for widows; sensitization of a broad range of stakeholders including government, judiciary, civil society and parliamentarians; development of widows as leaders; endorsement of a widows’ charter by the UN and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); and establishment of a widows’ unit at the UN with an assigned Special Rapporteur.

A team of two international evaluators and a local expert conducted an evaluation mission in Nepal in March 2014 as part of a series of post-project evaluations funded by UNDEF. The evaluators interviewed headquarters and regional staff of the grantee, WHR, and Board members active in the organization’s work as well as representatives of other organizations that participated in the project and of UN agencies that partner with WHR. The evaluators also met with experts who had prepared the capacity building actions and advocacy materials, and representatives of some of the major stakeholders, in particular two former parliamentarians, a journalist and donor representatives.

During visits to Pokhara in western Nepal and Kavre district east of Kathmandu, the evaluators were able to meet district authorities as well as members of the SWGs and to learn first-hand about the impact the project had had on the lives of widows in remote areas. The evaluators reviewed the advocacy and audio-visual materials produced and, to understand the project actions in the context of broader initiatives in the same and related areas, did preparatory on-line research.

ii. Evaluation findings

Questions related to the **relevance** of the project centred on how the many different activities organized fitted into an overall strategic plan for improving the situation of widows in Nepal. The evaluators learned that WHR has developed a strategy with five pillars (social mobilization; scholarships for widows’ children; economic empowerment of widows; the legal and policy framework relating to the status of widows; and local governance) in addition to networking at regional level. This strategy has been developed and is backstopped by a strategic relationship between WHR and the Danish development agency Danida HUGOU (Human Rights and Good Governance Advisory Unit). The activities supported by UNDEF fit clearly into the overall strategy and the actions carried out are logical and comprehensive responses to the needs identified and to the aims of the strategy.

Respondents interviewed for the evaluation noted that the support received from UNDEF arrived at a crucial time in the political development of Nepal and provided opportunities to leverage support and resources just when change was possible. UNDEF's support, moreover, allowed activities to be carried out in a comprehensive way at three levels: grassroots, national and regional/international. The evaluators found the project to be highly relevant in relation to the grassroots and national activities implemented, however were not convinced that the aims outlined for international recognition of widows' issues – primarily the establishment of a “desk” dealing with such issues in the UN and assignment of a Special Rapporteur -- were either realisable or desirable.

To evaluate the project's **effectiveness**, the evaluators reviewed the activities carried out and the numbers of targeted participants they had mobilized. Additionally, because the project was implemented through a decentralized structure that included central-level coordination, regional programme officers, district “social mobilizers” and a range of specialist trainers, the evaluators looked at how this had worked and whether there were obstacles to effectiveness. It was found that all levels of the structure had worked cooperatively, however concerns were raised that at regional and district levels the actions of WHR relied heavily on volunteer support. Additionally, some respondents raised concerns about the quality of reporting required and provided at the various levels, seeing this as a missed opportunity to document the project's lessons.

The project was judged to be **efficient**. The budget was well constructed and allocations among the various components of the project were appropriate. However the evaluators noted that the cost of broadcasting the TV and radio PSAs was comparatively high, and questioned whether it might have been possible to negotiate some free-to-air time for what were, after all, community service announcements.

The evaluators considered that the **impact** of the project was significant, especially on the widows themselves, who reported that they felt empowered, no longer isolated and able to represent their views to local authorities and thus effect real change in their communities. Policy makers and those who influence systemic responses to widows (judiciary, police, media) were also reported to have learned from the workshops and advocacy targeting them, and tangible outcomes were evident: inclusion of widows as a category in the national census; inclusion of widows' issues in the national three-year plan; a social security scheme (emergency fund) for widows; and removal of the age limit at which widows can claim government benefits. The daily lives of widows were therefore significantly improved by project activities, however the evaluators considered that more thought might have been given to also targeting men in the community and to addressing the low literacy levels among widows that hold back their progress. At regional level, the project succeeded in reinforcing the South Asian network working on this issue (SANWED) and in moving it onto a surer footing through registration.

The evaluators considered that the work done establishing and reinforcing SWGs at grassroots level had succeeded in embedding these groups firmly in the communities in which the widows lived. This was a clear sign of sustainable outcomes. However the evaluators expressed concern that other components of the project were not necessarily sustainable in the medium- to long term. Although a largely volunteer personnel may in some cases allow work to continue even when funding is not available, it can also conversely be a threat to sustainability when volunteers for some reason drop out or are no longer able to contribute. **Sustainability** is also threatened by the likely frequent turn-over in the “enabling environment” actors who participated in the sensitization workshops. Members of the judiciary, police force, authorities including parliamentarians and the media change regularly and the project did not include mechanisms or plans for ensuring that their replacements were similarly aware of the issues and sensitized to them. At an institutional level, a number of respondents expressed concern that WHR needs to address succession planning so that when the time comes for its high-profile founder to step aside, there will be someone to take her place and ensure a smooth hand-over.

In attempting to identify **UNDEF value-added**, the evaluators took note of the many comments of interviewees relating to how UNDEF support had provided leverage at just the right time and resources to undertake a significant multi-faceted project that would have maximum impact. The evaluators also believed that the strategic partnership with Danida HUGOU had added value to UNDEF's support both strategically and in terms of implementation of project activities, and that such an approach to funding – providing core funding plus technical support, allowing other donors' project-based funding to be implemented within an existing framework and to be backstopped – is something that UNDEF might wish to explore further.

iii. Conclusions

The evaluators drew the following conclusions:

- **The project was highly relevant.** This relevance grew out of the grantee's strategic approach to its work, which demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the problem of ensuring widows' rights.
- **The international component needed to be better strategized.** The grantee might profitably think through exactly what the desired outcomes are at international level, before planning how these might realistically be achieved.
- **The project was effective.** The planned activities met and in many cases exceeded proposed actions.
- **The budget was well conceived, however the costs of broadcasting the TV and radio PSAs were comparatively high.** The grantee might attempt to secure some free-to-air broadcasting.
- **Depending on large numbers of volunteers is a risk to both efficiency and sustainability.** The success of the grantee's work lies to a large extent in the "army" of volunteers at regional, district and VDC levels, and this is a risk to ongoing efficiency simply because volunteers are not locked into the work.
- **Staff and volunteers would benefit from capacity building in tasks such as reporting and documentation, and simple systems should be set up to make this more regular and useful.**
- **Programmes aiming to engender change for women need to consider the role of men.** It is important always to consider whether actions to change male attitudes and behaviours should form part of a project.
- **Low literacy levels among widows are a major challenge and will prove an obstacle to their advancement and integration.** Many of the respondents interviewed mentioned the low literacy levels of widows in Nepal and expressed concern that this would hold them back even as they became empowered. This is not currently on the grantee's agenda.
- **The project had significant impact on widows themselves and the decision makers and opinion formers who make up the "enabling environment" in which this new-found empowerment translates into practical change in widows' daily lives.**
- **Concerns that the focus on widows' issues interferes with the broader women's agenda need to be addressed.**

- ***The project was successful in increasing understanding among actors who create an “enabling environment” in which change can take place, however these actors will change over time and the work needs to be repeated.***

- ***Lack of succession planning is a risk to sustainability not only of the project’s outcomes but of the structures set up and indeed the viability of the grantee itself.*** Plans for the next generation of leadership need to be in place.

- ***UNDEF gained considerable value-added from this project because of the approach of Danida HUGOU.***

iv. Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the evaluators offer the following recommendations (explained in more detail in the body of the report):

For WHR:

- ***Consider what the desired outcomes at international level are and how realistically they might be achieved, and put in place a strategy for this.*** Some possible alternative actions include:

- Working (perhaps with SANWED) to encourage SAARC, South Asian Governments or the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to convene a regional dialogue or conference in order to put widows’ issues on the radar of governments across the Asia/Pacific region including donor governments such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan;
- Working with relevant INGOs and/or UN agencies to hold a web-based dialogue to exchange ideas on the issues and lessons learned and to draw up a Global Action Plan that can then be shared with international actors;
- Discussing with UNWOMEN, UNICEF, UNDP, OHCHR and other agencies present in South Asia whether widows’ issues are on their agenda and, if they are not, lobby them to consider whether they should be.

- ***Develop a working relationship with media outlets in order to negotiate free-to-air time for the broadcasting of PSAs and for ongoing media activities.*** This can be done in a number of ways, including offers of training (not only in widows’ issues but, alongside this, in how to cover such issues), exclusive briefings, high-level advocacy etc. This requires the understanding of an experienced media liaison person consideration might be given to recruiting such a person on a part-time basis when resources permit.

- ***Reduce the risk of volunteers leaving by offering incentives for them to continue the good work that they do.*** Small incentives can sometimes make the difference to a volunteer’s decision to stay or go. When funds are available, a small cash payment may be possible, but when money is not an option, consider other “rewards” such as extra training/personal development opportunities, acknowledgement on the website and in publications, awards (“Social mobilizer of the month” for example) and small “thank you” gifts that do not cost much.

- ***Consider how to improve management systems, especially in relation to reporting and documentation.*** If the strategic partnership with Danida HUGOU is renewed, talk to the relevant officer about help in collecting information and using it to improve reporting. Remember that, once information and data are collected, they can be

used in other ways too – for web features, press releases and newsletters, for example – and once systems to collect such information are in place, the process is much easier.

- **Develop actions and strategies that target men.** Getting men to understand women’s problems, and helping them to become supporters rather than “part of the problem” is crucial if there is going to be long-term change in families and communities.

- **Consider how the problem of low literacy levels among widows might be addressed.** If WHR does not have the expertise to run literacy programmes for the SWGs, think about partnering with an organization that specialises in this area.

- **While maintaining a clear focus on widows’ issues, do not neglect the concerns of those working on broader women’s rights challenges.** Exchange information, encourage discussion and cooperation, explain the importance of focus but also inclusion. Consider some joint actions that will defuse tensions -- the literacy programming noted in the previous recommendation, for example, might provide an opportunity to build links with a women’s organization that already conducts such programmes.

- **Prepare to repeat sensitization and awareness raising among stakeholders such as the judiciary, police, media and parliamentarians.** These groups of stakeholders will all have frequent personnel change and the people who have already been reached will be replaced. Consider embedding the training into a system that already exists.

- **Start the discussion on who will lead the organization in coming years and begin the sharing of high-level responsibilities early.** An eventual hand-over is inevitable, so start now to plan for it and ensure that, when the time comes, it is smooth and seamless.

For UNDEF:

- i. **Consider discussing with Danida HUGOU the “strategic relationship” approach this donor takes,** which was an important component of the success of this project. The international community has for more than a decade been calling on governments to take such an approach and UNDEF might perhaps use its internal processes to use this project’s success as an example of how such an approach to funding works in the interests of the donor and the target beneficiaries.

I. Introduction and development context

i. The project and evaluation objectives

From 1 April 2011 to 31 May 2013, Women for Human Rights (WHR), headquartered in Kathmandu, Nepal, received UNDEF support for work “Advocating for the rights of widows in Nepal”. As explained further in the body of this report, the work was not technically a “project” but a distinct phase in the ongoing work of the grantee to secure a sea change in the status of widows in Nepal, both institutionally and socio-culturally. The term “project” used in this report therefore relates to the period of the UNDEF grant rather than the stand-alone nature of the actions implemented.

The project ran for 26 months, including a two-month extension granted because of delays caused by political instability and the receipt of necessary data from the national census office. The UNDEF grant amounted to USD 275,000, including USD 25,000 set aside for monitoring and evaluation.

The project document did not specify an overall objective but listed three distinct areas of activity:

- Mainstreaming widows¹ issues into national policy by facilitating their political participation in the drafting of the new Constitution of Nepal;
- Capacity building and sensitization of stakeholders on widows’ issues at local and national levels, with a focus on developing leadership among widows’ groups (“single women groups”, called SWG in this report);
- Protection of widows’ human rights in South Asia and internationally.

The project had a large number of intended outcomes, reflecting the diverse range of actions to be implemented:

- Incorporation of widows’ issues into the drafting of the new Constitution;
- Establishment of a social security scheme for widows;
- Creation of a network of enabling actors including government, judiciary, civil society and parliamentarians;
- Sensitization of a broad range of stakeholders on women’s issues;
- Development of widows as leaders in decision-making positions;
- Promotion of enhanced representation of widows in the scheduled parliamentary elections;
- Endorsement of a widows’ charter by the UN and SAARC;
- Establishment of a widows’ unit at the UN with an assigned Special Rapporteur.

A team of two international evaluators and a local expert conducted an evaluation mission in Nepal in March 2014 as part of a series of post-project evaluations funded by UNDEF. These evaluations are designed “to undertake an in-depth analysis of UNDEF-funded projects to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project, which in turn helps UNDEF devise future project strategies. Evaluations also assist stakeholders in determining whether projects have been implemented according to the project document and whether the intended project outcomes have been achieved”.²

¹ WHR does not use the term “widows” in its work, since the word in Nepalese has negative connotations and carries a sense of stigma that WHR works specifically to change. They use the term “single women”. However this has a much broader meaning in English and is therefore not used in this document.

² Operational Manual setting Transtec evaluation methodology, page 6.

ii. Evaluation methodology

An international expert designated to lead the evaluation prepared a preliminary planning note (Launch Note) in January 2014 in consultation with the Transtec Evaluation Manager and with input from the second international expert and local expert. The Note was based on a review of project documentation (see Annex 2). Meanwhile, the grantee and the local expert began developing a schedule of interviews that would take place during the field mission to Nepal (effective dates 3 – 7 March 2014) and by e-mail/Skype during the visit.

The evaluators interviewed headquarters and regional staff of the grantee, WHR, and Board members active in the organization's work as well as representatives of other organizations that participated in the project and of UN agencies that partner with WHR. The evaluators also met with experts who had prepared the capacity building actions and advocacy materials, and representatives of some of the major stakeholders, in particular a National Planning Commission representative (now retired), a journalist and donor representatives.

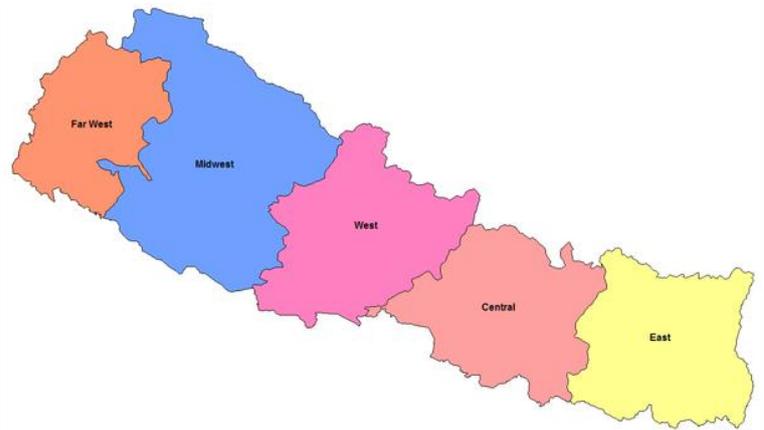
During visits to Pokhara in western Nepal and Kavre district east of Kathmandu, the evaluators were able to meet district authorities as well as members of the SWGs that constitute the primary beneficiaries of the project. The evaluators reviewed the advocacy and audio-visual materials produced and, to understand the project actions in the context of broader initiatives in the same and related areas, did preparatory on-line research.

Interviews were conducted in English and Nepalese. The full list of people interviewed is included as Annex 3.

Information was collected, analysed and is presented in this report according to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The evaluation questions are outlined in more detail in Annex 1.

iii. Development context

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal is a landlocked country with an area of 147,181 square kilometres and a population of some 26.4 million (National Census 2011) and nearly 2 million absentee workers living abroad. Nepal is the world's 93rd largest country by land mass and the 41st most populous country. It is located in the Himalayas and bordered to the north by the People's Republic of China and to the south, east, and west by the Republic of India.



Nepal is divided into five development regions: the Eastern Region (Purwanchal), Central Region (Madhyamanchal), Western Region (Pashchimanchal), Mid-Western Region (Madhya Pashchimanchal) and Far-Western Region (Sudur Pashchimanchal). The regions are sub-divided into 75 districts, each of which is headed by a permanent Chief District Officer responsible for maintaining law and order and coordinating the work of field agencies of the various government ministries. Local government at district and village level (District and Village Development Committees/Municipalities) are the first and in many cases only arms of government to which people living in the remote hill and mountain regions have easy access.

Until 1990, Nepal was a monarchy under executive control of the king. Faced with a popular multi-party movement against absolute monarchy, in 1990 King Birendra agreed to political reform that saw Nepal become a parliamentary monarchy with the king as head of state and a Prime Minister as head of government. Ensuing governments in Nepal tended to be highly unstable, falling either through internal collapse or parliamentary dissolution by the monarch; no government survived for more than two years between 1991 and 2006. As an outcome of joint movement by then parliamentarian forces and the rebel communist party in 2006/2007, a decade-long armed conflict (1995-2007) ended with a comprehensive peace agreement, and the interim parliament passed a bill declaring Nepal a federal republic with a President as head of the state. In January 2007, an Interim Constitution was promulgated, with the King giving up power.

On 15 August 2008, Maoist leader Prachanda (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) was elected Prime Minister; only to resign nine months later. After Dahal, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) were elected Prime Minister. Those governments forced to step down as the government could not succeed in carrying forward the peace process and constitution drafting. In August 2011, Maoist leader Dr. Babu Ram Bhattarai became the fourth Prime Minister. On 27 May 2012, the Constituent Assembly (CA) failed to meet the deadline for drafting the new constitution and Prime Minister Bhattarai announced that new elections would be held on 22 November. There followed a serious deadlock which ended only in February 2014, when Sushil Koirala, the leader of the Nepali Congress party, was elected Prime Minister with the backing of the UML. Prime Minister Koirala promised to draft the new constitution within a year.

Despite the difficulties in completing the drafting of a new constitution, Nepal has a robust and progressive legal framework. It is one of the few countries in Asia to abolish the death penalty and the first country in Asia to rule in favour of same-sex marriage.

In the 2013 *Human Development Report*, Nepal ranked 157th of 186 countries, in the “Low human development” category, with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of USD1,137. Almost 40 per cent of the Nepali economy depends on agriculture, however this is a shrinking sector. Industry is also contracting (c.16 per cent of GDP in 2012) while the service sector is growing.

The Nepalese workforce of about 10 million suffers from a severe shortage of skilled labour, and youth unemployment is a growing problem as young people migrate to the cities from the many isolated villages in hilly and mountainous areas. Moreover the distribution of wealth is uneven, with extreme poverty among disadvantaged groups in the remote regions.

During the life of the project, widows were included as a specific category in the National Census (2011). This showed that 68.9% of the female population of Nepal aged 10 or above (10.8 million) had been married at least once and, of this, 6.7% were widows. This represented 498,606 widows at 22 June 2011.

The age at first marriage is very low: 5.3% of girls are married before the age of 10; 75.04% are married between the ages of 10 and 19. Only 0.22 percent of women marry after the age of 30.

Just under 84% of widows are Hindu, with the next largest religious group being Buddhists at 8.64%. Islam, Kiratism, Christianity and “Other” account for the remaining 7.67%. The large majority of widows live in rural areas (83.5%), with young widows often moving to towns and cities in order to try and find work.

The average literacy rate of widows in Nepal is only 11.1%, far below the national average female literacy rate of 57.45%. Another 1.44% of widows are only partly literate – able to read or write but not both. Of the widows who are wholly literate, 68% have had some formal

education: just under half have completed primary school and 22% lower secondary school. Less than 4% have completed any tertiary study.

Just under half – 44% --- of all widows are heads of household and WHR quotes studies that indicate that these households are the poorest in society and that the children of widow-headed households are severely disadvantaged compared to their peers.

Above all, however women who have been widowed are particularly vulnerable because of social, religious and traditional attitudes that see them not only marginalized but also the target of abuse and violence.

Among uneducated communities in low development areas, widows are frequently blamed for their husband's death, branded as witches and demons, ostracized and expelled from community and family life. They have traditionally been forced to wear white, destroy the glass beads and bangles married women traditionally wear, stop painting the *tika* as a good luck sign on their foreheads and obliged to leave off make-up and any colours.

This is gradually changing, in no small measure due to the advocacy and campaigning of the grantee organization introduced through this report.

II. Project strategy

i. Project approach and strategy

The grantee, WHR, operates on a five-pillared strategic plan that includes:

- Social mobilization;
- Providing scholarships to the children of widows;
- Economic empowerment of widows (through income-generation and cooperatives);
- Peace and justice (legal and social status of widows);
- Local governance (services and entitlements for widows).

As a cross-cutting theme, the organization also works at regional and national levels through the South Asia Network for Widows' Empowerment in Development (SANWED).

The work undertaken with UNDEF support fitted clearly into these overarching areas and therefore did not constitute a "project" that had a beginning and an end but rather a series of actions undertaken as part of a broader strategy to improve the social, legal and economic situation of widows in Nepal.

The project approach was to address the issue on three levels: at grassroots, national and regional/international levels.

To a large extent, this recognized the fact that the challenges facing widows range from entrenched discrimination at community level to a lack of recognition of widows' specific situation in national laws and processes and regional/international debate.

At grassroots level, the emphasis was on empowering widows themselves, raising their awareness of their rights and entitlements, and bringing them together to raise their concerns with local-level actors who might advocate on their behalf and with their support to VDCs and, where possible, district-level authorities.

This was achieved through:

- Capacity-building meetings in 10 districts;
- Training of 50 "social mobilizers" to organize "single women's groups" (SWG) and facilitate their meetings and actions;
- Establishment of 196 new SWGs in eight districts;
- Five workshops, one in each of the regions, to identify common issues and challenges;
- Preparation of five regional reports for advocacy and information sharing;

At national level, the strategy focused on sensitizing "enabling actors" who might engender change in the status of widows and their treatment in the political and judicial systems, and the promotion of widows' issues in key national instruments. Actions included:

- Advocacy for the introduction of a social security scheme for widows;
- Advocacy for the recognition of widows as a separate group in the national census;
- National workshop to brainstorm ideas from the five regional reports;
- Sensitization workshops and follow-up advocacy targeting policy makers, with a view to integrating widows' issues in the government's three-year plan;³
- Access to justice workshops and consultations with judiciary officials;
- Sensitization of 300 civil society organizations (CSOs) on widows' issues;
- Training of 25 widows from different districts to prepare them for political participation;

³ Because of the delays in drafting of the Constitution, WHR notified UNDEF that it would work to integrate widows' issues into the three-year plan rather than the Constitution, as originally planned.

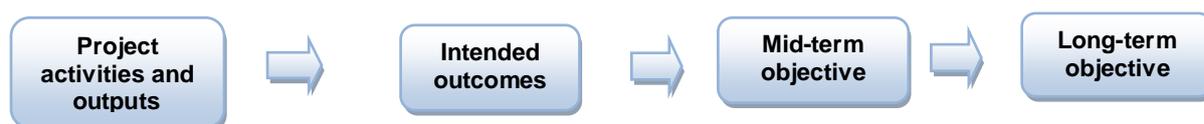
- Preparation/distribution/broadcast of advocacy materials: posters, photo novella, TV spots, radio jingles, documentary film.

At regional level, work centred on strengthening SANWED and working to promote the inclusion of widows' issues on regional and international agendas. Actions included:

- Workshop to brainstorm future strategy with SANWED partners (including registration of the group);
- Organizing a South Asian/International Conference for participants from 16 countries;
- Advocacy to include widows' issues on the agenda of SAARC;
- Development of a UN Resolution on Widowhood (including a call for a Special Rapporteur on Widows) and a General Recommendation.

These three levels of strategic action, the intended outcomes and the link between these and the overall objective are illustrated in the logframe below, which aims to systematically capture the project logic (cause and effect):

ii. Logical framework



| Project activities and outputs | Intended outcomes | Mid-term objective | Long-term objective |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Grassroots level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity building of widows is conducted in eight new districts - Training is undertaken of 50 'catalysts' - New local single women's groups are formed in 8 districts - Workshops are held on access to justice - Regional workshops are organized - A report is produced with recommendations to be taken to national level - Selected widows are trained to become leaders | <p>Widows are more aware of their rights and are organized into groups</p> <p>Group leaders and potential community leaders are trained</p> <p>Widow's issues are collected and carried to district level with recommendations for action</p> | <p>Widows are able to claim entitlements and participate more fully in community life.</p> <p>They are supported in this by local authorities</p> | <p>Widows' rights are recognized within their families and communities and widows' groups are empowered as advocates for the realization of those rights.</p> |
| <p>National level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National workshops are held - Enabling stakeholders (parliamentarians, judiciary, media, CSOs) are sensitized - Widows' issues are incorporated into national three-year plan - Advocacy is conducted for a social security scheme for widows - Consultations are organized with the judiciary - Widows' data is incorporated into national census data - Advocacy materials are produced | <p>Widows' issues are integrated into the national agenda</p> <p>Recognition and entitlements of widows are enhanced</p> <p>Enabling stakeholders are sensitized through advocacy</p> | <p>An enabling environment for systemic change is created, supporting the introduction and expansion of widows' benefits.</p> | <p>Widows are recognized in national plans and policies as a specific group and entitlements are made available to all members of this group.</p> |
| <p>Regional and international level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A regional workshop is held to develop a strategy to strengthen the South Asia network SANWED - Advocacy actions are conducted to put widows' issues on the SAARC agenda - A resolution and general comment are drafted to deliver to relevant UN bodies | <p>The regional network working on widows' issues is strengthened and SANWED is registered.</p> <p>Widows' issues are included on the agenda of SAARC</p> <p>Widows' issues are promoted at UN level</p> | <p>Efforts to promote changes in the status and welfare of widows moves beyond Nepal to South Asia and the UN.</p> | <p>Awareness of widows' rights is enhanced at regional and international levels and the issues facing widows are included on regional and international agendas.</p> |

III. Evaluation findings

i. Relevance

WHR has long experience in working at grassroots level to understand and address the challenges facing widows in Nepal not only in terms of the social stigma they face and the discrimination and violence that result, but also the legal and structural obstacles to their achieving full enjoyment of their rights as citizens and as women. WHR has rightly noted that widows' issues are not "project issues" but systemic, and so their work has to be ongoing and strategic.

As noted above, the relevance of this project derives from the overall strategic approach to WHR's ongoing work to improve the social and legal status, economic development, leadership potential and human rights of widows in Nepal, and recognition of their special needs and status at regional and international levels.

It is important to note that the strength of WHR's strategy derives also from the organization's "strategic partnership" arrangement with Danida HUGOU, which began in May 2009 and ended around the time of this evaluation (when it is under review with a view to extension).

Danida HUGOU has followed up the Paris Declaration by shifting its development support from project-focused funding to the identification of a small number of "strategic partnerships" (13 in Nepal) through which it provides core funding to grantees and then works with them to develop strategy, backstop implementation and provide capacity building and technical support.

Within the overall operational plan that forms the basis of WHR and Danida HUGOU's partnership, WHR is able to take on project-based funding such as that received from UNDEF (as long as it fits into the overall strategy) knowing that Danida HUGOU will provide necessary technical support and backstopping. This is of benefit to the grantee, the strategic partner and the donor because it promotes relevance, cohesion and a clear focus, avoiding the problems often faced by NGOs who are obliged to implement donor-driven projects even where these may not reflect priorities or strengths.

- ***A moment in time***

It is also important to note that the timing of the UNDEF-supported project was crucial to its relevance. WHR had begun its work as early as 1994 but, by 2011, when the UNDEF-supported activities got under way, the country was at a turning point in the drafting of a new constitution: the stalled process meant that WHR was able to concentrate instead on ensuring that widows' issues were integrated into the three-year plan of the government and into national processes that would lead to important changes in the status of widows (for example their inclusion as a distinct category in the national census). Widows' issues were beginning to be discussed in agenda-setting forums of all the political parties and WHR was able to work on sensitizing widowed parliamentarians and, through them, the women's caucus of the CA.

At the same time, political changes in the country had seen the creation and establishment of the CA and, for the first time a quota on female members. By 2011, 51 widows sat in the CA and provided a receptive target for lobbying and partnership-building. Board members interviewed noted the importance of UNDEF support coming when it did. It allowed WHR to work to link its aims at the three levels of action, to expand further into the districts and, importantly, it funded analysis of national census data which for the first time identified widows as a specific category. This was crucial evidence that could be used for lobbying. The UNDEF grant also provided leverage for raising funds and accessing resources at local levels.

- **Social stigma**

Many of the people interviewed during the evaluation, however, including the members of the SWGs, said that the major problems they face result from attitudes towards them in their communities and even families. It is likely that these have allowed the political and systemic neglect to continue for so long. Religious customs have also contributed to the widespread belief, in communities where literacy levels are low, that a widow is somehow responsible for her husbands' death, is a witch or bad omen and will bring bad luck to all who come into contact with her.

It is primarily for this reason that the habit endured of widows being forced to make themselves recognizable to others by wearing only white, removing the *tika* from their foreheads, casting aside jewellery, make-up and other coloured decorations, and absenting themselves from social gatherings such as festivals and parties.

This is exacerbated by low literacy levels among widows, particularly in rural areas, and low social development in these same areas that makes survival precarious even for those who can find work in their communities. Multiple challenges caused by the long-running conflict and displacement make it even more difficult for widows to access entitlements – for example the need to produce documentary proof of status that may be held in another district, or may have been lost. Isolated and often cast out, widows have hitherto found it difficult even to survive.

- **Single Women's Groups**

The most evident example of WHR's work at grassroots level is the SWGs that have been set up across Nepal. SWGs have been set up in 55 of the 75 districts of the country (including eight new ones set up as part of the UNDEF-supported actions). There are 3,915 VDCs and SWGs have been set up in 1,500 of them. Each group has between 20 and 45 members, widows ranging in age from 16 to 70.

The regional coordinators interviewed for the evaluation believe that more capacity building is necessary to reinforce the groups, not least because new members are joining on a regular basis. They point to the important role in this regard played by the 50 "catalysts" trained through the UNDEF project. The SWGs are very much the "heart" of the work done with UNDEF support and WHR's work at grassroots level is vital to changing the daily realities' of widows' lives but also to contributing to a broad movement that might eventually also underpin systemic change.

Kunda Sharma is Treasurer on the Board of WHR and a widow whose life was changed when she first came into contact with WHR 10 years ago.



She told the story of her own mother, widowed at an early age, who followed all the requirements laid down by her community and beliefs. She explained how she had watched her mother try to conceal her widowed status by not breaking her rows of glass beads and continuing to paint the *tika* on her forehead.

"You could see a widow coming from far away," she said, "because of the white clothes. This is why the Red Movement Campaign that WHR ran – urging widows to keep their coloured clothes and wear red, paint red *tikas* and refuse to be different – was so important".

When Kunda was widowed herself after just three years of marriage, she had two young children. Fortunately her mother had educated her and she had a job so could support them. She turned to WHR for support, with encouragement from her mother. "It changed my life," she said. "I am empowered, an activist, and I run a cooperative for widows. My children boldly say, 'we are the children of a widow'. And she paints the *tika* on her forehead for luck.

- **Enabling environment**

In the same way, building the understanding and support of stakeholder groups – judiciary, media, other CSOs – also contributed to creating change that would carry down to communities and up to those making decisions and revising systems and processes.

The logframe (page 11) illustrates how these different levels of action worked together to engender change.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (i).

- **Regional and international actions**

Less evident is the way the activities undertaken at regional and international levels contribute to changing the realities of life for widows in Nepal.

The problems facing widows in Nepal are common in other parts of South Asia, in particular India, and it is therefore logical that WHR might include in its work networking (through the South Asian Network for Widows in Development, SANWED) with a view to exchanging information and lessons. SANWED also usefully lobbies for a regional approach to widows' issues through SAARC and has succeeded in putting widows on the SAARC agenda. One component of the UNDEF-supported project aimed to reinforce SANWED through an exchange of experiences workshop and did in fact lead to a decision to register the organization and put it on a more permanent footing.

However WHR's activities during the UNDEF-supported phase of their work also included efforts to lobby at international level for the establishment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Widows and the corresponding secretariat support within the Human Rights machinery. It was not clear how or why this had come about and indeed, it seems potentially divisive given comments made by a number of respondents on the potential of the focus on widows' issues being seen as somehow detracting from women's rights in general. Within Nepal this is certainly the case – women's organizations have protested at efforts to single out widows for "special treatment"

Shyampati SWG

The scope and reach of the SWGs is illustrated by the SWGs in Kavre district, east of Kathmandu. Although only 40 kilometres from the capital, Kavre is one of the most remote parts of the country, high in the hills with unsealed access roads. There are 10,000 widows in Kavre district.



The evaluation team visited one of the nine wards in the Shyampati VDC. The SWG there has 100 members; the youngest is 20 years old and the oldest "about 70". The group has the use of a *chhahari*, a building where they can meet and where some of the older members live.

They are busy installing a tank to collect rainwater that will be used to irrigate the small plot of land they have negotiated from the VDC and which provides a small income.

The women spoke enthusiastically about the training they had received from WHR and about their "catalyst", Ram Devi. "We need two or three more Ram Devis," one said, "she helped us to come out of the house. She runs workshops. She makes our voice heard". Others confirmed that, through the SWG, they "have more power", noting that verbal abuse from the community had stopped and that they could walk freely through the village.

Most of the women do wage-based work, mostly agricultural, and most live alone with their children. Their families do not support them and they face severe financial difficulties when there is no work. Although they are not supported by the community, they are accepted. However they face significant practical problems. Childcare, for example, has to be provided by family and friends when they are working. When asked who they turn to for help, one elderly woman replied, "my family". Then, gesturing to the SWG members around her, she added, "this is my family".

when there are so many other distinct groups of women who might also merit such attention. At national level, however, there is potential for balance simply because women’s groups – and other NGOs – have generally equal access to government, similar resources and opportunities to ensure that advocacy and lobbying covers all women, whatever their special needs.

At international level this is not the case. Profile such as that enjoyed by WHR through the reputation of its founder, and through its own successful initiatives, brings increased donor support, and this in turn brings greater opportunities within international forums. In some ways this is a good thing, allowing WHR to advocate effectively for widows’ issues to be recognized (for example in outcome documents from the annual Commission on the Status of Women [CSW] deliberations) and acknowledged (for example through funding from donors such as UNDEF). On the other hand, it does mean that NGOs with equally worthy portfolios but much lower profiles do not have these opportunities. This risks skewing the women’s agenda at international level and over time might lead to poorer outcomes. Because of this, it is the opinion of the evaluators that it is unlikely that a Special Rapporteur for Widows would be established and that, in any case, it may not be desirable.

There are other ways to secure widows’ rights through international forums, which WHR might profitably consider with a view to achieving what it seeks to achieve at international level, and these are developed further in the report.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (ii).

ii. Effectiveness

All the planned activities were carried out and in many cases the number of events and number of participants exceeded the targets set.

▪ **Workshops at all levels**

In line with its strategy, the grantee organized workshops at grassroots, regional and national levels, as well as at intermediate regional level.

- Capacity-building workshops were organized for widows in 10 districts and, in conjunction with this, 196 new SWGs were established with 453 widows participating.
- The deliberations held during these workshops were fed into regional workshops in five districts, which brought together 193 participants.
- In turn, the discussions in these regional workshops were fed into a national workshop where 129 widows and members of the WHR Board drafted a Declaration to be used for advocacy with government and other policy makers.
- 10 workshops were targeted at the judiciary, media, young people, academics, entrepreneurs, government officials and women’s groups – 339 participants in total; these workshops were specifically used to advocate for the extension of social security benefits to all widows (removing the age limit that had meant young women were ineligible).

“We organized workshops for the judiciary at all levels – District, the Supreme Court and the Appeals Court. The police and quasi-judicial authorities attended also and representatives of the various religious groups came. They were surprised to learn about the reality of the lives of widows in Nepal. They had no idea of the challenges they faced.

For the widows themselves, the training they receive is vital because it is practical. They learn how to access the entitlements to which they have a right, and we help them to fill in the forms. We help them also to get legal help when they have to provide documents they may have lost.”

WHR trainer

- A “regional/world” conference was also organized for 170 participants, predominantly from South Asia. In preparation for this, a meeting was organized of the SANWED network and it was agreed that the network would become a registered entity.

- **Decentralizing the expertise**

In order to reinforce the framework for implementing its many activities, the grantee identified widows to receive advanced training in order to become “master trainers”. Given the geographical challenges of moving people into and out of Kathmandu from the districts, this ensured that new members of the SWGs would have access to a trainer nearer their community and that, when resources permitted, more capacity building could be undertaken.

Similarly, the grantee identified and trained 10 “social mobilizers” – one in each of 10 districts – to work on the ground finding women to join the SWGs, intervening on behalf of widows who needed help with local authorities, for example, and generally acting as the focal point for the SWGs in each district.

Leadership training was also provided to 25 widows who were considered potential future political leaders in their communities.

- **Spreading the message**

While the workshops were taking place, specific advocacy actions were being undertaken:

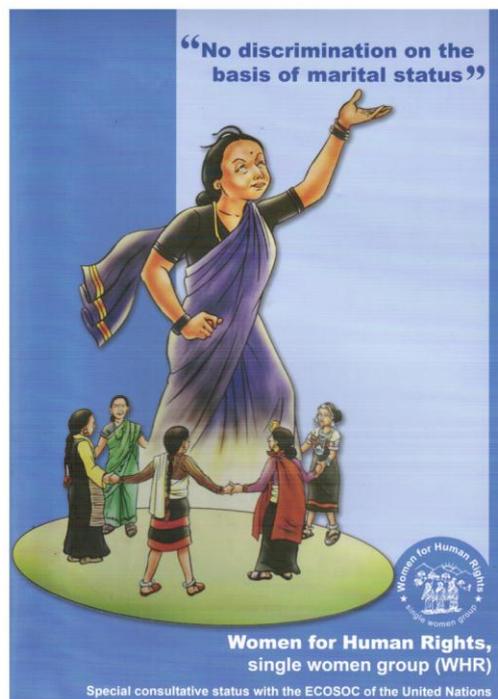
- Meetings were held with the 51 elected CA members who are also widows and, through them, the Women’s Caucus was also reached.
- At a national level, advocacy and awareness raising were helped by the production of 1,000 new posters and photo novellas, one PSA for television and a documentary. Four radio PSAs were also produced. The materials were widely distributed and used.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (iii).

iii. Efficiency

- **Budget**

Of the USD 275,000 total available funds (USD 25,000 being withheld by UNDEF for monitoring and evaluation), USD 54,990 was spent on salaries for the staff at central level and in the five regions. In Nepal salaried staff receive 13 months’ salary a year, which includes an extra month as “Dashain allowance” for the country’s principal national holiday. Trainers and resource people for the workshops cost an additional USD 10,194, while three analysts taken on to analyse census data and make it ready for advocacy purposes cost another USD 7,110, making a total personnel cost of USD 72,294 – just under one-third of the total budget.



Workshop folder (above) and photo novella (below)



The workshops and associated travel and expenses amounted to USD 28,213, and training costs were quite high at USD 44,250.

The cost of advocacy/outreach – in the form of publications and media materials – was high not because of the products themselves but because the grantee had to pay to broadcast the TV and radio spots. Of the USD 26,330 spent on this category of the budget, almost half was paid to air the TV spot 96 times and the radio PSAs 360 times. This may have been money well spent, but in future it might be a good idea also to try to negotiate some free air time.

Overheads and some necessary office equipment took up the rest of the budget allocation. Overall, the project budget was logically constructed, with appropriate allocation of resources between the organization's costs and project activities and outputs.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (iv).

▪ **Staff structures**

One issue that was raised as a concern during the evaluation was the role of the grantee's regional coordinators. The evaluators were surprised to learn that, when project funds are not available, the staff work in a volunteer capacity.

During the project, salaries were paid from funds transferred to the regional office by the grantee and accounting was efficient. However, one regional coordinator was disappointed at the level of reporting expected from the central office. She said that often this was little more than a phone call and that there were no specific reporting formats used.

A donor representative interviewed alluded to this also, suggesting that perhaps WHR's biggest challenge in the near future is strengthening the regional structures and capacities in a systematic way. She confirmed the effectiveness of the work done at national level and believed the next step was to step up the work at decentralized levels. She noted also, however, that in this respect it is "early days".

Another issue raised by this donor was whether WHR should not look also at involving more men in its activities. WHR advised that it does not discriminate on the basis of sex when identifying trainers or facilitators, and of course many of the stakeholder groups include men, however the work at grassroots level is predominantly focused on the women in the SWGs and those who support them. It may be that there is work still to do with male family members and men in the community in order to further reinforce the protective and enabling environment in which the SWGs and individual widows live.

A second donor underlined what she saw as a weakness in WHR's management/administrative capacities, particularly in relation to reporting and documentation, which she believed was "lagging behind other NGOs". However she also confirmed that her agency does not offer support or training in reporting requirements beyond orientation sessions when grants are given. This is an area that might perhaps be addressed if the Danida HUGOU strategic partnership is renewed.

The regional staff are vital to the successful implementation of this project and to the ongoing work of WHR. In addition to their management and administrative functions, they also work with the SWGs to accompany widows through often complex administrative processes.

One widow, for example, told how the regional office in Kaski had helped her when a complaint she had made to the Local Development Officer about the Secretary of her VDC was brushed aside. The Secretary had refused to invite the local SWG to the VDC's annual budget council meeting. After the intervention of the WHR Kaski office, the issue became public and the VDC Secretary was transferred. His replacement also ignored the SWG but was soon made aware of the fate of his predecessor and the widows were invited to attend VDC meetings. The widow who sought the help of the regional office is now Chairperson of her SWG.

These findings contribute to Conclusions (v), (vi) and (vii).

iv. Impact

The impact of this project was significant at a number of different levels:

▪ **Impact on the widows**

Stories of the life-changing impact of the activities carried out during the UNDEF-supported project came from every group of widows visited. These ranged from practical matters – women who had been helped to get the documents they needed to apply for widows' benefit, for example – to the inspirational, like the woman in Kavre who had never been to school but who, after joining the SWG and completing the empowerment workshops had taken herself to the local school and enrolled, completing two years' schooling and, now that she could read and write and count, opening a small shop in the village. The women speak out about these changes – a number of respondents said they heard from the widows of the impact the project had on them – and in this way the word is spread to other women who have not yet come forward to join the SWGs.

Many of the widows interviewed talked of the impact of the SWGs on their everyday lives. They feel stronger and supported and seem no longer to be "outcasts" since they have at least one place where they now belong.

In the VDCs and district offices, also, there has been change, if somewhat slower. At these lower levels of government, widows have lobbied for recognition and for entitlements, and in many instances have been given small plots of land, have been acknowledged as participants in community life and have received support for their efforts. One respondent said that she believed that one of the most notable outcomes of the project was the power that the widows now had at local level, and how widows' issues had gradually become integrated into community-level concerns.

The outstanding challenges facing widows and those working for them, however, are not simple: the large majority of Nepal's widows are illiterate and this constrains their progress as well as throwing up practical hurdles. Illiteracy also exacerbates the financial problems many of the widows mentioned. At the best of times they find it difficult to find work; when they cannot read, write or count, it is almost impossible to get anything other than casual or seasonal agricultural work.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (viii).

▪ **Impact on national laws and policies**

The impact of advocacy and awareness raising of key stakeholders has been significant, and a number of major achievements have been recorded.

Widows are now recognized as a category in the national census, which not only provides information for advocacy but allows for measurement of progress and leverage. Largely as a result, widows' issues are now included in the government's three-year plan. During the project, the Ministry of Women announced that it would commission research to understand

The story of a widow from Pokhara

After her husband's death, this young widow had to leave the family home and arrived in Pokhara with her two sons.

Their only resource was selling fruit on the street. They struggled to survive and the children did not go to school.

The woman heard about WHR through the newspaper and visited the regional office to seek help.

She was offered training in carpentry and is now a carpenter. More than that, she is a celebrity in her community for this unusual occupation and has been interviewed on radio and in the newspapers.

Her situation has drastically improved. Her sons go to school and both speak out proudly and loudly about their mother, the widowed carpenter.

widows' issues better. The specific outcome targeted in the grantee's original Project Document was to work for the introduction of a social security net for widows, and this was achieved when the government introduced an Emergency Fund for widows. Changes to widows' benefits now mean that all widows are entitled to support, not only those above 60 years of age. This is particularly important because so many young women lost their husbands during the years of conflict. One 20 year-old widow who spoke to the evaluators had lost her husband two years earlier, when she was four months pregnant, and was now receiving support for her son that would not have been available just a few years ago.

These changes have been almost entirely the result of WHR's work – many respondents noted that this is the only organization working on widows' issues in Nepal – but have been supported by the sheer numbers of widows and supporters who have been mobilized through WHR's actions. The WHR Board members interviewed spoke enthusiastically of how WHR could mobilize large numbers of women to take to the streets on major issues. "Urbanization means that we can bring 50,000 people together," one of them said.

"SWG = People power!
With mass mobilization
comes credibility. And
with this comes change."
**WHR staff member
interviewed**

This is what happened when the government, ironically trying to do something positive for widows, announced that they would introduce a payment of 50,000 NR (about USD 500) for any man who would marry a widow! The phones ran hot with accusations of "white trafficking" and widows gathered in Kathmandu to demonstrate. The government put the plan on hold.

▪ **Impact on the enabling environment**

Changes in the hearts and minds of the families and communities that ultimately should provide support to widows cannot happen if there is not leadership and a discourse that is protective and supportive of widows' concerns.

This "enabling environment" is multi-dimensional and ranges from the actions and pronouncements of high-level officials in the government and judiciary to the reports that are written in the newspaper or covered on radio. There is evidence that the work done by the grantee in this regard had an important impact in increasing understanding and reinforcing this enabling environment.

A journalist interviewed during the evaluation, for example, had integrated stories on widows' issues into his regular current affairs programme on Nepal Television. He said that media coverage on the issues had increased, although the quality of reporting remained low. WHR also paid for some articles to be published that it had written itself.



Media at the regional/international conference in 2013

Respondents believed that understanding of women's issues had been increased in important categories of enabling actors, especially among elected representatives and judiciary. However since the project closed there has been a national election and many of the women who participated in the project are no longer CA members. This raises issues of sustainability of impact (see below).

These findings contribute to Conclusion (ix).

- **Impact at regional and international levels**

The project achieved the desired impact at regional level when widows' issues were put on the SAARC agenda, and the South Asian network SANWED moved onto a more robust footing when it was decided to register the group.

However there has been little concrete impact at international level. Widows' issues are already on the radar of the UN – International Widows' Day (23 June) which was proclaimed in 2005 by The Loomba Foundation, was formally adopted in 2010. Beyond statements and side events at CSW, there has been no significant impact on the international stage. Plans to advocate for the creation of a Special Rapporteur on Widows' Issues are likely to meet political and structural obstacles in the absence of a government that is ready to lobby other governments to support (and fund) the position.

One donor interviewed queried the notion of a Special Rapporteur. "How many Special Rapporteurs can you have?" she said. "And would it change anything even if there was one?"

These findings contribute to Conclusion (x).

v. Sustainability

- **On the agenda**

Widows' issues are now firmly on the government agenda at central and local levels and the momentum for change has begun. Unless there were an unanticipated change in the political make-up of the government, it seems likely that there will continue to be opportunities to effect policy and legislative improvements.

The major risk to this may come, however, from other women's groups lobbying to integrate widows' issues into women's issues in general and thus taking away opportunities for addressing some of the very specific problems that widows face. Such a move would also have a negative impact on ongoing work to change attitudes and behaviours at community level, because leadership is crucial to such change.

One respondent cautioned that women's rights groups in Nepal do not accept that some women deserve "special treatment" – they cite, for example, the fact that when Dalit women are singled out, Upper Caste Brahmin women withdraw support – and activism for women suffers. "The whole issue of widows is divisive within the women's movement in Nepal," this respondent said, "and it is worrying".

These findings contribute to Conclusion (xi)

- **SWGs and their supporting mechanisms**

An important question is whether the SWGs are sustainable without more resources. Since the end of the project, the SWGs continue to meet and to provide the support the widows need. SWGs have been engaging in cooperative development, skill and leadership development of widows, and facilitating access to local government resources. They have in effect been embedded into the social fabric of the community and the widows themselves work to ensure that community-level achievements (such as the granting of land for planting) continues.

However, while they may be able to continue without new resources, the SWGs are to a large extent dependent on the energy of the social mobilizers who work tirelessly to identify new members, organize meetings, ensure that everything is running smoothly and be on hand for any problems that may arise. These women are volunteers and, although they are dedicated and motivated, building a structure around volunteers always carries risks that one day the volunteer may get an offer of paid work, may relocate, may no longer be available for some reason. This is perhaps the most serious risk to sustainability.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (xii)

▪ **Enabling environment**

The same risk is also evident, however, in the strength that has been built up among enabling actors. People move on, change positions, even die. As personnel changes, the work of capacity building, promoting understanding, identifying champions and keeping the enabling environment intact needs to be repeated. There is never a moment when this job is complete.

For the grantee, this translates into a need to raise funds to repeat programming that has already been implemented (not an easy matter), and not once but over and over again.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (xiii)

▪ **Succession planning**

The one threat to sustainability that was raised by numerous respondents, however, was the challenge of succession planning within WHR. The organization has been able to position itself, build credibility quickly and have access to key players because of the reputation and contacts of its founder, Lily Thapa. Ms Thapa is known not only in Nepal but across South Asia and in international circles as an exceptional advocate for widows' issues, a charismatic leader and a reliable interlocutor. To many people, she *is* WHR.

A number of respondents said that, although WHR's staff are motivated and efficient, no-one has the profile to just step into Ms Thapa's shoes, and they questioned what will happen when she eventually steps down.

This is a challenge that faces all NGOs that are built around a single person and needs to be addressed.

These findings contribute to Conclusion (xiv)

vi. UNDEF value-added

UNDEF was praised by a number of respondents for providing support to this project at exactly the right time but also for recognizing that ultimately the status of widows in Nepal is an issue that touches on discrimination, exclusion and therefore democratic process. There is no doubt that UNDEF's profile among donors, governmental and other high-level authorities, and UN agencies working in Nepal, has been significantly enhanced.

The Danida HUGOU representative pointed out that UNDEF's support to WHR had allowed it the first opportunity to work on a comprehensive programme that derived from its strategic plan, and that this had provided not only the piloting of new actions and therefore valuable lessons but also the opportunity to add value to actions by working across different levels. In the light of long-standing calls by the UN for donors to work strategically and move away from project-based funding that often reflects donors' domestic agendas rather than the recipient's needs, this is an important consideration.



The WHR team at the UN in New York

This finding leads to Conclusion (xv).

IV. Conclusions

i. The project was highly relevant. This relevance grew out of the grantee's strategic approach to its work, which demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the problem of ensuring widows' rights. Additionally, the multi-level action plan developed for the project ensured that results and outcomes would complement and support each other.

ii. The international component needed to be better strategized. It is tempting to aim for change at international level, however this is not an easy process and is certainly not going to happen without informed, ongoing lobbying for political support at international levels and the collaboration of governments and other organizations. The grantee might profitably think through exactly what the desired outcomes are at international level, before planning how these might realistically be achieved.

iii. The project was effective. The planned activities met and in many cases exceeded proposed actions. In particular, the decentralization of personnel, efforts and funds meant that large numbers of beneficiaries and stakeholders were able to participate in the project activities.

iv. The budget was well conceived, however the costs of broadcasting the TV and radio PSAs were comparatively high. The grantee might work on building good relationships with decision makers in the media, and attempt to secure some free-to-air broadcasting of what are, after all, PSAs and not commercial advertising.

v. Depending on large numbers of volunteers is a risk to efficiency. The success of the grantee's work lies to a large extent in the "army" of volunteers at regional, district and VDC levels, and this is a risk to ongoing efficiency simply because volunteers are not locked in to the work. Despite the best intentions, volunteers may move away or find other activities that reduce their availability and vital structures will then break down.

vi. Staff and volunteers would benefit from capacity building in tasks such as reporting and documentation, and simple systems should be set up to make this more regular and useful. Documentation and reporting are important to donors but they are also a useful tool in gathering lessons, learning and therefore improving actions.

vii. Programmes aiming to engender change for women need to consider the role of men. Often it is the attitudes and actions of men – in this case in the family and community – that are part of the problem that women's programmes aim to solve. It is important always to consider whether actions to change male attitudes and behaviours should form part of a project.

viii. Low literacy levels among widows are a major challenge and will prove an obstacle to their advancement and integration. Many of the respondents interviewed mentioned the low literacy levels of widows in Nepal and expressed concern that

this would hold them back even as they became empowered. This is not currently on the grantee's agenda.

ix. The project had significant impact on widows themselves and the decision makers and opinion formers who make up the “enabling environment” in which this new-found empowerment translates into practical change in widows’ daily lives. The various actions in the project aimed at building understanding, empowering widows and creating a context in which widows’ issues would be addressed seriously and practically were largely successful and had the intended impact.

x. Impact at international level was not wholly achieved. Although the project succeeded in having an impact at regional level, the desired outcomes were not achieved at international level. It is questionable, however, whether the outcomes themselves were indeed desirable or whether there are more realistic ways to integrate widows’ issues into international debate and programmes.

xi. Concerns that the focus on widows’ issues interferes with the broader women’s agenda need to be addressed. It is important to address the concerns of those who believe that focusing on one specific group of women is deleterious to the broader women’s agenda, since having an “enemy within” only detracts from the good work being done on all sides, diminishes the impact of advocacy on behalf of women and is a threat to sustainability.

xii. Over-reliance on volunteers is also a risk to sustainability. One of the strengths of the project evaluated was the substantial mobilization of volunteers at regional, district and VDC levels, however volunteers may not stay with the programme for various reasons, and consideration must be given to retaining them, replacing them or finding alternative ways to deliver their output.

xiii. The project was successful in increasing understanding among actors who create an “enabling environment” in which change can take place, however these actors will change over time and the work needs to be repeated. People in positions of influence and decision making move on and are replaced by others; the grantee will need to repeat the capacity building and sensitization actions on a frequent basis or else find a way to embed these actions into systems that already exist.

xiv. Lack of succession planning is a risk to sustainability not only of the project’s outcomes but of the structures set up and indeed the viability of the grantee itself. It is not uncommon for NGOs to be built on and to benefit from the high profile and exceptional abilities of one person, however this is not sustainable in the long term and plans for the next generation of leadership need to be in place.

xv. UNDEF gained considerable value-added from this project because of the approach of Danida HUGOU. It was Danida HUGOU’s “strategic partnership” approach to funding that allowed WHR both to develop a strong strategic framework that underpinned the design of this project and to rely on technical support and backstopping to ensure that the project was implemented successfully.

V. Recommendations

For WHR:

i. (Based on Conclusions ii and x): **Consider what the desired outcomes at international level are and how realistically they might be achieved, and put in place a strategy for this.** For example, do efforts at international level – in interactions with the UN or UN forums like CSW, and with individual governments and agencies – primarily involve helping to spread and increase understanding of widows’ issues and what needs to be done to address them? Or do these efforts primarily aim to grow support for WHR’s work and so the likelihood of future funding? Or is it hoped that in time there might be a new international Convention dealing specifically with the rights of widows? Or that widows’ issues might form the basis of an Optional Protocol to CEDAW, for example? Whatever the desired outcome, plans need to be put in place to achieve it. Some possible actions include:

- Working (perhaps with SANWED) to encourage SAARC, South Asian Governments or the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to convene a regional dialogue or conference on widows (or more probably on “women in especially vulnerable circumstances” if “widows” is too narrow a focus for such a conference;
- Working with relevant INGOs and/or UN agencies to hold a web-based dialogue to exchange ideas on the issues and lessons learned and to draw up a Global Action Plan that can then be shared with international actors;
- Discuss with UNWOMEN, UNICEF, UNDP, OHCHR and other agencies present in South Asia whether widows’ issues are on their agenda and, if they are not, lobby them to consider whether they should be.

ii. (Based on Conclusion iv): **Develop a working relationship with media outlets in order to negotiate free-to-air time for the broadcasting of PSAs and for ongoing media activities.** Journalists but also editors and senior media personnel are valuable partners but need to be nurtured. This can be done in a number of ways, including offers of training (not only in widows’ issues but, alongside this, in how to cover such issues), exclusive briefings, high-level advocacy etc. This requires the understanding of an experienced media liaison person, not just a “friendly journalist” and consideration might be given to recruiting such a person on a part-time basis when resources permit.

iii. (Based on Conclusions v and xii): **Reduce the risk of volunteers leaving by offering incentives for them to continue the good work that they do.** There will always be some attrition among volunteers as women relocate, move on to other things or are otherwise no longer available. However small incentives can sometimes make the difference to a volunteer’s decision to stay or go. When funds are available, a small cash payment may be possible, but when money is not an option, consider other “rewards” such as extra training/personal development opportunities, acknowledgement on the website and in publications, awards (“Social mobilizer of the month” for example) and small “thank you” gifts that do not cost much. Experience shows that small incentives can really make a big difference.

iv. (Based on Conclusion vi): **Consider how to improve management systems, especially in relation to reporting and documentation.** If the strategic partnership with Danida HUGOU is renewed, talk to the relevant officer about help in collecting information and using it to improve reporting. Remember that, once information and data are collected, they can be used in other ways too – for web features, press releases and newsletters, for example – and once systems to collect such information are in place, the

process is much easier. Even the information in this evaluation report, for example, might provide an article for a newsletter!

v. (Based on Conclusion vii): **Develop actions and strategies that target men.** Getting men to understand women's problems, and helping them to become supporters rather than "part of the problem" is crucial if there is going to be long-term change in families and communities. Community meetings at which both men and women are present, men-only discussion groups, male "champions" (such as sports stars) who will talk openly about widows' issues, and other traditional sensitization actions such as posters and brochures that specifically target men (ideally written and designed by or in consultation with men) are some of the activities that might be considered.

vi. (Based on Conclusion viii): **Consider how the problem of low literacy levels among widows might be addressed.** If WHR does not have the expertise to run literacy programmes for the SWGs, think about partnering with an organization that specialises in this area.

vii. (Based on Conclusion xi): **While maintaining a clear focus on widows' issues, do not neglect the concerns of those working on broader women's rights challenges.** Exchange information, encourage discussion and cooperation, explain the importance of focus but also inclusion. Consider some joint actions that will defuse tensions among groups that all have committed to working for women but with differing priorities. The literacy programming noted in Recommendation vii, for example, might provide an opportunity to build links with a women's organization that already conducts such programmes.

viii. (Based on Conclusion xii): **Prepare to repeat sensitization and awareness raising among stakeholders such as the judiciary, police, media and parliamentarians.** These groups of stakeholders will all have frequent personnel changes and the people who have already been reached will be replaced. One possible way to address this, if funds are not available for more workshops, is to try and embed the training into a system that already exists, for example a Press Club/Journalists' Association, policy training school or law faculty.

ix. (Based on Conclusion xiv): **Start the discussion on who will lead the organization in coming years and begin the sharing of high-level responsibilities early.** An eventual hand-over is inevitable, so start now to plan for it and ensure that, when the time comes, it is smooth and seamless.

For UNDEF:

x. (Based on Conclusions I and xv): **Consider discussing with Danida HUGOU the "strategic relationship" approach this donor takes,** which was an important component of the success of this project. The international community has for more than a decade been calling on governments to take such an approach but few have yet moved in this direction. UNDEF might perhaps use its internal processes to use this project's success as an example of how such an approach to funding works in the interests of the donor and the target beneficiaries. UNDEF might also perhaps seek opportunities to fund projects that are part of a strategy developed with Danida HUGOU's technical support and that otherwise might be high-risk or innovative in nature.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation questions

General evaluation question categories

| DAC criterion | Evaluation Question | Related sub-questions |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Relevance | To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse? |
| Effectiveness | To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this? |
| Efficiency | To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives? |
| Impact | To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples? |
| Sustainability | To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)? |
| UNDEF value added | To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues? |

Annex 2: Documents reviewed

Background documents

UNDP Human Development Indicators 2013 (www.undp.org)

"Bringing widows to the forefront", downloaded from www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories

"International widows' day: We can't forget", downloaded from www.womensnewsnetwork.net

"The situation of widows in Nepal", downloaded from www.mutunepal.com

Women for Human Rights website: www.whr.org.np

Project outputs

National census 2011: Highlight on the status of single women in Nepal (booklet)

A journey towards empowerment (booklet)

Enriching the journey towards empowerment of single women: Report of international conference 2013

Photo novella (in Nepalese)

Training materials (Powerpoint presentations in English)

Newsletters

Project presentation materials

Project documentation

Project Document, UDF-NEP-09-328

Mid-term Progress Report, UDF- NEP-09-328

Final Project Narrative Report, UDF- NEP-09-328 + Annexes

Milestone verification mission report 1 (December 2011)

Milestone verification mission report 2 (June 2012)

Consolidated regional workshop report submitted to UNDEF

Annex 3: People Interviewed

| Monday 3 March (Kathmandu) | |
|---|--|
| Ms Sumeera Shrestha | Senior Programme Manager, WHR |
| Ms Tracy Ghale | Programme Manager/Assistant Project Coordinator, WHR |
| Ms Upsana Rana | Programme Coordinator, WHR |
| Mr Biru Thapa | Finance and Administration Officer, WHR |
| Ms Srijana Kafley | Regional Coordinator, Central Office, WHR |
| Ms. Srijana Lohani | Representative, Women Commission, Participant in national advocacy campaign, national and international conference |
| Assoc. Prof. Nirmala Basnyat | Board Vice President, WHR, participant in national advocacy campaign, national and international conference |
| Ms.Kunda Sharma, | Board Treasurer, WHR, participant in national advocacy campaign, national and international conference |
| Assoc. Prof. Neera Shrestha | Board HRD Coordinator, WHR, participant in national advocacy campaign, national and international conference |
| Sashi Sharma | Board Member, WHR, participant in national advocacy campaign, national and international conference |
| Srijana Shrestha | President, Single Women's Group, Kirtipur |
| Tuesday 4 March (Kavre) | |
| Ms Ram Devi Tamang | President, Single Women's Group, Kavre |
| 16 members (Focus group) | Single Women's Group, Kavre |
| Indrakala Rai (by telephone) | Regional Programme Officer, WHR Eastern Development Region |
| Tuesday 4/Wednesday 5 March (Pokhara) | |
| Juna KC | Regional Programme Officer, Western Development Region, WHR |
| Manamaya Nepali | Assistant, Western Development Region, WHR |
| Kalpane Devkota | Assistant, WHR Kaski |
| Durga Neupane | Regional Chairperson, WHR, Pokhara Sub-metropolitan city |
| Pramila Tajhya | WHR District President, Kaski |
| Sita Koirala | WHR Kaski Vice-Chair, vocational trainer |
| Geeta Thapa | WHR Kaski District committee member |
| Ishowari Chapagain | WHR Kaski District committee member |
| Devi Thapa | WHR Kaski District committee member, vocational trainer |
| Harimaya Baral | VDC/WHR Committee Chairperson, Champion advocate for WHR |
| 7 members (Focus group) | Single Women's Group, Kaski |
| Wednesday 5 March (Kathmandu) and e-mail interviews | |
| Ms Margaret Owen By e-mail | Director, Widows for Peace through Democracy, UK, Participant in SANWED workshop and international conference |
| Dr Mohini Giri By e-mail | President, Guild of Service, India, Participant in SANWED workshop and international conference |
| Dr Masurna Hasan By e-mail | President, Aurat Foundation, Pakistan Participant in SANWED workshop and international |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| | conference |
| Rajin Rayamajhi | Trainer/resource person |
| Robin Subedi | Laywer, Access to Justice trainer |
| Thursday 6 March (Kathmandu) | |
| Rachana Bhattarai | Project Manager, UN Women Nepal |
| Yasodha N. Shrestha | Democracy Advisor, Danida HUGOU |
| Praveen Amatya | Finance Manager, Danida HUGOU |
| Friday 7 March (Kathmandu) | |
| Birendra Saud | Journalist, Documentary maker |
| Atmaram Pandey | Trainer, workshops for judiciary National Planning Commission |
| Team debriefing | |

Annex 4: Acronyms

| | |
|--------------|---|
| CA | Constituent Assembly |
| CEDAW | UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women |
| CSO | Civil society organization |
| CSW | Commission on the Status of Women |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee |
| Danida HUGOU | Danida's Human Rights and Inclusive Democracy programme |
| ESCAP | (UN) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GNI | Gross National Income |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| INGO | International non-governmental organization |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| NR | Nepalese Rupee |
| PSA | Public Service Announcement |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation |
| SANWED | South Asia Network for Widows in Development |
| SWG | Single Women's Groups |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDEF | United Nations Democracy Fund |
| UNWOMEN | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| USD | United States dollar |
| VDC | Village Development Committee |
| WHR | Women for Human Rights |