

WHY SHOULD WE INVEST IN BUILDING CAPACITY AROUND GENDER?

Case Study from the BRIGE Nepal Program

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Since the first development plan was drafted by the Government of Nepal in the 1950s, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have supported the development process in Nepal and worked directly with communities to facilitate change. International NGOs play an important role in development processes in Nepal; however, the majority of programming activities are led by local organizations.

Mercy Corps began its operations in Nepal in 2005, and has created partnerships with more than 60 NGOs to implement development projects in over 40 districts. Mercy Corps' Building Resilience through the Integration of Gender and Empowerment (BRIGE) program¹ collaborated with the Rural Enterprise Development Center (REDC), a local Nepali NGO that focuses on microenterprises, disaster risk reduction, infrastructure, and governance. Together, they focused on integrating gender into programming with the overall aim of implementing effective strategies to build resilience to natural disasters. Mercy Corps' Earthquake Recovery Program (ERP)² also collaborated with REDC to promote infrastructure development, DRR, market linkages, and financial services. To strengthen the institutional capacity of REDC, Mercy Corps' BRIGE team organized a 4-day gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) training in January 2018 for fourteen REDC staff and one board member.

Following the training, Jagdish Shiwakoti, Chairperson of REDC, reflected: *“The GESI training was just what we needed at the time to deeply think and consider if we have been on the right track. REDC had implemented various projects and we were so proud of our achievements, but the training has made us question our efforts in terms of inclusiveness and fairness. It was a great learning experience for our staff members. After the training, we discussed our next steps to approach gender and social inclusiveness. Taking everyone’s feedback into account, we realized we needed to draft a new GESI policy for our organization.”*



Jagdish Shiwakoti, Chairperson of the Rural Enterprise Development Center.

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps

¹ Mercy Corps' Building Resilience through the integration of Gender and Empowerment (BRIGE) program is a two-year program funded by the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP)

² Mercy Corps' Earthquake Recovery Program is a three-year recovery program implemented in six earthquake affected districts of Nepal.

Additionally, Mr. Shiwakoti examined the structure of the organization’s General and Executive committees and discovered that the ratio of males to females was 60:40 and 5:2 respectively. Among the executive committee members, the two female members were from marginalized castes (Dalit and Janjati). After participating in the GESI training, the organization now ensures that everyone on the committees participates in a meaningful way and is able to contribute to decision-making. The board has also been supportive of implementing REDC’s new GESI policy. Several highlights of REDC’s newly drafted GESI policy include:

- 1) a provision for maternity leave
- 2) a provision for leave for monthly check-ups during pregnancy
- 3) a provision for leave (half-day or full-day) for check-ups during menstruation
- 4) reserved seats for female candidates and candidates from marginalized castes during recruitment processes.
- 5) GESI training for all new employees

REDC has also made several improvements to its work environment and infrastructure. For example, they have designated separate restrooms for men and women, and equipped the women’s restroom with personal hygiene products such as sanitary pads. REDC remodeled the first floor of the building to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, so that anyone can approach the reception desk. ***“We have adopted the meaningful principles of equality within our organization and we are constantly trying to introduce the same principles in the communities where we work. We prioritize the inclusion of marginalized groups when we implement projects or conduct trainings,”*** shared Mr. Jagadish.



REDC designated separate restrooms for women and men within their office.

Photo Credit: Mercy Corps

REDC now integrates gender and social inclusion in its strategic planning, project implementation, and proposal development. The increased awareness of gender and social inclusion has not only been helpful at an institutional level, but also at an individual level. Employees have changed the way in which they speak to one another, and now treat each other with more respect. They now realize that gender or other identities (e.g., ethnicity or caste) should not determine employees’ roles within the organization. Mr. Jagdish shared, ***“One employee always considered himself to be superior to female colleagues and would speak rudely to them. Now, he behaves politely with everyone and carefully chooses his words. I also realize that I am more thoughtful and avoid inappropriate words when addressing women or other groups. I feel more responsible for understanding household responsibilities and being respectful of family members’ personal space. The training is necessary for everyone, especially those working in the development sector.”***

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