

USAID COMMEMORATES 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NEPAL

USAID, in close collaboration with other sections of the U.S. Embassy, organized several outreach activities to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence across Nepal. These activities included workshops, talk programs, public debates, street dramas, screening of movies and documentaries, and public service announcements, with an overall objective to raise awareness and promote dialogue on gender rights issues in Nepal. Following are some of the major USAID-led activities to commemorate the 16 Days:

27TH WORLD AIDS DAY:



(Top to bottom) Dignitaries on stage for the main event in Kathmandu; Daniel Sinclair, USAID, giving remarks to a crowd of several thousand people; Daniel in one of the stalls displaying IEC materials on HIV; and Free HIV testing and counseling services

On December 1, Nepal commemorated the 27th World AIDS Day under the banner of “Getting to Zero: Zero new HIV Infections, Zero discrimination, Zero AIDS-related deaths” at a special event in Kathmandu’s historic Basantapur Square. Presided over by the Minister of Health and Population, Khaga Raj Adhikary, and a prominent Constituent Assembly member, Nabindra Raj Joshi, the event called attention to the importance of joining forces for a united approach to combating HIV/AIDS. USAID commemorated World AIDS Day as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. Over the past several years, USAID has played a lead role in supporting the Government of Nepal in nationwide commemoration of World AIDS Day in Nepal. USAID’s Deputy Director for Health, Daniel Sinclair, provided remarks to a crowd of several thousand people. USAID’s HIV/AIDS partner, the Saath-Saath Project, provided funding and supported publicity efforts for the event. USAID also supported free HIV testing and counseling at the event. In his remarks, Mr. Sinclair highlighted the need for quality data on the epidemic in Nepal, noting that several important prevalence studies for certain key-affected populations have not occurred. This lack of timely data on the epidemic in Nepal has reduced the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions designed to prevent new infections. ●

MASS RALLY TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:

On December 3, USAID’s Strengthening Political Parties, Electoral and Legislative Processes project observed the 23rd International Day of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Kathmandu in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare by organizing an “Awareness Mass Rally” with the global slogan of “Sustainable Development: The Promise of Technology.” Traditional trumpets led the procession of over 1,500 PWDs, including students with disabilities, family members, government representatives, and national and international PWD organizations; rally participants carried PWD rights messages on placards, banners, caps and badges. Subsequently, participants joined a formal inaugural session, presided by Information and Communication Minister, Minendra Rijal, who emphasized that technologies should be made accessible to improve PWDs’ lives. ●



INAUGURATION OF VICTIMS/WITNESS SPACE:

On December 5, USAID Nepal Deputy Mission Director Amy Tohill-Stull, along with Chief District Officer Kedar Neupane and The Asia Foundation (USAID’s Combating Trafficking in Person project’s implementing partner) Country Representative, Dr. George Varughese, inaugurated a victim/witness Safe Space in the Public Prosecutors’ Office in Kavre District as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. Representatives from civil society, media, district police, and the Public Prosecutor’s office were present at the event. The purpose of this USAID-supported Safe Space is to create a safe environment for survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence – free from



(Top to Bottom) USAID Deputy Mission Director Amy Tohill-Stull, along with Chief District Officer, Kavre District, and The Asia Foundation Country Representative inaugurated a victim/witness “Safe Space”, which is located inside the Public Prosecutor’s Office building.

perpetrators’ threats or others’ manipulation, and also from public scrutiny

– allowing them to deliver valid testimony. “This 16 Days campaign is not just about raising awareness on ending violence against women. It’s also about acknowledging efforts to address challenges that deprive women of basic human rights – such as access to justice. The opening of this Safe Space is one example of such efforts,” remarked Amy-Tohill-Stull at the inauguration. She also added that efforts like this help create an enabling environment for victims to confidently engage in judicial processes while reducing the instances of withdrawal or changes to testimony during the prosecution due to undue influence, fear or hostility. This enables Public Prosecutors to successfully administer justice. ●

A TALK PROGRAM ON CHAUPADI:

On December 10, USAID’s Safe Wash II project, in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section, organized a talk program on *chaupadi* at the U.S. Embassy’s American Corner in Dhangadi to mark the 16 Days, particularly International Human Rights Day. *Chaupadi* is a social malpractice that prohibits menstruating Hindu women and girls from participating in household and other activities (or in some cases from staying in the house at all), as they are considered “impure.” The talk program was organized to raise awareness about gender discrimination and gender rights, particularly to focus on *chaupadi* as a human rights issue in the Far Western region. It provided a forum for organizers and panelists to develop and share new and effective strategies to reduce/eliminate *chaupadi*. Panelists for the discussion included representatives from government agencies, the Nepal Police, the Women and Children Office, advocates, women-led NGOs, female activists and local intellectuals. A total of eight speakers were invited to participate in the discussion. The program attracted about 65 participants, including from women



activist groups, Embassy Youth Council members, media (3 regional journalists), NGO representatives, and traditional faith healers called *jhakris*. Participants stated that these harmful traditional practices against girls and women are prevalent all over Nepal and that *chaupadi* is more prevalent in the Mid- and Far-Western regions. Interestingly, the faith healers, who at the beginning of the program had vocally supported the practice, agreed towards the end that it is indeed a malpractice and promised to help raise awareness against it, which was met with a round of applause from the crowd. ●

LOCAL-LEVEL THEATER PERFORMANCES TO RAISE AWARENESS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:



USAID-supported Street Drama in action.

From December 6 – 8, USAID’s Sajhedari Bikas (Local Governance) project, in collaboration with Fatima Foundation, hosted Kachahari theater performances in six Village Development Committees of Banke district, followed by a performance and discussion attended by senior government officials and NGO representatives in Nepalgunj on December 9. The drama, which was set in the Mid-Western Terai, told the story of a young girl faced with sexual harassment in school, early marriage, domestic violence and accusations of witchcraft. The drama was performed in Tharu, Awadhi and Nepali languages utilizing an interactive forum theater model in which the actors invited the audience to participate in resolving the girl’s situation. An estimated 1,000 people attended the performances. In Nepalgunj, the Acting Chief District Officer, Regional Director of the National Human Rights Commission, and Deputy Superintendent of Police participated, along with USAID’s Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Adviser, Manju Tuladhar. Mohammadi Siddiqui, a prominent leader, said in her opening remarks, “This event marks the solidarity of the American public with the Nepali public on fighting GBV, and I applaud USAID’s initiative.”

USAID also broadcast two Public Service Announcements in local languages through regional radio stations to raise awareness of gender-based violence. ●