

Advocacy Against Traditional Marriage Rituals

A Successful Initiative of Women in Bhasi VDC, Sunsari District

Submitted to:

**UNICEF Field Office
Eastern Region, Biratnagar**

Submitted By:

Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS)

P.O. Box 2254, Kathmandu, Nepal

Email: iids@wlink.com.np

2001

Executive Summary

SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY AGAINST TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE RITUALS **A case of Bhasi VDC, Sunsari**

Tharus are one of the largest groups of people living in the Terai region of Nepal. They constitute the predominant majority in the Pipraha village, ward no 9, Bhasi VDC, Sunsari district, Eastern Development Region.

The Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW) programme was initiated in Sunsari district in BS2042 with the establishment of Arpan Revolving Credit Fund Committee, comprising fifteen women groups. The number of groups has now reached twenty-six, of which more than twenty are of Tharu community. All the members attended the monthly meetings and apart from the financial transactions, the women also discussed the things that mattered to them. The monthly meetings of the groups provided the women a forum to put forward their concerns and apart from financial transactions also discuss the problems that affected them. They got a chance to bring forward the cultural differences among the Pahadia (hill communities) and Tharu communities and discuss what could be done to bring about desired changes.

One such cultural difference between the Tharu and Pahadia communities that was observed was the elaborate marriage ceremony of the Tharus that continued till the birth of the first child. The marriage ceremonies included feasts and exchange of gifts over at least 5-7-9 years before the bride got to leave her paternal home for the groom's home. Feasts kept on happening at the pretext of the families meeting their sons and daughters-in-law. Earlier, the Tharu families were rich and lived comfortably. But gradually they kept on getting poorer due to the various ceremonial obligations and the resulting expenses.

After four years of prolonged deliberations and discussions, the women were adequately conscientized and empowered, and became ready to change their customs. The PCRW programme has brought about awareness and confidence among the members to realize the customs that hinder their progress. The women have become empowered enough to convince not only the women but also the men of the community. Even the men now appreciate the new found courage and awareness among the women. Ms. Chamain Chowdhary of Sunsari district, Bhasi VDC, ward no 9, Pipraha village, married her daughter in 2056 Baisakh. This marriage was first of its kind in this area as the parents of both the bride and the groom tried to shorten the whole marriage ceremony. Drastic changes were brought about in the time and money spent and the workload associated with traditional Tharu marriages. A few of the unnecessary ceremonies were also cut short or not performed at all. The marriage ceremonies that earlier went on till 5-7-9 years are now conducted within a day.

Although the parents spent much money for the dowry for the bride, they were satisfied that at least the money was spent on their daughter, rather than wasting on unnecessary feasts for the villagers and the guests from the groom's side.