

## **Profile of Irada Parajuli Gautam**

Irada Parajuli Gautam, a founder president of Aawaaj has been taking a leadership role since 1999. Aawaaj, a social organization working to empower rural women and children, is also a pioneer organization to establish community support mechanism against violence in Mid and Far western region. At present, she has been providing a leadership to this mission along with 40 project team members. The programs have been implemented through more than 302 listener's clubs in 23 remote districts of Nepal, 20 CSM (community support mechanism) groups in rural districts ( Surkhet, Dailekh and Bardiya ) along with about 5000 change makers against violence of women and children.

Aawaaj has successfully established community support mechanisms and has been breaking the silence against child sexual abuse, exploitation and gender based violence through social mobilization. It focuses on the access to minimum standard services that are required for the individual children and women who faces different kinds of violence. Along with addressing child sexual abuse, trafficking and gender-based violence, the organization has also been conducting peace-building programs for children and women, access to gainful employment opportunities for young women and adolescents' girls who are affected by the armed conflict of Nepal.

It has been a pleasure to see how Irada has grown into a professional meeting the challenging demands of the development work in Nepal. It is a great challenge being a leader to take up challenge against such intolerable violence that has lead to gross violation of human rights of women and children. It is even harder for a woman in this deep-rooted patriarchal environment of Nepal. Irada has responded to these challenges and established herself as a respected and liked leader, with a reputation for her hard work and commitment while bringing positive changes in the society. Her personal warmth with her colleagues and staffs, good relationship and collaboration with government authorities, different international agencies and national NGOs along with her determination to generate quality work has contributed to the creation of a good

program. These efforts made by and for the people, who are committed, have succeeded while breaking the silence that was tolerated by women and girls through out their lifetime. Irada as an emerging woman leader with considerable program management experiences is committed to fulfill the rights of women and children in Nepal. She has broader understanding of the South Asian and Nepalese context and systems including the problems and issues affecting children and women's status particularly the status of women and children in rural and urban slum areas. With her experience, intelligence, seriousness and modesty she can have significant effects in the improvement of women's and children's lives in Nepal. All the partners and stakeholders have been impressed with her leadership and involvement in the challenging issues, as she demonstrates competence in her field, professionalism, and commitment to fulfill the rights of women and children in Nepal. She displays a clear knowledge of gender and child protection issues and possesses strong analytical and communication skills. She is innovative, dedicated, supportive, hardworking, and outstanding leader against violence of children and women in Nepal.

Irada started her professional life when she was just 19 yrs in 1986. She joint in Save the children UK, Nepal and went in very remote district of western part of Nepal as a clinic in-charge of Maternal and Child health clinic where there was no road access during that time. Later on she joined in Surkhet Midwestern region in 1992 and was responsible in Mid and Far western region of Nepal for Save the children UK as Program Manager. When asked by her country director on what is your long-term vision in future, she told to establish well-known social organization against violence of children and women and want to become a social leader. In reality, she demonstrated her capacity as social leader against sexual and domestic violence where no organization had raised this issue in 1999.

In 1998, Irada had done research in Surkhet district, Midwestern region Nepal on the difficulties faced by adolescent and pre-adolescent girls and with their brothers and parents. It was found that almost all the girls were not happy at being a daughter due to low value and status, restrictions on mobility, negative attitude of parents and neighbors, verbal abuse and sexual harassment towards daughters etc. Discussed with different

groups, political leaders, parents, girls and their brothers, the conclusion was that the complete societal environment is not good for girls that need to be changed. After research, Irada had asked again to adolescent girls whether girls would like to change this situation or remain as it is in society. Surprisingly, they committed to bring changes in society that create safer environment for all girls.

Considering the issues came out from her professional experiences and no organization working at community level on Sexual and Gender based violence; Irada herself has shown commitment and realize to do social work against Sexual and Gender based violence and established an organization called Aawaaj – breaking the silence in Midwestern region Surkhet in 1999.

Since 1999, she has continued her leadership role to Aawaaj as founder president. She also has been involved in research, evaluation, trainings on the issues of child protection, Gender based violence, HIV and violence, trafficking and early childhood care and development of young children to different international agencies in National level and South Asia as an expert.

Since 1999, she has been actively involved in advocacy, research, training, facilitation and designing various projects against Sexual and gender based violence in local, national level and South Asia. During her professional life she worked with rural children and women, the girls/ women working at Cabin restaurant, the girls/ women who were trafficked, and rescued, Female sex workers, girls / women living with HIV and AIDS. Almost all groups have faced various forms of violence in their lifetime. From her facilitation, numbers of groups in remote district are becoming change makers to change the society as a whole. Her resume is attached for the reference.