

## Men as Models for Gender Equality

“I have found him to be so co-operative always. I am blessed to have him as my life partner and I am grateful to Action Works Nepal for their praiseworthy work towards women’s rights,” says Tara Devi from Kudari-4, Jumla. Her husband, Bhim Bahadur Shahi is a member of the male support group in Jumla. She proudly explains her husband to be a model man. She says: “My husband has proved to be a perfect partner to me. He has overcome the orthodox beliefs on menstruation. He went against the societal traditional practices, and brought me from a cow shed into our house even into our kitchen during my menstruation. Now I do not have to spend nights in that dark and scary cow shed during my periods.”

She added that, still people in Jumla do not allow women to enter their homes during menstruation cycle and force them to live in cow sheds built far from the main house. Tara’s husband has respectfully allowed her to stay in the house for the last 2 years. He has rejected the superstitious beliefs and accepted his wife as pure and touchable during menstruation.

Tara says, “He helps me also with my daily works like, cooking, washing and taking care of children. He has also given me the freedom to attend meetings. He has given me a respectful and dignified life.

Bhim Bhadur does not think that there is not work that less important, and that there is no division of work between men and women. He believes both should have equal responsibility to do tasks and each of their work should be accepted with dignity.

Another model Man is Pratip Shahi from the same village who expresses his thoughts: “God has given men a precious gift in the form of women. We should respect them and help them to live with freedom and dignity.”

He was the first man in his village to raise voice against the *Chhaupadi* practice, and he was the first one to bring his wife in the house from the cow shed. He helps his wife with household chores in the house and in the farm. He encourages his wife to attend women’s groups meetings and trainings for empowerment.

Pratip Shahi helps other women to solve their problems. Participation in women's groups helped him earn respect. The groups invite him to attend their meetings as an advisor. They have given him the title of a model man in their village.

With the initiatives of Action Works Nepal, the male support groups in the Jumla and Kalikot are slowly becoming effective. These groups work towards gender equality within their own homed and community. They express that learning about women's rights, gender based violence and problems women face in their own community has given them confidence, and has helped them improve self-esteem.

The initiatives of AWON to actively involve men help women achieve their rights and empowerment, is pushing to them to change the patriarchal thoughts and beliefs this movement has made them aware the importance of gender equality within their family and in the community. This surely is one of the major achievements of AWON.