

To: Louise, Kare, Meera, Gaylord, Chela, Paula, Nicky, Edwina, Jenny, Laurie, Anne, Tracy, Mary Ann, Hemant, Dorothy, Susanne, Sashank, Penny & Lee, Marji, Sarita
From: Rita
Date: 31 May, 2011
Subject: Sampanna Campaign Update – May, 2011

Nepal Now:

I saw an elderly couple holding hands and begging from shop to shop. She was blind. They came from Ramechhap district and were living far off from where I met them while visiting the office of the Madheshi Jan Adhikar Forum – one of the 4 major political party. They looked respectable and dignified. But what made them beg?

Did this illustrate the insecurity and instability all of us are feeling in Nepal now? I requested them to come with us to the near by party office. They agreed. They kept repeating how political leadership in their district meant nothing to them although there were two significant party leaders in the district. From this experience, I concluded that many Nepalis were now reduced to fending for themselves. Making us at times even beg! While political leadership remain mired in power struggles/ego web.

The power cuts has improved with so much rain this month. But inside stories say that that the earlier situation was hyped to enable further corruption. I would not know. But nothing else has – rather further deteriorated. This month we encountered 4 strike days, bringing day-to-day work/life to a complete halt and impacting negatively on several following days as well.

The women's movement of daily vigils, advocacy, and demonstrations went non-stop during the month. From two hours a day the vigils went up to 10 hours a day. From the 24th the Government declared a restricted zone outside the Constituent Assembly hall. We decided to demonstrate non-the-less, and even as we did so in 3

groups, police used force and took over 60 of us in detention that day. Over 20 of us were beaten up and a couple of us ruthlessly and quite severely (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYopcmp9OnM>). Meeting with political parties, the Peace Ministry, strategizing and organizing for demonstrations, for inviting and coordinating fellow activists from all over Nepal, and organizing rallies and vigils was our life this month. The demonstrations went on for 44 days and for the last 12 days for 10 hours each day! Even on the 28th the final day of our 10 hour a day vigil, as we waited for the verdict and the streets filled with Nepalis wondering what may happen to our fate, an 8 year old girl was raped on the same street and brought to the hospital in front of which we stayed in vigil. Even with beefed up security that day, we learnt that only one of the two rapists was caught. How can rage not fill our hearts! This demonstrates for all of us the conditions we now live in – in the heart of our capital city.

The Constituent Assembly time has been extended for 3 months for now with a roadmap that needs to be closely monitored. Our work as activist women is going to get only more difficult – that is for sure! During the demonstrations, our activist colleagues were amazing – braving the strikes, spending the little monies they have coming from remote districts, still dancing and singing and being vigilant and disciplined throughout the day – so that women can live as full

citizens of this country. As we can see this country cannot progress without the full representation and leadership of women!



Women Activists From Throughout Nepal participate in the 44 Days Demonstrations!



28 May - Charged & Volatile Yet Peaceful!

Moving the Campaign

Susanne Jalbert (of the “Tewa Tea” fame) visited, and not only did she pledge a personal gift of \$1000 but agreed to be a durga! So DID **Sarita Lohani** - (pledge \$1000 & agreed to be a durga) a college friend of Meera’s and mine who is married and based in Seattle, USA. Through Janaki Shah her sister-in-law Rajni Prakash who is Chicago based, made a gift of approximately \$ 1400 (Rs. 100,000). My sister Anita Karki pledged approximately \$700 (Rs. 50,000). Through Anne Firth Murray, Penny & Lee Stevens from New Zealand visited Tewa and Nagarik Aawaz before meeting over dinner in my home. According to his father, Lee shared “even after the darkest days, society will reinvent itself when it realizes that the greatest thing in life is service to others”. Personally I could completely relate to this. They are interested to receive a small proposal from Tewa for operational costs! Dorothy Abbot philanthropist, feminist activist, and a longtime supporter of Tewa pledged \$5000 each for 2011 & 2012 via **Gaylord durga!** Professor Kare Vollan pledged approximately \$1400 (Rs. 100,000) for SC, although declining to be durga – he said he would help us in spreading the SC word when he can. I could not be as proactive as I wished to be in terms of e-reaching out and explaining the campaign to too many Tewa supporters and well wishers owing to my intense work in advocacy for women’s rights as the final constitution assembly dates drew to an end this month and the larger environment which had deteriorated became highly charged.

Update on Building/s:



Pillars and the retaining wall behind – one can see that this is a significant building!

Owing to the strikes we had only two on-site visits. We revised the drawings for a few essential changes e.g. ensuring a disability accessible bathroom. The progress on the construction is quite good as you can see – without the strikes

and the pressures it could be much better. However once the difficult work of the pillars and the retaining wall is over, work is expected to be more visible & move faster in the next couple of months.

Financial Aspects of Sampanna:

Meera has worked very hard with the Finance Officer (in transition) and the Treasurer to ensure the best ways of understanding the TLBDP financial situation so far. The contractors have estimated that we will need approximately \$300,000 for the dormitory building alone, the cost of which is expected to rise by 10% before the building is completed simply because of inflation. We will have to monitor carefully, but it will be wise to budget the additional money. So far we have already spent \$ 70,000 on this building. So far we have stated pledges of approximately \$146,600 (of which 10,000 is for 2012). This number will hopefully grow soon since there are some of you who have committed to making a gift for the campaign without stated figures. More importantly there are many more who have offered that they will reach out to perspective donors for the SC. This support we so need! A piece of very good news is the recent approval of the OAK Foundation grant for Tewa, which included \$ 67,000 for the TLBDP. Thus we have raised approximately \$ 2,13,600 so far.

Conclusions:



Women Activists In Action - During Our Demonstrations!

This is such a significant campaign. We need all the help we can get – your good words and outreach where and when YOU can is invaluable. Here, we will all work hard to ensure the best outcomes and financial transparency. I am exited!