Proceedings Report

First National Conference on Women Shelter

Kathmandu
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Contents

Executive Summary

It has been more than 25 years since the women shelters in Nepal started serving women and girls faced with sexual and gender-based violence. However, these shelters have predominantly been working in silos, lacking synergy, little collaboration and devoid of united spirit to work against SGBV.

Realizing that shelters need to work in tandem with each other to make GBV including sexual violence response, prevention and prosecution further effective, Saathi in collaboration with Women Children and Senior Citizens and National Network of Women Shelters organized this first national conference of women shelters.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the vulnerabilities within the system became even more evident as incidents of domestic violence increased. Survivors of violence were left without assistance, particularly women and girls who were confined with abusive family members. They faced uncertainty about where to seek help for their safety. Due to lack of resources and planning, many shelters were unable to respond effectively to the emergency calls from survivors. As shelters were not listed under the list of essential services, the operation of most shelter services when it was most needed during the COVID -19 pandemic was disrupted.

The conference was participated by 200 participants from across the country comprising of shelter operators, care providers, survivors, lawmakers, provincial and local government representatives, and government officials from federal, provincial and local government, rights activists.

The 3-day conference encompassed a comprehensive program, featuring a total of 6 parallel thematic sessions and 3 plenary sessions. These sessions were skilfully facilitated by a panel of gender experts, government officials, and civil society activists, each drawing upon their wealth of prior work experience within the field. Over the three days the participants discussed on how essential GBV services can be made more effective, qualitative, survivor friendly, inclusive and aligned with related national and international standards.

Throughout the conference, a significant emphasis was placed on a recurring challenge within the realm of gender-focused initiatives. This challenge pertained to the assurance of uniformity across standard operating procedures, as well as consistency of quality services provided to individuals in need. The discussions underscored the importance of addressing this issue to enhance the overall effectiveness of shelter service interventions.

A significant challenge that surfaced during the conference was the lack of committed resources to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives. Through deliberations, the crucial need to secure ongoing support was underscored, as essential for maintaining the continuity and effectiveness of the care and support provided by women shelters.

Furthermore, the conference shed light on the complexities surrounding the establishment of an effective inter-agency referral mechanism. Achieving seamless coordination and collaboration among diverse agencies remains a formidable challenge, yet one that is imperative to optimize the assistance provided to those in vulnerable situations.

In line with this, a central theme that reverberated throughout the conference was the call for stronger coordination with governmental entities. Participants deliberated extensively on the significance of fostering robust partnerships with government agencies to create a more unified and comprehensive approach to addressing gender-sensitive issues through shelter service initiatives. Recognizing the significance of shelter services during pandemics and humanitarian crises, the conference also called the government to categorise shelter services under essential services and provide relevant support.

The conference served as a platform to foster cross-learning, unite voices against violence, and champion the rights, safety, and empowerment of women and girls. It yielded 17-point recommendations to enhance shelter services, ensure inclusivity and sustainability, and adopt a survivor-centric approach. These recommendations will serve as a guiding operational and advocacy document for government as well as NGOs dedicated to providing safety and security for women and girls survivors of SGBV.

Background of the Conference

The first-ever National Conference on Women Shelters was organized by Saathi in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen and the National Network of Women Shelters on 25-27 June, 2023.

The conference aimed to bring together representatives from Government and Non-Government Organizations; Policymakers; Experts; Focal Persons of One Stop Crisis Management Centres (OCMC); representatives and management team members of shelters; survivors of Gender Based Violence; media persons and other relevant stakeholders to discuss and address the challenges faced by women shelters and to devise effective strategies to provide comprehensive support to them. The conference served as a platform to create awareness, share best practices, and promote collaboration among various stakeholders working in the field of women's empowerment and operation of women shelters.

The conference also aimed to foster collaboration and coordination among shelter operators, enhance the quality of services, establish uniform shelter policies, and facilitate shared learning. It also sought to improve inter-agency referral practices and advocate for the establishment of a formal national referral mechanism to better address the diverse needs of women and girls experiencing violence.

The conference was participated by more than 200 inclusive participants including shelter operators, gender-based violence victims/survivors, LGBTQI+ members and government officials from all over the country. The three-day conference discussed issues faced by women shelters in the country, solutions to those issues, challenges for which the solutions are yet to be decided and real-life cases of victims/survivors.

Objectives

The conference had the following key objectives:

- Address the pressing issues surrounding gender-based violence and promote empowerment of women and children through improved and effective shelter services.

- Identify key issues, challenges faced by women shelters.

- Share best practices and success stories from different organizations and institutions.

- Discuss on policy recommendations to enhance support for women and girls in need of shelter and reintegration service.

- Identify concrete demands and guidance points to be taken forward collectively for enhancing quality care and shelter services

Inaugural Ceremony (Day 1: 25th June, 2023)

The conference began with an inaugural ceremony featuring distinguished guests/speakers; representatives of Government and Non- Government Organizations; prominent women's rights activists, and representatives from key organizations working in the field of women's empowerment; representatives from women shelters across the country; media persons and other stakeholders.

The speakers highlighted the significance of providing safe and accessible shelters for women in need and stressed the importance of collective effort to address the issue effectively. The event commenced with captivating performances from the youth of Saathi's support program and survivors of Shakti Samuha depicting the plight of gender-based violence. Women survivors also shared their stories and experiences, highlighting how their lives were transformed after receiving shelter related services.

In addition to stories of survivors/victims, the conference introduced "lila.help," a specialized help initiative by Global Network of Women Shelters. This initiative aimed to enhance the understanding of shelter operations in each province and set the context for the discussions in the following two days.

Sajani Amatya, President of Saathi welcomed the guests and participants to the program and shed light on the objectives of the program. She expressed the hope that the conference would contribute

to providing policy direction for making women shelters more inclusive and responsive to the needs of women survivors of violence as well as children seeking safe refuge in shelters.

The Program was inaugurated by chief guest Hon. Surendra Raj Acharya, Minister for Women, Children and Senior Citizen by watering the plant. Minister Acharya emphasized on the need to improve quality of services offered by shelters to ensure justice and empowerment for women and children facing violence. He also stated the government's commitment to enhancing and improving shelter services for survivors by providing increased funding and implementing regular monitoring efforts.

Bandana Rana, UN CEDAW Committee Member and Convener of the conference and former chair of the Global Network of Women Shelters (GNWS), drew upon her experience in taking the shelter movement forward nationally and globally. And the emergence of new trends and approaches in shelter services. Rana expressed that this conference provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to celebrate achievements, reflect on challenges, and learn from each other. "Stronger shelter movement results in addressing diverse needs and quality services for the GBV survivors who are banished from their homes and stigmatized in society," she added.

Hon. Kamala Parajuli, Chairperson of the National Women Commission, acknowledged the instrumental role played by shelter services in rebuilding the lives of women and girls affected by domestic and gender-based violence. She highlighted the importance of shelters for survivors of gender-based violence to empower women to overcome the violence faced by them and transform their lives.

During her keynote address, Hon. Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba, Member of Parliament, reflected on the history of the shelter movement in Nepal and highlighted the achievements, challenges, and the way forward. She expressed her belief that shelters should expand their focus to encompass the prevention of gender-based violence, beyond merely providing support to survivors. Deuba stated, "Cases managed by women shelters, data, and other evidence generated by the shelters should be used to inform policies in the prevention of gender-based violence. As a lawmaker and women's rights activist, I am committed to improving policies related to shelters and strengthening the monitoring and regulation of shelter services" she said.

Won Young Hong, Country Representative of UNFPA Nepal, one of the partners of the conference reaffirmed UNFPA's support in preventing gender-based violence. Laxmi Kumari Basnet, Joint Secretary of Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen thanked all the participants for their presence, seeking their active participation in the program she emphasized on government and CSP partnership.

Day 2: June 26th
The three-day conference was divided into plenary and different thematic sessions to make it more participatory and effective.

Overview of the National Women Shelters Network and Mapping of Women Shelters:
Uma Rajya Laxmi Shah, Co-founder and past president of Saathi, who initiated the formation of the national network of shelters in Nepal, shared that COVID -19 made shelter operators realize the need for shelter services as a collective movement. Shah said that shelter services, which were not listed as essential, faced tremendous difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown. The need for shelters became most apparent when domestic violence spiked during the pandemic. She added that the collective movement of shelter operators was crucial in addressing this need.

Saathi initiated the National Network of Women Shelters in 2020 and currently serves as its secretariat, facilitating collaboration and advocating for the recognition of shelter services as essential. Shah further shared on how shelters in Nepal play critical role in providing a safe haven for survivors, depicting them an indispensable resource in our fight against violence. Amid the challenges

posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations in Nepal faced closures, trafficking and violence increased during this time, emphasizing the importance of shelters in protecting vulnerable women.

Shah informed that during the COVID-19 pandemic shelters had to continue their services despite limited emergency services, resources, and staff. However, essential services such as transportation for victims and survivors to reach shelters were not considered a priority. Ensuring proper access to essential services remains a crucial aspect of shelter work, she opined.

She also highlighted the need to further focus on survivor support, adhering to national minimum standards and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and strive to make survivors self-reliant through skill training programs for the economic independence of survivors. Nevertheless, she also underlined the challenges such as obtaining citizenship certificate among other documents of the survivors as such vital documents are essential for job placements and this also hinders their ability to become economically independent.

She further emphasized crucial partnership between government and non-governmental agencies including National Women Commission, and OCMCs to ensure effectiveness of the GBV essential services.

Overview of Women Shelters: Status, Challenges and Way Forward
In this plenary session, Laxmi Kumari Basnet, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizen shed light on the status, challenges, and the path ahead for the improvement of women shelters.

She also drew the attention of all stakeholders to provide due consideration towards the struggle faced by minority groups in obtaining official identification documents, stressing its importance for equitable access to shelter services.

Her presentation further emphasized on the significance of strengthening economic conditions and promoting education through economic empowerment and literacy initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of women shelters. By creating opportunities for job and skill development, shelters can provide a conducive environment for survivors to rebuild their lives and achieve financial independence, she opined.

The psychological impact of experiencing violence was acknowledged, underscoring the necessity of providing proper counselling and mental health support to survivors. Ensuring access to hospital treatments and prioritizing physical well-being were also highlighted as crucial aspects of holistic care and recovery.

Looking beyond immediate needs, her presentation touched on various other elements contributing to shelter residents' well-being. Ensuring adequate clothing, creating opportunities for personal growth, and empowering survivors to become self-reliant were deemed essential for their successful reintegration into society.

The collaborative efforts of all levels of government were identified as crucial to improving shelter services. The presentation stressed the need for comprehensive cooperation from local, provincial, and federal authorities to work collectively towards the betterment of shelters. Only through such joint efforts can the necessary resources and support be garnered to address challenges and ensure the success of these crucial facilities.

Plenary Session 1: Sharing best practices and lessons learnt
This plenary was facilitated by Bijaya Rai Shrestha, Aaprabasi Mahila Kamdar Samuha (AMKAS) member of the Shelter Network. During the plenary, best practices and lessons learned were shared by experts from diverse fields and background who provided valuable insights and experiences.

Jira Rai, Deputy Mayor of Belaka Municipality shared her experience in regard to the empowerment of women through shelters. She also shared how shelters have been prioritized in the municipality by providing funds to shelters for operationalization as well as providing trainings to the survivors.

Dr. Bikash Shah, Chief of the One-Stop Crisis Management Centre (OCMC) at B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences Morang shared a compelling case involving a young girl who experienced trauma resulting from rape. The OCMC provided extensive psychological counselling and support to help her recover. He emphasized the critical role of mental health in the overall well-being of survivors, as depression and other psychological issues can lead to physical health problems. He also shared the importance of OCMCs in facilitating the survivor's access to justice.

Renu Shah, a psychologist from Alleviate Poverty Empowering Women in Rural Areas of Nepal (APEIRON) another member of the Network, emphasized the significance of shelter-based work. She highlighted three crucial aspects for empowerment of shelters. Firstly, she stressed on the importance of good psychological health for the residents. By prioritizing counselling and mental health support, survivors can be empowered to engage effectively in various programs. Secondly, she emphasized the need for financial and economic empowerment through employment and job opportunities. Such empowerment motivates survivors to work towards their self-sufficiency and independence. Lastly, she underlined the importance of managing both the mother and child in shelters. When the mother and child are mentally stable, their overall well-being improves, and the mother can better support her child's education.

Durga Baral, Head of Social Development Division at Ministry of Social Development, Koshi Province, highlighted the practical gaps in implementing existing laws, guidelines, and criteria related to shelter services. He further acknowledged the role of women shelters in ensure access to and empowering the survivors.

Kiran Bhatia, an International Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) expert stressed the need for capacity building and mentoring of shelter staffs working in the frontline. Drawing on her international experience, she shared that empowering the survivors through counselling and support should be emphasized, rather than trying to change their behaviour.

During the open floor discussion, various issues were raised, such as managing cases related to sex addiction of survivors, violence by government officials and reputed individuals, and the complexities of depression among survivors. The participants also commented that laws and policies are based on ideal situation but their implementation conditions in our context are very basic. These legal and policy instrument should be based on practical approach rather than ideal consideration.

Thematic Sessions
Altogether 6 thematic sessions were featured in the conference. In these parallel sessions, experts made presentations and interacted with the participants. These sessions were carried out to facilitate deeper discussions and knowledge sharing. Participants had the opportunity to actively participate in group activities, share their experiences, and brainstorm solutions to address specific challenges. Each session featured expert panellists who shared their research findings, insights, and practical experiences.

Participants were divided into three groups based on their areas of interest and three parallel thematic sessions were conducted. First three thematic sessions were conducted in parallelly. They were about Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Referral Mechanism and Case Management Process.

Thematic session 1: Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)
Dr. Madhuri Singh, Saathi's founder president and gender expert, facilitated this thematic session. The objective of the session was to have proper framework that ensures efficient and effective response to victim/survivors of gender-based violence and dependent children residing at shelters. The session began with the Ice Breaker and the general discussion on Gender Based Violence, Concept of Shelters to the GBV survivors, types and categories of shelter homes.

She further shared holistic support and services should be provided to the survivors and the children accompanying the mothers which includes Medicine and Obstetric, Psychiatric services along with the psychosocial counselling and legal services. Furthermore, income generational and livelihood activities help empowerment programs. Formal and Non-Formal Education should not be limited to

basic literacy. Seed money and other similar capital must be provided to survivors for impactful reintegration and to lessen the chance of re-victimization. In spite of providing all available resources, there are high chances of survivors becoming vulnerable and destitute and may seek other options. In such scenarios, subsidized second stage home concept can be helpful for the survivors.

She also emphasized on the importance of policies and guidelines for smooth operationalization of the victims/survivors. SOP should clearly state the available services; structure and accessibility; age and ranges of the target groups. There should be additional or optional guidelines for senior citizens and minor survivors. SOP should also focus on the Terms of Reference of shelter staff; case management; infrastructure; safety and security of the place within and in the periphery; code of conduct of survivors and staff.

Implementation of SOP is important for all the front-line service providers and service seekers as it guides the overall procedures of the operation of shelters. It also helps to run the shelter home within the given framework / guidelines. Monitoring the effectiveness and evaluation of the program will help in identifying and mitigating the gaps and challenges too. Similarly, case management and process of data collection and compilation need to be stated within the SOP. Other vital aspects are consent, confidentiality and safety planning of the survivors. Shelter homes should have separate entry and exit point for security and the safety of the survivors while designing the infrastructure.

Some of the Challenges discussed during the sessions included:

- Shelter homes may encounter challenges when survivors find it difficult to adapt to their new environment, which could include language barriers and the multicultural context

- Survivors coming from different socio-economic backgrounds, having varying experiences of violence, dealing with stigma, and experiencing stress can significantly shape their respective behaviours. These differences can, in turn, contribute to strained interpersonal relations among the shelter residents that sometimes results in quarrel and fight.

- The approach to be adopted should be stated clearly in the SOP for the operationalization of shelters: Welfare Approach, Need Based Approach or Right Based Approach.

Recommendations from the Session:
- Shelter services should be considered as essential services. During the time of COVID 19 cases of GBV were skyrocketing and victims were seeking shelter services but due to the lockdown mobility was limited.

- Shelters should have operational policies in place to effectively manage situations during times of pandemic and disaster.

- Insurance of the building and other infrastructure should be highly prioritized.

- Shelters are obligated to take any type of cases without the aligning criteria. Hence, there should be a clear definition of terminologies such as safe house, transit home, shelter and rehabilitation centres.

- To cater to survivors of all age groups effectively, we need to reform shelters to be more inclusive, focusing on women and children rather than just women shelter. This may require expanded program design and funding.

- Shelters can also be vulnerable to conflict between mentally stable and unstable cases. Frequent conflict may arise between survivors who may harm each other or the staff. Insurance of survivors and staffs should be made mandatory.

- Unforeseen mishap and other accidents may also take place inside the shelter premises so insurance of survivors are also crucial factors.

- Refresher training, mentoring and supervision for staff are required. Psychosocial counselling and Psychiatric consultation should be available or referral services should be mandatory to all cases of sexual assault residing in the shelters.

Thematic session 2: Referral Mechanism

The session was facilitated by Roshani Devi Karki, Under Secretary, Ministry of Health and Population. The session began with a story narrated by the resource person about a girl in Chitwan who was rescued from the streets by an organization. This girl was pregnant and in need of a long-term shelter. The organization reached out to the resource person, who was working at the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizen at the time, seeking assistance in finding a suitable shelter. The resource person promptly took action and arranged for the girl to be brought to the Mangala Sahana Rehabilitation Centre in Kathmandu.

At the rehabilitation Centre, the girl received healthcare services through the One Stop Crisis Management Centre (OCMC) and eventually gave birth to a child in a hospital. However, she refused to accept the child and began mistreating and abusing the new-born. Clearly, she was dealing with immense trauma. To ensure justice for the girl, the rehabilitation centre initiated the necessary processes. The girl recorded her statement to the police, leading to the arrest and investigation of a 23-year-old boy from Ramechhap who was found guilty of raping her. The boy is currently in prison.

The child has been placed in child protection facilities, while the girl has been focusing on her education and acquiring new skills. She is on her path to achieving economic independence. The resource person shared this incident to illustrate those referrals for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) can originate from various other sources, contrary to the popular belief that they must solely approach the OCMC for referral services.

The resource person then started her presentation giving the legal definition of survivors of gender-based violence. She also highlighted that the law not only envisions women and girls as survivors but also considers men and LGBTIQ+ members and children who face violence and are in need of health, legal and rehabilitation services. She also defined the rehabilitation centre/safe houses established for the services for the survivors providing short term and long-term safe space and other. She highlighted the process of case management and rehabilitation of GBV cases. She also shared the nature of violence, its gravity, economic condition of the family of the victim/survivor, age of the victim, their education, if the victim has any relative and helpful friends, if they can receive assistance from their relatives / friends, all this should be considered during rehabilitation process.

Other topics covered in the presentation were:

- **Economic Assistance:** Providing economic assistance in the form of seed money to start business or livelihood activities based on the interest of the victims / survivors. The amount of the economic assistance is determined based on the nature of the enterprise they choose.

- **Technical assistance:** Along with the financial assistance, there is need for enhancement of skills of victims / survivors and regular counselling. For this purpose, the private sector, government and non-government sectors should work in coordination.

- **Network and Cooperatives:** Establish cooperatives of GBV survivors and provide them with financial assistance. Promote the establishment of survivors' network and mobilize it to make the cooperatives accountable, protect the rights of victim/survivors and help in their rehabilitation process

- **GBV**: Reported GBV cases are just the tip of an iceberg. The forms of GBV are changing and most of the GBV cases take place inside one's home. In many cases, children, adolescent girls, and women are discriminated, mistreated and perpetrated with violence by their guardian themselves. There is a lack of priority and political commitment towards addressing and preventing sexual violence. GBV management has become like 'everyone's responsibility is no one's responsibility".

- **Referral**: The primary objective of referral services is to ensure that all service providers in relevant organizations can easily and conveniently provide necessary services to the GBV survivors without any hassle, with the availability of simple, user-friendly, and free-of-cost platforms that operate 24 hours a day. The agencies in the referral mechanism are Hospital, OCMC, Security Agency, Judicial Agency, Training/skill development centre, Shelter/rehabilitation center, Society and Home/family. When there is a need for other

services apart from those mentioned, coordination should be established with local government authorities, safe shelters, rehabilitation centers, and services related to education and empowerment.

Sample of Sexual Violence Management Referral Handbook:

S.N.	Kinds of Services	Name and address of service provider organizations	Service referred to	Name of contact person	Contact number
1	Medico-legal services	Name of hospital	Medico-legal	Dr. Shah	9841....

The session also focused on Case Management Process and things to remember while filling out the referral form. The session was interactive and participants shared issues and challenges from their experiences managing a shelter.

Issues and Challenges:
- Lack of financial resources to support the rehabilitation and livelihood of survivors.
- Lack of sufficient centres for the rehabilitation of survivors affected by severe mental health issues, disabilities, and other forms of severe violence.
- Lack of framework for rehabilitation based on the nature, severity, economic conditions, and family support in cases of violence.
- Delays in case investigation and judicial remedies.
- Delays in implementing the decisions of the closed session and expediting justice delivery.
- Lack of sufficient attention given to traditional harmful practices and social mind-set change.
- Lack of effective coordination and collaboration due to the burden of responsibilities assigned to the designated contact person.
- Inability to manage gender-based violence cases on-call at OCMCs.
- Difficulty in achieving social integration/family reunification, including a dignified life, for the survivors and affected individuals.
- The affected individuals are unable to access integrated services in a free, convenient, and easy manner.

Discussion:

The purpose of the referral system is to ensure that essential services for those affected by gender-based violence are easily and readily available in a convenient and free manner, provided by service providers 24 hours a day. The establishment of a referral system is crucial for effective management of cases, including social justice and redressal.

The existing referral system incorporates the presence of police, government lawyers, and judicial authorities at OCMC on-call basis. However, it has been found that the accountability of the judicial agency in implementing this arrangement is significantly lacking.

It has been observed that the crisis management centers may exhibit reluctance in providing the necessary services, including clothing and other amenities, to the affected individuals. They may provide false reasons such as procedural delays, which can hinder the fulfilment of their responsibility to provide support as outlined in the OCMC directives. This lack of timely and adequate assistance can further impact the well-being and recovery of the affected individuals.

Gender discrimination and patriarchal attitudes originate within the household and family, and it is crucial to intervene at these primary locations to address such issues effectively. Programs that aim to challenge gender-based harmful practices and promote transformative social norms are highly necessary. Special attention needs to be given for eliminating harmful practices and traditions perpetuating gender disparities and social biases.

It is crucial to enhance the involvement of the private sector in addressing the essential aspects of gender-based violence cases, particularly with regard to economic empowerment. It is important to recognize that perpetrators often hold social and economic power, which can pose challenges to survivor-centric approaches adopted for GBV case management.

Recommendations:

- All relevant institutions, including local governments, should establish an internal and external referral mechanism that is sensitive, responsive, and inclusive towards cases of gender-based violence.

- There should be a system in place within the existing referral mechanism to designate a focal person responsible for attending to the referral process during on-call hours.

- There is a need to establish an integrated referral system that takes into account the social, economic status, age, and family situation of the survivors, in order to effectively address their needs.

- In addition to individual economic empowerment, promoting collective income-generating activities can have a significant impact on the economic well-being of survivors and contribute to sustainable GBV case management

- Awareness and training on the fundamentals of gender-based violence and related services are essential for service providers, referral systems, and case management. This helps service providers understand, identify, and address issues of gender-based violence and its consequences effectively.

- To enhance the quality of psychosocial counselling services, it is important to promote uniformity and consistency in service delivery. This includes standardizing the training, skills, and competencies of the counsellors, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines, and promoting a unified approach to counselling methodologies. By establishing a standardized framework, the quality and effectiveness of psychosocial counselling services can be improved, resulting in better support and outcomes for individuals seeking assistance.

- Enhanced collaboration and coordination among service providers in the referral system is absolutely essential

Thematic Session 3: Case Management Process

Under Secretary Mamata Bishta, Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens and Aatma Ram Neupane, GBV Program Coordinator, UNFPA facilitated the session. The session began with an overview of cases in shelters in Nepal. Participants from various organizations, shelters, and OCMCs shared their experiences and challenges they face.

The main points discussed were:

- **Challenges of GBV case management:** The patriarchal mind-set and cultural factors contribute to the lack of priority given to managing a victim/survivor's case. Many violence-affected women face abandonment by their families, lack of support systems, and financial aid issues. This is why case management is crucial when they arrive at shelters.

- **Case Management System:** One of the shelter representatives shared a case management process, which involves physical and mental check-ups, training, referrals, and maintaining personal files and counselling reports. The focus is also on education, with formal education

provided for those aged 18 and below, while special schools are available for those above 18 and dropouts. The ultimate goal is to reintegrate and empower the survivors through life skills and seed money support.

- **Collaborative Efforts:** Various entities, including the court, police, National Women Commission, I/NGOs should work together to provide free services to survivors

- **Survivor's Rights and Privacy:** The survivors have the right to information, and their privacy and confidentiality must be safeguarded. Security is also crucial, and obtaining consent before proceeding with any action is essential. However, there is a practical challenge which hinders the privacy of the survivor.

- **Principles of Case Management:** The facilitators emphasized four principles - social work practices, the socio-ecological model, the women's movement, and trauma theory - as the foundation of case management for violence-affected individuals. The two models for the case management process includes:

- **Social Work Practices: Social** work practices involve demonstrating the need for services and conducting assessments and evaluations. This model includes multi-service management, monitoring, and advocacy. It encompasses various aspects, such as counselling and training, falling under the umbrella of social work practices.

- **Socio-Ecological Model:** This model considers individuals within their relationships, family, community, and society. It recognizes that different experiences contribute to the main causes of various problems. Many factors can impact a person's situation, requiring careful consideration. For instance, violence can stem from societal values or a patriarchal mind-set. When examining a particular individual, their experiences may reflect or represent the experiences of their entire community. Therefore, rather than solely focusing on providing services, understanding the underlying causes of violence and its impact on the survivor's journey and reintegration is crucial for effective case management.

- **Discussion on Maintaining Confidentiality:** During hypothetical case examples, the audience debated whether to maintain confidentiality in cases of domestic violence, especially when family matters are involved. Opinions varied, with some arguing for confidentiality to protect survivors, while others shared instances where a lack of confidentiality exacerbated violence. The survivor-centric approach, involving working with perpetrators, was also stressed. Ensuring equality and creating a conducive environment in shelters were seen as key elements in managing cases effectively.

Main Steps in Case Management:

- **Introduction and Involvement:** The process begins with comforting the survivor, obtaining informed consent, explaining confidentiality, taking signatures, and building trust.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Prioritizing the survivor's suggestions and avoiding blame or discouragement.

- **Making a Case Response Plan:** Informing survivors about available services without giving direct advice and organizing meet-ups while minimizing home visits.

- **Implementing the Action Plan:** Providing relevant services within the scope of available resources.

- **Following Up on Violence Incidents:** Regularly re-evaluating security and safety plans to ensure survivor's well-being.

Points to consider in Case Management:

- Case managers do not investigate but provide support without negative judgment or suggestions.

- Case supervisors collaborate with case workers to schedule meetings effectively.
- Case management is distinct from GBV service provision.
- Psycho-social trainings should only be provided by trained specialists, ensuring survivors' well-being and empowerment.

Main Steps in Case Management:
- Introduction and Involvement
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Making a Case Response Plan.
- Implementing the Action Plan
- Following Up on Violence Incidents

The case is considered closed when the survivor feels physically and emotionally stable, financially independent, and safe. Feedback surveys conducted by those who supported the survivor throughout their journey provide valuable insights for improvement. Need for separate body to handle case management system was discussed. The discussion drew following recommendation for effective management of GBV cases

Recommendations:
- Foster collaboration among stakeholders including government, NGOs, shelters, and legal entities to provide seamless and coordinated support to survivors.
- Strengthen privacy protocols, ensuring survivor confidentiality, informed consent, and safety in all interactions.
- Implement comprehensive training for case workers and service providers on trauma-informed care, survivor-centered approaches, and gender-based violence dynamics.
- Establish a data system to track survivor progress, enabling informed decision-making and resource allocation.
- Secure sustainable funding for shelters, staff, training, and empowerment programs to ensure comprehensive survivor care.

Thematic session 4: Inclusivity in Shelters

This session mainly focused on the issues of inclusivity in women shelters, aiming to raise awareness about the challenges faced by specific marginalized and minority groups and recommended strategies to ensure women from diverse backgrounds have equal access and support within shelter facilities. The session facilitated by Sita Niroula, Undersecretary at National Women's Commission discussed equitable services to all women, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or other socio-cultural identities.

Laxmi Ghalan, President of Mitini Nepal shared that it is important to note LGBTIQ individuals are often left out as shelters are usually designed only for women. Transgender individuals, in particular, face difficulties in accessing shelters. Ghalan further said that the conference should address the concerns of Sexual and Gender Minorities as there is no separate shelter for them. The subject of sexuality is different even within women but shelter home does not cover this issue.

Tika Dahal, President of Nepal Disabled Women Association (NDWA) talked about the challenges faced by person with disabilities in accessing shelters as most of the shelters do not have disabled friendly infrastructure. This creates a barrier for them, especially in cases of violence. Additionally,

even if they seek help, the shelter staff may not be equipped to provide assistance. One of the challenges is that the shelter staff often work without holidays.

Disabled-friendly shelters are designed to ensure the safety and comfort of individuals with disabilities. This includes accessible entrances, ramps, wide doorways, and accommodation of mobility aids like wheelchairs and crutches. These modifications are essential for individuals with physical disabilities to move freely and independently within the shelter. Shelters must be disabled-friendly for promoting inclusivity, accessibility, and human rights. Ensuring that shelters accommodate the needs of disabled individuals is a crucial step towards creating a society that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all.

Matrika Devkota, Chairperson of Koshish Nepal, shared overall thoughts on inclusivity in shelters. When coming to the shelters, the survivors may feel a sense of alienation and a desire to return home. It is essential to consider their unique needs and ensure that the shelters provide a supportive environment. It is very difficult to find the families of people with mental problems, to find their relatives.

Sajani Amatya, President of Saathi, shared shelters over the years have seen a shift from primarily serving women affected by domestic violence to now accommodating more minorities and children, including those who have experienced rape or are pregnant at a young age. These survivors require psychosocial support as they have been living in violent environments. Referrals are also crucial for their well-being.

She further added adequate budget allocation is necessary, including the provision of trained teachers for children. Psycho-social counseling should not be limited to mothers; it should also be extended to children. It is crucial for shelters to operate in a peaceful manner and be easily accessible, with disability-friendly facilities such as accessible toilets. She also raised the issues of children in shelters. An important part of the shelter home is the management of children. Most of the children in shelters are in miserable conditions with psychosocial problems. This problem is even more common in children when living with victims. Because of this, children are also victims. Who will take care of the sick child in the shelter home? Who will treat? Who will teach them? Questions like these are not given much thought, which are big problems in shelters. For this, social counseling is very necessary in shelters.

Discussion

Sexual and Gender Minorities

Individuals from Sexual and Gender Minorities face unique challenges when accessing women's shelters. In some cases, they face discrimination, rejection, or a lack of understanding due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The absence of gender-neutral or LGBTQ+ specific shelters also pose a significant barrier to their safety and well-being. Shelters should be equipped to provide safe spaces and appropriate support for members of the LGBTQIA+ community who may face unique challenges due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The session also underscored the necessity for creating an inclusive environment within shelters that respects and supports the diverse identities of survivors.

Accessibility for Women with Disabilities

Women with disabilities encounter barriers when seeking shelter services and often face inadequate accessibility measures. Physical infrastructure, communication channels, information materials, and support systems are not always inclusive and fail to cater to the unique needs of women with disabilities. Hence, there is need for disabled friendly infrastructures.

Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Many women from diverse cultural backgrounds face obstacles when accessing shelter services, primarily due to language barriers and cultural differences. Limited availability of culturally sensitive

services, lack of interpretation services, and unfamiliarity with the existing support systems hinder effective communication and adequate support.

Dependent Children
Dependent children require wide range of services such as education, accommodation, and medical treatment but all shelters do not have enough resources to meet their need. Hence, shelters should also focus the needs of the dependent children.

Age-Related Considerations
Women of different age groups have varying needs and experiences when seeking shelter services. Adolescents, elderly women, and pregnant individuals require specialized support systems, age-appropriate facilities, and specific services that cater to their unique circumstances which should be considered by the shelter operators.

Economic Disparities
Women from low-income backgrounds often face financial barriers when accessing shelter services including difficulty in affording transportation or lack of knowledge about available financial support options.

Some of the concerns raised during the session are highlighted as below:

- Shelters should be gender-friendly as well as LGBTIQ+ friendly.
- It is necessary to make a plan for Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Shelters should be financially stable and independent.
- Focus should be given to special needs of the survivors.
- It is important to address the holistic approach needed for t prevention of Gender based Violence.
- It is important to have a uniform system for the operation of all shelters across the country.

Conclusion: The session highlighted the significance of developing inclusive policies, conducting staff training, and collaborating with relevant organizations to ensure that shelters are safe and welcoming for all survivors, irrespective of their backgrounds and identities. The discussion emphasized the ongoing commitment to promoting inclusivity and diversity within women's shelters to better serve and support all survivors in their journey towards healing and recovery.

Recommendations:
- Cultural Sensitivity and Linguistic Support.
- Implement interpreter services and translation facilities to ensure effective communication.
- Employ staff members who are linguistically diverse and culturally competent to facilitate an inclusive environment.
- Accessibility for Women with Disabilities
- Conduct regular accessibility audits of shelter facilities to identify and rectify any physical or communication barriers.
- Train shelter staff on disability awareness, inclusive communication strategies, and assistive technologies.
- Partner with disability advocacy organizations to ensure comprehensive support for women with disabilities.

- Develop LGBTQI+ inclusive policies and procedures within women's shelters, ensuring that staff members are knowledgeable about LGBTQI+ issues and supportive of diverse identities. Establish gender-neutral or LGBTQI+ specific shelters to cater to the unique needs of LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Engage local businesses, non-profit organizations, and community groups to create sponsorship programs to support the shelter service providers.

Thematic Session 5: Sustainability and Resource Mapping

Facilitator Ratna Kaji Bajracharya, former Joint Secretary of Nepal Government started the session with quote "The root cause of 'violence against women' is patriarchy. Therefore, to eliminate violence, one must eliminate patriarchy. Do 'Safe shelters' really help to eliminate 'patriarchy'?

Following topic were discussed in the session

What is Safe shelter?

- While these facilities may have different names such as safe shelters, safe houses, protection homes, service centers, or rehabilitation centers, it is important to recognize that their purpose remains the same. They are all aimed at providing temporary protection and support to women who have been affected by domestic violence or any form of violence based on sexual and gender-based violence. Ensuring their safety and well-being is of utmost importance.
- Similarly, shelters are established to meet the needs of other individuals as well, recognizing the importance of such support systems.
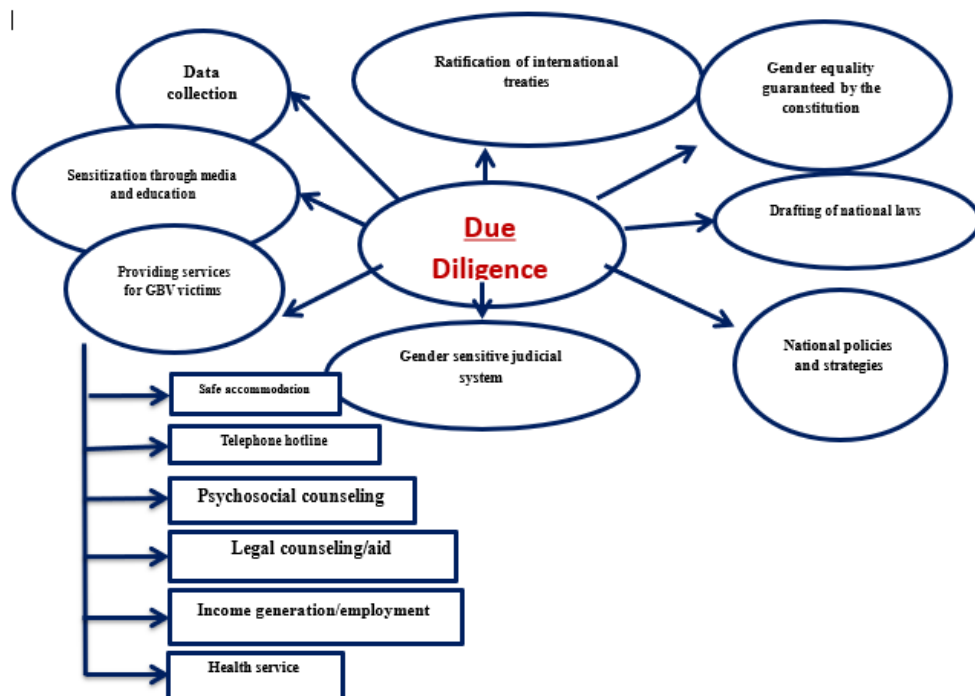
Why safe shelters?

- Because it is an appropriate and safe place to go when facing physical injury and harm from gender-based violence and being banished from home
- To take refuge in situations where it is not possible to reside in the home due to the presence of violence as well as immediate separation from the relationship is not possible.
- To seek safe environment and accommodation in situations where it becomes difficult to stay in an unfamiliar environment due to the threat of violence
- It not only provides shelter to women survivors of violence but also ensures the safety of dependent children and adolescents.
- It provided not only physical and mental health care but also legal and psychosocial support for the safety and well-being of individuals affected by violence and in need of such assistance

Different names of shelter homes based on its objectives and services
- Transit Homes
- Emergency Centre
- Drop-in Centre
- Short-Term Shelter
- Long-Term Shelter
- Rehabilitation Centre
- Second Stage Home

Due Diligence Standards to VAW

Concept of women shelter: origin and expansion

It started in 70's decade (1970) in the world

Country	Year of women shelter established
Canada	1965
Netherlands	1970's decade
England	1971
USA	1972
Australia	1974
Germany	1976
Austria	1978
Italy	1989
Japan	1993
China	Unaware about this concept until 1990s
France	After covid-19 pandemic

When did Shelter Homes for Women Start in Nepal

It was NGOs like Saathi, WOREC, Maiti Nepal and Shakti Samuha that started operating shelters in the 1990s. Saathi opened its first shelter in 1995. It was only in 2009 that the Government opened 4 rehabilitation centres and additional 15 service centres. Now government runs 21 service centres and 10 rehabilitation centres. According to the research conducted by Saathi in 2021, the total number of shelter homes across the country is 53.

Koshi province –6
Madhesh province –4
Bagmati province—23
Gandaki province –6
Lumbini province—7
Karnali province –2
Sudurpaschim province –5

Resources required for Sustainable management of shelters

- Establishment cost
- Expert human resources and volunteers
- House rent, construction cost, maintenance and operation cost including electricity, telephone, transportation, garbage management, food and accommodation and other
- Running cost
- Data / document management cost
- Financial management, audit and fund-raising cost
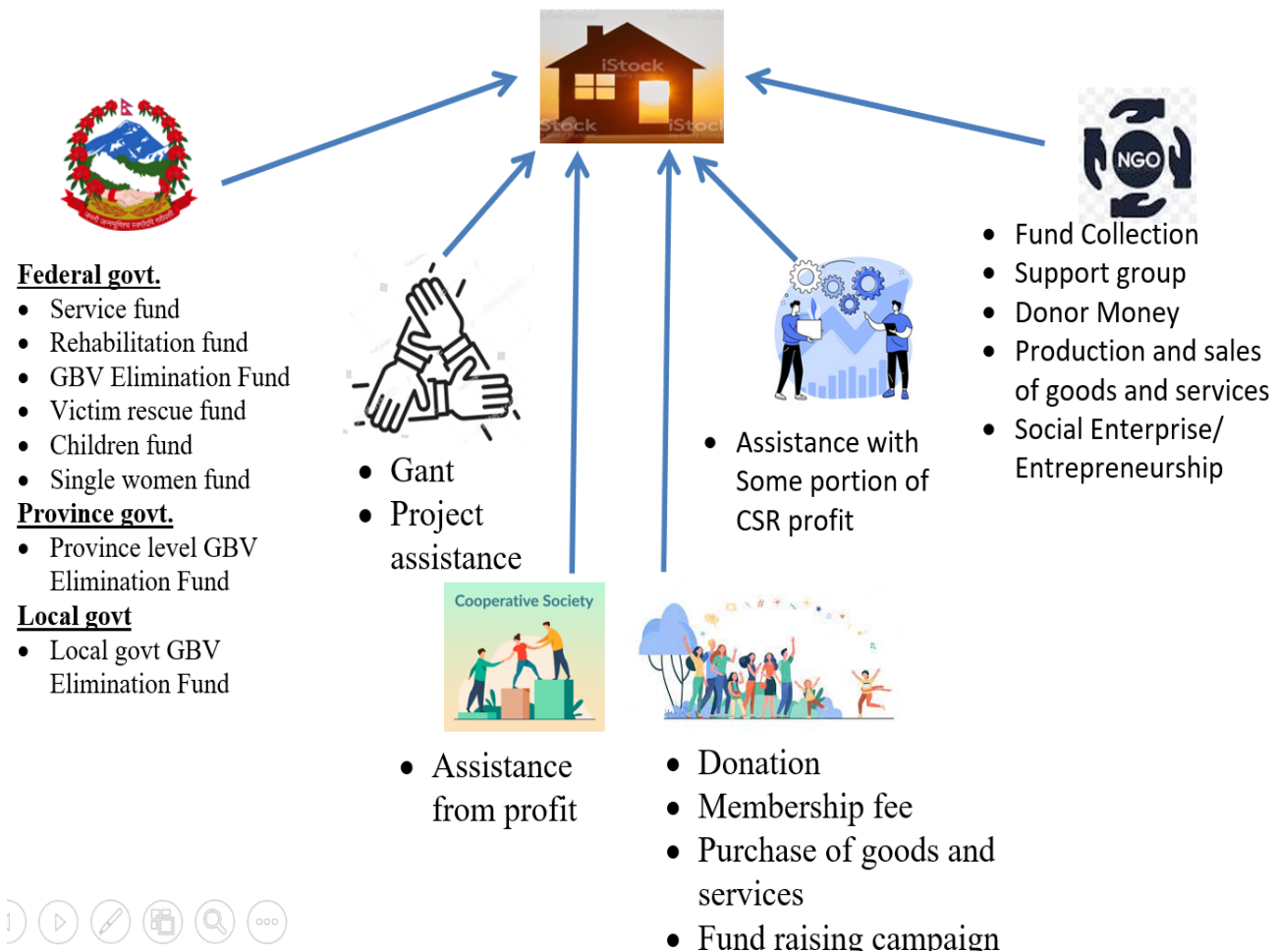
GBV concerns in UN instruments

CEDAW General Recommendations that specifically addresses violence against women and the need for shelters

- **General Recommendation No. 19**: "Prevent as well as investigate, prosecute, punish and provide reparation for acts of omissions by non-state actors which result in GBV against women"
- **General Recommendation No 35:** "Provide specialist women's support services, including adequate shelters"

World Conference on Women Shelters

- 1st: Alberta, Canada, organised by Council of Women's Centre—2008
- 2nd: Washington DC, USA, organised by US National Network to End Domestic Violence and Global Network of Women's Shelters (GNWS) (delegates from 96 countries and 1400 participations) - 2012
- 3rd Hague, Netherlands, organized by GNWS and Foundation of Women's Shelters, Delegates from 115 countries, 1500 participants - 2015
- 4th, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, organized by GNWS and Garden of Hope Foundation, delegates from more than 120 countries, 1500 participants - 2019
- World Shelter conferences drew attention on the following issues
- To support and strengthen the International Women's Shelter Campaign.
- Create public platform for Shelters
- Sharing experiences and adopting best practices in shelter management
- Focusing on innovative approaches in women's violence reduction through shelter homes.
- Shelter home operation and other variable cost

Source Identification

Federal govt.
- Service fund
- Rehabilitation fund
- GBV Elimination Fund
- Victim rescue fund
- Children fund
- Single women fund

Province govt.
- Province level GBV Elimination Fund

Local govt
- Local govt GBV Elimination Fund

- Gant
- Project assistance

- Assistance from profit

- Assistance with Some portion of CSR profit

- Donation
- Membership fee
- Purchase of goods and services
- Fund raising campaign

- Fund Collection
- Support group
- Donor Money
- Production and sales of goods and services
- Social Enterprise/ Entrepreneurship

Summary of discussion

- The establishment of shelter homes is the result of a campaign initiated by women organized against domestic violence. Over time, the state and government have recognized the necessity of their establishment and have taken responsibility for it.
- The global agenda for women's empowerment, violence reduction, and support for survivors and affected individuals is still not fully integrated into government agendas. Civil society organizations are the ones primarily addressing these issues.
- Women's shelters are not adequate in Nepal and other countries worldwide
- There is an urgent need for shelters to provide immediate services to women and children affected by violence or in need of protection. However, shelters are not the ultimate solution for preventing and completely eliminating violence.
- The main source of funding for shelters typically comes from the general public, government sector, development partners, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, who contribute through donations or purchase of goods and services.
- In the current situation, ensuring the safety of survivors and raising awareness against violence, as well as improving the quality and management of shelter services, are vital. To provide guidance in this regard, the National Conference on Shelters is an important platform.
- It is necessary for all three levels of government to assess the needs and feasibility and ensure effective management of shelters.

Recommendations:

- Non-governmental organizations should collaborate as complementary institutions to the government in the efforts to prevent domestic violence. Furthermore, it is advisable to encourage increased private sector involvement in these initiatives, as their current participation in this area is insufficient.
- The Private Sector's Business and Social Responsibility Fund has not been utilized for gender-based violence prevention. The law related to CSR needs to be revised.
- Non-governmental and non-profit organizations can make significant contributions to the operation and services of women's shelters, emphasizing social entrepreneurship and non-profit motives. To facilitate this, there is a need to remove legal barriers or obstacles that prevent non-profit organizations from engaging in profit-oriented activities.
- There is no one-size-fits-all model for comprehensive coverage. It is essential to have thorough discussions on which model is appropriate based on necessity, a rights-based approach, and the concept of a welfare-oriented state.
- There are challenges identified in the operation of women's shelters initiated by women's savings and cooperative groups, which require re-evaluation and further examination.

Thematic Session 6: Addressing Mental Wellbeing of Survivors and Care Providers

Kripa Acharya, psychosocial counsellor and mental health researcher, was the resource person for the session

The thematic session emphasized the importance of survivors' and caregivers' mental wellbeing. Addressing survivors' mental health helps them in trauma recovery, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and building their self-esteem. The resource person focused the discussion on caregivers' mental wellbeing, citing that it adds to the quality of care and service to survivors.

The session started with engaging the participants in deep breathing exercise followed by explaining a mood meter. The mood meter is a tool which is used to recognize and understand own or other peoples' emotions. The activity promotes emotional self-awareness. Furthermore, there was a discussion on the meaning of mental health and its importance and other related term such as trauma and how it affects the brain. A group work was carried out on the "Mental health status of women, children and caregivers in shelters. "The findings of the group work were:

Mental status of women survivors and their behaviour in the shelters

- They often find it challenging to trust other residents due to their past experiences, often keeping a distance.
- Survivors may resist listening to caregivers due to fear, trauma, or a sense of helplessness.
- Their eating habits and communication patterns might change drastically – either eating excessively or very little, and talking excessively or withdrawing.
- Survivors may experience disruptions in their sleep patterns, struggling with insomnia or nightmares.
- Some survivors might be at risk of self-harm as a way to cope with emotional pain.
- Feelings of entrapment could lead to attempts to escape the shelter environment, seeking control over their situation.
- Many survivors suffer from low self-esteem, finding it hard to assert themselves or voice their needs.
- They may struggle to maintain personal hygiene and self-care due to emotional distress.
- Survivors might turn to various coping mechanisms, including addiction to substances like cigarettes, engaging in risky sexual behaviour, overworking, overeating, or oversleeping

Children who have experienced domestic violence may display the following behaviours:

- They often exhibit mental and emotional disturbances as a result of witnessing or experiencing domestic violence.
- Children may find it difficult to trust others due to the trauma they have witnessed or experienced in their home environment.
- Some children may become stubborn and exhibit undisciplined behaviour as a way of expressing their distress and attempting to regain control in a situation where they might have felt powerless.

Challenges faced by caregivers:

- Constant exposure to traumatic stories and situations can lead to compassion fatigue, causing caregivers to feel emotionally drained and overwhelmed.
- Caregivers might feel personally threatened, especially if they're working in environments where the abusers could pose risks to their safety.
- Dealing with the complex needs of survivors, along with administrative tasks, can result in a heavy workload that might impact their well-being.
- The emotional toll and challenges of the job might lead caregivers to contemplate quitting, especially if they don't receive sufficient support.
- Sometimes, caregivers might struggle with effective communication and coordination among themselves, which can affect the quality of care provided.
- Feedback from participants can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the services provided, helping caregivers and staff make improvements.

Survivors' mental health Influencing factors

- The scarcity of mental health professionals in Nepal can significantly hinder survivors' access to proper psychological support. Limited availability of trained therapists and counsellors can lead to delayed or inadequate treatment for trauma.
- Survivors of domestic violence often experience attachment trauma due to the betrayal of trust by the perpetrator. This can result in difficulties forming healthy relationships and trusting others, contributing to their mental health challenges.
- Interactions or situations that remind survivors of their past traumatic experiences can lead to re-traumatization. This can be particularly damaging to their mental well-being and hinder their recovery process.
- Stigma surrounding domestic violence can deter survivors from seeking help or speaking about their experiences openly. The fear of judgment or societal backlash can exacerbate feelings of isolation and impact their mental health.
- Influencing factor of caregiver's mental health
- Caregivers are exposed to survivors and their traumatic experiences on a 24/7 basis. This continuous exposure can lead to emotional exhaustion and take a toll on their mental well-being.
- Continually hearing survivors' stories and witnessing their pain can lead to secondary trauma, where caregivers begin to experience symptoms similar to those of trauma survivors themselves.

- The constant empathy and emotional support provided by caregivers can lead to compassion fatigue. Over time, they may feel drained and emotionally overwhelmed due to consistently giving of themselves.
- The demanding workload that caregivers face, including managing administrative tasks, providing direct support, and dealing with complex cases, can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety.

Recommendations:

Key recommendations drawn from the session for addressing the challenges faced by front line staff working with survivors of gender-based violence:

- Ensure adequate number of staff members to effectively manage the workload within shelters. This can help prevent burnout and ensure that survivors receive the attention and care they need.
- Make the mental and physical well-being of front-line staff a priority. Regular wellness check-ins, access to counselling, and opportunities for self-care should be provided to mitigate the emotional toll of their work.
- Focus on capacity building for shelter staff by providing training and resources that enhance their skills in trauma-informed care, communication, and managing emotionally demanding situations.
- Implement regular monitoring and supervision of staff members' mental health. This can involve assessments, open discussions, and a supportive approach to ensure that staff are coping well.
- Establish psychosocial counselling and psychiatric services within shelter homes for survivors of violence. Offering professional support can aid in the healing process and help survivors rebuild their lives.

Letting out frustration

After the day-long discussions, participants were asked to let out their frustrations in one sentence followed by sharing positive thoughts in one sentence. This ice breaking session was facilitated by Bandana Rana.

Some frustrations shared by the participants

- The more you understand, the more complex it is
- Tired of seeing so much work to do
- I was fed up calling incessantly requesting for shelter budget at the local level
- I am shocked that these issues have not been included at the local level
- Difficult to understand at first and gets more difficult when you try to understand more
- No matter how much I did, I was never acknowledged
- Frustrated at the lack of clear policies
- Seeing the despair of the elders, we, the youths, became even more depressed
- Shocked to know about the kinds of heinous torture the perpetrator and apply
- Perpetrators stay indoors, victims seek shelter
- Saddened that the federal government does not recognize us

Positive thoughts shared by participants:

- I am happy if the government listens to us
- The conference gave confidence and hopes for better shelter homes
- It made me happy to come to the conference and listen to the elders
- Hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, let's make it all together

The conference also allowed participants to network with each other and establish connections with professionals, activists, and organizations working in the field. This networking is envisaged to promote collaboration and exchange of ideas beyond the conference and to foster long-term partnerships in the pursuit of women's empowerment.

Day 3: 27th June, 2023

Yoga and Motivational Session

As part of the objective of the Conference to focus on self-care and appreciative inquiry the morning started with Dr. LP Bhanu Sharma, the founder of Jeevan Vigyan presenting a motivational talk as well as practicing the general rules of yoga for relaxation. Sharing various inspiring stories, he said that 'the task of running a shelter home is incomparable and those involved in it are entitled to highest of reward.

During this session, Dr. Sharma's motivational talk and yoga practice significantly inspired and rejuvenated the participants, providing them with valuable insights and relaxation techniques. These tools and perspectives have not only enhanced their well-being but also equipped them with a renewed sense of dedication and motivation in their essential work of running shelters, enabling them to better support survivors.

Emerging Challenges of Shelter Services - Insights from Shelter Operators

The session was facilitated by Kiran Bhatia, International Gender Expert from India, Representatives from different shelters shared their experiences and concerns particularly related to mental health issues and violent behaviours within the shelters.

Sharada Gautam from Kaski emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach. Education and awareness programs were highlighted, such as peer group for sharing experience, fostering youth teamwork, and promoting belief-based initiatives.

Bimala Ghimire from Saathi Kapilvastu discussed the challenges in managing mental health issues among shelter residents. One significant concern raised was the lack of work-life balance for shelter workers.

Bidhya Bista from ABC Nepal pointed out the increasing prevalence of anxiety and depression among shelter residents such as children experiencing anxiety disorders when denied access to social media or resorting to alcohol and drugs.

During the open floor some of the participants shared how children's mental health can be affected by social media restrictions, leading to anxiety disorders. Also a shocking incident where a shelter resident drugged the entire shelter staff to escape.

Kiran Bhatia emphasized the importance of shelter staff being capable of handling these issues properly, as everyone has different coping mechanisms. Further discussions from the audience included, the bureaucratic delays shelters faced during the pandemic, the importance of comprehensive sexuality education, understanding the journey and challenges of survivors, and promoting inclusivity in rehabilitation centers. Discussions also took place on the legal age for sexual relations and the rights of survivors.

Reporting Back from Previous Day's Thematic Sessions

Suvekchya Rana, Executive Director of Saathi, facilitated a session where participants collectively shared the key highlights from the thematic sessions held on the previous day. To ensure that all participants were informed and could contribute their insights, a panel discussion format was adopted. This involved having a representative from each of the parallel sessions present the major outcomes, fostering a comprehensive understanding among all participants about the key issues discussed during the various sessions and promoting active engagement and collaboration.

Plenary Session 2: Survivor-Centric Approach

Sachchi Karki, Gender Specialist (UNFPA) who facilitated the session shared four different case examples to highlight survivor/victim-friendly practices in the country. She emphasized the importance of tailoring services to meet the unique needs and experiences of each individual. The survivor-centric approach focuses on empowering victims and survivors, ensuring they do not feel like passive recipients of services but rather empowered individuals with agency over their lives.

She stressed the significance of strengthening the internal power of survivors, helping them move beyond their experience of violence, and encouraging their economic independence. Providing security, justice, and support for victims with children is essential. A panel discussion followed, where each panellist shared their experiences and challenges related to the survivor-centric approach.

Confidentiality was discussed as a critical aspect for shelter operators. The panellists highlighted the code of conduct and orientation provided to staff members to maintain confidentiality and protect the identities of survivors. They also stressed the importance of creating a welcoming environment for survivors based on the nature of their violence and having regular counselling visits.

Challenges faced by shelters included safety and security concerns, continuity, and uniformity of services. Collaboration with other organizations was mentioned as a way to improve services for survivors. The panellists emphasized the need for proper tracking, monitoring, and clarity on the essential services provided by shelters.

The discussions emphasized the importance of a Survivor-Centric Approach with an "Essential Service Package" that includes physical and mental health, security, justice, and social services as top priorities for victims and survivors.

During the Q&A session, a participant raised a concern about how to assist victims who do not speak or express themselves. The panellists emphasized the need to ensure the safety and trust of victims and survivors, allowing them time to feel comfortable and share their experiences. Karki added that victims know themselves best, and providing the right information and support will empower them to speak and make informed decisions.

Plenary Session 3: Adoption of Conference Declaration

The conference declaration calls upon various entities to work together in ensuring the safety and security of women and girls affected by gender-based violence (GBV) and to empower them. These entities include all levels of government, political parties, national and international development partners, the private sector, and stakeholders. The declaration recognizes the crucial role played by women shelters in providing vital services to GBV victims and survivors.

The preamble of the declaration emphasizes that women shelters serve as critical platforms for raising awareness, offering security, holding perpetrators accountable, and facilitating survivors' access to justice. It highlights the significance of providing comprehensive and skilful trainings, as well as promoting economic empowerment initiatives. These measures are essential for instilling mental motivation and fostering economic independence among survivors, ultimately enabling their successful reintegration into society.

Moreover, the declaration acknowledges the invaluable contribution of shelter homes during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It recognizes the essential role they played in providing

support and protection to GBV victims and survivors who faced heightened vulnerabilities and increased risks during the crisis.

To address the pressing issues at hand, the declaration puts forth several demands. It calls for the establishment of standardized operating procedures, referral mechanisms, and effective case management protocols within the context of shelter services. Additionally, it urges local, provincial, and federal governments to recognize and include shelter services as essential components in their policy and planning documents. This recognition will ensure that shelter services receive the necessary support, resources, and attention they require to effectively address GBV and support survivors in their journey towards healing and empowerment. Declaration was finalized incorporating feedback from the participants and adopted subsequently.

Closing Plenary Session

Kamala Parajuli, Chairperson of the National Women Commission, was the chief guest at the closing session facilitated by Irada Gautam of Aawaaz a member of the Shelter Network.

The Chief Guest emphasized the critical importance of sustaining shelter services for women and girls affected by gender-based violence (GBV). She highlighted the need for local governments to take proactive measures and allocate sufficient budgetary resources for shelter homes. This financial support not only ensures the continuity of these essential services but also demonstrates the government's unwavering commitment to safeguarding the rights and well-being of GBV victims and survivors.

At the conference, representatives from all seven provinces shared their invaluable experiences and perspectives. They pointed out the absence of sessions focused on legal services for survivors and the lack of discussions regarding economic empowerment and rehabilitation. Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of allocating more time for comprehensive discussions on the various conference topics. As a solution, they proposed addressing the remaining issues through separate, dedicated workshops to facilitate in-depth exploration and problem-solving.

In her closing remarks the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen Laxmi Kumari Basnet, shared about the initiatives undertaken by the federal ministry. She emphasised that shelters serve as safe havens for GBV victims, providing them with the much-needed protection, counselling, and support during their journey towards healing and empowerment.

Moreover, the ministry has taken concrete steps to combat GBV by forming a well-regulated GBV Elimination Committee. This committee, comprising dedicated professionals and experts, aims to tackle the root causes of gender-based violence and implement effective measures to prevent its occurrence.

Furthermore, Joint Secretary Basnet emphasized the ministry's commitment in providing free support for the smooth functioning of shelter homes. She reaffirmed the government's commitment to address the pervasive issue of GBV. The combined efforts of local governments and federal authorities underscore the gravity of this social problem and the collective determination to create a society where all women and girls can live free from violence and discrimination.

Some Quotes from Participants

"As long as the society, including the state institutions does not become victim friendly, the victim cannot feel justice." - Bhim Prasad Poudel, Three Angels Nepal: Pokhara

"The story shared by the survivors reflects their long struggles, the agonizing pain of justice denied - a truly heart-wrenching situation." Gita Kumari Shahi, In-charge: Bajhang Safe House

"I'm putting in more effort, but the results seem elusive. It's becoming really frustrating." Bijaya Rai Shrestha, AMKAS Nepal

"Attending this conference was overwhelming for me. Hearing the stories of those who've been affected left me deeply moved and concerned." Mina Devi Rai, Police Office: Jawalakhel

"I find it uplifting to see people, who are not part of the LGBTQ+ community, supporting and advocating for LGBTIQ+ individuals. This support has a positive ripple effect, and it's something I deeply appreciate." Sudeep Gautam, Blue Diamond Society

"Dedicated individuals, tirelessly working and actively listening, are striving to help those affected across all seven provinces. However, it's disheartening that the government of Nepal has yet to establish a policy for shelters." Nisha Poudel, AAWAJ, Surkhet

"Offenders are at home receiving respect, while the survivor's seeking justice are the ones residing in shelters. "Tika Dahal, Nepal Disabled Women Association (NDWA)

"Initially, it was challenging to grasp, and now it's becoming even more complex. Learning about violence against women was distressing, and today, when Ms. Laxmi Ghalan spoke about the agony faced by the LGBTIQ+ community, my sense of frustration deepened." Ramesh Koli, Patan Municipality: Baitadi

"Addressing survivors' and caregivers' trauma, and highlighting the vital role of trauma-informed therapy for healing, was a crucial yet rarely discussed topic. I'm pleased this conference shed light on it." Kripa Acharya, Counseling Psychologist

"Observing the energy, dedication, and long-standing commitment of experienced individuals in this field has inspired me to take action. Their significant contributions motivate me to contribute as well." Sanjita Timilsina, Women's Rights Activist

"We must acknowledge that perpetrators often hold greater economic and social power than our security and legal systems," Roshani Karki, undersecretary MoHP.

"The perception that the state is inherently male-dominated raises questions about whether women can perceive state-operated shelters as genuinely safe spaces," Ratna Kaji Bajracharya, former Joint Secretary GoN.

Annex I: Program Schedule

<u>**Programme Schedule**</u>

First National Conference on Women Shelters

25 - 27 June, 2023

Kathmandu, Nepal

Inaugural Session (25 June, 2023)	
3:00 - 3:30	Registration/Tabla Performance - Youth from Saathi Support Program
3:30 - 3:35	National Anthem
3:35 - 3:50	Welcome Remarks and Objectives • Sajani Amatya, President, Saathi
3:50 - 3:55	• Inauguration by Chief Guest Hon'ble Minister Surendra Raj Acharya, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen
3:55 - 4:05	Performance by Survivors from Shakti Samuha
4:05 – 4:20	Context Setting National & Global: Bandana Rana, Member of UN CEDAW Committee
4:20 - 4:50	Survivor's Voices – Individual Case sharing and short video clips made by survivors
4.50 - 5.25	• Remarks –Won Young Hong, Country Representative of UNFPA Nepal - 5 mins • Keynote Speaker - Hon. Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba, Member of Parliament (Co-founder of Saathi) - 15 mins • Remarks – Honorable Kamala Kumari Parajuli, President, National Women Commission - 5 mins • Inaugural Remarks by Chief Guest, Hon'ble Minister Surendra Raj Acharya, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens—10 mins
5.25 - 5:30	Vote of Thanks Joint Secretary Laxmi Kumari Basnet, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen
5:30 onwards	Group photo followed by Dinner

Master of Ceremony: Ms. Sapana Maharjan, Coordinator, Saathi Women Shelters

Programme Schedule

Day II (26 June, 2023)	
7:30 - 8:30	**Breakfast & Registration**
8:30 - 8:45	**Logistics Announcement**
8:45 - 9.00	**Overview of shelter network and mapping of women shelters** Uma RL Shah, National Network of Women Shelters
9.00 - 9.30	**Overview of Women Shelters: Status, Challenges and Way Forward** Joint Secretary Laxmi Kumari Basnet, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen
9.30 – 10.30 Plenary	Sharing Best practices and lessons learnt Facilitator: Bijaya Rai Shrestha, Aaprabasi Mahila Kamdar Samuha (AMKAS) Panelists: • Asst. Prof. Dr. Bikash Shah, Chief, One- Stop Crisis Management Center (OCMC), B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences • Durga Baral, Ministry of Social Development, Koshi Province • Jira Rai, Deputy Mayor, Belka Municipality, Udaypur • Kiran Bhatia, International GESI Expert • Renu Shah, Psychologist, Alleviate Poverty Empowering Women in Rural Areas of Nepal (APEIRON)
10.30 – 11.00	**Tea Break**
11:00 - 1:00 (Thematic Sessions)	**Standard Operating Procedures** Resource Person & Facilitator: Dr. Madhuri Singh, Founder President, Saathi
	Referral Mechanisms Resource Person & Facilitator: Under Secretary Roshani Karki, Ministry of Health and Population
	Case Management Process Resource Person & Facilitator : Under Secretary Mamata Bishta, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens Aatma Ram Neupane, GBV Program Coordinator, UNFPA
1:00 - 2:00	Lunch
2:00 – 4.00 (Thematic Discussions)	**Inclusivity in Shelters Facilitator:** Under Secretary Sita Niraula, National Women Commission (NWC) **Panelists:** • Laxmi Ghalan, President, Mitini Nepal • Matrika Devkota, Chairperson, Koshish Nepal • Sajani Amatya, President, Saathi • Tika Dahal, President, Nepal Disabled Women Association (NDWA)
	Sustainability and Resource Mapping Resource Person & Facilitator: Ratna Kaji Bajracharya, Former Joint Secretary
	Addressing Mental Wellbeing of Survivors and Care Providers Resource Person & Facilitator: Kripa Acharya, Counseling Psychologist
4.00 – 4.30	**Tea Break**
4.30 – 5.15	**Letting Out Frustration** Facilitator: Bandana Rana, Member of UN CEDAW Committee
5:15 - 6:00	**Recreational Networking**

Day III (27 June, 2023)	
7:30 - 8:30	Registration & Breakfast
8:30 - 9:30	Yoga and Motivational Session: LP Bhanu Sharma
9.30 - 10:30 Plenary	**Emerging challenges of Shelter services - Brief sharing by Shelter operators** Resource Person and Facilitator: Kiran Bhatia
10:30 - 11:00	Tea break
11:00 - 12:30	**Reporting Back Previous Day's Six Thematic Discussions** - 10 minutes each Open Floor Facilitator: Suvekchya Rana, Executive Director, Saathi
12.30 - 1.30	Lunch break
1.30 - 2.30	**Survivor Centric Approach - Brief sharing by Shelter operators** Resource Person & Facilitator: Sachchi Karki, Gender Specialist (UNFPA)
2:30 - 3:30	**Adoption of Conference Declaration** Chair: Bandana Rana, Member of UN CEDAW Committee
3:30 - 4:00	Evaluation
4:00 - 5:30	**Closing Plenary:** • **Facilitator:** Irada Gautam, AWAAZ Presentation of Conference Declaration –Sajani Amatya, President, Saathi **Remarks by:** • Province Participants (one each from seven provinces) – 3 minutes each • Representative, Ministry of Social Development, Province – 5 minutes • Closing remarks by Chief Guest – Secretary Suman Raj Aryal, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens • Vote of Thanks: Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens
5:30	**Hi-Tea**

Conference Convener - Bandana Rana, Member of UN CEDAW Committee

Annex II: Kathmandu Declaration

KATHMANDU DECLARATION

Adopted By

First National Conference on Women Shelters

(June 25-27, 2023)

"Shelters Sustained: Empowerment Attained"

Preamble:

Recalling the vital role and importance of women shelters operated by governmental and non-governmental organizations in addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and providing short-term and long-term services for immediate rescue, relief, protection, security, psychosocial counseling, legal aid, human rights and access to justice for GBV survivors/victims with the assurance of dignified life, human rights and access to justice for their socialization and family reunion;

Realizing the contribution made by women shelters in the past to bring the perpetrators to book by ensuring justice with social protection and reparation, while emphasizing the social, cultural and economic transformation of GBV survivors/victims with their economic empowerment, bringing social awareness against GBV, as well as providing integrated services for the GBV survivors/victims;

Acknowledging the active role of the women shelters in according justice to GBV survivors/victims in the face of the human and economic challenges due to global pandemic of COVID-19 including other disasters and crises, in coordination and collaboration with various agencies of the government, by providing health awareness, psychosocial counseling, housing and livelihood, and medical care and rehabilitation activities in the best possible way through remedial and other necessary services;

Calling upon all the stakeholders including the three tiers of the State, political parties, private sector, all organizations and international development partners to prioritize cooperation, coordination and partnership for enhancing the services of women shelters for the safety, assistance and protection of women in Nepal and to ensure expansion and sustainability of women shelters with effective and uniform policies in the services of the shelters, with necessary technical and human resources for women's recovery and resilience, and to strengthen the shelter movement for women's safety, empowerment and equality;

Recognizing the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural and diverse regional characteristics guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal; pledging to remain constantly active in the expansion and quality enhancement of women shelters to realize women's equality, freedom, well-being and human rights without discrimination in services of and access to women shelters on the grounds of caste, gender and sexual orientation, physical and mental conditions, and disability by protecting and promoting unity in diversity, and social and cultural solidarity; expressing commitment to integrity, impartiality, fairness and transparency in the operation of women shelters;

Through intensive sharing and discussions among nearly 200 participants, representing the line ministries of the Federal and Provincial Government of Nepal, Women Shelters, Survivors/Victims, political parties, private sector, , international development partners and other related stakeholders of the society from all seven Provinces, reflecting on the status quo and emerging, sharing experiences and holding discussions on necessary facilities for GBV survivors/victims in the women shelters as an important part of state responsibility contributing to the national commitment of establishing gender equality;

With a strong belief that this Conference has enabled us to contribute to the construction of safe, systematic and decent shelters by providing an opportunity to explore the challenges and problems in the upgrading and development of women shelters and to identify innovative solutions that are put into use in the world and adopt good practices and learnings;

We, the participants in the First National Conference on Women Shelters (June 25-27, 2023), do hereby adopt the following declaration:

1. **We**, in this conference, express our commitment to expand a strong national network of women shelters as a platform for enhancing the goals, objectives, management and sustainability of women shelters.

2. **We** believe that the State has an important role to play in women's safety and protection of their fundamental rights. In this respect, we call upon the State to attach special importance to the safety of women and the development and promotion of shelters and to improve the services and quality of shelters as required.

3. **We** appeal to the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international development partners, private sector, political parties, civil society organizations and other members of the society to support and assist women shelters in our determination to make policy, institutional, financial and programmatic arrangements for enhancing services of and access to women shelters operated with the aim of providing essential integrated services (including physical health care, psychosocial counseling, medical services, safe environment, legal aid, capacity development, livelihood, life skills, social rehabilitation, assistive devices and support services, etc.) for GBV survivors/victims.

4. **Bearing in mind** that infrastructures and financial and skilled human resources play an equal role in the capacity and institutional development of women shelters, we urge all three tiers of the government, development partners and civil society for commitment and solidarity to extend their collaboration and support to enhance access, services and effective management of shelters including sustainability.

5. **Since** women shelters play a crucial role in the safety and protection of GBV survivors/victims even during disasters and pandemic, we demand that shelter services be listed as essential services of the State.

6. **Since** effective and safe referral has a vital role for GBV survivor/victim-friendly service delivery, we call for strengthening the criteria related to shelters to bring in uniformity in the Referral Mechanisms and Case Management System in order to make the services reliable and hassle-free. We request for the classification of shelters operated by the governmental and non-governmental organizations on the basis of services they provide, by setting common criteria, to bring consistency to their operation.

7. **We** urge the service providers to establish a disaggregated and integrated data system, taking into account the potential risk to all forms of GBV survivors/victims and their dependent children, paying special attention to confidentiality and their sensitivity, and ensuring the flow and transparency of all services and information to provide easy access to the services and facilities of shelters with an inclusive approach

8. **We** call for inclusion of shelters and services relating thereto in the budget, policies and programs of the Local, Provincial and Federal Governments, in addition to regular monitoring, guidance, coordination and specialized training for them with utmost priority.

9. **We** urge for the expansion of financing to the Gender-Based Violence Prevention Fund, Relief and Rescue Fund including other Funds, which have been put into operation by all three tiers of government for the support of GBV survivors/victims, while making timely revision in them for the process of providing easy access for the victims/survivors to ensure necessary support and livelihood programs of the survivors/victims taking refuge in shelters.

10. **We** demand that the development partners working for the management of GBV cases abide and implement the provisions that require them to allocate and invest a certain percentage of their budget for GBV survivors/victims in accordance with the provisions stipulated by the Gender-Based Violence Prevention Fund (Operation) Regulation.

11. **We** request all three tiers of government to make directive reforms in the laws, policies and standards related to construction, operation and management of the physical structures of women shelters and to provide mentoring, care for caregivers, regular training and other services/facilities for their mental health and holistic development, while ensuring the security of the operators, managers and staff of the shelters.

12. **We** request all the relevant parties to contribute to the sustainable management of shelters, the development of self-reliance of GBV survivors/victims and the transformation of their life by

supporting the social entrepreneurship development of the organizations involved in operation of shelters.

13. **We** demand that the government develop specific women shelter prosperity plan including it in the existing government plan, policies and structures in order to facilitate shelters to implement their plans related to the employment, health care services, legal aid, entrepreneurship promotion and other essential services for GBV survivors.

14. **We** call for amendments in the necessary policies and laws related to grants and assistance currently being provided by private business companies under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to include support for shelters operated for GBV survivors/victims and provide employment opportunity to GBV survivors/victims commensurate with their capacity and experience.

15. **We** demand for assurance of continuity of support by all three tiers of the government to specialized counseling services, medical treatment and health care, education and skill development, legal aid and access to justice, social transformation, economic empowerment and other services in women shelters, while assisting in the education, awareness-raising, employment and development of the affected children.

16. **We** demand that Provincial level well-equipped state-of-the-art and technology-friendly multi-purpose training center and permanent rehabilitation homes be established for the long-term purpose of developing their skills and abilities in such cases where the GBV survivors/victims cannot be reunited with their families, in addition to establishment of temporary rehabilitation homes in each district.

17. **We** call upon government agencies, all organizations and members of the National Network of Women Shelters for joint collaboration, cooperation and coordination to hold Provincial Conferences of Women Shelters followed by a cumulative National Conference on Women Shelters every two years

Notwithstanding the adoption of this Kathmandu Declaration by the National Conference of Women Shelters for operational management, strengthening and sustainability of women shelters, its purpose shall be useful for other shelters of similar nature and may be implemented accordingly.

Notwithstanding the mention of only the term 'women' as contained in this Kathmandu Declaration, it shall also include adolescent girls, girl children and dependent children.

Notwithstanding containing 'shelter', 'shelter home' or any other term in any previous document, we, the participants in this National Conference, do hereby unanimously consent to and adopt the resolution that the term 'safe house' *(Surakshit Awas Griha)* shall be used henceforth.

Done on this 27th day of June in the year 2023 in Kathmandu, Nepal

Annex III: Glimpses of the conference

आश्रय गृह सेवा: सशक्तिकरणमा टेवा
Shelters Sustained: Empowerment Attained
First National Conference on Women Shelters
महिला आश्रय गृहहरूको प्रथम राष्ट्रिय सम्मेलन
June 25 - 27, 2023
Kathmandu, Nepal