

Women's Careers and Empowerment in Global Health

Kathmandu, Nepal, March 26, 2023

Seminar Report

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Introduction

The Women's Careers and Empowerment in Global Health seminar was held on March 26, 2023, in Kathmandu, Nepal. It was hosted by the Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway, together with Prof. Dr. Dibya Singh Shah, Dean from the Institute of Medicine at Tribhuvan University. The seminar focused on women's careers and empowerment in global health. The seminar provided an opportunity to share the rich experiences of women from various sectors such as high-level positions in academia, non-governmental and governmental institutions, and private sector institutions.

Keynote Speakers

The seminar was moderated by Dr. Bernadette Kumar, Vice President of Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway. It featured the following thirteen keynote speakers:

1. Prof. Dr. Dibya Singh Shah, Dean of Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University, Nepal,
2. Prof. Dr. Hanne Harbo Flinstad, Dean of Faculty of Medicine, University of Oslo, Norway
3. Ingeborg K. Haavardsson, President, Women in Global Health (WGH), Norway
4. Hon. Dr. Arju Rana Deuba, Member of Parliament, Nepal
5. Dr. Rita Thapa
6. Hon. Prof. Dr. Chanda Karki, Member of Parliament, Nepal
7. Dr. Toshima Karki
8. Dr. Jeanette H. Magnus, Director, Center for Global Health at the Sustainable Health Unit, the University of Oslo (UiO) and Special Counselor of Women in Global Health (WGH), Norway
9. Dr. Sangita Mishra, Additional Secretary of Ministry of Health, Nepal
10. Dr. Lonim Dixit, World Health Organization (WHO)
11. Dr. Esperanza Diaz, Professor and Director, Pandemic Center, University of Bergen (UiB), Norway
12. Prof. Dr. Paleswan Joshi Lakhe, Head of Surgery, Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH), Nepal
13. Dr. Runa Jha, Head, National Public Health Laboratory (NPHL)

Aims

The aim of this seminar was to address the issue of gender inequality in leadership positions in academia, non-governmental institutions, and private sector institutions related to global health, as there is still much work that needs to be done to achieve gender parity.

Sessions

Opening and Welcome

Prof. Dr. Dibya Singh Shah, Dean of Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University, Nepal began by welcoming everyone to the Women's Careers and Empowerment in Global Health seminar. She expressed her excitement at the prospect of discussing ways to advance women's careers and leadership roles in the field of global health. During the opening remarks, she acknowledged that historically, women have been underrepresented in the various sector, particularly in leadership positions. However, she expressed optimism that events such as this seminar can help to promote gender equity and empower women in the field of global health.

Prof. Dr. Dibya Shah also acknowledged the historic nature of the event which brought together herself, the first female Dean of the Institute of Medicine at Tribhuvan University in Nepal and Prof. Dr. Hanne Harbo Flinstad the first female Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Oslo in Norway. She emphasized the significance of this gathering, stating that it represented a powerful display of women's achievements in leadership positions.

Dr. Bernadette Kumar, Vice President of Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway, also welcomed everyone and expressed her gratitude for attending the seminar. She acknowledged the importance of discussing ways to empower women and promote gender equity in the field of global health. Dr. Kumar introduced the seminar's objectives and agenda, highlighting the various topics and speakers that would be featured throughout the event. She emphasized that the seminar's purpose was to provide a platform for attendees to learn, share their experiences, and discuss ways to address the barriers that women face in advancing their careers.

She also reminded attendees of the importance of active participation, urging them to ask questions, share their perspectives, and engage in meaningful discussions with one another. She emphasized that everyone's contributions were valuable and encouraged attendees to take advantage of the opportunity to network and connect with others in the field.

Women in Global Health (WGH), Norway

The seminar continued where Ingeborg K. Havaardson, of President Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway gave us a brief introduction to Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway and what they do. Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway's purpose was to create a platform for women to connect, share ideas, and collaborate with each other, as well as to advocate for gender equality in global health policies and practices. Through their various initiatives, they aimed to empower women to take up leadership positions, increase their visibility in the field, and influence decision-making at all levels of global health.

Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway recognized the critical need to increase the representation and influence of women in global health and work towards achieving gender parity in all spheres of the sector. They work towards achieving these aims through a range of activities, including organizing networking events, mentorship programs, and leadership training.

In addition to their various initiatives and activities, Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway has also produced a member booklet that provides valuable information about their organization and its members. The booklet includes a directory of their members, highlighting their areas of expertise, research interests, and professional backgrounds. This allows their members to connect with each other and collaborate on projects and initiatives related to global health.

Panel Discussion I

Ingeborg K. Havaardson and Dr. Bernadette Kumar led the first panel discussion, inviting all the panelists to the stage. The distinguished panelists included Hon. Dr. Arju Rana Deuba, a Nepalese Member of Parliament, Dr. Rita Thapa, Prof. Dr. Hanne Harbo Flinstad, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Oslo in Norway, Hon. Prof. Dr. Chanda Karki, a Nepalese Member of Parliament, and Dr. Toshima Karki. They were introduced to the attendees then the panelists were each asked a question related to women's careers and empowerment in global health. The following is a summary of the discussion:

Hon. Dr. Arju Rana Deuba reflected on how the major aspects of her life have influenced her choices. She shared a personal experience of childbirth, describing how her idealistic and glamorous view of the process was shattered during a difficult and prolonged labor at Patan Hospital in Nepal. Despite receiving care from one of Nepal's most successful gynecologists,

Dr. Geeta Rana, she felt as though she might not survive the ordeal, highlighting the limitations of even the most sophisticated medical facilities. Drawing comparisons to the experiences of women in rural Nepal, where lack of resources often leads to maternal mortality, she emphasized the urgent need for action to address this issue. She noted that when asked about their biggest challenge, many women in rural Nepal identified childbirth as a significant concern. She highlighted the importance of empowering women and girls with education and skills that can help to break down the barriers that prevent them from accessing healthcare services and exercising their rights and by investing in women's education and training, we can help to create a more equitable society and empower women to take charge of their health and wellbeing.

Dr. Rita Thapa discussed her time in Nepal during the 1950s, which was a significant period in Nepalese history, particularly for women's education. Despite the cultural norms that looked down upon women's education, Dr. Thapa was fortunate to have a liberal father who supported her education, and she was able to attend the first girls' school in Nepal, Padma Kanya High School. In addition, she discussed her first job in a maternity hospital which opened her eyes to the helplessness of women regarding their reproductive choices. Dr. Thapa pioneered the training and mobilization of community-based health workers to reach rural mothers and children during a time when health workers were virtually absent. She highlighted the importance of providing women with access to education, healthcare, and opportunities to succeed in their careers.

Prof. Dr. Hanne Harbo Flinstad shared her insights on gender equality. She highlighted the importance of supporting women in leadership roles and creating a more diverse and inclusive environment in the workplace. She emphasized the role of mentorship and networking in empowering women to achieve their goals and encouraged the attendees to take action towards promoting gender equality in their respective fields. Overall, Prof. Hanne Harbo's message was one of hope and determination, as she urged us to continue working towards a future where women are fully represented and empowered in their respective fields.

Hon. Prof. Dr. Chanda Karki discussed the existence of institutional unconscious bias. She began her address by humorously pointing out the tall podium and jokingly suggesting that it was designed for a man by a man, highlighting how institutional unconscious bias has been prevalent for a long time. She pointed out that there has been a recent increase in attention towards this issue. She highlighted that unconscious bias is the result of cultural and societal

norms and can manifest in various forms such as gender stereotyping and double standards. These biases are often deeply ingrained in institutional practices and policies, which makes it challenging for women to succeed. Hon. Prof. Dr. Karki emphasized the need to recognize and address institutional unconscious bias to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for women at workplace. She explained that institutions should acknowledge the existence of unconscious bias and take action to eliminate it. Her message serves as a reminder that it is not only important to recognize and eliminate individual biases but also institutional biases to ensure equal opportunities and a level playing field for everyone.

Dr. Toshima Karki spoke about the aspects within the system that needed to be improved, drawing on her own experiences and lessons learned. She discussed the importance of education and skills development for women, noting that these were key factors in empowering women to take on leadership roles and make a positive impact in their communities. She spoke about the constitution of Nepal, which explicitly supports equality for women and recognizes their rights and dignity as equal citizens of the country. The constitution has several provisions that aim to ensure gender equality, including right to equality, access to education, and prohibition of discrimination. She spoke passionately about the constitution of Nepal and that while it guaranteed equal rights and opportunities for women, there are still significant gaps in its implementation. Despite the constitutional provisions and legal frameworks in place, women in Nepal continue to face various forms of discrimination and inequalities. To address this issue, she emphasized the need for a concerted effort by the government, civil society, and other stakeholders to challenge patriarchal attitudes and practices, strengthen implementation and enforcement mechanisms, and promote women's empowerment and access to education, employment, and decision-making positions.

Following the panelists' speeches, a brief question and answer session ensued where they discussed the possibility of a future where women would no longer need to advocate for equality. The discussion that followed included how Nepal has made significant progress towards gender equality, with more women being educated and joining the workforce. Dr. Toshima Karki highlighted the government's efforts in promoting gender equality, including policies that ensured women's rights were protected and their voices heard. Hon. Prof. Dr. Chanda Karki discussed the importance of breaking down traditional gender roles and stereotypes that had limited women's opportunities in the past. She emphasized that women's

empowerment was not just a moral imperative but also a necessary step towards building a prosperous and equitable society.

The first panel discussion came to a close as Dr. Bernadette Kumar and Prof. Dr. Dibya Shah presented a token of appreciation to all the panelists.

Women and Leadership

Dr. Jeanette H. Magnus, director of the Center for Global Health at the Sustainable Health Unit of the University of Oslo (UiO) and Special Counselor of Women in Global Health (WGH) Norway, commenced a new session on the topic of "Women and Leadership". Throughout the seminar, Dr. Magnus emphasized several crucial themes that could help women achieve success and empowerment in their careers.

Firstly, Dr. Magnus emphasized the importance of education for women, stating that educating a woman can educate a nation. She further stressed the need to increase access to education for women, which is a collective responsibility. Dr. Magnus's emphasis on education highlights the role that education plays in empowering women and promoting gender equality.

Another key theme in the seminar was the importance of recognizing and celebrating the contributions of women who came before us. Dr. Magnus urged attendees to remember that they stand on the shoulders of these women and to appreciate their contributions. This theme highlights the significance of acknowledging the struggles and successes of women who have paved the way for the current generation of women.

Dr. Magnus also emphasized the importance of dreaming big for oneself and one's children. By encouraging attendees to set high goals and aspirations, Dr. Magnus aimed to inspire women to pursue their passions and ambitions.

Throughout the seminar, Dr. Magnus highlighted the importance of mentorship and role models. She pointed out that there were mentors and role models in the room and encouraged attendees to seek out these individuals. This theme highlights the importance of learning from those who have gone before us and of having people who can guide and support us in our careers.

Dr. Magnus also spoke about self-awareness and self-appreciation. She noted that it is essential to know oneself and to appreciate oneself. This theme highlights the importance of

developing a positive self-image and self-confidence, which can be crucial in achieving career success.

Lastly, Dr. Magnus emphasized the importance of focusing on one's strengths rather than weaknesses. She encouraged attendees to write down their strengths and to focus on them rather than fretting about their weaknesses. This theme highlights the significance of recognizing one's abilities and building on them to achieve success.

Overall, Dr. Magnus's session provided valuable insights and guidance for women looking to achieve success and empowerment in their careers. Her emphasis on education, mentorship, self-awareness, and focusing on one's strengths can serve as a roadmap for women pursuing careers in global health or any other field.

Panel Discussion II

Prof. Dr. Dibya Singh Shah introduced the next panel discussion, centered around the theme of "Narratives of Love: Positive Experiences". The distinguished panelists included Dr. Sangita Mishra, the Additional Secretary of Ministry of Health in Nepal, Dr. Lonim Dixit from World Health Organization (WHO) Nepal, Dr. Esperanza Diaz, Professor and Director at the Pandemic Center, University of Bergen (UiB) in Norway, Prof. Dr. Paleswan Joshi Lakhe, Head of Surgery at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH) in Nepal, and Dr. Runa Jha, Head at the National Public Health Laboratory (NPHL). The following is a summary of the discussion:

Dr. Sangita Mishra spoke on gender equity and positive experiences in her career. She shared insights from her experience working in the public health sector and highlighted the importance of empowering women in leadership positions. She shared that despite progress in some areas, many women in Nepal continue to face barriers to their professional development. According to Dr. Mishra, women in Nepal often find it challenging to break through to higher levels of management and leadership positions. This is often due to cultural and societal norms that prioritize men in leadership roles, as well as the lack of mentorship and sponsorship for women in the workplace.

Dr. Mishra highlighted the need for greater mentorship and networking opportunities for women in Nepal. She emphasized the importance of creating supportive environments where women can learn from and support one another, as well as from more experienced professionals. Dr. Mishra called for action to address these issues, including the need for

policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equity and empowering women in the workplace. She stressed the importance of breaking down the cultural and societal norms that hold women back and creating more inclusive and supportive workplaces for all. Dr. Mishra emphasized the importance of addressing gender-based discrimination and stereotypes to create a more inclusive and equitable work environment. She encouraged women to speak up and advocate for their rights and opportunities in their careers.

Dr. Lonim Dixit spoke about the misconception that work-life balance is solely a female issue. She addressed the gender stereotypes that prevent women from achieving a healthy work-life balance. She highlighted how women are often expected to juggle multiple roles, including full-time jobs and full-time housework, without any time for themselves. Dr. Dixit explained that these stereotypes create a significant barrier to women's career advancement, as they are forced to prioritize their domestic responsibilities over their professional goals. She emphasized that women have to put on a number of hats, including that of a caregiver, homemaker, and employee, which can prevent them from reaching their full potential.

Dr. Dixit called for increased political representation of women, as well as policies that promote gender equality and protect women's rights. She also highlighted the importance of self-reflection and personal accountability in achieving work-life balance and career success. She encouraged women to take ownership of their goals and aspirations, as well as to prioritize their own self-care and well-being. Dr. Dixit encouraged women to take an active role in supporting other women in their journeys towards success. She emphasized the importance of building supportive networks and communities, as well as mentoring and empowering other women.

Dr. Esperanza Diaz emphasized the importance of personal responsibility in shaping one's career and life path. She highlighted that while external factors such as gender bias and discrimination can be barriers to success, it is ultimately up to each person to make their own choices and pursue their goals. Dr. Diaz also underscored the importance of building a strong network of friends and colleagues. She encouraged attendees to seek out mentorship and networking opportunities, and to build relationships with colleagues and peers who share their values and goals.

Prof. Dr. Paleswan Joshi Lakhe spoke about the challenges that women face in achieving work-life balance in academia. She explained that academia is a demanding profession that requires a significant amount of time and energy, and that this can make it difficult to balance

work with personal and family responsibilities. Prof. Dr. Lakhe further elaborated on the concept of work-life balance, highlighting that achieving it is like having a full-time job in itself. She emphasized that it requires a significant amount of effort and time management skills to ensure that both work and personal life receive the necessary attention. She also pointed out that while striving to do both work and personal responsibilities to the best of one's abilities is admirable, it can ultimately compromise both. This is because attempting to excel in both areas simultaneously can lead to burnout, stress, and a lack of productivity.

Prof. Dr. Lakhe also discussed how societal norms and expectations in Nepal often place a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities on women. In many cases, women are expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their professional careers, which can make it even more challenging for them to achieve work-life balance in academia. She shared her personal experience during the seminar, discussing how she has had to make difficult decisions in order to balance her career with her family responsibilities. She explained that, like many women in academia, she has had to forgo numerous opportunities both in her professional life and in her personal life to maintain a sense of balance. On one hand, she has had to pass on many professional opportunities and take a step back in her career to prioritize her family's needs, such as caring for her children and managing household responsibilities. On the other hand, she has also had to sacrifice time with her family to pursue her career goals and excel in her field.

Prof. Dr. Lakhe's personal experience highlighted the complexity and difficulty of achieving work-life balance in academia, particularly for women. It also emphasized the need for ongoing support and understanding for women who are navigating these challenges in their own lives.

Dr. Runa Jha emphasized the role of family in facilitating women's career development and empowerment. She emphasized that having supportive parents or guardians, especially a mother and father who encourage their children to pursue their dreams and aspirations, can be instrumental in helping women achieve their goals. She shared how she was the first girl from her village to pass the tenth standard and how many other girls in her school were irregular in coming to school. Dr. Jha highlighted the barriers that she faced in pursuing her education, such as societal expectations and gender discrimination. However, she had parents who supported her education and encouraged her to pursue her dreams. Through their support, Dr. Jha was able to break barriers and achieve success in her career. She also emphasized the

importance of individual factors such as competence, self-esteem, confidence, and physical and mental health in empowering women to succeed in their careers.

Following the discussion, an engaging question-and-answer session took place where the panelists enthusiastically answered a variety of inquiries from the attendees. The topics of the questions raised included the gender gap and the necessity for a designated breastfeeding room.

Dr. Toshima Karki expressed her concern over the lack of implementation of the constitutional provision that guarantees equal rights to women in education and employment. She suggested that it should be included in the primary school curriculum to teach children that both women and men are equal. Dr. Karki also highlighted the issue of parents sending their female children to government schools while sending their male children to private schools, despite the government schools having high rates of dropouts and low SEE (Secondary Education Examination) scores. She emphasized the need to improve the standards of government schools, so that parents feel confident about sending their male children to these schools as well. The panelists agreed that such changes in attitude and education are crucial in promoting gender equality in society.

Dr. Magnus shared a fascinating example from 1998 while working in Louisiana, she observed that there was no designated breastfeeding room available. In response, she took it upon herself to add a chair in the bathroom as the first step towards creating a more accommodating environment for breastfeeding mothers. This initiative had a significant impact, as it increased the rate of breastfeeding among Black women from 9% to 35% within four years. The panelists discussed the importance of such initiatives in empowering women to balance their professional and personal lives.

Prof. Dr. Lakhe emphasized the need to remove age limits in grants, scholarships, and fellowships, as it could potentially discriminate against women who have taken time off for childbearing and rearing. She pointed out that women often face a disadvantage in terms of career advancement due to societal expectations and responsibilities, which can lead to gaps in their resume. By removing age limits, women who have taken time off can still have access to educational opportunities and continue their career growth.

Summing Up and the Way Forward

As the panel discussion in the Women's Careers and Empowerment in Global Health seminar drew to a close, Prof. Dr. Dibya Singh Shah and Dr. Bernadette Kumar took the stage to summarize the key points that had been discussed.

They thanked the panelists for their insightful contributions and reiterated the importance of empowering women in the workplace. They highlighted some of the common themes that had emerged during the discussion, such as the need for mentorship and networking opportunities.

They also invited the attendees to share any final thoughts or questions before concluding the session. They encouraged the attendees to continue the conversation outside of the seminar and to support each other in their professional journeys.

As the seminar came to an end, Prof. Dr. Dibya Singh Shah and Dr. Bernadette Kumar reminded everyone of the valuable insights and lessons that had been shared. They thanked the attendees for their participation and encouraged them to take action towards their career goals, confident in the knowledge that they had gained from the seminar.

Networking and Discussions

The seminar provided ample opportunities for networking and discussions among attendees, panel discussion. These interactions allowed attendees to share ideas, collaborate on research projects, and form new professional relationships.

Conclusion

Overall, the Women's Careers and Empowerment in Global Health seminar was a successful event that brought together women from various sectors such high-level positions in academia, non-governmental and governmental institutions, and private sector institutions. We look forward to the next seminar and continuing the important discussions and collaborations that were initiated at this event.

Annex

Schedule

List of Participants

Photos

Brief Biography of the Speakers