Knowledge Fair

Siddhartha Samudayik Samaj (SSS) in coordination with the Women Development Office (WDO) in Rupandehi and with technical support and collaboration with CARE Nepal organized a two day long Knowledge Fair for adolescent empowerment on the 28th and 29th of January 2017 at the Bhanu School in Bhairahawa, Rupandehi.

Over one hundred participants, including adolescents, parents, VCPC members, religious leaders, district level stakeholders marched from Lumbini Gate to the Bhanu School in Bhairahawa in solidarity to echo, “I take responsibility to end child marriage.”
The main slogan for the event read, “I take responsibility to end child marriage.” The fair was organized with a view to allowing adolescents from across Rupandehi to converge and learn about various issues pertinent to adolescence, particularly child marriage. SSS and CARE Nepal have been working in Rupandehi district to address and tackle the root causes of child marriage in the region through innovation and advocacy. In order to promote sustainable and long-term solutions, there is an emphasis on positive shifts in social norms to facilitate adolescent empowerment. The two organizations have been working to contribute to the Government of Nepal's vision of ending child marriage by 2030 in Nepal and thereby also contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
The Chief District Officer (CDO), the chief guest of the event, remarked, “Despite the fact that I have a very hectic schedule, I felt a moral pressure to attend this event. We need to collectively stand up against social ills such as child marriage.”

The knowledge fair saw the adolescents mobilize themselves as volunteers to lead the event and make it a grand success: this was a fair by the adolescents, primarily for the adolescents. The event started out as a rally from the Lumbini Gate to Bhanu School. The event was chaired by Urmila Harijan, an adolescent girl from Raipur VDC and co-chaired by Asok Kumar Pasi, an adolescent boy from Chotki Ramnagar VDC in Rupandehi where SSS and CARE have been working to allow for adolescent empowerment. Along with leadership from adolescents, the fair was also strongly supported by parents, religious leaders and other community members from various parts of Rupandehi.
Adolescents leading the rally.
The registration desk documenting the attendees of the fair. Over 600 people showed us their support during the course of the two day event!
Adolescents at the Tipping Point Stall where they held quiz competition, a feedback section on what adolescent empowerment should entail, a gallery walk of the work they have done for far to allow for positive shifts in social norms.

The pre-event of the fair was organized on the 27th of January 2017 where adolescents were invited to hone and polish their leadership skills. Adolescents from across the district converged here to prepare for the two day fair, and interact and learn from each other. The District Child Club President, Ajay Mallah interacted with his peers to share with them his experience of being in a leadership role, and also to explain to his counterparts the various resources available at the district level for adolescents and how to access them.
The District Child Club President, Ajay Mallah interacting with his peers to share with them his experience of being in a leadership role during the pre-event of the knowledge fair.
Adolescents involved in art workshop during the pre-event.
The main event was organized on the 28th and 29th of January 2017 which saw the adolescents executing the leadership skills and taking on responsibility during the knowledge fair. District level stakeholders including the Chief District Officer (CDO) Binod Prakash Singh, Acting Women and Children Development Officer Subhadra Gautam Panthi, representative from the District Education Office Diwakar Bhandari, Secretary for the District Welfare Committee Om Bahadur Malla, representative from the Nepal Police’s Mahila Cell Yagya Kumari Gurunge, representative of Cottage and Small Industries Shiv Pujan Chaudhary, Abdul Rashid Pathan Municipality Ward Secretary, Sunil Tripathi District Legal Aid Committee, School Management Committee (SMC), district level political stakeholders, and Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC) were also present at the event and supported working together with the adolescents to hone their leadership abilities. The CDO remarked, “Social development is also integral to wholesome development and child marriage is a social ill that hurts wholesome development.” He further reflected that, “although a national level strategy to end child marriage has been made, it is up to those of us at
the grassroots level to implement it and see it to success. We need collective effort to overcome this hurdle for a safe and secure future.”

A very impressive turnout for the event!
The chair for the event, Urmila Agrahari and SSS’s chair welcoming the CDO at the event.

The knowledge fair was the first of its kind in Rupandehi district and proved to be innovatory, and most certainly shall not be the last. Among partners of the event included the Women and Children Network of Rupandehi including the WDO, ABC Nepal, CWIN Nepal, Seto Guras, Sungabha, Namuna, Digo Social Development.
A welcome dance prepared by the adolescents on the issue of dowry and marriage was well appreciated by all the audience.

The event saw various informative stalls including life skills corner on the root causes and effects of child marriage through problem tree mapping, street drama and dance to spread messages of adolescent empowerment, speech and quiz competition, team work games, documentary screening, bangle making training with sessions on empowerment, sanitary pad making training with sessions on menstrual hygiene and an informative snakes and ladders game demonstrating the harms of early marriage. The knowledge fair held an intergenerational dialogue event on the second day where the adolescents presented the questions amid the district level stakeholders for their answers. The event also supported local products with stalls selling various locally made goods made by the adolescents, food made by the Ama Samuha in Rupandehi and other locally available products.
Some CARE projects work on economic empowerment of women and girls through livelihood programs. Adolescent girls displaying the various stuffed animals and cushions they made themselves through the programs and sharing their learnings.
Adolescents who are working with the Women Development Office in Rupandehi display the goods they have made at the fair. CARE had supported one of the adolescent girls, Laxmi Neupane (far right) to take part in the Girl Summit event in March. Upon her return to the district, Laxmi is now not only a student, but also a school teacher teaching English Grammar to community schools.
An innovative game of snakes and ladders on the consequences of early marriage was available at the fair.
Artists gear up for a drawing competition at the fair.
A bangle-making training had been conducted during the fair.
A sanitary pad making training was available at the knowledge fair, along with sessions on menstrual hygiene, for those interested.
We asked, “What is adolescent empowerment?”
An informative documentary corner was a part of the fair.
The Ama Samuha (a district level network of mothers) in Rupandehi provided the fooding for the event. The knowledge fair sought to support all things local.
Inter-generational dialogue was conducted as part of the fair between the adolescents and the stakeholders.
The drama team take center stage after a compelling performance that left everyone pondering about the entrenched issue of dowry and how we can tackle it.
An interactive and fun-filled musical chair game was also played!

The event was organized to create a knowledge sharing platform for the adolescents in an entertaining and interactive manner. The event brought together various governmental and non-governmental bodies united by their vision for adolescent empowerment along with adolescents, parents, religious leaders and community members alike. With more than 600 attendees, the event proved to be a great success and contributed to keeping the conversation going about child marriage.