

# **Blended Finance and Gender Lens Investing: Development Tools to Achieve the SDGs**

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## **Rapporteur's Report**

Submitted by:



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## About Rapporteurs

### Ashesh Shrestha

Ashesh is a Research Officer at Samriddhi Foundation where his focus areas are micro-enterprises, industrial law, and public education. He also writes newspaper article and blogs based on the findings of his studies. He moderates the ‘Liberty Discussion Series’, a monthly discussion program organized by Samriddhi, where young individuals sit at an informal setting and deliberate over contemporary political-economic issues. He is currently a graduate student of Economics at Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

### Prience Shrestha

Prience Shrestha reserves interest in area of Development Economics and policy research. He previously researched in policy facilitation for microenterprises. He is currently pursuing research in the subnational governance after the inception of federalism in Nepal.

### Yatindra KC

Yatindra KC is a researcher at Samriddhi Foudation. His background in law gives him a sophisticated grasp on the many legal aspects associated to political and economic development of the nation. His real passion comes from his zeal to improve the policy landscape of Nepal through evidence-based policy making. For the same, he started his career by practicing his legal knowledge in identifying the issues and challenges in many acts and regulations of Nepal that has been hindering its growth. Today, he can be addressed as a proficient youth who through his research has gathered immense knowledge in areas like land management, ICT development and public transport management. In his efforts to advocate for a better Nepal, he also engages himself in writing blogs and articles on contemporary economic and political issues.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AI - Artificial Intelligence

BFI - Banking and Finance Institutes

CBS - Central Bureau of Statistics

CSI - Cottage and Small Industries

CSOs - Civil Society Organizations

DFID - Department For International Development

DoI - Department of Industry

GDP - Gross Domestic Production

IFC - International Finance Corporation

IT - Information Technology

LDC – Least Developed Countries

MEDA – Mennonite Economic Development Associates

MSMEs - Micro Small and Medium Enterprises

NGOs - Non-governmental Organizations

NPC - National Planning Commission

NRB - Nepal Rastrya Bank

NRN - Non-Resident Nepalese

PDA - Power Development Agreement

PPP - Public Private Partnership

PPWE - Policy Partnership of Women and the Economy

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals

SEBON – Securities Board of Nepal

SIG - Sustainable Innovation Grants

SMEs - Small and Medium Enterprises

TA - Technical Assistance

TNA - True North Associates

UMIC - Upper Middle-Income Countries

## DAY ONE

### 09:00 – 09:45 | Welcome and Opening Speech: Leveraging Impact Investments to Harness the Potential of Nepalese Entrepreneurs



*Honorable Dr. Yubaraj Khatiwada, Minister of Finance delivers keynote speech at the seminar.*

#### **Honorable Dr. Yubaraj Khatiwada, Minister of Finance**

The seminar titled Blended Finance and Gender Lens Investing: Development Tools to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), hosted jointly by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) and Samriddhi Foundation, in partnership with Society of Economic Journalists – Nepal and Federation of Woman Entrepreneurs Association of Nepal (FWEAN), officially began with the opening speech by Honorable Dr. Yubaraj Khatiwada, Ministry of Finance for the Government of Nepal.

Honorable Khatiwada, with brief introduction of himself and his role as the Finance Minister in creating an environment for enabling all kinds of financing vehicles and mediums, began with his perception of the term ‘blended finance’. Honorable Khatiwada primarily described blended finance as the continuation of the Public Private Partnership (PPP) in business. As such, blended

finance, alike most of other financing vehicles, needs to retain the component of ethics and should have a substantial contribution to the society.

Moving forward, Minister Khatiwada transitioned in explaining the three pillars of developments in the form of institutions. As such, he described private institutions, the state, and the institutions working at the grass root level as the pillars. Honorable Khatiwada recognized that the private sector, as one of those key institutions, which works for profit. Likewise, the state has its own duties, it is often not efficient. Having said that, he mentioned that markets also fail and the state is no exception. Therefore, Honorable Khatiwada believes that the third pillar, i.e. the institutions at the grass root level comprised of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) are a key for achieving the SDGs. Therefore, their needs have to be ensured while their efficiency must be supported by inclusion. Meanwhile, inclusion happens in terms of decision making, participation of production, and sharing of benefits. Inclusion is also participation and not just gender specific. Despite government's desire to be inclusive it has its limitations in terms of capacity and the same goes for private sector.

As such, Honorable Khatiwada believes the question on hand is about the strategy to mobilize such grass-root institutions. On such context, he recognizes that mobilization comes from partnership, capacity building, and proper monitoring and evaluation. The government can borrow funds and leverage capital to the private sector. Regardless of the fact that in the past some partnerships and leveraged funds have failed. The other aspect that must be considered, according to him is the procedure to mobilize the funds. Whether it is through budgets, transfer mechanism or through other mechanism, whatever means it is, for credible spending and investing, auditing is a must.

Honorable Khatiwada further stressed the need to focus on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) so that they can attract impact investment. The concern is accompanied by the fact that statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) shows a significant number of enterprises in Nepal being in the informal sector. Out of nine hundred thousand enterprises, nearly half of them are informal as per the data provided by the CBS. So, the challenge, as Honorable Khatiwada believes is, how do we work with the informal businesses? How to formalize the informal enterprises? Once they formalize, how do we leverage our tax system so that they are incentivized to pay taxes? Likewise, as some enterprises impact society, how do we subsidize them amid the concern that subsidy creates distortionary effect but becomes necessary at the same time?

Highlighting the roles of cooperatives as a social business, Honorable Khatiwada said that their profit needs to be monitored in order to provide benefits to society. Often times philanthropic and social organization, such as cooperatives, get diverted from their values and might solely focus on making profit, irrespective of its contribution to the community that is composed of such vulnerable enterprises. Likewise, he explained that if we are serious about ending extreme poverty, then impact investment must also be carefully targeted towards eliminating poverty and such programs must also be fine-tuned. The society is heterogeneous, and therefore the design of impact investment needs to address the said heterogeneity. On an optimistic note, he said the

challenge of reducing poverty is met with the impressive fact that our country has been reducing poverty every year by one per cent with an average economic growth rate of four percent.

In speaking of gender participation in investment and enterprise, Honorable Khatiwada mentioned that the national statistics state that 30 per cent of enterprises are owned by women, while 45 per cent of the managerial positions are held by women. The statistics may be positive but not entirely sufficient. Therefore, the challenge we now face is also finding a way to strengthen enterprise with women representation. The Cottage and Small Industries (CSI) mostly run by women are started with very little capital, but access to capital for such enterprise is not available either from micro-finance institutions due to their obvious lack of investable fund or from corporate Banks as such projects do not fall under their radar, and are consequentially relegated as being not bankable. Therefore, Honorable Khatiwada is emphasized the need to support such enterprises as they make development more inclusive, create more jobs, and make development sustainable.

### **09:45 – 10:30 | Technical Keynote: Concessional Finance in Blended Finance**



*Ms. Katie Turner, Senior Director at MEDA delivers technical keynote at the seminar.*

## **Ms. Katie Turner, Senior Director, Global Programs, MEDA**

Ms. Katie Turner began by contextualizing the idea of blended finance, whereby she clearly recognized blended finance to fall under the idea of broader impact investment, as a tool for achieving SDGs. While stipulating the tentative market for blended finance to be about USD 15 billion, Ms. Turner pointed out that Asia is the largest market for blended finance, with combination of private and public participation.

Ms. Turner continued her technical speech with reiteration that SDGs, established in 2015 targeting 17 different and interlinked Goals, were set by the UN state members with the aim of achieving these goals by 2030. As such, the achievement of these goals is only possible with capital amount of USD 3.9 trillion, of which the currently available finance is only about USD 1.4 trillion.

According to Ms. Turner, blended finance reserves a significant role in fulfilling the investment gap. And, of course, it will require substantial collaboration between public and private finance. And, the nature of such collaboration is mutually reinforcing. Such is acknowledged by the precise note that recognizes the leverage ratio to be 7. In other words, USD one million of public capital can leverage USD seven million in private capital. This reinforcing dynamics is noted around the globe.

Meanwhile, of the USD 153.9 billion mobilized in private finance, approximately USD 9.3 billion went to LDCs. And, average blended finance deal size is smaller in LDCs, whereby Upper Middle-Income Countries (MIC) has received USD 61 Millions, Lower MIC retrieved 27.3 Million and LDCs retrieved USD 6.1 Million.

Delving into the definition, characteristics, and context governing the blended finance, Ms. Turner identified three defining features of blended finance to be development impact, leverage and returns.

Speaking of those definitive features, an important thing to note here is that not all participant of blended finance will have a goal to achieve development impact. However, hypothesis prevails that investment capital combined with technical assistance accelerates development impact. And technical assistance specifically includes Sustainable Innovation Grants (SIG) and Global Fund Manager Mentorship Program. As such, compared to blended finance transactions in other developing countries, transactions targeting one or more LDCs are more likely to deploy technical assistance alongside investment capital. Likewise, while return is part of the blended finance, the rate will differ with the participant. And interestingly, speaking of the context governing finance, most investors from developed nations are wary of investing in developing nations. And, therefore, the risk surrounding the finance must be effectively mitigated. Likewise, another question governing the context of blended finance is; how do we build capacity on the receiving end? The market is large and significantly growing, and one of the main challenges is aligning the interests of all stakeholders.

Furthermore, in speaking of the market for finance, Africa is the largest market in terms of impact investment, but Asia is the emerging market. India, Indonesia and the Maldives are currently the highest market. While some sectors have been focused more, for instance

agriculture and renewable energy, MEDA focuses more on agriculture and financial service providers.

It is not surprising that impactful investment may suffer losses in the beginning phases. And therefore, the idea governing MEDA has also been about absorption of preliminary loss. And, this also is an example of donor public funding catalyzing private investment. Lately, USD 15 million first losses from Global Affairs Canada was issued to catalyze Sarona's USD 150 Million fund for Global Investment. Meanwhile, improving environment, social governance is also an important element of the equation to attract greater investments.

In conclusion, significant return must be provided to private investors, investment funds investing in other investment fund (fund to fund model), which allows assurance in that investing in local funds allows mitigating risks because local fund managers have more knowledge. The funding allows for accelerating impact, co-creation of learning outputs, while impact measurement system is strengthened.

### **11:00 – 12:00 | Panel Discussion: Fund Manager's Challenges in attracting Finance and Opportunities for Impactful Investment**



*Mr. Suman Joshi, Managing Partner of True North Associates, Mr. Ashutosh Tiwari, Managing Director of SAFAL Partners and Mr. Tim Gocher, CEO and Founder of Dolma Impact Fund with the moderator, Ms. Katie Tuner, Senior Director, Global Programs, MEDA.*

### **Mr. Suman Joshi, Managing Partner, True North Associates**

The session began with Suman Joshi introducing and sharing the stories behind True North Associates (TNA). TNA is associated with the emerging markets and industries and it pledges to work with the regulators to establish regulations for easing investors to invest. Likewise, Mr. Joshi mentioned the exposure of TNA in different investment areas including Information Technology (IT), Agriculture, Financial Technology (FinTech) etc. However, Mr. Joshi clarified the company's refrain from investment in hydropower and tourism sector as he believes the sector already attracts substantial capital and the investment market is relatively deep for those sectors. Likewise, Mr. Joshi shared their One-to-Watch initiative that invests in Person-to-Person (P2P) basis that brings investment specifically from the Netherlands.

Importantly, Joshi recognized the primary objective of TNA to make companies investment ready while significant challenges related to governance and compliance remain. As such, Mr. Joshi recognized significant gap in terms of capability of scaling up business in Nepal. The gap is also accompanied by difficult legal procedure to get the investments approved, which requires approval of the Department of Industry (DoI) and Nepal Rastrya Bank (NRB).

However, Mr. Joshi is positive that there is a lot of appetite to invest in Nepal and even among foreign investors, despite the policy and bureaucratic hurdles to bring in investments. The problem of liquidity crisis in Nepalese banking industry, along with their responsibilities to look after depositor's money, he argued that the investment appetite of banks and financial institutions will always be constrained. Meanwhile, investment risk is also high so they have to ask for collateral. And ultimately, the people without collateral have to solicit alternative source of finance. And, such is the crucial backstory of entrepreneurs.

Mr. Joshi further expressed that the venture investment ecosystem is being built. There is significant investment in building and enhancing capacity, but we are yet to see the results. But there certainly are constraints as previously explained. And therefore, confidence in the fund managers is the key and so is the support from developing agencies.

### **Mr. Tim Gocher, CEO and Founder, Dolma Impact Fund**

Succeeding Mr. Joshi, Mr. Gocher also started by introducing the investment portfolio of Dolma Impact Fund that he specified to be USD 37 million, invested across energy, healthcare, and technology sector. As such, Dolma Himalayan Energy- develops utility scale solar projects. Dolma Fund particularly sources funds internationally, and investors of Dolma are typically European institutions. Tim further exposed the investment policy of Dolma Impact Fund to invest around USD 6 million per investment and funds are also used for training purposes.

Moving forward, in speaking of the dynamics and prospects of different investment areas, Mr. Gocher believes that tech companies can scale regardless of bureaucracy and infrastructure. Meanwhile, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Cloud Technology is democratizing the market, it

does not matter where you work from over the platform of current AI and Cloud Technology. Likewise, Mr. Gocher recognized that Nepal is competitive in the tech sector. This statement runs along another positive recognition that energy sector appears to have a huge demand. All in all, his observation runs in contrary with his early observation whereby did not expect to find a lot of innovations in Nepal.

Mr. Gocher seconds Mr. Joshi with his observation that though the availability of capital has never been higher, it is very difficult to bring money into Nepal. He shared a recent example whereby one of their companies has been waiting for eleven months to get FDI into the country. Though the government has a larger role in blended finance, there unfortunately does not seem to be enough support garnered from the government. While bank compliance and paper works take a lot of times, making business friendly policies, interest rate, and currency rate hedging mechanism is vital. Another thing is minimum FDI threshold of USD 50,000, that has affected investment into Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as foreign investment in the form of impact and blended investment with the aim of investing in MSMEs are restricted from coming in.

#### **Mr. Ashutosh Tiwari, Managing Director, SAFAL Partners**

Following the etiquette of Mr. Joshi and Mr. Gocher, Mr. Tiwari started by introducing his venture, SAFAL Partners, and its role in creating jobs, performing angel investments into SMEs and innovations around finance. Simply put, SAFAL Partners pledges on providing growth capital to early stage companies. Mr. Tiwari introduced SAFAL Partners' investment in 3 companies; a motorcycle gear making company, a company that has launched *Kopila* app connecting school children and parents via teachers and a cleaning service called Orange Ball. In contrast to Dolma Impact Fund, Mr. Tiwari expressed that SAFAL Partners sources investment locally and investments can begin from a couple of thousand dollars. Meanwhile, Tiwari experiences gap in local funding along with high interest rate and collateral required for loans.

Regardless, Mr. Tiwari proclaims that SAFAL Partners wants to create a trusted investment platform, and a growing pool of investors. However, investors who come to invest with quick returns and expectations of returns alike to investment in real-estate or share market are frankly unwelcomed. As investors who are genuinely interested in invest in growing ventures and are willing to take likely risks are rare, Mr. Tiwari believes that at SAFAL Partners, they make sure that investors are educated and risk aware. He wanted people who know the purpose, nature, and objective of SAFAL Partners and also trust the company.

## 12:00 – 13:00 | Fireside Chat with Q&A: SMEs – Access to Investment and Benefits of Increased Finance



*Mr. Niranjana Shrestha, Director of Sujal Foods, and Dr. Linda Jones, Vice President, Partnerships and Innovation at MEDA with Mr. Bishal Thapa, Managing Director of Saral Urja.*

### **Mr. Bishal Thapa, Managing Director, Saral Urja**

Mr. Bishal Thapa began by introducing Saral Urja, a distributive energy company, with the objective to provide alternative energy source. The ultimate goal of the company, as Mr. Thapa sees is to see many people use the national gridline. Thapa expresses his company at the moment to be relatively small sized, with purpose to be the investor that provides renewable energy. Meanwhile, Mr. Thapa shared that the interest of the company for further investments as plans for raising equity are at place. As the company is of capital-intensive nature, it plans to raise domestic investments to fulfill the investment gap is in the pipeline.

Dr. Jones, the moderator of the chat, expressed her interest to know if Saral Urja falls under the category of MSME that Minister Khatiwada previous exposed as essential support. Besides, Dr. Jones also requested Mr. Thapa to specify the proportion of earlier investment in Saral Urja and challenges faced as a growing energy company.

In response, Mr. Thapa revealed that the nature of investment his company received at first was in the form of mixed investment of both domestic and foreign. In fact, though the investment was mediated from a Nepalese investment firm, the source of fund was nevertheless foreign.

Likewise, Mr. Thapa further expressed equity to be the formidable challenge for his business and businesses that resemble Saral Urja, because the market has a very low base of understanding for unconventional ideas that his business hinges on, and the idea that the business does not need government as the core aspect of its value chain unlike other independent energy producers.

In contrary, Mr. Thapa believes that there is no company in Nepal that can be successful by selling electricity to the government. The idea of his company instead was on selling produced energy directly to the customer. And in effect, the company has remained unregulated because selling to the government or the customer is a choice and making people understand this is very hard.

Likewise, Mr. Thapa revealed that project finance is another challenge that he faced. In what probably is a first instance, loan has been arranged within eight months on a first loss guarantee and opportunities opening up.

In regards to financing modality, Dr. Jones asked why Saral Urja had chosen alternative finance model rather than banks and financial institutions. And, how did Mr. Thapa look at equity dilution and what made a bank consider collateral free loan?

Mr. Thapa, in response, expressed that he vowed for equity financing because this financing modal allows for test of ideas and get a validation. As such, Mr. Thapa found Business Oxygen to provide credibility and was a very important investment partner. On the contrary, when Mr. Thapa had to choose banks for financing in later stage of business growth agreement to a first loss guarantee was required. The banks effectively had to gain permission from NRB, and although collateral was not needed, the loss had to be covered by the equity of business. And in Nepal, the concept of private limited liability is not present. As such, what would be beneficial to him would be a Development Credit Authority.

Speaking of the trajectory for growing the number of consumers, Mr. Thapa said that his target is to produce energy of one megawatt. For that, the business needs to sign long term contracts and it needs 30 customers to reach one megawatt, which he believed to be reasonable pipeline. He further argued that if a storage system is built, there is the possibility to attract more customers. As such, the business has already piloted a project regarding the same and if they are successful, they are likely to disrupt the energy market, hopes Mr. Thapa.

### **Mr. Niranjana Shrestha, Director, Sujal Foods**

Following Mr. Thapa, Mr. Niranjana Shrestha started his introduction by calling himself a second-generation entrepreneur because his father started a business and he continued the legacy. As such, he shared that when he first joined the confectionary business it was fragmented and was very difficult to take it from a regional to an international business. As for now, he shared that the company maintains two line of business as its corporate diversification, and effectively hires around 1000 employees.

Mr. Shrestha explained that loans were the primary financing vehicle of his business growth and it has continued till yet. However, about ten years ago, World Bank had started a private equity but by the time it reached Nepal hsi business had grown significantly and could not qualify for the investment. The business needed a fund with a higher gestation period. As such, he financed

the dairy business with the proceeds from confectionary business, and therefore it was outside of the company's financing modality.

As for debt financing of dairy farmers who supplied his company milk, Mr. Shrestha shared that the company was between the banks and did buyback guarantee in along with tripartite agreement where they would be the guarantor. At that period, he said that the default rate was four percent.

Meanwhile, Dr. Jones expressed her interest to learn about the dairy unit of the business, the nature of the suppliers and financing modality. Mr. Shrestha answered that microfinance at the time was not very active and maximum of NRs 500,000 was given at that period. The recipients later formed a cooperative. The farmers/suppliers used to supply milk, and the payment received by the business was adjusted for their loan payables. And the nature of the suppliers was such that 50 percent of the farmers were women.

Mr. Shrestha boasted that the dairy unit though started very small, is now the second largest dairy producer. The artificial insemination has therefore gone from 3000 to 800,000. He is hopeful that the expansion will keep increasing, and the testimony regarding the effectiveness of their financing modals is also retrieved from others who have seen increase in their income by inheriting the modal.

## **14:00 – 15:00 | Fireside Chat with Q&A: Technical Assistance Programming for Impact Investment**

### **Mr. Rabi Rayamajhi, Private Sector Development Advisor, DFID**

Mr. Rabi Rayamajhi began by establishing that impact and technical assistance are operational to the objective of Department For International Development (DFID). As such, impact refers to the outcome that DFID wants to see, and Technical Assistance (TA) being one of the tools to achieve that very outcome. In terms of outcome or impact, DFID vows to achieve right things in terms of job creation, reduction of poverty, and generation of income. And, in terms of deploying TA, it basically refers to mobilizing multilaterals, consulting firms, and NGOs/INGOs, supporting to improve processes, and assistance to government to make investment friendly policies.

Likewise, speaking on behalf of business development, Mr. Rayamajhi recognized that not every business is scalable and there are businesses which do not want to scale. As such, in Nepal, a lot of businesses are in the bottom. Therefore, to move above, entrepreneurial ecosystem should be in place. And, for that, state support is required in their early stage. The support yields in the form of enabling ecosystem that is going to provide them comfort and provide confidence to move into upward direction.

Moreover, in speaking of the external sector, he believed that export sector is ailing, and the export products are losing competitiveness.

Likewise, Nepal unfortunately is not a very attractive destination for foreign investment, and it's time we talked how we attract investments into Nepal. However, Mr. Rayamajhi agreed that creating an enabling environment is always challenging



*Mr. Santosh Pandey, Acting Resident Representative of International Finance Corporation and Mr. Rabi Rayamajhi, Private Sector Development Advisor at DFID join Mr. Anil Chitrakar, President of Siddhartha Inc. for the chat.*

### **Mr. Santosh Pandey, Acting Resident Representative, IFC**

Likewise, Mr. Santosh Pandey shared the goal of International Finance Corporation (IFC) in looking into profitability and impact, for which investment and TA act as the tools. Primarily, TA prepares platform for the firms to scale up. It is important firms should be paying for TA as when they pay, they have direct stake with the technical assistance scheme. IFC provides TA to the ideas which provides return and also creates impact. Speaking of such, IFC 3.0 is a strategy rolled out by current CEO of IFC which aims to create markets.

The strategy looks into potential opportunity and whether the project is investable or not. However, the strategy does not necessarily require investment to come from IFC, but other private investors are also brought to invest. Regardless, IFC is trying to invest by issuing bonds in foreign countries (AAA credit rated), and the money borrowed will be used to finance small businesses in Nepal who find it difficult to find investment from traditional sources. For instance,

Upper Trishuli Hydropower with capacity of 256 MW retrieved one of the largest FDI in Nepal. Power Development Agreement (PDA) of this project has been taken as a model for other projects.

Likewise, environment and social risk management of the project is another aspect that the strategy looks at. As such, project needs to undergo Free, Prior Informed Consent where consent needs to be taken with local community. This procedure has led to smooth building of the project.

Moving forward, corporate governance in the business scene is also of concern, which Mr. Pandey finds to be commonly weak. As such, firms should be able to run on its own based on its policies, processes and working procedure. And, firms at early stage should be working on maintaining good corporate governance.

### **15:00 – 16:00 | Closing Plenary: Enabling Environment Challenges and Solutions/Pathways for Quality Investment**



*Mr. Rameshwor Khanal, Former Secretary of Ministry of Finance moderates the closing plenary featuring Mr. Niraj Giri, Executive Director of Securities Board of Nepal and Dr. Gunakar Bhatta, Head of Research, Nepal Rastra Bank.*

### **Dr. Gunakar Bhatt, Head of Research, Nepal Rastra Bank**

Mr. Rameshwor Khanal kicked off the session by opinionating that proper market innovative practice cannot be fostered without proper regulation. He said that impact financing, blended finances face several hurdles yet today.

Moving forward, Mr Khanal asked Dr. Gunakar Bhatt, Research head at Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) where NRB stands in terms of blended Finance, and whether the idea itself is different than that of conventional Banking and Finance Institutes (BFIs).

After introducing himself and his role at NRB, Dr. Bhatt emphasized the vitality of finance in the country by providing the data that reckon saving-investment gap of 10 per cent. Likewise, Dr. Bhatt also spoke of over-dependency of the national Gross Domestic Production (GDP) with remittance whereby the GDP still consists of 25 per cent remittance, and as such any disruption to remittance leads to challenge in accumulating resources. As such, any disturbance in the Middle East, where most Nepalis work, which is most likely at present situation, affects Nepali economy.

Likewise, Dr. Bhatt reiterated the fact that National Planning Commission (NPC) calculation still shows that the country needs NRs 3,000 billion to achieve the SDGs, and therefore the country need finances. He recognized that resources of the country need to be channelized into the areas where we pose competitive advantage. As such, our import of energy has reduced and by next fiscal year, we could be exporting electricity. These are areas where we need to channelize our funds so that our import also reduces. Meanwhile, NRB have also given high priority to sectors that have a competitive advantage in Nepal. Deprived sector lending and priority sector lending are the ways NRB is channeling funds to areas where we have competitive advantage.

Speaking of context surrounding BFIs, Dr. Bhatt recognized 19 percent of the BFI to have investment in agriculture and energy. The priority sectors have been defined by the central bank, and it maintains effective provision for deprived sector lending. As such, three years ago, NRB had introduced a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) where by one per cent must be allocated and such fund can be used for attaining the SDGs. Likewise, he revealed that the NRB had introduced the new monetary scheme whereby BFIs that provide NRs 125 million cannot charge interest rates higher than two per cent of its base rate. Additionally, NRB has also opened external commercial borrowing window. He pledged that NRB will be adding resources to the window in coming year. And, Enterprises can effectively borrow from Non-Resident Nepalese (NRNs) and foreign institutions.

Speaking of the banking approach in Nepal, Dr. Bhatt acknowledged that the industry had specialized banks in the past before the industry moved to a commercial banking system. Now, the industry is having discussions as to this regard but there still persists confusion as to what approach we need to undertake.

### **Mr. Niraj Giri, Executive Director, Securities Board of Nepal (SEBON)**

Succeeding Dr. Bhatt, Mr. Niraj Giri, being at the regulatory center of the Capital Market sector of Nepal, revealed that capital market of the country is mostly composed of BFIs. And therefore, the challenge is inviting businesses of other nature into the capital market of Nepal. As of now,

because our capital market is dependent upon BFIs, it is evident that the decisions made by the central bank normally disrupt the secondary market.

Speaking on behalf of private equity market, Mr. Giri revealed that SEBON has been discussing with Ministry of Finance as to how we can bring the private funds into registration. As of now, SEBON has put in the lock in period for venture capitals at one year, and Mr. Giri hoped it will be of help to private equity fund managers. He further argued that there is need for another board for SMEs, because having the same criteria for small and big businesses may not enable SMEs into the capital market. As such, discussions regarding such proposals are being carried out. On the same note, Mr. Giri concluded that the idea behind regulating venture capital firms is that when the companies that are being invested in by the venture capital funds, ultimately go public, they can be facilitated.

## DAY TWO

09:00 – 09:45 | Welcome and Opening Speech



*Mrs. Ambika Shrestha, President of Dwarika's Hotels and Resorts, delivers the welcome and opening speech on the second day of the seminar.*

### **Mrs. Ambika Shrestha, President of Dwarika's Hotels and Resorts**

The second day of the seminar, on the theme gender lens investing, kicked off with the opening speech of Mrs. Ambika Shrestha. She began stating that gender does not specifically represent women but represents all possible genders. However, she agreed that women need to be placed ahead because they have been held back since long, at least in Nepalese context. As such, much work needs to be done so that women come forward and work in equal terms with men. Men, on the other hand, need to see and understand that women are equally capable. However, it is true that there has been great change as young girls are doing very innovative things. It is in stark contrast to the past during when women were only allowed to get engaged in teaching and nursing professions that were stereotypical to women. From a gender perspective, Mrs. Shrestha believes that the things have now become progressive. And, this opportunity can be exploited to train women from the villages to get engaged in income generating activities.

Speaking of diaspora of Nepalese youngsters, Mrs. Shrestha expressed that there are certain challenges that have led young people to move out of the country. And, she does not think it is because the education system at home is worse. For an example, our doctors have proved to be better than the doctors who have been trained in India. Mrs. Shrestha adds that education is important for any country. It is one sector where investment should actually go. Likewise, the other thing that needs to be done is to resolve the problem of emigration. After all, young people with energy are going abroad for work. So, in order to make them stay the country needs to promote competitive sectors as agriculture through micro-credits. In fact, agriculture can also fill the gap between imports and exports and therefore improve the external economy of the country.

Mrs. Shrestha also observed that that the huge amount of population in the cities needs to be taken care of. Of those people who are specifically who come from rural areas, women arriving from rural settings are at the highest risk when they come to cities. She said that they are subject to exploitations, and therefore need to be protected and nurtured to help them grow. She also said that vulnerable population can be introduced to microfinance sector to help them come forward. She effectively provided an example of a woman living in an impoverished condition who had her fortune turned as the result of micro-credit program that has pushed her agriculture business to heights. According to Mrs. Shrestha, it proves that women just need a little push and little backing to move forward.

Speaking of the economic and political-economic dynamics of Nepal, Mrs. Shrestha argued that Nepal has a huge potential as it composes of diverse land terrain, diverse flora, and fauna. Meanwhile, tourism is one of the top sectors for investment and the natural and cultural beauty of the country can attract a lot of tourists. Likewise, she appealed the audience to complain less about our government not doing things and rather work on making things suitable as the country has already graduated to democracy.

## **09:45 – 10:30 | Technical Keynote: Gender Equality Mainstreaming/ GLI Success Story**

### **Dr. Linda Jones, Vice President, Partnership and Innovations, MEDA**

Dr. Linda Jones began her presentation by reiterating the fact that she is using the term investment and investing in the sense of equity and debt. And, she believes investment is really about private sector investing. Dr. Jones purported that micro credit may not fall under investment in the traditional sense.

Dr. Jones asserted that the term gender lens investing is associated with women run enterprise in along with investment in enterprise where women work regardless of who it is owned by. As such, the entities may also be enterprises where women are suppliers or consumers of the end product. In relevance to the tourism industry, one could think of a hotel owned by a man, but there may be lot of women employees, women tourists, and suppliers. Although gender lens investing is more focused on women owned enterprises, the term may be used broadly to include the overall value-chain of an industry.

Speaking of engagement of MEDA in gender lens investing, Dr. Jones expressed her pleasure to introduce the organization as a global leader in the area. Speaking further, she shared the identification regarding huge gap in access to finance for women back in 2016. The gender credit gap was USD 320 billion. By 2017, USD 1.3 billion was raised for gender lens investing, and the recent gap figure is 2.4 billion. Dr. Jones, however, is aware that a lot needs to be done to fill this gap of access of finance. Nevertheless, she agreed that the industry has grown significantly whereby a lot of investors have been involved in gender lens investing. And, increasing number of gender lens investment vehicle has been launched. The field is rapidly growing, amid the fact that gender lens investment is a new concept in Nepal. However, Dr. Jones is concerned that when it comes to raising capital, male fund managers consistently receive more funds than women. Moreover, the growth rate of funding injected into female founded companies has plateaued over the last few years. And therefore, it can be said that the industry is gender biased. Meanwhile, McKinsey in 2015 predicted that USD 12 trillion could be added to annual global GDP if there was greater gender parity. Investors also proved that gender diverse boards correlate with top and bottom line growth. And, women fund manager out-perform their male counterparts as per Boston Consulting group.

Dr. Jones reiterates that MEDA particularly focuses in gender lens investing because it has been proved numerous times about the gender dividend. And, MEDA has been working in the gender mainstreaming actively for about 25 years in Asia, Sub-Sahara, and the Middle East etc. Gender lens has remained crucial aspect of MEDA since the organization started investing in 1953 to leverage private sector partnership to advance inclusive finance, market, systems development, investment, and women empowerment. Dr. Jones further revealed that MEDA is raising 100 million dollars through the Gemini program, and is working to support women across all investments through a gender equality mainstreaming approach. The framework, developed for USAID, is a practical toolkit to assess and upgrade company business practices and policies to promote women's inclusion. For instance, Portea in India developed a soft skills empowerment training to develop confidence in women based on the framework. As such, 2000 women were trained in a very short period of time. A thing about this program was that a lot of the people were ethnic minors and were very shy. They lacked confidence, and therefore this training focused on building them up. By the end of the program, it was amazing how confident they had become, how their value was changed and this ultimately meant that the company also grew as their employees and the service provided became better. Meanwhile, MEDA is eager to work with enterprises that have an impact on women either through employment, end consumers, and also with enterprises that vouch to have impact on women enterprise.

## **11:00 – 12:00 | Fireside Chat with Q&A: Women Business Owners**

### **Ms. Sunita Nemaphuki, Founder, Agri-Nepal**

Ms. Sunita Nemaphuki started by introducing the fundamental thrust of her business endeavor as being networking and communication. Her area of business is in agriculture sector, and her business has 20 employees, and ten thousand farmers working in the network.

Ms. Nemaphuki lamented of challenges for women to access finance from the financial market whereby she expressed the industry to still be gender discriminatory. She shared her experiences in having to have a male compatriot in order to seek finance in the financial market. Likewise, the other challenges, she put forth were about the disadvantage for women in compared to male counterparts in terms of having to fulfill roles in taking care of the family regarding which most males are relieved from.



*Ms. Reetal Rana, Managing Director of Mid-Valley International College, Ms. Mahalaxmi Shrestha, CEO and Founder of Bee-keeping and Research Center, Ms. Sunita Nemaphunki, Founder of Agri-Nepal with Dr. Linda Jones at the seminar.*

### **Ms. Mahalaxmi Shrestha, Bee-keeping and Research Center**

Ms. Mahalaxmi Shrestha began by sharing how she started bee keeping business. Initially having worked on multiple growth projects, her work had mostly focused on flora and honey quality analysis. She said that her engagement in projects in the past had originally helped her realize the potential of bee keeping business and inspired her to delve in the very industry, which was before when she realized the vitality of marketing of honey. Ms. Shrestha acknowledged that the size of her business is small in terms of employees hired. However, the business outreach is large and involves exporting and retailing of honey.

In speaking of challenges, Ms. Shrestha recognized that her core-knowledge in bee-farming was not sufficient to operate a bee-keeping business successfully as she only had technical knowledge. She realized that sufficient knowledge business financing, marketing, and compliance issues are equally vital to run a successful business. Likewise, seconding Ms. Nemaphuki, she shared her experience of difficulty to maintain work-family balance as women are expected to put family first culturally. Ms. Shrestha further said that she could have done better if her male counterparts in the family took fair share of the responsibility in managing household chores.

However, Ms. Shrestha is thankful that the entrepreneurial eco-system has progressed for women, also through the fact that a broad network for Female entrepreneurs continues to support women through Federation of Women Entrepreneurs of Nepal.

### **Ms. Reetal Rana, Managing Director, Mid-Valley International College**

Similarly, Ms. Reetal Rana shared her career story by revealing how her journey started as a teacher followed by becoming teacher trainer. Her career later followed by becoming the vice-principal of private school for five years which progressively ended with her desire to a decision maker, a leader, and an entrepreneur.

Her entrepreneurial journey started by establishing a college in 2011 that offered undergraduate hospitality management with honors program. Her establishment maintains 120 students in total facilitated by 30 part time faculty members and 15 full time staffs. While, her first endeavor is continuing, she now finds the need of vocational and technical skills in the economy, and therefore plans to start a vocational and technical college.

The challenge she has faced is the slow decision-making process in the government that has hindered her intention to widen the programs that she wants to offer through her college. She shared an unfortunate experience whereby she has been waiting for two years to retrieve essential permission for that very purpose. She further shared her sour experience in regards to legal affairs whereby here lack of awareness about the legal compliances had cost her financially in the past. Likewise, she admitted that finance had not been so much of a challenge during her entrepreneurial journey as she had always retrieved support from her parents. As she has progressed through her entrepreneurial journey, she intends to look for alternative source of financing.

## **12:00 – 13:00 | Gender Inclusion in Business and Investment is so important – Why they care?**

### **Ms. Reeta Simha, President, FWEAN**

Ms. Simha begins by acknowledging the fact that Nepal stands at 101th position out of 153 countries in terms of economic progress. Amid this deplorable fact, she finds it encouraging that the country is at the 7<sup>th</sup> position when it comes to female labor force participation with 84.5%

female labor force participation compared to 86.3% male labor force participation. But, what concerned is the position of the female labor force in the organizational hierarchy. As such, it comes to appear that the Global Gender Gap reports the position of the country to have dropped to 122 and 118 with respect to female legislators, senior officials and managers, with only 18.4% female but more than 80% male representation in these positions and with only 37.5% female and 62.5% male as professional and technical worker.

Likewise, Ms. Simha recognized that companies with a higher presence of women than men are still a rarity, despite the progress made with gender equality. In many industries such as mining, construction, and energy they are only a small minority; and in almost all sectors they represent a smaller proportion than men in management positions. Thus, only 11.7% firms are with female majority ownership and 17.20% firms have female top managers. As such, these data clearly reflect gender bias in businesses in Nepal from board room to staff. On the other hand, the policy environment is more favorable for gender inclusiveness with the latest Labor Act and Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act, 2015; but in absence of regular and stringent monitoring the implementation is weak.

Similarly, Ms. Simha questions the number of women who feel that the businesses have made an effort to attract, retain and promote them. And, the numbers of businesses that have made an effort to award bids to female owned, managed businesses or that promote female employment. She believes the number is not very encouraging. Regardless, she believes that business ecosystem should care about gender inclusion because research has consistently demonstrated that gender diversity in the workforce, including management, among suppliers, and in community engagement is beneficial. As such, employees in a company with higher workplace diversity will have access to a variety of different perspectives, which is highly beneficial when it comes to planning and executing a business strategy. After all, according to Ms. Simha, one is more likely to get a melting pot of fresh, new ideas, thus increasing creativity, innovation and productivity when people who see the same thing in different ways are put together. On such context, Harvard Business Review found diverse teams are able to solve problems faster than cognitively similar people. Having gender inclusion also strengthens supply chains, improves social license, and reduces friction with key community stakeholders. Ms. Simha presents another analysis of Ernest and Young whereby the top 20 most gender diverse power utility firms had a 15 per cent higher return on investment than the bottom 20 for three consecutive years. Likewise, IFC has found that hiring women in non-traditional roles could increase firms' productivity by as much as 25 per cent through gains in maintenance costs and lower turnover.

Thus, increasing female influence at all stages of a business in any sector, should be treated as a business necessity, not just a moral objective. Talking about challenges in expecting gender inclusion in business and investment in Nepal - If in an interview, men score slightly higher in terms and qualification and experience than an female candidate or a male owned company score slightly more than female owned in a bidding competition, would to given extra weightage to the female candidates knowing the benefits on having female employees or doing business with

women? But, what is the incentive for the businesses that make the extra effort for gender inclusion and include gender friendly policies - related to parental leave, the gender pay gap, flexible work hours, extra points if the applicant is a female? At times implementing these provisions mean providing additional benefits at extra expense or cost? In absence of incentives why would businesses care, even if they know they should?

With socio-culture norms still pulling women towards domestic responsibilities, women opt out of employment or do not participate due to work and family balance, lack of affordable care, family members not approving and also because of lack of good paying jobs and unequal pay. Government in partnership with donor agencies could generate political commitments towards inclusive & gender responsive policy measures for businesses. Business associations could provide cross-learning opportunities to share and be inspired on gender inclusive practices and provisions. Businesses could advance flexible working arrangements and reintegration measures.



*Ms. Hima Bista, Executive Director of Women LEAD moderates the panel Ms. Rita Simha, President of FWEAN, Dr. Manju Tuladhar, GESI advisor, USAID and Ms. Kamakshi Rai Yakthumba, Program Manager, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.*

### **Dr. Manju Tuladhar, GESI Advisor, USAID**

Succeeding Ms. Simha, Dr. Manju Tuladhar began her presentation with acknowledgement that women's economic empowerment exists when women can equitably participate in, contribute to,

and benefit from economic opportunities as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, and investors. This requires access to and control over assets and resources, as well as the capability and agency to manage the terms of their own labor and the benefits accrued. Likewise, she further placed that women's economic equality exists when all women and girls have the same opportunities as men and boys for education, economic participation, decision-making power, and freedom from violence. This requires collectively addressing barriers to commercial activity and labor market participation, such as restrictive laws, policies, and cultural norms; infrastructure and technology challenges; unpaid care work; limits on collective action; and poorly enforced protections.

Moving forward, Dr. Tuladhar provides ten Principles for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality and these are as follows:

- Understand the Systems: This principle highlights that economic empowerment is linked to political, social, cultural, educational, and economic systems. These systems influence women's economic empowerment and equality.
- Amplify Women's Voices: This principle emphasizes the importance of listening to the voices of men and women throughout the program cycle and incorporating their concerns and solutions into designs, budgets, work plans, and evaluations. In addition to "listening", USAID programs should consider how to support and amplify the voices of women, for example through providing them leadership opportunities and connecting them to networks.
- Be Specific: Solutions to addressing women's economic empowerment should be specific to needs and to women of different ages, backgrounds, and identities.
- Engage Men and Boys: Men need to also be agents of change to build women's economic empowerment. They can be advocates or leaders in creating reform.
- Collaborate: Programming should work across sectors and with public, private, and NGO actors to maximize their impact.
- Establish the Evidence: Evidence is fundamental for identifying the constraints to women's economic empowerment. This should include measuring impact and effectiveness of programs.
- Address GBV: Gender-based violence has wide-reaching negative impacts on women and girls, including economic impacts because it reduces their opportunities and undermines their empowerment. GBV also damages businesses and economies through reduced productivity and increased costs for services.
- Partner with Women: Women and women's organizations are too often missing from development funding and partnerships. This does not allow us to practice inclusive

development. To change this, we may need to do capacity building or change our outreach strategies.

- Walk the Talk: Promoting women's economic empowerment means that our institutions should also do this internally. As a leader in international development, USAID can ensure that each Mission incorporates women's voices throughout the program cycle, in economic planning, and in procurements
- Embrace Emerging Innovations: We should utilize changes in the ICT and in particular the digital economy to support economic development for women.

Dr. Tuladhar further maintained that access, agency, risk mitigation, leadership and enabling environment are the domains of women economic empowerment. These domains encompass within themselves things such as productive resources and market, access to assets and finance, control over income and expenditures, control over resources, key role in decision making, enabling environment such as sexual harassment laws, proper labor laws, quality education and skill-building; equality health care; gender, diversity, and inclusion norms.

According to Dr. Tuladhar, there also exists USAID Cross-sectoral Domains of Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality. These are specific cross-sectoral domains of analysis that can be used for a gender analysis focused on women's economic empowerment and equality. These were developed as a part of USAID's Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality framework. These domains overlap with the USAID's five domains of gender analysis

Dr. Tuladhar further revealed the APEC Women and the Economy Dashboard which appears to be an initiative that seeks to provide a snapshot of the status of women in APEC, by looking at a set of indicators in recent years, which allows measurement of the progress of women's participation in economic-related activities and women's inclusion in several aspects of life. The Dashboard is comprised of almost 80 indicators, classified in five areas previously identified as priorities by the APEC Policy Partnership of Women and the Economy (PPWE): 1) access to capital and assets; 2) access to markets; 3) skills, capacity-building and health; 4) leadership, voice and agency; and 5) innovation and technology .

The indicators were selected and endorsed by consensus in 2014 following an extensive study and consultations with data experts and economy representatives at PPWE. The Women and the Economy Dashboard provides a quick assessment of women's inclusion in the economy, showcasing the extent to which women participate in their economic spheres. This interactive tool will empower USAID and the broader gender community with a starting point for essential discussions about women's economic integration.

**Ms. Kamakshi Rai Yakthumba, Program Manager, DFAT**

Ms. Yakthumba, began by opinionating that gender equality is now a donor driven thing. People are complying just because they have commitment to donors. As such, she feels that behavior

change, that requires, has not happened. She made this statement with the observation that many people who come to trainings at DFAT and talk of gender inclusion do not apply the same in their household context. Putting into context, according to Ms. Yakthumba, we need to understand why the blended finance came about and why is gender inclusion included in it. Ms. Yakthumba believes that blended finance came because we had to achieve SDGS, but since donor financing can only do so much, we had to include the private sector and that when blended finance came about.

As such, Ms. Yakthumba believes it is important to look into the context of Nepal. Donors have invested in Nepal for a long time and we are yet sitting here and talking about it again. As such, it is provoking how the agenda has failed to take effect for such a long time. And, Ms. Yakthumba believes that it basically boils down to our norms, our behavior and we need to practice what we preach.

### **14:00 – 15:00 | Fireside Chat with Q&A: Technical Assistance for Women SMEs: Needs and Supply**



*Ms. Katie Turner, Senior Director, Global Programs, MEDA moderates the chat featuring Ms. Rabina Deshraj Shrestha, Deputy-CEO of Mega Bank, Ms. Barsha Shrestha, Business Head of ICRA Nepal, and Ms. Santona Malakar, Program Associate at SAFAL Partners.*

### **Ms. Rabina Deshraj Shrestha, Deputy CEO, Mega Bank**

Speaking on the session titled “Technical Assistance for Women SMEs”, Ms. Rabina Deshraj Shrestha started out by sharing that the biggest challenge that the industries face is the dominant patriarchal society in a nutshell. And, according to Ms. Shrestha, it applies for both women entrepreneurs and woman workforce. Ms. Shrestha pointed out that women have to give up career for their families, whereas the men don’t. And, likewise, there are women who don’t even have ambition and aspiration to excel their careers. As such, Ms. Shrestha believes that, as the leading women businesswomen or entrepreneurs, it is their role to change the mindset and built ambition onto them. And specifically, Ms. Shrestha has taken this initiative targeting women groups through FNCCI. As such, FNCCI is engaged in building their exposures to international destinations that enjoys substantial women entrepreneurship. Ms. Shrestha believes that such exposure builds confidence among women.

### **Ms. Barsha Shrestha, Business Head, ICRA**

Likewise, veteran woman banker, Ms. Barsha Shrestha expressed herself by stating the fact that only one business out of 200 institutions that ICRA have worked with as a credit rating agency was headed by woman. She seconded Ms. Shrestha in regards to the challenges and hassles that women have to face while competing and engaging in the business eco-system. She believed that challenge is entirely mindset and the discriminatory aspect of the cultural mal-practice that yet echoes in the Nepalese household. She strongly asserts that change in the mindset has to come from within the home. And, Ms. Shrestha pointed out that such contagion of discrimination also haunts the educated families as they treat their siblings based on their gender. But the fact do remain that the new generation have taken charge to change this. And, to change the mindset, education is the key.

Likewise, Ms. Shrestha recognized that women entrepreneurs not only have difficulty to access finance but also are unwilling to access it altogether. Ms. Shrestha came to know about it when Clean Energy Development Bank, that she used to head previously started concessional loan for women willing to take entrepreneurial role. As such, there are not enough women willing access such opportunity. And, speaking of the banks, banks do not assess feasibility of the clients based on gender. The assessment is purely based on risk perspective.

### **Ms. Santona Malakar, Associate, SAFAL Partners**

Revealing her involvement in SAFAL Partners, Ms. Malakar stated that the fund company is working to set up women entrepreneur’s fund. As such, the company is aspiringly trying to contact with investors who are women. And, they also want to support the female entrepreneurs both financially and technical.

And speaking of SMEs in general, Ms. Malakar believes that SMEs belong to the sector which is only domestic, but to grow those businesses need have to have skills, network and finance.

Different skill sets are required to start and scale a business. And, unfortunately, the women are unaware about the method and system. So, they are ultimately unable to access loans. So, they clearly need mentorship support. But again, most of the mentors are also male, which makes them reluctant to seek mentorship. Such is the plight for women aspiring to be entrepreneurs.

### **15:00 – 16:00 | Closing Plenary: Vision for Gender Inclusion**



*Charu Chada, Editor at Media 9 moderates the closing plenary featuring Ms. Nikita Acharya, CEO and Co-founder at Urban Girl, Ms. Nishinta Bhatta, Investment Manager at Dolma Impact Fund, Ms. Bahar Kumar, Executive Director at Nepal Communitere.*

#### **Ms. Nikita Acharya, CEO and Co-founder, Urban Girl**

Ms. Acharya shared that she and her partner who founded the Urban Girl did not think about scaling up for the first three years. But past the period, the founders had considered scaling up, and had approached banks for the purpose. As such, they realized that they could retrieve loans for up to 2-3 lakhs without collateral which however was not sufficient. So, as an alternative resolution, Urban Girl had attempted to approach foreign investors, and had signed a term sheet. But the investor backed out at last because of the uncertain political scenario and market confidence.

#### **Ms. Nishinta Bhatta, Investment Manager, Dolma Impact Fund**

The solutions that the entrepreneurs are designing really fill the gaps in the market. And, Ms. Bhatta herself believes that female entrepreneur design solution better than men. And as such, the fund company foster interdisciplinary teams. After all, it enables more in designing solutions for women is also important. Speaking of the ticket size per investment, Ms. Bhatta revealed that the impact fund has an investment criteria of NRs 5 crore at present.

In terms of addressing women inequality, she believes that if we want to address inequality it has to go hand in hand with both genders. She said, “I think as to workplace, the situation is changing with more and more cases being reported and better laws in place.” She added that financial mentorship is actually really important, and we are seeing an impact through this form of mentorship in the workforce.

### **Ms. Bahar Kumar, Executive Director, Nepal Communitere**

At her venture, Nepal Communitere, Ms. Bahar believes that she has started seeing that millennials are solving problems differently. They also have a sense of giving back and bringing those millennials into the fold will really help us.

Similarly, in speaking of start-up financing, Ms. Bahar said that the fund was able to facilitate two of our startups to get NRs 15 lakh loan during the second year of the cohort. As such, some startups did come up to them and asked if they can bring some of their relatives to be eligible for the finance. However, the company simply denied them on the grounds that the company wants women to be engaged not tokenized.

Likewise, in terms of speaking of how research institutions as Samriddhi Foundation can empower women, Ms. Bahar believes that it could assist in anyway in the idea of scaling up. And, it is necessary to be mindful of designing Nepal. And as such, we need to think that we need to build better solutions that fit into building a balanced Nepal.

Moving forward, the panelists discussed on their outlook for 2020 whereby Ms. Acharya predicted that the year 2020 will witness growth of women and women entrepreneurs in the economy. Meanwhile, Ms. Bahar said, “The coming decade is going to be pretty amazing. There is this critical mass of brilliant mass of women. And, there will be opportunities to bring some of the champions into the fold where we have women investing in women.” As more women claim and take the business space, Ms. Bahar thinks that the situation will change.