

# Final Report for the Jennifer Jessica Cohen Foundation

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Summer 2010



I recently returned from two and a half months in Nepal working with the Women's Reproductive Rights Program (WRRP). WRRP is an advocacy organization which works on the issue of uterine prolapse – a reproductive health condition which burdens an estimated one out of every ten women in Nepal. WRRP approaches uterine prolapse as an issue of women's rights and gender discrimination.

I had a very positive experience this summer working with WRRP particularly in terms of being able to make tangible contributions to WRRP and also in terms of gaining experience working in development overseas.

Prior to departing, I established a work-plan through the Advocacy Project - the Washington, DC-based organization with whom I was affiliated and which connected me to WRRP. I was able to accomplish everything on my work plan.

My most significant project this summer was working on a "Quilt Project" – a program we received funding for from an organization called Zonta International during my three weeks in DC prior to departure to Nepal. The aim of the quilt project was to assemble a quilt from paintings made by uterine prolapse sufferers in Nepal. The quilt will travel around the US and abroad to raise awareness of, and possibly funding for, the plight of suffering women in Nepal. In terms of this project, my job this summer was to work with WRRP to arrange for the paintings to be done. We arranged the painting programs in an area in Nepal where WRRP works called Lahan – in the southern Terai region of Nepal. It is a very impoverished area and one where uterine prolapse is prevalent. There is a traditional form of art in this area called Mithila Art which dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and was traditionally painted by women on their walls at home to depict scenes from village life. Fewer and fewer women practice this type of art these days so it seemed like a positive form of art to promote and train village women in. We arranged for three separate painting programs in three villages around Lahan with a total of 35 women. We hired women who had been locally trained in Mithila Art to act as trainers for each program. The paintings turned out amazingly well. I have included a picture below:



I conducted video interviews of each woman in which she discussed the panel she painted and her difficulties and impressions of being a woman in her village. An example of this interview can be found on my blog through this link: <http://advocacynet.org/wordpress-mu/kbollinger/>.

I delivered the panels and my interviews to the Advocacy Project in DC upon my return. The panels and interviews were very favorably received by Zonta International - who is now in the process of constructing them into a quilt. I will continue to remain involved with this project and will likely be presenting on this work a few times this Fall. We hope that this painting project can become a more sustainable, long term income-generating project for these village women. They seemed to really enjoy the painting process -which was entirely new for them.

In addition to the quilt project, I completed several other projects. One was to do video interviews with six women suffering from uterine prolapse regarding their experiences. I interviewed a range of women - young, old, those who have had surgery, and those who still suffer. I translated these interviews with the help of a translator and made them into subtitled movies which WRRP can now use to show to potential donors and those interested in their work. An example of one interview

I did is posted on my Advocacy Project blog: <http://advocacynet.org/wordpress-mu/kbollinger/2010/07/25/one-womans-story/>.

I also helped WRRP finish their first web site which was put up this summer. I spent many hours editing the web site and making it user-friendly and thorough. In my web site work, I worked with my nepali coworker, Sunita Maharjan, so that she could continue to update the web site after I left. We also started a Twitter account for WRRP which will hopefully provide useful information about uterine prolapse, women's rights, and the organization to those interested.

My time in Nepal was divided between the office in Kathmandu and work in village sites. During my first trip into the village, WRRP put on a village nutrition fair for pregnant women. The aim of this fair was to educate women about proper eating habits during pregnancy. One major reason for uterine prolapse is very poor nutrition during pregnancy – both due to ignorance and also lack of funds to buy needed foods. The nutrition fair both provided information on how to eat well during pregnancy and also educated women about biological facts of pregnancy, stages of embryo development, and ways women can prevent uterine prolapse from occurring. Below is an example of a picture that was put up at the nutrition fair:



In addition to my time in Nepal, I was also very fortunate to have the opportunity to spend three weeks in Washington, DC prior to my departure. The executive director from WRRP, Samita Pradhan, came to DC during this time to attend and present at the Women Deliver 2010 conference – a large conference that brought together people from all over the world interested in women's rights. I was a volunteer at the conference which allowed me to attend for free. In addition to the conference, I went to various meetings with Samita and Iain Guest, from the Advocacy Project during these three weeks in DC. We met with staffers from the Senate, with NGO's, and with other government representatives with the aim of raising awareness of uterine

prolapse. It was a successful mission and we came one step closer to the goal of creating an international network of people working on uterine prolapse. Right now, there is no such network so, although uterine prolapse is a significant problem in many developing countries, there are not international movements to encourage governments across the globe to take active steps to prevent and treat it.

In addition to this work that I did, another very important part of my summer was gaining invaluable experience working with a development organization abroad. This is the type of work I hope to do following graduation from my masters program at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. WRRP was a wonderful organization to gain this type of experience with. They are an exceptionally dedicated group of people who work very hard and really believe in their mission. WRRP's approach to addressing uterine prolapse is extremely effective. They approach uterine prolapse through preventative measures which means they run educational programs, have support networks in villages of uterine prolapse sufferers, and work to raise awareness of the issue in families. WRRP works to educate both men and women – which is very important in putting an end to this problem. In order to address the immediate needs of women with uterine prolapse, WRRP lobbies for the Nepali government to implement treatment programs and also provides funding for women in dire need to have surgery. The structure of WRRP is also very effective. They have a very strong network within villages of “campaigners” (volunteers who work to educate and arrange treatment within their own villagers). The campaigners are extremely dedicated and hard working. One level up, WRRP has program offices within the regions they work with staff who know and work with the campaigners. And, one level up from that, is the central Kathmandu office, who works with the program office staff. This structure creates a very effective network which allows for direct communication between villages and the central office. It was a wonderful example to me of how a successful development organization can be organized and run in a very effective way. I hope to carry this knowledge into future development work I am involved with.

All of these experiences contributed to the very positive experience I had this summer. My time at WRRP is an experience which will strongly carry into future work I do. I am very grateful to the Jennifer Jessica Cohen Foundation for providing the funding and support which enabled me to do this work.