

## The Spirit of Hamro Team

“Football is my life, a passion that will never die until I live,” said 20-year old Bijay Chetteri.

So when Hamro Team, funded by Dfid, aired on Kantipur TV in 2011, Bijay tuned in. “The show was cleverly done because after a while, you realize that it was not just about football anymore,” said Bijay. He explained that football is just a medium to get young people like him educated about the hard realities about Nepalese society and the traditionally practiced social discrimination against people on grounds of ethnicity, gender and class.

These deep-rooted practices have left ethnic groups, particularly the youth, marginalized and disenchanted. How to engage youth and to provide hope has been a challenge. Aptly titled as Hamro (My) Team the series is a metaphor for a country hoping, but challenged, to unite as one Nepal.

The storyline is unique and controversial because a woman, “Seema” is not only the lead character in the series; the character is the coach of an all-male football team. It was a risky choice for the producers, Search for Common Ground and partner, Bushan Dahal, a popular Nepalese director.

Bijay admits, “I was not ready for this in the beginning. My footballer friends found this too unreal and unacceptable. But slowly it started to make sense,” He realised that perhaps a woman makes a better coach because with a male coach, footballers take him for granted because he is one of them. But with a woman in leadership, things are done differently. There is more discipline among players and the team is better managed and organized.

For Bijay, it was a test for himself and his friends and they decided to experiment with such a change. A few months back, Bijay and his footballer friends took the risk of announcing to their sports club in Bharatpokhari Village Development Committee of Kaski District in West Nepal that they should hire a female coach to improve their own poorly managed volleyball team which was failing to perform well. They even took the initiative and hired female coach for both their male and female volleyball teams.

“There was huge protest even among the girls about such a change and we were in big trouble.” To convince the players, Bijay gave a presentation about the significant roles that women have played around the world. He gave an example of Burma’s freedom fighter Aung San Suu Kyi about how significant she is globally. Everyone agreed to give it a try.

The news of a female coach in this VDC spread among the villagers who are so proud now. “The whole attitude of stereotyping roles of women has been changing.” says Bijay. Besides gender equality, Hamro Team has raised issues about social inclusion, cooperation through leadership, team work and good governance. “The spirit of football has been well channeled through Hamro

Team” said Bijay. “If there was anything that has changed me today at a personal level, it is Hamro Team.”



Hamro Team cast at launch for Kantipur TV



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“Milan” , a club in Sunsari, Eastern Nepal played the Hamro team as part of the campaign to reach out to marginalized youth.