



Mother Centers International
Network for Empowerment



Introduction Seminar to Mother Centers

Workshop presentations by Monika Jaeckel and Andrea Laux, **mine**
Report by Marieke van Geldermalsen and Monika Jaeckel

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Mother Center Workshop in Kathmandu 7 - 9 March 2008

Monika Jaeckel, Andrea Laux, **mine**
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Executive summary

Mother Centers are a self help movement originating in Germany. There are currently over 850 Mother Centers in 20 countries. Mother Centers are public spaces in the community where women gather on a daily basis to support each other in organizing the tasks of everyday life and addressing the issues of the community. The centers are self managed; activities in the center are initiated and conducted by the participants. Women can bring their children with them to the center, where they are taken care of in an extra 'children's room'. The women take turns in providing the childcare for the children. Access is open and easy, everyone is welcome, there is no need to become a member, to commit time or money, or to inscribe in a course. The centers operate on an open 'drop in' basis, you can come anytime and always meet other mothers and find a cup of tea and a listening ear. The centers run on the assumption that 'everyone is good at at least one thing', which they can contribute to the Mother Center. The activities initiated in the centers relate to the needs as well as the available skills in the community and include educational as well as recreational activities, income generation as well as family services. Some examples include: computer and language courses, information on hygiene and health issues, composting, hot lunches and catering services, home work support for children, music and dancing classes, preserving cultural traditions in handicraft, savings and credit groups, childcare services for employed parents, second hand shop, food cooperative, eldercare.

In the Mother Center everything can happen 'under one roof' 'women can deal with and find support simultaneously for all areas of their multi-tasking lives. A wealth of information and know-how is shared on a peer learning basis. Over time Mother Centers function as a kind of clearing space for the community. Everything that happens in the community can be discussed on a daily basis. Anything that needs immediate attention or response can be dealt with. Mothers are often at the core of the community. They have a lot of knowledge of what is happening on the ground and they are most often inclusive of the whole community in their approach as they are usually the ones dealing with the needs of husbands, children, youth, the elderly, and the frail.

At the Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) during the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in 2004 the NGO's Lumanti Nepal and Practical Action International were introduced to the Mother Center concept by members of the Mother Center International Network for Empowerment: **mine**. Both groups had the impression that the concept might work and be helpful to their work with community women in Nepal. Lumanti started 2 Mother Centers in Kathmandu and one center in Bake addressing the community of internally displaced persons. They expressed the wish for **mine** to visit their centers. Practical Action was interested to learn more about the concept of Mother Centers and the experiences of the Nepali centers and invited trainers from the **mine** network to conduct a Mother Center start up training in Kathmandu for interested women's groups together with the Lumanti Mother Centers. The training was held as a 3 day workshop from March 7-9 2008. Women's groups from 15 Nepali communities participated.

The workshop confirmed that indeed the Mother Center concept is useful and relevant to the Nepalese context and can help to activate women in the communities. 10 major community concerns were identified by the participants and the workshop laid out point by point how Mother Centers can help in addressing these concerns. The existing Mother Centers in Kathmandu and Bake found inspiration and new ideas for their centers. For Butwal, a one year action plan was worked out to start up a new Mother Center; the idea being that after gaining more practical experience the idea should be spread to other women's groups and women's cooperatives throughout Nepal. Further exchanges and networking between the Nepali Mother Centers as well as linking to the international Mother Center movement were enthusiastically welcomed by the participants.

Mother Centers are a self help approach in the sense that what happens in the centers is organized by the participating women themselves. Mother Centers do, however, need partners to support with providing space and funds for the centers. Strategies of partnering with local authorities and lobbying for public space for women's groups in the community were also discussed during the workshop.

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I. Introduction

The MC workshop in Kathmandu from 7-9 March 2008 was organized as a joint initiative of two Nepali NGOs (Lumanti and Practical Action Nepal), who invited Mother Center trainers from the international Mother Center network **mine** to present the concept of Mother Centers to women's groups from 15 Nepali communities. Eight project settlements from Butwal attended (Pragatinagar A Sector, Rajpur, Ekata Tole, Sisne Plate, Madan Nagar, Shanti Tole, Manakamana, Pakhapani) as well as representatives of the municipalities Butwal, Vyas, Bharatpur, Birendranagar and Nepalgunj. All three existing Mother Centers in Nepal (two in Kathmandu and one in Banke) had sent representatives as well as the two organizing NGO's.



Lumanti and Practical Action learned about the Mother Centers during the Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) at the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in 2004. Lumanti used the opportunity of the IDP support program to implement the concept in Nepal. They found the concept to be very appropriate for Nepal and especially for the situation of IDP's who are faced with the absence of their community and traditional support systems. Practical Action was interested in the Mother Center concept as a way to activate women's groups in the communities they are working with.



"The traditional practice of Purma, where villagers help each other in farming, is disappearing. We need a contemporary variant of village life and of Purma. Mother Centers can help to preserve it. They are very helpful to preserve this tradition, because the basic concept of Mother Centers is coming together. That is the only way in which we can preserve Purma. We need to keep it vital even if the conditions are different from what they used to be in the old days and even if now people are forced to flee from home and are separated from their original community setting."

(Lajana Manandhar, Lumanti)

"We find that women play an important role in the community. We are especially interested in developing the leadership skills of women. We have conducted community mapping sessions and worked out participative community development plans in many of the communities we are working with. It is important to support women in negotiating with local authorities for the implementation of the plans."
(Binaya Raj Shrestha, Practical Action, Nepal)



II. Background and History of the Mother Center Movement

Monika Jaeckel explains how she founded the Mother Center concept.

It started 30 years ago when the government of Germany requested a research about the question why low-income parents were generally not attending parent education courses.

"As researchers we were interested in activating society and a bottom up approach. We wanted to understand the framework in which families viewed their own situation. So we changed the question a bit and asked: '*what would you consider support in your situation?*' In their answers people mentioned a lot of things, but they did not mention parent education. It became clear that the reality of people and government is not always the same.

We developed the Mother Center concept from what families told they needed: They wanted a place where they could go *with* their children. Publically there were only places either for adults or for children but no "home away from home". They did want to learn about child raising, but from other parents. Meeting other mothers was important because many women felt isolated and left alone in the task of raising children.

There was a need for what we later called 'community parenting'. That was the basic message.

They also wanted a place to raise their family income because with young children it usually is very tight. They wanted to learn skills *and* they wanted to contribute their skills. They did not want to define themselves as a problem, they wanted to contribute and share. They wanted to give as well as take.



We analysed the main elements in what we heard in the interviews:

- 1) Women want to learn from other mothers in the same situation
- 2) The need for public space that includes children
- 3) The need of young families to earn some extra income
- 4) The need for a place in the community to contribute your talents

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Together these elements were called “Mother Center” and as such it was introduced to the government. Because science has a high reputation in Germany, after some negotiation, it was accepted to try out this new approach as a way to provide parent education.

Besides of a scientific report, we supported the women of the first centers to write down the experience in their own words. This book spread the movement. It was published as a paper book sold in department stores. Women who read it said two things: *“this is it, this is what we want”* and second *“we can do this too”*.

The Mother Center concept was totally new, because it was based on self help. The women use the space of the Mother Center as they wish. They manage the centers themselves. They decide themselves what happens in the center. Support was given only in fundraising. The first thing they did was tell their friends and other women that they were starting and asking for other to join. Renovating and furnishing the rooms was done together. That way the center belonged to the community from the beginning. They asked each other *“What are you good at?”* The slogan of the Mother Center movement became: ‘Everybody is good at something and this you can contribute to the center, and thus to the community.’

Whatever is done in the Mother Center should be paid because the family budgets are often very low. The funding for the project was split in small bits to spread around as much as possible and to pay for work and the activities in the center, Women were paid on an hourly basis for example if they cooked once a week in the center or took over the child care on one afternoon. Women took turns with the different tasks, and the money available was spread amongst many women in the center. It was also a way to share knowledge.

When the book came out and women read it, the centers started to spread. After the first 3 model centers, funded by the government, Mother Center initiatives needed to find their own ways of establishing the centers. They started negotiating with their municipalities. In practice it took an average of one year to get started. All 400 centers in Germany started with a group of women getting organized in their own community. Some centers now have large spaces and grew into Three Generation Houses, but they all started with a small space. Over the years it grows.

The Mother Centers have spread also across the borders, first in Europe, both West and East but also to further away places like here in Nepal as well as to Africa and Canada.

As young sociologist I never dreamed of starting an international movement but it happened.

What Mother Centers do is to create community, they create a public space for women to come with their children. This is a strong way to support community building, for which there is a great need.



In Europe community networks have been weakened by the modern individualistic life style, people do not know one another anymore. People with small children feel isolated. In Bosnia there was a civil war and most families have been displaced which has broken down community ties. In Kenya communities have been disrupted by the AIDS epidemic. In all these situations Mother Centers help to rebuild community. When the Mother Centers spread to meanwhile 20 countries, we saw the need to create an international network and to exchange and keep contact between the different centers in the different countries.

Mother Centers are based on self help, as is our network **mine**. We are not a program, we are not funded and we do not have staff, we work voluntary. We are happy to be here and that Practical Action supported one trip, because we think it is important to share our experiences. We believe in peer learning and meeting.

As a network we conduct international campaigns, one of which is called "How do we want to raise our children"? In each of the Mother Centers that joined that campaign, women discussed the same sets of questions. At the end of the first year of discussing these topics women from 20 countries shared their experiences in Slovakia. The 20 countries were very different but the mothers agreed on many points. We put together the common issues in a 'platform of action' which you will also find on the **mine** website www.mine.cc.

Also every year we conduct the "Mothers walk a mile" campaign in which in different places around the world women go out on the streets with their children to raise awareness of the fact that cities and communities need to look different to be appropriate for children and for families. This way mothers all over the world draw attention to the issues of community mothering they stand for. "



Question: Are Mother Centers created as a local branch and is there a head office?

Answer: New centers are not really created as branches. Each center is their own center and has friendship links to the other centers. Mother Centers are a network, not an organization. They are a concept and an idea and in many places women take up that idea and do it themselves and stay in contact. This is the difference between top down and bottom up. **Mine** stands for Mother Center International Network. We have no money or power or desire to organize top down, we network between independent Mother Centers. We meet and exchange with women from the other centers, we learn from another. We share our skills and experiences, that is the principle.

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III. What Situation and Understanding are we Starting from?

In a questions and answers session in two working groups, the participants of the workshop reflected on the following questions:



- What do I like about Mother Centers?
- Why do we want a Mother Center and what does it contribute to the community?

Below are some quotes from the Working Group with the women from the existing Mother Centers in Kathmandu and Bake:

I am in a saving and credit group in the Mother Center and when there is a problem you can take credit. We save 100 NRP per month. I have fled to Kathmandu, my husband is in the army and I had to go from Lonsum to here because of the Maoist problem. There are mothers from different regions and in the Mother Center we make one group now that unites women and that is important to have all differences together in one group. Most mothers are illiterate. Before they did not know about different things and now they are involved and I am happy about that. In the Mother Center they have a way to go forward and they are getting more in front of the society.

The Mother Center is place where mothers can come and share their sorrows and their joys. The mothers before were just in their house but with the Mother Center they have a place to go and meet. When they come they wear clean clothes and look very nice for their friends and it is a special occasion and they take great care. The children are supported in learning centers. We also do city cleaning activities and we are investing our money in the savings and credit groups in the right track as well.

I am from a rural area and moved to town. I am in Bake and there I heard about the Mother Center. I took benefit from various activities in the Mother Center group. Before my family did not know about personal hygiene, things like washing your hands before eating or when having been to the toilet. I learned these things in the Mother Center and now my family too knows about hygiene and sanitation and also I benefit from the saving and credit group.

My children could be kidnapped by the Maoist so therefore I moved to town to avoid that they were forced to join the Maoist forces. By fear of Maoist I sent my son to India. I don't know who killed my family members, the government or the Maoist forces. My daughter in law and my grandchild were killed by hanging them from the end of her sari. Due to the Mother Center I am now getting rid of all this stress and I meet people with similar problems and we share. I am there from 10 to 17 and I do cleaning and photocopying and other helping duties. The Mother Center is a place to make friends and that is why I like it.



We have made a network to raise the different kinds of issues the families face when they have to leave their communities like having a citizen card and birth certificate. Before that was not an issue. In each centre we have the "Internally Displaced (IDP) network where the men also take part and we advocate for our rights. Also the issue of property rights.



This is a Mother Center and I am still a girl so I want to share why I want to be part of it. Back home in the village the maoist tortured my sister who was put in sack and hit and they did terrible things. My brother in law is in the Army and they requested he should quit. They had to pay 50.000 to set my sister free and that is why we came to town. My mother is still there and we are worried I also was captured and they kept me for 3 days and I never want to go back. Being active in the child learning center has helped me a lot to overcome this.

Andrea Laux sums up the debate at the end of the session:

"What I hear from you is that in the Mother Center you have a public space where you can share even if you have a hard life. If you share it is not only your own issue any more but part of the group and that way you find solutions and you are part of the solution. Sharing with different people is also an important learning tool. A home is not only where your bed is but also where you are understood. It is not only about the programmes in the center, I heard much that is beyond the programmes. What happens between the women when you meet and share and from that there is developed a vision and hope. Together you created a new kind of partnership and you create a network to lobby for your issues. This meeting with different people is also what makes the world bigger for your children. That is the same also in my country or in Bosnia, the children also get exposed to more experiences and learning. The countries are different but the type of learning in the Mother Centers is the same."



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IV. Summary of what is needed locally - 10 Point Program

In the working group with the women from Butwal, who do not have a Mother Center yet, the participants focussed on the concerns of women and children in their communities they hoped the Mother Centers could address. These were put up on the wall and summarised into 10 points to be looked at and referred back to throughout the workshop to see what can be the Mother Center way of answering to these concerns.

In the following days the Mother Center concept was presented in regard to the 10 issues of concern raised by the participants.



What is needed?

- 1 A place to create income
- 2 A safe place for children
- 3 A place to rest
- 4 A place to create unity in the community
- 5 A place to learn good habits, especially around health
- 6 A place to be allowed to go by husbands
- 7 A place to get support for the multiple family and community responsibilities women take on
- 8 A place to get education for women and children
- 9 A place to support the family environment
- 10 A place to create balanced families



V. Secrets of Success: The Key Elements of the MC Concept



The workshop proceeded by a point by point interactive presentation and discussion of the Mother Center concept and its relevance to the local context and experience.

0. How to get started

Andrea Laux presents how she started her Mother Center and demonstrates the Mother Center concept points and principles of **self help and self management**:

"My Mother Center in Germany now looks very big, however it started small. The group who started consisted of women who had moved to the city and we were welfare clients. I read the book about Mother Centers and thought that it was exactly what I needed and that we could do it well. We started by gathering a group. We put up notices in the supermarket and asked women and so we got a very mixed group. It was not just women on welfare but middle class women as well. We managed to get a space for free that we could use once a week.

The first activity we did was singing together with our children. This way my son learned a lot of songs that I did not know. To relieve the burden of work for all of us, one woman would cook for the whole group so that we would save time and money by not having each of us to cook individually. By now 20 years later, this has grown out to be a complete restaurant and we provide food for the whole neighborhood. Making music together and eating together helped to create a group. We were a very diverse group and we were not at all politically active, but as a group we grew stronger. All the shy women were learning and growing. After a while just one afternoon was not enough for us and we wanted to have the space more often so we went to the mayor to ask. The group elected me to represent them and I was so shy it was very difficult for me but I learned a lot from representing the group.



After a while we got more and more ideas for activities. There was a woman who wanted to celebrate a baptism and her house was too small for all the guests so she used the space of the Mother Center. Then we also started to do it for other people, they could rent the space to celebrate parties and have catering and childcare as well.

All the activities and income generating ideas started little by little. We had an idea or an emergency situation forced us to do something. This is how the childcare started. An emergency situation with one of the mothers required childcare so we started it. For some of the activities we got help from other Mother Centers. We exchanged ideas with the other groups and learned from them.

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Sometimes we have courses. They start if somebody says "I have a skill, I can teach the others". Or when somebody says they want to learn something. This way we have started different courses and trainings. I learned English this way. In many centers they have computer courses or trainings in health issues. One woman can do yoga and she teaches the others. Dental hygiene is a point, many women don't know you need to clean the teeth even of small children otherwise you get dentist bills later. We invite a midwife to explain about the things related to pregnancy.

In my Mother Center we also have many activities for youth. We invite people to tell them about HIV and how to prevent it. The youngsters can learn from us how to be a good baby sitter. We give a certificate if they have learned everything well.

With time we developed our dreams and our vision. We needed more space and were lucky that an organization had an apartment for rent. The city has helped us with paying the rent, all the other costs we needed to pay ourselves. At that point we sat together with the active women to discuss what to do. We decided that we would start a shop with second hand clothes. This is a way so that families can buy cheap clothes and for the Center it was a way to generated income. The other thing we started was a food cooperative. By buying food as a group we could buy healthy food at very good prices directly from the farm. The members of the cooperative buy the food for a lower price than what they pay in the shop and still there is a little margin left for the Mother Center to pay the women who do the work of organizing the food cooperative.

Singing was the first thing we started with and still every week young and old come in and join and sing the traditional songs and that is very much fun and brings people together. On Monday we do sport and all can join in. That is especially important for the development of the children. In our country the young do not move enough anymore and that is not good for their health.

In my Mother Center there are now 600 families that are member and when we started we were 30 people. On an average weekday there are about 200 people coming. This is a very big center. There are small ones as well with just 20 or 30 families. In villages the centers often stay small, but in city often the centers start small and grow. For a large center the people come from further away by bus. Normally the centers are at walking distance from where the women live, maybe 3 kilometer. It would be preferable if in city planning a Mother Center is a part of the regular infrastructure."

Question: We have a community building in our municipality. Could we start a Mother Center there?

Answer: The community building could be a location for a Mother Center provided that there is separate space of at least two rooms and a kitchen that the women can manage themselves and control and have the keys.



Question: Is there a formal registration procedure?

Answer: You start off with a loose group of women, you just organize informally. However in order to be able to apply for funding, it is better to be formally registered, to have a legal title with which you can apply for funds. In Germany that is the *Verein*, or association, in which all members have voting power and there is a board of seven people. In every country the appropriate legal form can be different.

Question: How do Mother Center get funded?

Answer: It is always a struggle. The space is most often provided by the municipality after some negotiation. Sometimes they also get money from the municipality for running costs. Businesses sometimes support things like building playgrounds or furnishing a kitchen or contributing toys, computers or tables. Religious or charitable organizations sometimes give donations. However, all over the world, in both rich and poor countries it always is a constant struggle to gather the resources for starting and running a Mother Center.

Question We are IDP's and we do not even have houses here. There is extreme poverty, we are afraid we will not find land because it is very expensive and people discriminate us.

Answer: Last year we worked with Roma communities in Bulgaria. They too are very poor and discriminated. They started with a very small space. They had a garage and started there. It was amazing what they did in such a small space. They have dreams and visions for the future, even if these dreams could not be realized in a long time it did bring them a strength.

Question: How can we start in a new community?

Answer: First you identify an active group of women. Then you look for space with at least 2 rooms (one for adults one for children) and a kitchen. For running the center you don't need outside help, you run the center yourself. It is a very good idea to sit together in the beginning to clearly define the aims and objectives of the Mother Center and what you will do there and put it on paper. In order to be in discussion with the municipality and donors you need to get registered. Once you are a legal entity you can look for funding partners. When we say that Mother Centers are based on a self help and bottom up approach, it does not mean that they do not need support. Mother Centers do need partners to help them to get space and find some kind of funding to run the Mother Center. It is a misunderstanding that many donors have. When they hear self help they understand self reliance. The Mother Center self help approach implies self management. The women run the center by themselves, but they do need funding. All over the world Mother Centers need rent free space, mostly from the municipality. In countries where the government is so poor that they cannot give space this is a problem. The centers in Bosnia and Argentina have to get help with the issue of space from donors.



Fundraising is a very difficult skill that requires know how and access to the right people. This is only possible with the help from partners and even then it is difficult. This is the main support partners can give. They do not need to give help with coordinating the programs or running the activities, this is done by the group, this is self help. But to provide space and funds for the center, that is where partners are required.

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1. A place to create income

Poverty and lack of income is the biggest issue for families in Nepal. This gives special stress between mother and child because the children demand something and the mother has the stress that she is not able to provide that. The concept points of Mother Centers that respond to this issue are **income generation and the remuneration of work**.

Remuneration of work

The principle of remuneration of work is important because so often women's work is taken for granted. By having some money for payment of tasks that normally are done for free, like caring for the children, these important things become visible and more appreciated. Women who have a function in the Mother Center like running the coffee shop or conducting the singing sessions with the children, get paid. There mostly is not much money but the effort is made to give some money on an hourly basis to each woman active in the center.

These payments mostly do not constitute employment or full jobs. Women are paid per hour or per day that they take on certain responsibilities or activities in the center. This can be done without paying taxes, it is a kind of informal sector work. Up to 155 euro per month can be earned in Germany this way without paying taxes. This system is especially practical because it allows to pay many people from little money. It is a token of appreciation rather than a real wage, but even small money is important for poor families. Over years centers manage to pay a bit more, but it always starts small.

In many projects there is one or two people paid and the others are volunteers. In the Mother Centers this is different, the money that is available is divided amongst everybody who is active. It is often difficult to put this principle in practice; donors prefer paying the wage of just one person instead of providing money for a general pot from which many women get a bit. They also say "why pay for women drinking tea?" They don't see that the group around the table talking (and indeed also drinking a cup of tea) are involved in an important education process. It looks different from a group listening to a teacher, so it does not seem to be education or training, even though in terms of learning the results are often better. Some Mother Centers are more successful than others in convincing their funders. It is a continuous point for lobbying and for educating donors: to give money to women for space and to give money for their work.

Andrea Laux:

"We have learned that it is in our hands to make visible the invisible tasks that women do. We did not have money at first, so what we did was pay a bit when we were drinking tea and we put the money in a box and we used the money from the box to pay the woman who was cleaning or being the host that day. It was very little but it made the value of the work visible. As a group we decided how much money we had and how much money we could therefore afford to pay. In some instances we did not have money at all and then we waited till later when we would have something. Over time we have become clever. If we have no money we can still pay women who are active in the center by providing the services of the center to them for free.



This way we also reached women who normally would not take part. Now their husbands allow them to join because they are earning a bit. Nobody is excluded that way. Whatever money there is, is spread out between the whole group. This creates a strong group, many women feel responsible. It creates ownership. It is very different from a situation with a few leaders with salary and the others are passive consumers.

We give the most decision-making power to the women who are the most active. As a group they decide how the money is used. In practice that meant that the work, like cleaning and cooking and taking care of the children was paid, but leadership roles like lobbying were not. This is rather different from businesses where management who do this kind of tasks, tend to get the best income. Now we also pay for this kind of work.

Even if there is money to pay for work there is remains a lot of unpaid work. The German Youth Institute did a study about this and they found out that for every hour of paid work there are in average two hours of work the women put in voluntarily. They are so motivated and committed that they contribute much of their time for free. The remuneration generates voluntary work, it creates visibility and it creates responsibility and a strengthening of the group as well."

Income Generating Activities

Businesses are created in the Mother Center by the women as a group. That is different from having your own business alone on the market, which does not create community. The principle behind the Mother Center way of doing business is doing it collectively. Either you do it together as a group, as a cooperative, or as an individual under the roof of the Mother Center. Then part of the earnings is given to the Mother Center.

Andrea Laux:

"For example with four women we started a catering business. Neither of us could have done it alone because we each had some skills but nobody had all the skills needed. We made a contract with the Mother Center to make sure it goes well because when there is money involved you need to be clear. We can use the kitchen of the center. In the beginning when there is no profit we do not need to pay for using the kitchen. We give work and education to youngsters in return for the use of the kitchen. We do food for weddings and other parties.

The food cooperative is a way to save money and time on buying food. This way you spend less money for food. Bulk buying as a cooperative is also possible for soap or school supplies. Other examples for income generating are for instance a hairdressing salon in a Mother Center in Bosnia, people come there for a haircut for themselves or their children or for a massage. When the Mother Center has a photocopy machine that can be used for income generating too. Another thing many centers offer are childcare services for employed parents. All these activities bring income. Some women make a business in ironing clothes or mending clothes. If a Mother Center has a sewing machine, the women of the Center can use it to make or repair clothes."



Question: Are there savings and credit groups in the Mother Centers of the other countries?

Answer: Saving and credit groups are something the German Mother Centers have learned from the women in India. It is not very common in Europe yet, there are saving groups in Mother Centers in some Eastern European countries as well as in Africa.

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Activities that can take place in a Mother Center

- Computer classes
- Organic food cooperative
- Sport activities for mothers and children
- Singing, music, dances
- Yoga
- Language courses
- Medical information
- First aid course
- Father and child activities
- Compost making
- Saving and credit
- Childcare and babysitting courses with certificate
- Child learning center / homework support
- Hygiene courses



Examples of income generating activities in Mother Centers

- Child care
- Baby sitting
- Cleaning services
- Sewing and mending clothes
- Laundry and ironing services
- Massage
- Hot meals and catering service
- Second hand shop
- Hair dressing salon
- Renting out space for children's birthdays and family celebrations (sometimes providing full 'party service')



2. A safe place for children

During the workshop some women admit that they are physically there but that the mind is at home worrying about the safety of the children. Concern about the safety of the children when you go out and do something for the community was the second issue mentioned. In Nepal many women have 3 or 4 children so they are involved with small children for around 10 years. It is very practical to be able to bring the children to the Mother Center. **Including the children** is one of the pillars of the Mother Center concept. It provides them with safety and education. The Mother Centers have their own childcare concept.

Andrea Laux:

"In the Mother Center a woman can become active without having to "get rid" of her child. In the Mother Center you may see a child sitting next to the computer, it is not separate worlds. It is not that the children are always everywhere. We have a childcare room and most often the children are there. Still it is always possible to have contact between mother and child, the separation is not rigid. The childcare in the Mother Centers are run by a mother who has a talent for that, not by a professional child minder. There are children of different ages. For the children it is very good because they get the experience of interacting with many adults and with children of different ages.



children to experience.

At some point a young boy in the Mother Center was asking "who is my mother today?" that is a good sign. I myself was not confident in raising my child and my son found in the Mother Center those aspects like structure and order that I was not so good at providing to him at home. This way you do not only look after your own children but after many children and the children have many adults who keep an eye on them. That is important for children, it is a kind of community parenting. The children become proud of their mother, they see their mother in a different role, as a leader and strong women, this is good for

When you follow a training in the Mother Center it is good to know that your child is safe and nearby in another room of the Mother Center and you can learn. If you go to a workshop in another city in my country you can travel with your children and bring them to the local Mother Center. Sometimes you need to go somewhere where you cannot take a child. At those moments you can leave them in the childcare of the Mother Center which is safe and known. You combine doing things for yourself with educating your child that way.

We have been getting a good feedback from teachers at schools and kindergartens: the children who have been in Mother Center are well behaved and have good social skills.



The second type of childcare provided in the centers is different. In general this is a next step and involves more space. Mother Centers have developed childcare as an income generating activity for the women and the center. This type of childcare is a service offered to employed parents and the general community. Some centers provide childcare when there are large events in town, like the annual fair, this has developed over time. The Mother Centers have gained a reputation of being able to do things in a flexible way. We profile ourselves with this skill in the market. We give out certificates to women who have gained "everyday life expertise" Sometimes we offer this kind of childcare in our space and we pay the women and take a percentage as a center. We also go to hotels or events and women who are experienced Mother Center child-minders go there and look after the children of the participants of those events. In that case too the centers keep a percentage of in between 20 and 50% of the fee that is paid for the childcare. This way the center is more sustainable.

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When we were lobbying to get space for our Mother Center in Germany we went to the town hall and brought all our children, because that is how we operate. That was a bit of a shock but in the end we changed the culture there. In city hall the administrative staff loved our children, they gave them chocolates. By now our City Hall offers childcare during opening hours. They profile themselves as a child friendly city this way. But they got the idea from us."



Question: In Katmandu there is no separate room for children yet. When you have children under 3 it is impossible to leave them at home. Does that not create some disturbances when you take the children with you?

Answer: Being able to bring the children implies that you need two rooms, children and mothers all in one room is too much, you need one room for the mothers and one for the children. In the children's room there need to be women with talent for working with children and doing activities with them. In general each group has some women who have a talent of dealing with children and they take turns in that. It can be flexible, it is not that all children have to be in their room all the time. If they want they can go to mama and sit on her lap for a while until they are bored again with all of the adults and go back to the children. If it is not too strict in general it does not create a big disturbance. Both women and children learn how to deal with being in the center together.

Question: Do women pay for childcare in the center?

Answer: If you are in the Mother Center participating in the activities you do not pay, but if you are not and just drop off your child when going somewhere else you need to pay. This happens when the childcare that is provided by the municipality is not at the right moments or not flexible enough. The Mother Centers fill the gap in the childcare provision. This is a service they have developed over time and they are especially good in childcare for children under 3 years of age. Paying for childcare is ONLY the case when you are not in the center. So this does not hinder poor women from participating in the center. They come to the center with their children and they learn new skills, while their children are being taken care of in the children's room.



3. A place to rest

Women in Nepal have many obligations, in the family, social obligations, the need to create income.

Often it is too much, they need a place where they can have a bit of rest. The concept point that responds to this concern is the importance of **claiming public space**, creating a kind of 'public living room'.

Monika Jaeckel:

"What we mean by claiming space is that the women control the space. It is their space and they have access to it 24 hours a day. Mother Centers are not only open when there is a course, you can go there anytime you have a spare moment. Mother Centers must feel like home, and be welcoming like a home. We call them public living rooms. They are close to home -preferably at walking distance- and it is easy to join. There are no blockages like an entrance fee, or required membership. It must be a place for everybody. In the Mother Center all women are welcome. The center is for everybody and everybody is welcome.



You just come in and discuss what is happening in the community. This way everything that needs attention in the community is voiced by somebody and gets attention. This way you do not need to feel alone with your issues, because there is a place where you can go and at the very least you will find a listening ear. Most often there will be somebody who has an idea, solutions grow in the group.

For most women it is important that they do not need an appointment to go to the center. Daily issues or emergencies do not tend to fit into a schedule. Also rest was mentioned. If there is such a moment where everything is too much you can go to the center and find support and people who understand and you can take a moment to catch your breath.

You can take your child the day it does not stop screaming and give it to one of the other women at the center, who will take over for a while, so you can have some minutes of rest and drink a cup of tea and recuperate. So while we say that Mother Centers are important for learning they are also a place to find relief and relaxation. At the moment that everything is happening at the same time in the center you can find a moment to take a deep breath and gather your strength."

Question: How can you keep the center open 24 hours per day?. Women are overloaded and they have little time available.

Answer: We do not mean by this that the center should always be open, the important thing is that you COULD always go there when you need it. There could be a crisis situation in which it is needed to go at night. It is about ownership and control over the space. That participants can use the space any way and any time they need it. To have accessibility it does not need to be the same somebody who always is there. Many participants should have the key and many people use the center in the time they do have. The point that everybody has a key normally creates debate, but it is an important part of the concept. In a Mother Center it is not the idea that you can only go there when there is a program or a course going on. You can go there when you want to go there or need to go there. Many people think it is not safe when so many women have access. However having many keys assures that women feel it is their place and when they feel ownership they take care of their space. The sense of ownership creates safety.

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4. A place to create unity

Participants mentioned the need to create unity in the communities, that many communities have become conflict ridden and people have lost their sense of cooperation and unity. The concept points that address this concern include the already mentioned aspect of **claiming public space** as well as the concept point of starting with **visions and values**.

Monika Jaeckel:

"If there is an open and welcoming space in the community, you can always go there and meet friends. There is always somebody there to talk to and that is a way to create community. That is also an answer to the question on how to create unity. Our experience is that such a space for women and children creates community. A welcoming space creates a climate that fosters friendship and social cohesion. What we heard from the women coming from other parts of the country is that their Mother Center became a place where they could create new social ties. That they were lonely at first, but found friends and a new sense of community in the Mother Centers."



Andrea Laux:

The other way we create unity in the Mother Centers is that we focus on values and visions. It is important to start your Mother Center with visions and to keep them alive. We lead by values. When you have an open discussion in your center and agree on common values, you can also make agreements or rules of conduct in the center. It starts with discussing the common values. For instance one of the values many groups have is that good health is important and from that the agreement of washing hands is born. Some groups put their agreements in writing on the wall. Because the agreements come out of consensus and are founded on common values it is not difficult to maintain them, there is no need for a strong or strict leader, the agreements are carried by the group.

Agreements can change over time. As a group you have regular discussions over the agreements and can come to other conclusions. When there is a conflict you go back to what you agreed on before you take a look at what the disagreement is about and usually that is a good way to find the solution.

One example is the Aboriginal Mother Center in Vancouver Canada where there is extreme poverty and there are drug addicts or women who earn a living through prostitution. The Mother Center made the agreement that these women are welcome in the center on condition that they do not use drugs there, otherwise they will be excluded for some months. This works very well because the drug addicts have the need for a safe space and they appreciate and respect the rules in the center to create this.



We found out that it is powerful to start with a dream, creating a vision about how our neighborhood should look like. The next step is thinking strategically on how to realize the vision. Over the 20 years we have continued to sit together as a group regularly and continue to define our vision. Throughout the year we sit together and discuss again. We call it community building tools, we create a vision of what we want and start defining very small steps of how we can realize this vision. We do circles and rounds to hear all the voices. Important decisions can only be made when everybody from the group is present and heard.

One value that is very important for us is that the center is beautiful, an attractive space, also a clean space. We sometimes have to tell the women to clean and be clean. . It needs to be a safe place for everybody, a good environment for the children to grow up. We had a woman who had stolen so we told her that she could not work in the shop anymore and she did not come for 2 months. Then she came back, she said she missed the center so much and she promised to correct herself.

Visitors from outside are often surprised about our center. They are impressed with the atmosphere. Even important people comment that it is different and special and that they feel safe. That is because there are values behind it.

In our campaign "How do we want to raise our children" very different groups from 22 countries around the world discussed issues related to child raising. There were women from all classes, ethnic groups, religions, continents, still the answers were rather similar. In Nepal as well as Germany parents want safety for their children, in Argentina as well as Uganda they are concerned with the health of their children. Behind many of the things we do, are values. By discussing it regularly we continue to create unity and peace, because you define and redefine and realize the values that you have in common."

Question: What about membership, can non members take part in the activities? How do you distinguish between members and non members? Here it is people who are part of a saving group that are considered members, how do you do it?

Answer: Everybody can participate and you do not need to say your name or pay money, everybody is welcome as they are. Most things in the Mother Center are for free like the debate groups and the child care, so everybody even the poorest can take part for free. People often after a while say that they want to become a member out of appreciation. They get much from the Mother Center and want to give something back. When they become member they sign a membership form and pay a very small symbolic fee, equal to the wage of 3 hours of work per year or the price of a cup of coffee per month.

We did not believe in membership at first, it is a formal thing that is not our world and everybody can take part anyways. However it is very useful in our communication with the outside world, donors love numbers, we can show now how many people we represent. We have the membership because of legal requirements and also to show to the city who we are and how many we are. In order to earn money in our center now, you need to be a member. The members do have privileges; some services are cheaper for them.

Question: You said you have 600 members in your center. How do you reach so many people?

Answer: Not all centers are as big as we are. In villages there are few families and maybe 10 or 20 members. There is one village where 90% of the families in the village is member because there is nothing else there. The centers vary a lot in size and also in membership.

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5. A place to learn good habits

Participants mentioned as a concern the bad habits some children in the communities are engaged in, like alcohol and drugs or playing cards. A place is needed for women and children and families to learn good habits about health and good nutrition. In places where there is child labour there is a need to learn about the good habit to send your children to school. The Mother Center concept points that relate to these issues are called the **resource based approach** and **peer learning**.



Monika Jaeckel:

"Good habits are learned in Mother Centers in the framework of peer learning. Not only through a training or a course, but by seeing women like yourself applying good habits around you and learning to apply them yourself. When you experience others preparing healthy meals in the center that can inspire you to do the same thing at home as well. You learn by practical example and you learn by doing."

The resourced based approach relates to 'starting with competences'. It is important to see what women already know, what skills and competence they already have that they can share in the center. When starting with a Mother Center you look at everybody in the group and see what interests they have and what they are good at and even when they are shy they are always good at something. It often takes a while to find out the talents that you and the women themselves were not so much aware of. First they have to grow their confidence and the Mother Center is a place where this happens, where the women grow and discover and use their competences and learn new skills through peer learning. Many women have skills but they are not so confident about it. In the Mother Center they learn to appreciate their skills and good habits and to share them with each other."

During the workshop participants started to make an inventory of their competences and resources:

What are you really good at and do you want to contribute that to your Mother Center?

- I have knitting skills and want to use them to start a business.
- I am a teacher, I can teach the children when they come with their mothers to the center.
- I can make carpets, I have been teaching it to many people.
- I encourage people and I like to make new friends. I am a good listener as well.
- I am good at knitting I can make caps and socks and I can teach that to people.
- I love children and I get a good relationship with them very soon and I am quick to help.
- I am a good listener. I am a good councillor; I can bring out the potential of people. I stand strong in times of trouble.
- I can educate the children on two topics health/hygiene and discipline.
- I am good at resolving quarrels. I settle disputes in the community. I am happy to serve the community. Once there was a man who came out with a sword. Everybody was afraid but I was the one who stepped forward and took him by the hand to stop him. My husband was angry with me because I could have gotten hurt but that is how I am. When there are problems I do not go away but I face them. You should face problems and think of others who maybe even have bigger problems and give hope.
- I know sewing. I can teach others and I can do the cutting as well.
- I can support saving and credit groups and do the accounting. I can teach about children's rights.
- I am a good listener. Because you have to be strong I am not always so polite. I am still struggling to give continuity to this programme and for this it is required to be tough and talk to the donors.
- To make other people happy you have to be happy yourself. Don't be sad, be happy. I make myself happy and thus make others happy.
- I can support women who are illiterate and teach them literacy skills.

6. A place to integrate husbands into family life

Nepali society experiences male domination and mostly the husbands need to agree to what their wives do and where they can go. A place with mothers and children is often unthreatening and unintimidating to husbands. Also the concern was raised that men often have heavy work and are tired when they come home. They do not manage anymore to take an active part in the family. An important concept point of the centers that addresses these issues is to include **activities for the whole family**.

Andrea Laux:

"Many women have saved their marriage because they got support from the other women. It also is good to include husbands in the activities of the center. They often feel that their work and responsibility for earning income leaves them too little time for the family and they welcome activities in the center that give them a chance to experience and be with their children. In Germany the men are usually not so active in the family. We try to get them involved once a week on Saturday. We ask a very supportive husband to organize this. Very popular are family breakfasts or excursions with the whole family. We have noticed that men enjoy family responsibilities more if they happen in a group setting. It seems to be a bit more prestigious to be involved in family like life outside the home in a larger group. In the Mother Centers also the fathers are asked to bring in their talents, they are very much in demand for handiwork and when things need to be renovated or repaired. Over time they identify with the centers as well and feel at home there, and they become more active also in the family life at home."



Question: Would it be good to have a separate room for the men?



Answer: Generally fathers are welcome in the whole center. Sometimes there are special programs for fathers and in one center in Bulgaria they have a room for the men where they do sport, weight lifting and such. Sometimes in Muslim communities there is a need for more privacy for the women, so you can adapt to that. The Mother Centers are flexible and can adapt to the needs of the community.

Question:

What to do if women have a husband who is very strict?

Answer: It is then good to discuss with the husband first and clarify the objectives of the center to the husband. Often they take another attitude when they understand that the center is also a very good place to support the development of their children and to help them succeed in school.

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7. A place to lessen the burden of women's multiple tasks

Women in Nepali society are responsible for many things, including the family, the children, the household, social obligations, family and religious festivities, income generation. They need support in dealing with these multiple tasks. Mother Centers offer the opportunity to **organise every day chores collectively**.

Monika Jaeckel:

"When work is done together each individual does not need as much effort to get all their tasks done. It is not such a burden to take care of difficult children when you are in a group. In Africa they say that it takes a village to raise children. That is what happens in the Mother Center. Women support one another in their everyday tasks. When lunches are cooked together for the women and children in the center, not every woman needs to provide a daily lunch at home.



I have heard of the Nepali tradition of Purma which mainly is about mutual support in agriculture and collectively cultivating land. In the Mother Center you apply that same principle to other areas of life as well, to the tasks of raising children and taking care of a family. Women save time by being part of the Mother Center and organizing things together."

Question: Does the Mother Center not overload the women, how do they find time to be active in the center?

Answer: Especially the very active women in the center can find themselves overloading themselves through the many activities and opportunities to get engaged. Especially when fundraising and lobbying for the centers is involved. In general family tasks become easier, but feeling responsible for a whole center and many families can become quite overwhelming. Here we have introduced the concept of leadership support that we will present later on.

8. A place for education for women and children

Education was listed as an important issue by the participants. This can be adult literacy, training for income generation or learning about health as well as supporting children in their homework, as happens already in the Child Learning Centers of the Bake and Kathmandu Mother Centers.

In Mother Centers a wealth of education is transferred both formally through courses and trainings that are conducted there as well as through **informal learning**, learning from role models, learning by doing, learning by trying things out.





Andrea Laux:

"You learn skills in the Mother Center by doing it, you learn managing and accounting by running the center. I have learned how to use a computer even though I have not been to school much. Mothers learn how to do haircutting and other practical skills. The young tell the older ones how to use modern things like a mobile telephone. By being involved in city affairs we have been learning about city budgets and the planning of projects. The active women in the Mother Center learn a lot of things themselves and in the process also teach others who are still new in the center.

Healthy eating and healthy cooking is something the women learn that way. In Germany many young women don't know how to prepare healthy food anymore and in the Mother Center they learn that. Good food is an important preventive health measure. Other health issues are shared as well. For instance the women become more aware of what is an emergency and what not, so that they do not immediately give heavy and expensive pills to the children. For small ailments the old herbal treatments we learn from the grandmothers can be fine as well.

There are many traditional things that are valuable that we can learn from older women. They still know the old songs and dances and can show them to us and the children. Especially in town where there are many migrants who are separated from their original community, these things can get lost. In our modern cities people who come from elsewhere have nobody pass on their wisdom to. It is a joy to be able to share your knowledge and skills with other people. In the Mother Center different people come together and we listen to one another and we learn of the old traditions. This way the wisdom of the communities does not get lost, we learn from older people as well as from different cultures.

Mother Centers are a vibrant switchboard for information. A lot of information, written and oral, gets spread in the Mother Center, women get informed about many subjects. But the education in the Mother Center goes further. Mother Centers are a place where women can try out their skills and develop them further. Before venturing into income generation and starting up a business you can try it out first in the protected environment of the center. You can see how a business idea works and how you like it. You can develop new skills by trying them out. The centers function as a kind of incubator or laboratory space for new skills."

Question: We have done skills training for income generation, but often it does not go any further after the training, how to implement what we learn in the trainings?

Answer: Best is to try it out first in the Center. Then you can gather experience first, before you go out on the market. But you do not even have to always start with a training that costs money, you can share amongst each other the skills you have and teach each other what you know. That can already generate a lot of knowledge and new skills that you can also use for income generation.



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9. A place to support the family environment

Participants voiced the issue that often the family environment is not peaceful. Poverty can lead to quarrelling and even domestic violence. It can result in the children running away. There is a need for support of the family environment. Mother Centers are a place that promotes **community integration and an intergenerational approach**.



Monika Jaeckel:

"In Germany many Mother Centers have developed into intergenerational houses. Over time all issues in the community start being addressed in the center. Young people start coming and asking for help with their problems, or asking if they can contribute something to the center. They enjoy the atmosphere there. Also elderly people want to be a part and ask if activities can be organized with and for them. This creates many opportunities for community issues to be addressed in a larger context. Younger women find people of the generation of their parents or in-laws to help them understand what has shaped their views and opinions. Traditions and sound advice based on long years of experience are passed on. On the other hand the older generation gets to know and interact with younger people in a warm and cooperative setting who can explain the changes in contemporary society and in the ways of the youth. The support that families find in the Mother Centers and intergenerational houses tends to decrease a lot of the pressure families experience. Often the centers are also places where family conflicts can be dealt with and mediated in a supportive and collective setting. Mother Centers create a supportive environment for families in which to deal with conflicts and family pressures."

Question: Are Mother Centers also a place for women and children who are beaten at home?

Answer: Mother Centers are open for all families. And all issues can be discussed there. Mostly it takes some time and trust for issues of violence to be voiced in the centers, but often it is the only place where women or children find the possibility to address these experiences. Often the women in the center can help, or they can help the participants dealing with these issues to find specialized help.



10.A place to support balanced families

One issue that was brought up concerned the fact that often Nepali families are too large because there is a preference for boy children. Mother Centers can address this issue through the **empowerment of women** that is an important part of the Mother Center approach.

Monika Jaeckel:

"Although Mother Centers also include men the focus is clearly on women. This follows also from a community organising point of view. Women are the ones keeping communities together. When you reach women you also reach the future generation. What women have learned, they pass on to their children. When women come together and work together, the whole community starts to be organized, women address the needs of the whole community, for they are the ones taking care of the children, the youth, husbands, the elderly, the sick and the frail. It is often the mothers who still have the strength to reweave community in instances where it is broken. When giving information about for example the importance education, also for daughters, it is best to give it to the women who are the ones dealing with these issues at home. Empowering women is the key to more empowered and balanced families and to more empowered and balanced communities."

Question: How can you support women to take leadership roles in the community?

Answer: When women are active in the center they learn to develop more confidence and self assurance. Their talents and competencies are in demand and are mirrored in the centers and many experience themselves in leadership roles and learn about leadership skills they have. From here the step to also take on leadership roles in the community is not that big anymore. In the Mother Center experience we have found many women to grow into leadership roles in the community after being active in the centers.



General Principles of Mother Centers

- Claiming Space
- Everything under one roof
- Self Help
- Peer learning
- Networking
- Building on Competencies
- Starting with Values and Vision
- Empowerment
- Leadership Support
- Joy and celebration

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VI. The Mother Center Leadership Approach

Practical Action explicitly considers women's leadership development an important part of their community mobilization. Therefore part of the workshop was used to discuss the Mother Center approach to leadership.



Monika Jaeckel:

"In our view leadership is not a position, it is a quality. It is a function that needs to be there in every group. It can, however, be different people at different moments and in different situations that provide this quality. We do not think one person can do all the leading, we do not talk about a "leader" we talk about "leadership", and the qualities needed for good leadership. We encourage that women "take leadership" and become aware of and develop their own leadership skills in the centers. Many of the skills that participants mentioned in the skills inventory exercise relate to leadership skills.

Part of leadership as a skill is bringing out the ideas of others, especially those who do not say that much. It is a leadership task to assure that the whole group is involved and brings in their concerns. Sometimes people hide behind the group. It is a leadership skill to take responsibility. At the same time it also is a leadership skill to give space to others in the group to take responsibility, to at the appropriate times step back and nurture leadership in others.

When taking up a leading role you must also be able to create support to avoid burn out. The Mother Center movement believes in creating such a supportive climate in our centers. We work with the Leadership Support Method and provide trainings to spread this method.

In many groups conflicts or problems are pushed under the table and not talked about. An important leadership skill is addressing conflicts and mediating to get to sustainable solutions.

Persevering is a leadership skill, success often does not come quickly.

Besides of bringing out the human resources in the own group a accessing resources from outside is also an important leadership skill.

Mistakes do happen inevitably and leadership also implies to be open to learn from mistakes and to be open to change.

The following is a list of leadership skills and it is by no means complete:

Leadership Skills and Competencies

- * Able to use time effectively
- * Capacity to structure situations, define what needs to be decided, structure debates and bring out conclusions, define tasks
- * Ability to translate ideas into goals and steps
- * Ability to hold visions and create visions
- * Personal charisma
- * Good and inspiring speaker
- * Able to detect, reflect on, & respond to leadership needs
- * Ability to take decisions and to act
- * Ability to ask the right questions



- * Ability to approach situations pro-actively, think in solutions, rather than in complaints
- * Ability to take initiative
- * Ability to take responsibility
- * Ability to persevere through difficulties
- * Ability to follow through with plans
- * Ability to access and generate resources
- * Ability to generate partners and allies

- * Ability to create group cohesion and cooperation
- * Capacity to create a constructive atmosphere
- * The ability to listen



- * Ability to be accessible
- * Ability to give attention and appreciation

- * Capacity to motivate others, generate participation
- * Capacity to stimulate identification, responsibility, engagement, ownership
- * Ability to bring out the talents, creativity and resources in others
- * Ability to secure agreement and consensus
- * Good communication and relating skills
- * Ability to give and to build trust
- * Ability to empower others
- * Ability to support participative group procedures, involve others in decision making, trust in self-organising power of groups
- * Ability to share information and create transparency
- * Capacity to delegate
- * Ability to be a team player
- * Capacity to resist burn out
- * Capacity to organise leadership support
- * Ability to nurture growth, involvement and development of organisation

- * Ability to nurture leadership skills in others

- * Ability to confront and work through problems
- * Ability to confront and work through conflicts
- * Ability to create interaction and communication in stuck situations
- * Ability to understand and work with group dynamics

- * Capacity to be open to new ideas
- * Ability to welcome and adapt to changes
- * Ability to acknowledge and be relaxed with not knowing
- * Ability to tolerate "chaos" and advance it to a higher level of order

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- * Ability to reflect and learn from mistakes
- * Ability to question oneself

Obviously nobody combines the full scope of leadership qualities. You need to share leadership roles among many people to create all the functions of leadership that you need. Nature provides an example of this kind of leadership. Watch the formation of birds when they migrate. They fly over large distances in a V shaped formation. The bird up front takes the most wind and shelters the ones behind it. When the front birds get tired, which is sooner or later depending on their strength, they go to the back and can rest in the shelter of the others. This only works when there is agreement and unity to do it this way. The birds do this by instinct; we humans need to have a conscious and shared vision to



approach leadership in this way. Mother Centers support participatory leadership, which means sharing leadership roles and tasks and believing that leaders need rest and leaders need support. We try to create structures for this kind of leadership in the Mother Centers."

VII. Steps towards our Visions

Discussions on ways to go forward were held in two working groups. The women from Butwal discussed if they were interested in the Mother Center concept and what would be next steps in implementing it in their communities. Kathmandu and Bake have Mother Centers already. The women from these Centers discussed how the new knowledge had changed their perspective and if they would alter the way they organize their Mother Centers. The following sums up the results of the working groups:

What activities and income generating strategies would apply in the Nepalese context?

- Most activities are possible. However laundry service is not so appropriate.
- Computer courses are difficult because of the price of a computer. On the other hand, sometimes it is possible to get a computer as a donation. When a company decides to get a new computer they often donate the old one. Young people who have learned computer at school can teach mothers in the center. An old computer is good to learn also for the children, Children need to learn about computers because there is so much competition on the job market.
- Adult education (literacy),
- Making handicraft products like purses and bags
- Information center on different subjects: HIV aids, women trafficking, hygienic food, better nutrition
- Plastic collection and compaction by use of machine
- Furnishing the Mother Center with things made from waste materials such as cushions.
- Accounting training for the savings and credit groups
- First aid
- Candle making
- Meditation and conflict resolution
- Addressing the specific needs of IDP's and other migrants that want to stay

What new ideas did you get in the workshop, what was different from what you are doing already?

- Some new activities were suggested that we did not think about yet.
- A kitchen makes a meeting place into a public home, you can cook and make tea, so we want to look now at how to include kitchen facilities in our Mother Center as well.
- We liked the idea of asking the women who participate to contribute something. That is an important approach which will attract women to be part of the Mother Center.
- Another difference that will enrich our Mother Center is that women can bring their children.



One year plan Bake & Kathmandu

- * Include children, other families, youngsters
- * Use know how and skills of the participants, organise a group mapping process to identify available skills and competencies, share knowledge and skills among each other
- * Improve family environment
- * Teach women who are illiterate
- * Make use of the kitchen
- * Negotiate with donors.

One year plan Butwal

- * Start up a pilot Mother Center (in Manakamana Tole)
- * If successful spread to more settlements and communities.
- * Use one story of the existing community center for the Mother Center. There is a large space of 20 feet by 20 feet (6x6 meter) which could be separated into spaces for the women and the children.
- * Make a kitchen close to the building
- * Find group of initiators
- * Discuss vision goals and steps
- * Register
- * Explain the goals and Mother Center idea to the community
- * Activities to do in the Mother Center
 - Child education center
 - Hair cutting for children
 - Rent out space for family celebrations and for social functions
 - Rent out cooking utensils
 - Computer and software training
 - Giving knowledge and information on health, hygiene, medical consultation, how to care for children, household composting and waste management (including demonstrations)
 - Adult education
 - Conflict resolution
 - Saving and credit
 - Vaccination
 - Keep tradition of singing songs for weddings
 - Information on balanced diets



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Next steps: Define what is needed and where to go for it

Needed	Partners to address
* Equipment	* Municipality
* Utensils	* Political parties
* Computer	* Practical Action Nepal
* Software	* Donors
* Compost bin	* Collect contributions in own community
* Furniture and stationary	* Use savings from savings and credit group
* Funding	

Perspectives of spreading Mother Centers in Nepal

- Practical Action will start with one model center in Butwal (ManakamanaTale)
- Lumanti can introduce the Mother Center concept to the women's cooperatives they work with (for instance in Baratap, where Practical Action also works)
- Lumanti is also starting a new water and sanitation program with a strong gender focus. Maybe the Mother Center idea can be introduced into this program there. Water and sanitation is a central part of women's life and they have to deal with. In a Mother Center they can share their expertise and get organized also on this issue.
- There is a wide movement of informal women's groups in Nepal (amasawa) The concept can be introduced to them.
- Creating demonstration projects and building up a network of Mother Centers are seen as the most powerful ways and strategies to go forward.

VIII. Advocacy Issues

Space is a crucial element to the implementation and sustainability of the Mother Center model and was identified as a central advocacy issue by the participants.

Especially in Kathmandu land and space is scarce and expensive, what to do when the current IDP program ends? Grassroots women's groups need to lobby for public space. Local authorities donors and community stakeholders need to be educated how basic and key the issue of accessing public space is for the mobilization of women in the community.



Participants also discussed the value of networking in regard to advocacy and lobbying work. The Mother Centers from Lumanti and Practical Action should keep contact, exchange their experiences and build a network. The negotiation position with local authorities and donors is strengthened if women do not only represent an individual Mother Center, but a network of Mother Centers in several communities. Creating a network and organizing study visits and peer learning exchanges is also a good way to spread the Mother Centers to other communities. Everybody learns best by seeing for themselves and by learning from the experiences of others.

The wish to stay in touch with the international Mother Center network **mine** was also expressed by the participants. The Mother Centers of Nepal will be included in the **mine** list serve and receive information on international **mine** activities and campaigns. It is, however, important to note that **mine** is a network, not a donor. Mine can contribute know how, mediate exchanges and conduct international campaigns, but is not an agency that excels in fundraising.



A strategic lesson discussed in regard to sustainability included the importance of diversifying the sources of income to avoid dependency from a single donor, who might stop or put conditions on their contribution. This is a way to safeguard the independence of the group and the local policies.

Creating solid partnerships with local authorities, donors, and stakeholders in the community was another strategic insight participants agreed on.



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IX. Annexes:

The Nepali Mother Centers and a savings cooperative in Kathmandu



In the week after the workshop, the mine/Nest! delegation visited both Mother Centers in Kathmandu, as well as one of the Savings and Credit cooperatives that are supported by Lumanti.

During the visits the members showed their Mother Center and explained how they used it.

After an introduction round, discussions were held on the meaning of the Mother Center to the participants and those who

participated in the workshop reflected on what they had learned there. The visitors highlighted some of the main concept points in response to questions and a vivid discussion took place during the visits. The visits to the two Mother Centers in Kathmandu are summarized as follows:

Can you say what the Mother Center means to you?

"We get together here and we exchange information."

"We have a savings group and we want to start businesses."

"We share joy and sorrow here. Being here is so much better than being at home because here you see the others and who is in need of something. There is the possibility here of taking a loan from the savings group and for the children there is a Child Learning Center."

"We have a savings and credit group. My children also profit from the Center because they go to the Child learning Center and get help with their homework which I cannot provide myself."

"Even though I have been living in Kathmandu for many years already, it has been difficult for me to get friends. We were scattered and did not know each other. Now we find one another in the Mother Center and get a lot of support."

"Every Friday morning I join the savings and credit group. I am very excited about the new ideas we got in the workshop. We decided that the women who are educated and can read and write will be teaching the others."

"The Mother Center is a place to laugh, that will lengthen our lives."



Can the workshop participants share what they learned, what was very inspiring to them?



"I learned how to stand up and how to speak up in front of women who are older than I am. I felt very special because the whole family can be included in the Mother Center. Before I thought that the white are the richest and we are the poorest people. Now I learned that you too had a lot of difficulties in fundraising and talking to the municipality. We need to do that too. It really changed my view."

"We saw a presentation with pictures from different countries and we saw how in other places Mother Centers were started by very poor people as well. In one place they started in a garage. Compared to that we are in a better position."

"There are three things that made an impression on me. First of all the idea to sell second hand things. Also the idea of women taking care of each other themselves, without professional help, and finally the idea to start a catering service."

"Previously we did not bring the children to the Mother Center, but now we know they are a part of it. What I liked a lot was the idea that the Mother Center is a place where everybody, I too can contribute. We can teach one another and exchange information about the things we know or the skills we have."

"At the moment we get food from outside during meetings, but we could do our own catering as well since our space has a kitchen. Buying a stove would cost seven euro and equipment another six. If we make that investment maybe outside catering is possible as well."

"The idea of taking care of the children together was inspiring to me, we don't do it that way yet."

"We want to have a meeting with all our participants to explain about the workshop and what we learned. We want to repeat the inventory exercise we did in the workshop with our whole group. We will set up a meeting and ask everybody about their skills and what they can contribute to the Mother Center."

"I am good at candle making. I would like to give a training to the other women in how to make candles, and how to include the children in painting them in different colours."

"We could also buy things in bulk, like soap or milk. That can make such daily items cheaper for the Mother Center participants."

In response to these remarks, Andrea Laux shares what her Mother Center means for her and Monika Jaeckel provides information on how the group could go about starting up catering, child care and second hand activities, with much emphasis on practical details.



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The women's saving and credit cooperative

The women's cooperative consists of 550 members who live in the environment; the furthest live in settlements at five kilometer distance. Most of the members are squatters who learned about the cooperative from Lumanti. The savings the women make are collected at their homes by a team leader who brings it to the cooperative, for which they get a transportation fee. The savings are invested into loans to the members and the surplus is put in a bank. At the moment Lumanti only provides some technical support and advice. The cooperative runs well enough to be able to pay the staff and the rent from the interest rates.



Besides of saving and credit activities they also give scholarships to poor students. They have a donation-box which is used to support medical expenses for the poorest. The difference between a savings and credit group and a cooperative is that the latter is formally registered. This provides more security to the members than an informal group. As a group the women are also involved in social works in the community, like installing taps and improving pavements and waste discharge.

"Loans can be taken from the cooperative up to a maximum of around 4000 euro. The interest rate that is paid over the loan depends if there is a security, in which case 12% is due. We give loans without a security as well in which case it is 18%. Only our own members can take a loan. The reason for which they take up loans varies. In many cases the money is needed for family expenditures such as education or health. There are also women who borrow money to start a business in for example animal raising (pigs, poultry), or small shops."



The loans are taken by individuals, as yet there are no cooperative businesses. The **mine** delegation explains how the habit of savings groups is not much widespread amongst the Mother Centers, but that there is a strong tradition of collectively dealing with everyday life and joining forces in business.

People who do not take a loan get an interest of 5% over there deposit. The rates of the cooperative are better than that of the commercial banks. "In the five years of our existence we have accumulated a capital that equals about a hundred thousand Euro."



The habit of saving is fostered as well in the children who can take part in a special saving scheme for children of up to 16 years. They each get their own savings box.

"I am the chair and now coordinate eight cooperatives. I am a grandmother and even though I am already seventy years old, it is now that my husband and I really fall in love with each other because we have a stable income situation. When there are problems with money this really disrupts the family. Most discussions in families are about the income situation."



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Annex 2: Mother Centers World Wide Slide Show



Pictures to illustrate the concept points and practice of Mother Centers



Albania is a Balkan country with a lot of poverty and where there has been conflict. The Mother Centers in Albania have been started by Roma women. They are poor and make their space beautiful with self made embroidery.



In Argentina the Mother Center is started in a slum area in Buenos Aires. The area is prone to flooding. People live in houses made of cardboard. The Mother Center is organized by women many of whom earn a living as scavengers gathering plastic.

The founder of the center is a grandmother. She began by organizing other plastic collectors into a group or cooperative of 15 women earning a living this way. She wanted to have a better future for the children. The center is built by the women with their own hands. They got a piece of land from the church. The money for the building materials was raised in a funding campaign "stone by stone" in which women from Europe each donated money for one stone and other money was donated by European embassies. The group was advised to make a wall first to make sure that the building materials would not get stolen, because it is an area with much drugs, prostitution and criminality. Instead the women explained to the neighbors what a Mother Center is. By involving the whole community they felt ownership and nothing was stolen.



When a young boy was told that the MC was built by material donated by families in Europe, he was impressed and concluded "then we should take good care of it". By creating a community space the center contributes to peace and unity in the neighborhood.



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Bosnia is a country in the Balkan that suffered from a civil war. The founder of the first Bosnian center lived as a refugee in Germany and became active in the Mother Center there. She found a home away from home in the German Mother Center. When she was forced to go back to her country after the war, she started her own Mother Center. The German Mother Center women have stayed linked to their sister in Bosnia.



The pictures show a leadership support training conducted by trainers from German MC. At that occasion the men helped to translate. They do collective cooking and have many activities. One of them is telling the children about nature and environment



As one of their income generating activities they offer laundry and ironing services.





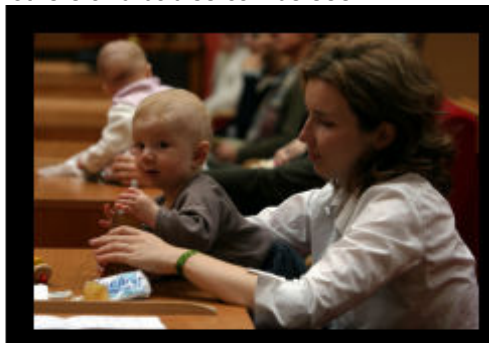
In Bulgaria there are 4 Roma Mother Centers. In their presentation the Bulgarian women stress the importance of being a role model to the children and assuring that they develop their talents. 'Mother Centers are a community of learning, helping and sharing our hopes.' The Mother Center women ventured to get in partnership with the local authorities by setting up a meeting with the mayor to discuss why a Mother Center would be needed. Sometimes there is collaboration with schools to assure that the children of discriminated minority groups go to school. Through negotiation with the local government authorities the group received public space for the Mother Center.



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Czech Republic pictures show the very official situation of a conference, but still the children are a part of it. The children in such a situation see their mother with a microphone and experience her in a different role than normal. An official reception at the town hall is normally not the place where mothers and babies can be seen.

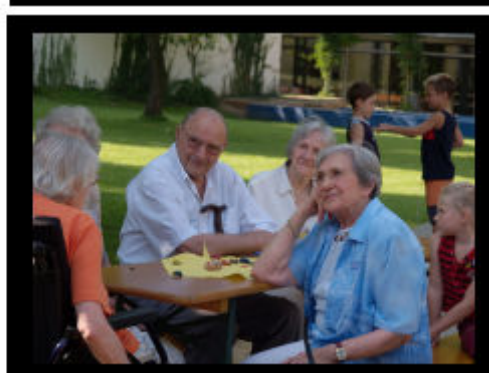
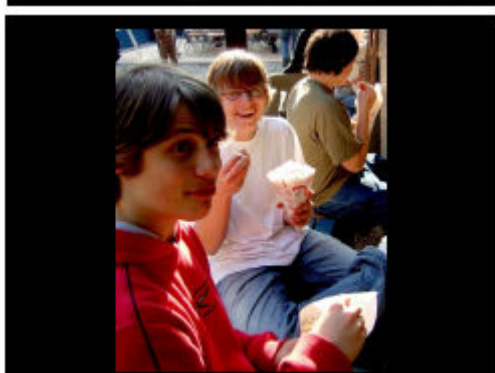


The German pictures are from an intergenerational Mother Center. In 20 years the center developed from a small place in the back to a nice new place in the front. It is a place where everybody from the community comes for a cup of tea or coffee. They do not have money to pay real wages, but they have some funding, which is not used to pay for a coordinator but it is split up in small pieces so that everybody who works gets something on an hourly basis. There is a catering business and the women who do that are not professional cooks. The MC is a place where people can meet, like a public living room. Women with children of the same age meet and discuss about how to do things and this way they learn from one another. In Germany children do not get food at school but when women work it is difficult to give them food at home, so that is why the Mother Center organized that the children can get a meal there to support working mothers. At the same time the center lobbies that children can eat in school. Both approaches self help and advocacy are done simultaneously.

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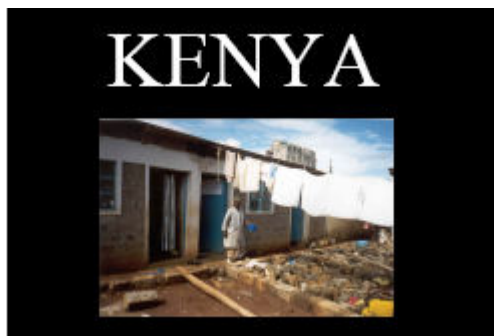
A popular activity is singing together and a choir.
Older people are included. In Germany it is not so usual any more that old people are integrated in society. In the center dialogues are conducted with older people and older women from the area read stories to the children.



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All religious festivities are celebrated together in the center, the Christian as well as the Muslim. Muslims are very active in this center even if the rest of the community is Christian, the groups are in good contact. The center is a place where different stakeholders come together. City officials are introduced to people they normally don't meet, like migrants.





In Kenya the Mother Center is located in a slum area. They also have after school teaching. They have child care for working women, take care of aids orphans and make and sell handicrafts, like lampshades.

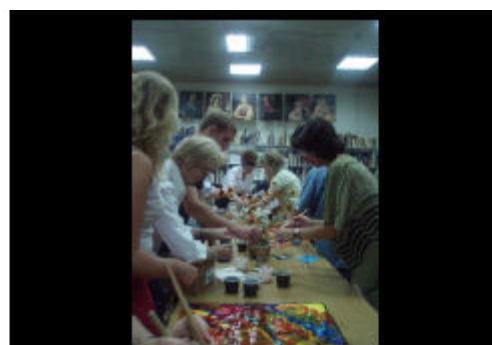
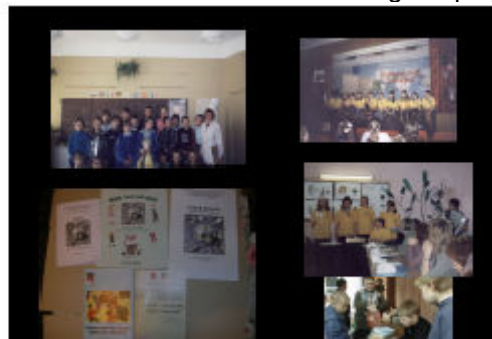


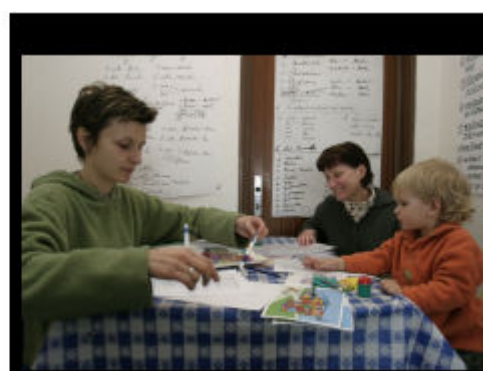
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Mother Centre "Three generations" Pushchino, Russia

In Russia the Mother Center was started by an environmentalist. In this center there is a lot of emphasis on the environment like separating waste. They have a greenhouse and plant a garden and teach the children about making compost and growing flowers. Grandfathers who know a lot about the traditional ways of farming teach their knowledge.

The Russians are very active in creativity and art. They do not do it so much for selling but more for enjoyment. All parents together made a playground for the children which did not exist in their settlement. This was an activity where also the men were helping actively. The school-children are involved in maintaining the playground.





The pictures of Slovakia show a group doing yoga together. Children can be around while their mothers are working.

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In Turkey the Mother Centers are just starting.
 They organized a debate for which they invited a midwife



Uganda is one of the countries that joined the two campaigns of **mine**: 'Mothers walk a Mile' and the discussion groups on 'How do we want to raise our children?' Many activities there happen outdoors.

There are Mother Centers as well in the USA and they have an active national network.

