

**An Interview with:**

**Ms Mira Rana  
Program Director  
Educate the Children - Nepal**

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**Educate the Children** or ETC (<http://www.etc-nepal.org>) is an NGO whose mission is to provide educational opportunities for low-income women and children in Nepal. ETC's programs include scholarships for indigent children, improvement of public school facilities, establishment of public kindergartens, and programs for rural women that include literacy, health education and income generation. In addition to many programs in the Kathmandu Valley, ETC works in seven Village Development Committees in the districts of Nuwakot and Rusuwa, northwest of Kathmandu.

ETC began in 1990 as a child sponsorship organization through the efforts of founding director Pamela Carson. However Pamela recognized that the organization could be much more effective by using its limited funds to work with communities, rather than only individuals, and after 1994 no new sponsored children were added. ETC's rural development program began in 1994 in an area northwest of Kathmandu. ETC launched a combined and complementary education and women's development program, realizing that in order to improve the situation of children, it is crucial to improve the status and wellbeing of their mothers.



Tragically, Pamela is no more. HelloLife.org salutes her pioneering efforts, and interviews Mira Rana, Program Director of ETC in Nepal.

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**What inspired you to join Educate the Children, Nepal? How did your friends and family react to your decision?**

The sad situation of women in Nepal is the main thing that inspired me to join ETC (Educate the Children). Despite the fact that women play a significant role in the overall development of the country, and have a big role to play to bring changes in the path of development, their importance is not recognized in most families. The women, who actually work harder than the men, are still perceived as dependents and unproductive forces in our society. The discrimination between men and women starts from their very birth, and the man is always more privileged than the woman. Women are suppressed in all socio-economic, religious and cultural facets of Nepal's society.

Due to illiteracy, ignorance and evil social practices traditionally governed by superstition, Nepal is also a country where people have a high preference for sons as opposed to daughters. A son is economic insurance against the insecurities of old age. People think that a son will open the gates of heaven for them by performing their last rites. Sons also carry on the family name. On the other hand, daughters are considered as temporary guests who will one day get married and leave their parents' home. The status of women in Nepal is frustrating and depressing.

All the above problems motivated me to work for women, to try my best to improve their socio-economic status in Nepal through the mission of Educate the Children. I had started working in the community development sector 6 years before I joined ETC. I consider myself lucky as my family, friends and supervisors provided me with great support and encouragement. My family, relatives, children and husband always inspired me to work with the community. Born to the urban way of life and culture, I had never before had the experience living in a rural community. When I married a man from a village, I lived for some months in the village, and shared the sorrows and happiness of the village people.

***What is a typical day at work like for you?***

I monitor the day-to day affairs of the organization, provide necessary support to the staff, meeting with visitors, maintain linkages with other organizations, and provide necessary information to the Head Office and others.

***How many paid employees and volunteers does ETC Nepal have at present?***

There are 15 paid staff currently working in ETC Nepal. At the moment we do not have any volunteers.

***What are some of the major obstacles that ETC faces in its work in Nepal and how are they dealt with?***

The major obstacles in the ETC working area are the political uncertainty in the country, insecurity, local politics, high expectations of the community people, lack of government support, and lack of marketing for income generation activities. With a view to dealing with such problems, ETC is trying hard to maintain a good relationship with leaders of different parties.

Actually, some of ETC's activities could fit into the government framework keeping in mind that one day ETC has to phase out the program from the area, and the government will have to step in. We are not able to get enough support yet but we are trying to link up our program with the government agencies. It is very difficult trying to deal with a government office, but we are proud to say that four ETC women's cooperatives are registered with the District Government Cooperative Office.

***Does ETC's work lead to interaction with government bodies and if so, what is the experience of working with officials like?***

We do not directly work with the government. However some pre-primary education classes and community libraries are now taken care of by government agencies. We sometimes sit with government officials in meetings and training workshops. Sometimes, government officers provide the training.

Being an international organization, we have to do lots of paper work to conduct our business. Being bureaucratic, government officials sometimes delay their decisions a lot, and this wastes our time and effort even over minor matters. I believe that if the government could provide a little more support and help to NGOs like ETC, they would be able to accomplish much more work.

***Is there any unique event or experience that you had while working with ETC that you would like to share with us?***

Eight years ago when I had just started working with ETC, I went to visit the field area for the first time with one of our female staff. We had started early in the morning after having just a cup of tea, and climbed uphill till noon without any food. There were no shops in the vicinity and we did not know anyone over there. But we were both so hungry that we decided to find the house of the chairman of the Village Development Committee. It took us well over an hour to find his house. First we introduced ourselves to him and explained our mission and reasons for visiting his village.

But the chairman said to us roughly, "I don't believe women can implement development programs in our village, how can they do so when it is impossible even for men?" He said that the men folk would never listen to what we said, and that we should return to Katmandu, stay at home and take care of our family and children.

Hearing this made me sad, but I also resolved to do something to change attitude of such men in the village through community development and outreach activities. As a result of our efforts, one can see many changes that have occurred in a short period of time. Women have started their own groups and engage in income generating activities without the aid of men.

***Do you have a message for young people who would like to do similar work?***

I think human beings are born not just to do things for their personal benefit but also to help others. I urge the younger generation to give their time, energy and skills to improving the status of poor and disadvantaged people. It's not just a question of helping them with our pockets. We must reach out to them with our hearts.

***Are there organizations/people doing similar work in Nepal?***

Yes, there are many organizations doing similar kind of work in Nepal, but in our geographic area ETC is the only organization engaged in integrated community development, with a focus on Education, Women's Empowerment and Agriculture.

***What are ETC's future plans?***

ETC's future plans are to make the programs more effective and longer lasting in its project areas. We will be slowly expanding the program in the most needy areas. We are trying to target the services more and more to the low income and disadvantaged Nepalese. Another goal is to make the organization stronger. We need to improve the efficiency of the staff as well as the budget in the long run.

If you are reading this interview and are motivated by the work of Educate the Children, then you can consider making a small donation to Educate the Children to support the work it is doing.

You can do so by making an online credit-card donation at <http://www.etc-nepal.org/donatetoetc.html>

ETC may be contacted at [info@etc-nepal.org](mailto:info@etc-nepal.org)

## Say Hello to Life

Hello Life ([www.hellolife.org](http://www.hellolife.org) ) is a voluntary effort dedicated to improving the lives of people worldwide. The aim is to embrace life: and to help those less fortunate to embrace it as well. Hello Life periodically features an extraordinary individual initiative or South-based organization that has made the difference where it counts: at the grassroots.

One of the core aims of Hello Life is to link up and share information on South-based initiatives that so far have an inadequate web presence. Hello Life volunteers will aid such organizations to develop a web presence of their own. It is hoped that this will catalyze their work and further the overall mission of improving the lives of people worldwide.

Do you know of a unique individual initiative or small South-based organization that has made a difference to people's lives? Would it benefit from the publicity of being featured as the "Helping Hand of the month" on HelloLife.org? Then share it with us at [helpinghands@hellolife.org](mailto:helpinghands@hellolife.org).

Join Hello Life and become part of our network:

Send a blank email to [hellolife-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:hellolife-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) and receive updates on network activities, featured stories and the latest "Helping Hand of the month".