Search for Common Ground

'Aaba Hamro Paalo' (It's Our Time Now): Youth experiences of conflict, violence and peacebuilding in Nepal.

Informing the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security and the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2250.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2017

Dr. Bhola Prasad Dahal
Country Director
Search for Common Ground, Nepal
Phone: +977 9851191666
Email: bdahal@sfcg.org

Niresh Chapagain
DMEA Manager
Search for Common Ground, Nepal
Phone: +977 9801024762
Email: nchapagain@sfcg.org

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

CPA:	Comprehensive Peace Accords
CPN:	Communist Party of Nepal
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
KII:	Key Informant Interview
PLA:	People's Liberation Army
PBSO:	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
SCR 2250:	United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250
Search:	Search for Common Ground
TRC:	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund

1. Executive Summary

Purpose

This case study aims to document the narratives of young women and young men from the districts most affected by conflict in Nepal, their unique experiences of conflicts, movements for social transformation, and their roles in violence prevention and reconciliation processes, as lessons for global learning and sharing.

The research was commissioned and funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to inform the United Nations Secretary-General's Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, mandated by Security Council Resolution 2250.

More specifically, the case study seeks to provide a platform for youth who were part of the 1996-2006 civil war, and youth who were involved in or are witnessing the Terai/Madhesh movement, in order to bring attention on post-conflict issues that affect them the most, and on the challenges that they have faced and continue to face to secure their meaningful participation in their society, including in decision-making and peace processes.

Methodology and Research Activities

Qualitative research was carried out in seven districts of Nepal, engaging 175 young people from the districts that are among the most affected by conflict: Kailali, Rolpa, Bardiya, Kapilvastu, Gorkha, Rautahat and Saptari. A total of 14 focus group discussions, 29 key informant interviews and 12 case story interviews were conducted with 74 young women (42%) and 101 young men (58%) between the ages of 15-34.

The participants for the study were selected purposefully to represent diverse sexes, castes, ethnicities, religions and topographies, including the Hilly and the Terai regions, representative of growing regional and social tensions in the country. The research participants are considered hard to reach, understood in this context as those whose voices are not typically heard and whom mainstream development programs - whether national or international - have challenges in reaching and meaningfully including.

Findings

Young people who fought the war in Nepal have an overwhelming feeling of having been used and forgotten, and that their sacrifice has not yielded the results they were hoping. Their testimonies are a call to society to recognize that beyond engaging in a violent conflict, youth dedicated years of their youth to fight for ideals of social justice. They were powerless then, and feel powerless now. They see many issues that still need to be resolved in their country today, but for many reasons, they struggle to be meaningfully engaged in peaceful action and the social transformation of their communities and country. A new generation of marginalized young people is coming to the same realization, and got involved in violent movements. However, among those who got involved in violence, many then realize they want to engage in peaceful action. While many stories show positive transformation and social contribution to communities, young people converge in saying that more must be done to unite youth and meaningfully engage them in the consolidation of peace.

Overall, there is a strong grievance of youth who participated in the conflict. While they perceive some benefits of having taken part in movements for social change that addressed - at least in part - both the structural and political violence, they also feel highly frustrated due to a lack of social acceptance and their gradually deteriorating living conditions. Young people live in insecurity, and are highly vulnerable to violence, unemployment, and radicalization. They feel stigmatized and disadvantaged, and they lack opportunities to meaningfully be engaged in society today. This leaves them with the sense that they lost opportunities (education, employment, their youth, and other life opportunities) while they were engaged in the conflict, with little in return for these sacrifices. Persisting marginalization and social exclusion in Nepal also makes them feel that youth, who literally gave their youth to the cause, have been cheated.

In addition, the young people consulted were found to live in an environment that does not favor their participation in peacebuilding. Major challenges included family pressure to ensure their livelihood; social discrimination and exploitation; influence of political leaders and a corrupt system that feed youth divisions; restricted mobility of young women; difficulty in conducting activities against their families' or elders' will; low societal trust towards young people; drug addiction; and motivations for revenge. The youth affected by the civil war and the Madhesh movement also felt that the process of reconciliation in Nepal is stalled and incomplete. They have lost faith in this process and its possible outcomes. This suggests that youth are therefore skeptical of the actual potential of consolidating peace. Actions may be undertaken, but real transformation and moving forward in a positive way is perceived to be limited.

As a result of the challenges mentioned above, peacebuilding activities led by young people in the areas of the research are found to be scarce, particularly with regards to the engagement of the youth interviewed during the research. However, while there are very few initiatives with a broader scope of addressing structural and political violence, or connected to formal peacebuilding mechanisms, there are nonetheless examples of young people's positive social engagement in their communities.

Youth mostly shared examples of small-scale initiatives as well as stories of individual transformation. These include initiatives to heal the wound of violence, promote development and social cohesion, address different forms of violence in their communities, lead informal dispute resolution and prevent violent responses to conflict. Youth use local clubs and civil society organization platforms - but also informal channels - to address issues of social discrimination, marginalization, violence, poverty and unemployment. They are also able to mobilize other youth in the process, and to collaborate with different institutions (the police, Village Development Committees, religious institutions). There seems to be a growing realization among the consulted youth that they are exploited and manipulated by political parties and other forces to be engaged in violent activities. Many have had a serious reflection on these matters, realizing the loss they had to bear and what other avenues they can explore. Among the consulted youth, those who have been part of initiatives promoting social cohesion feel proud of their achievement, which allows them to finally gain the social acceptance and recognition they long for.

These examples show that despite challenges, young people are experts of their own experiences and local realities. They are motivated and able to make a positive difference. Leveraging these initiatives, with the collaboration of elders, local government and other institutions such as the

police, would contribute to increasing young people's potential and their contribution to consolidating peace.

Recommendations include:

Partnership:
- <u>To local government:</u> Engage youth in various committees at the local government level and gather their inputs on their long-term vision of governance in their district and beyond.
- <u>To the government of Nepal and CSOs:</u> Develop a National Action Plan on SCR 2250 that can guide local governments in mainstreaming the five pillars of SCR 2250 in the local contexts. National Action Plans should be developed collaboratively through the contribution of youth, CSOs, government representatives and other stakeholders.

Reintegration:
- Promote social acceptance and reintegration of ex-combatants. Reconciliation programs need to be supported to allow communities to move forward and accept ex-combatants as active members who can contribute positively to society. Youth clubs and local CSOs should be mobilized to facilitate such initiatives.

Reconciliation Processes:
- Increase the effectiveness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ensure the population, including youth, trusts and recognizes the process and its outcomes, to avoid further grievances and vengeance. Document cases, for national learning. Conduct more awareness raising programs with young people in order to get them interested in the reconciliation process, help them develop more critical understanding of how it works and how its efficiency and impartiality can be ensured. Getting young people interested in the process and understanding the reconciliation is the key for trust and acceptance of its outcomes and ultimately, sustaining peace.

Prevention:
- **Promote meaningful employment schemes** and income generating activities for youth and ex-combatants
- **Address the livelihood needs of conflict-affected families:** Youth, and especially those who were engaged in violent conflict, believe this investment is necessary to ensure lasting peace. Focus on the health, education and employment opportunities of parents, as well as children, of conflict-affected families.
- **Increase community and family support programs:** Develop and implement programs to support parents (of youth-at-risk) in caring for young family members. Work with parents on the importance of giving their children emotional support, and encouraging their children's education, empowerment, and emotional wellbeing, instead of pressuring them to start earning at any cost and get government jobs.
- **Address drug abuse:** Increase programs to prevent and treat drug abuse and addiction, including the participation of peer-educators.

Protection
- **Reform the security sector.** Programs can be developed that work on improving interaction, trust and collaboration between youth and security forces.

Participation
- Local government in collaboration with other actors: **Engage youth in social accountability processes,** official and traditional channels of decision-making. Young people's ideas and solutions will benefit society as a whole. This can also help youth to gain confidence in peaceful means of social transformation.
- National and International Development Organizations: **Encourage and support conflict-affected youth in designing and implementing their own initiatives.** Support small-scale initiatives of conflict-affected youth; offer capacity building on how to analyze the local context, design appropriate strategies and project interventions, and engage other stakeholders in promoting accountable, inclusive and responsive governance.
- **Address barriers to women's participation:** Ensure women's safety in traveling to or at the space of activities; think of options to support the participation of single mothers or mothers whose husband work abroad, for example by coordinating time of activities and options for child care.
- **Offer capacity building to diverse youth in conflict mitigation and resolution:**
- **Document and disseminate success stories of youth promoting peace:** This can inspire and give other youth ideas on how to be innovative in addressing their local problems. It is also crucial to raise positive visibility of the role of youth in their communities.

2. Introduction

In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2250 (SCR 2250) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS). SCR 2250 recognizes the important and positive contributions of youth in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, affirms their critical role in the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts and stresses the importance of empowering young men and women as contributors to the sustainability of peace rather than stereotyping them as victims and perpetrators of violence. It also urges Member States to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels, as well as in institutions and mechanisms to prevent and resolve conflict and counter violent extremism.

The resolution requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations to "carry out a progress study on the youth's positive contributions to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels". The study, co-led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), is designed as an independent, evidence-based research and operational report that will propose a forward-looking agenda for the international community.

As part of the Progress Study's participatory research process, consultations with young people in all regions of the world were commissioned in order to document young women and men's involvement in peace and security issues. A set of case studies were also commissioned to bring in more detailed evidence from specific country contexts. The results of this process will feed into the Progress Study.

In 2017, Search for Common Ground (Search) conducted research activities in five countries to support data collection for the Progress Study, producing country reports for Burundi, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia, and a country case study for Nepal. The research in Burundi, Nepal, Nigeria and Tunisia was made possible through funding from UNFPA. The research in Niger was made possible through a grant from PeaceNexus.

This case study presents results from a two-month long consultation with hard to reach youth from Nepal aged 15-34. For the purposes of this research, hard to reach young people are understood as those whose voices are not typically heard and who face challenges in accessing and being included in mainstream development programs - whether national or international. Among these hard to reach youth, the study focused more specifically on those with prior experience of violent conflict: the 1996-2006 civil war, and the recent Terai/Madhesh movement that took place during the pre-constitution assembly election as well as pre- and post-Constitution promulgation. The young people were selected among the districts of Nepal most affected by conflict - Kailali, Rolpa, Bardiya, Kapilvastu, Gorkha, Rautahat and Saptari - encompassing different regions, including those currently experiencing mutual tensions (Terai/Madhesh and hilly regions).

3. Methodology and Description of Research Activities

3.1 Objectives, Population of the Study and Key Research Questions

This case study aims to document the narratives of young people from the districts most affected by conflict in Nepal, their unique experiences of the conflict (during and after) as well as their role in violence prevention and reconciliation processes, as lessons for global learning and sharing.

More specifically, the case study seeks to provide a platform for youth who were part of the 1996-2006 armed conflict, and youth who are witnessing the currently unfolding unrest in the country, in order to discuss and share their experiences of conflict, violence and peace, and bring attention to post-conflict youth issues. The study also explores reintegration of former combatants, stigma and discrimination faced by youth involved in conflict, and trends of (re-) recruitment of youth in violent groups in behest of political and social disparity. Finally, the study attempts to bring greater understanding to the role of youth in spearheading the country to a democratic front post-conflict, and to expose the challenges that they have faced and continue to face to secure their meaningful participation in decision-making and the peace process in Nepal.

The study focuses on hard to reach youth in seven districts of Nepal that are among the most affected by conflict. The term 'hard to reach youth' in this context refers to young people who may not have been involved in official development and peace efforts in the country, those who have fallen through the cracks or have not been involved in formal activities despite their roles in Nepal's transition. The study team, therefore, targeted youth who were involved in civil war as combatants or have lost their families in extra-judicial killings and kidnappings led by the warring parties. It also targeted youth who participated in the Terai/Madhesh movement. In addition to experiencing violence and loss, these youth are living in isolation. Due to social stigma and other financial causes, they are not accessible to people other than their closed groups.

The study sought to answer the following key research questions, in line with the core research questions of the Progress Study:
- What are the main peace and security challenges that hard to reach young women and men face, and how do these impact their lives (locally, nationally, regionally or globally)?
- What factors prevent or inhibit the involvement of hard to reach young women and men in building peace and contributing to security? And what factors could promote and support their active involvement in building peace, preventing violence and contributing to positive social cohesion in their communities, societies and institutions?
- What are the peacebuilding and violence prevention activities, initiatives and projects being undertaken by young people, and what is their impact?
- What do hard to reach young people recommend to enhance the contribution and leadership of young women and men to building sustainable peace and preventing violence? Do they have particular views on how their governments, state institutions, civil society organizations, media, or the international community, could help to support these contributions?

3.2 Data Collection Tools, Approaches and Activities

The case study is based on a qualitative approach that used focus groups discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to collect data. In order to further capture key themes that emerged from the FGDs and KIIs, case stories were prepared to highlight the trajectory of specific individuals whose story illustrated these themes.

Search prepared a set of guiding questions to stimulate discussion around the five pillars of SCR 2250 (prevention, participation, protection, partnership, disengagement and reintegration), and to generate evidence of young people's role in the conflict and in designing and implementing interventions to prevent or address violence, as well as to understand their attempts in sensitizing the influential stakeholders about the viability of involving youth in Nepal's peace process and capture their recommendations. The guiding questions were prepared in Nepali language. Search also mobilized local partners who were available to translate questions or interact with participants in local language, if necessary.

The team that conducted the fieldwork and facilitated FGDs and KIIs in the districts consisted of lead researchers (members of the Search team), as well as local field researchers. The team was diverse, with consideration of caste/ethnicity and sex to ensure gender and social inclusion, and was especially aware of promoting a positive interaction with research participants, avoiding comments and questions that could be perceived as prejudice or discrimination against conflict-affected and marginalized communities. FGDs and KIIs were selected in places where participants felt comfortable and safe. Participants completed informed consent forms and gave their approval for taking their photo and publishing the data obtained from them. Confidentiality of participants is ensured: the case study omits to list their names and/or uses pseudonyms.

A total of 14 focus group discussions, 29 key informant interviews and 12 case story interviews were conducted during the study period with a total of **175 participants (42% females, 58% males) between the ages of 15-34** from seven districts of Nepal.

The participants for the study were selected purposefully to represent diverse sexes, castes, ethnicities, religions and topographies. Apart from other social parameters, including gender and social inclusion issues, topography has been a source of tension and conflict in the post-civil war context and it has been a parameter of dichotomy between the Hill population (known as Pahade) and the Terai people (known as Madhesi), especially in the Terai region where in-country migration influx is ever increasing. Figure 1 (right) shows the diversity of respondents' backgrounds.

Figure (1): Respondents by Caste/Ethnicity

- Brahmin/Chhetri/Newar 35%
- Janajati 17%
- Muslim 13%
- Tharu 16%
- Dalit 12%
- Others 7%
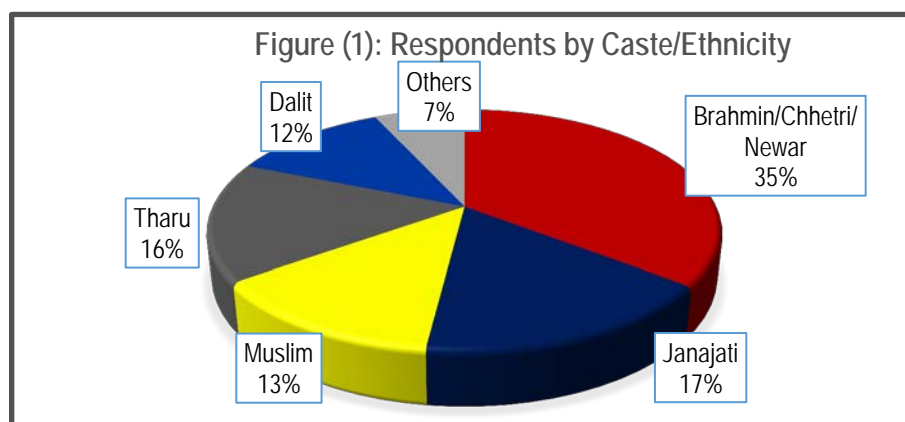
The detailed activities conducted in each district are as follows:

Location	Kapilvastu	Rolpa	Kailali	Ghorka	Bardiya	Saptari	Rautahat	Total
Total Youth Participants	29	28	23	21	25	24	25	175
Young Women	11	11	15	10	12	8	7	74
Young Men	18	17	8	11	13	16	18	101
Number of FGDs	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**14**
Total FGD participants	**23**	**22**	**17**	**17**	**18**	**18**	**19**	**134**
Young women	9	8	12	8	9	6	7	59
15-19 years	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	5
20-24 years	3	0	2	4	3	2	1	15
25-29 years	1	7	6	3	3	2	5	27
30-34 years	5	0	4	1	1	0	1	12
Young Men	14	14	5	9	9	12	12	75
15-19 years	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	6
20-24 years	5	1	2	5	1	3	5	22
25-29 years	3	7	3	4	6	6	3	32
30-34 years	6	6	0	0	2	0	1	15
Total KIIs	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	29
Young Women	1	1	2	2	2	2	0	10
15-19 years	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
20-24 years	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
25-29 years	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	6
30-34 years	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Young Men	3	3	2	2	3	2	4	19
15-19 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20-24 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25-29 years	2	3	2	2	3	2	1	15
30-34 years	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
Case stories	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	12
Young Women	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	5
15-19 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20-24 years	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
25-29 years	1	1		0	0	0	0	2
30-34 years	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Young Men	1	0	1	0	1	2	2	7
15-19 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20-24 years	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
25-29 years	1		1		1	1	0	4
30-34 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2

The seven districts of the study were selected on the basis that they are among the most affected by violent conflict in Nepal, and have been marked by active involvement of youth during the violent conflict, movement or incidents that took place there.
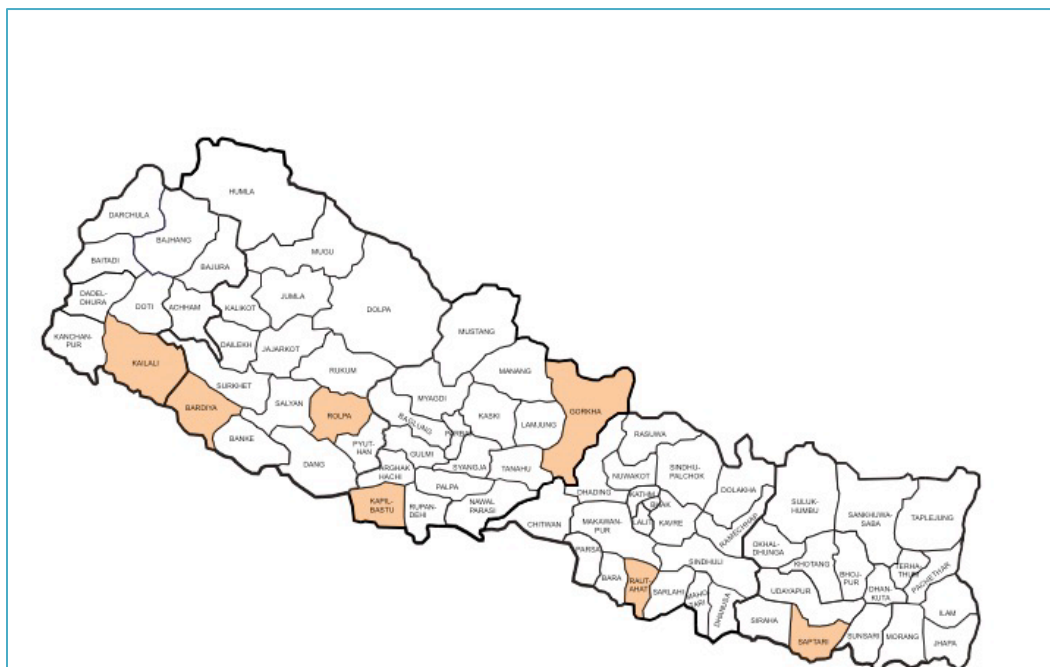
Map of Nepal showing areas of research. From left to right: Kailali, Bardiya, Rolpa, Kapilvastu, Gorkha, Rautahat and Saptari

An overview of the seven districts and how they have been affected by violent conflict is presented below.

District	Overview
Saptari	**Hotspot of a series of Terai/Madhesh** (a plain region bordered to India) movements since 2007 including Madhesh-Hill trust deficit. The Madhesh movement of 2007 can broadly be divided into three phases. The first phase of was led by the Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Aanandi Devi). The time before the promulgation of the interim constitution characterized this period. The second phase of the movement was led by Madheshi Jana-Adhikar Forum (MJF), a Madheshi activist organization. It took place from the day after the promulgation of the interim constitution until the first amendment of the constitution. The third phase was led by the United Democratic Madheshi Front [4] (UDMF) from February 13, 2008 to February 28, 2008. Current political unrest after the promulgation of the new constitution (2015) - Three persons died and dozens were injured when police opened fire to control the situation following a clash with agitating cadres of *Madhesi Morcha* during the main opposition CPN-UML's *Mechi-Mahakali* campaign.

Rautahat	**27 individuals were brutally killed** in violence that broke out when the Madheshi People's Rights Forum (MPRF) and Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M) organized simultaneous rallies at the same site in Gaur, Rautahat District on 21 March 2007.
Kapilvastu	**Violence between Muslims and Hindus in September 2007**, when a Muslim political leader and former head of an anti-Maoist group was killed. A crowd attacked government buildings setting fire to more than 200 offices, beating to death a police official. Many stores were pillaged. Likewise, Hindus retaliated by attacking and beating Muslims. Two mosques were destroyed and fire was set to houses owned by Muslims.
Rolpa	Epicenter of the 10 year long (1996-2006) **Civil War** led by CPN-M, known as the 'Maoist Stronghold' of the Communist Party of Nepal**.** Still stronghold of one of the factions of then CPN-M and as a result, in some of the villages there was no voter turnout in the 2017 local government election.
Kailali	Highly influenced by armed conflict, many Tharus and Kamaiya (ex-bonded labors) joined Maoist combatants. A number of the population that migrated were ex-combatants from far/mid-western hills. Recently, (in August 2015) in a **violent confrontation between the indigenous Tharus and the security forces** eight security personnel lost their lives. A child was killed by a stray bullet.
Gorkha	Major base of the Maoist party during the decade-long Maoist insurgency, where Maoists attacked in 2009, that further saw a serious devastation in recent earthquake in Nepal.
Bardiya	Over 200 cases of enforced disappearances after arrest by the security forces in the district. This is the highest number of conflict-related cases reported in one district in the country.

3.3 Data Analysis

Using mind mapping software, that rests on a radiant thinking process, information was organized around the key research questions and thematized by various attributes such as geography, respondents' prior involvement with the violent conflict, their educational and socio-economic background and disaggregated accordingly that helped analyze the information from various perspectives. After organizing the information, an inductive approach of meaning making (generalizing) was adopted while not losing the sight of specific cases, information, incidents and evidence.

3.4 Limitations

This research has some limitations, as follows:

1. The study's qualitative approach and research sample was not intended to be representative of all Nepali youth involved in conflict, so findings cannot be generalized beyond the populations interviewed.
2. Data collected during the FGDs was not fully disaggregated by the respondents' age. As FGDs included youth in the age range of 15-34 years, trends and differences across different stages of youth could not be identified. The lower number of participants in KIIs did not allow the identification of many trends and differences with certainty. Further research could collect and explore age-specific data for this population in order to inform age-specific policy and programming.

4. Literature Review

In recent years, the case of Nepal, especially the resolution of its 10-year violent political conflict and its transition to democracy, has drawn the attention of the international community, including the United Nations. The case of a country that has successfully resolved an armed struggle continues to be relevant in the current context - one in which Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, is putting emphasis on violence prevention (Einsiedel & Salih, 2017), especially as we assess how the country is moving forward in achieving peace and whether threats of new violent conflict are looming.

Nepal's current democratic system is the result of a long political movement, including a people's movement in 1990 and a decade-long violent conflict (1996-2006) initiated by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which, at its face value, emerged out of a frustration amidst poor governance in the country. Despite some development activities and the restoration of a multi-party system in 1990, the country did not progress sufficiently in terms of political representation, economic and social development to benefit a vast segment of the population, with 31% still living below the poverty line in 2003-04 (ADB, DFID, and ILO, 2009). By overthrowing an autocratic regime and eliminating the monarchy, the movement aimed at ending structural injustices and establishing an egalitarian society.

The civil war of 1996-2006 claimed the lives of 17,000 people, most of whom were young, and many from historically marginalized groups. Massive mobilization of young men and women into the conflict also had repercussions on the education, health and economic situation over the course of a decade in which most of the combatants dropped out of school and exited the war with no formal education completed.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed on 21 November 2006, brought an official end to the conflict, and initiated Nepal's complex transition phase. Positive progress for this post-conflict country includes maintenance of the ceasefire; Constituent Assembly elections in 2008; the peaceful declaration of Nepal as a federal democratic republic; the discharge of 4,008 verified minors and late recruits in 2010 and 7,365 personnel from Maoist army cantonments through 'voluntary retirement' in 2012; and the clearance of all minefields (United Nations Country Team Nepal, 2012).

In response to the peace process, the international community increased its official development assistance from USD 873 million in 2013 to USD 1.2 billion in 2015 (OECD, 2016). With the influx of this assistance, also rose the number of organizations responding to the multitude of needs. However, "despite thousands of NGOs and significant amounts of foreign aid, Nepal remains one of the poorest countries in South Asia. The case of Nepal indicates that aid and donor support alone are insufficient for sustained development." (Karkee & Comfort, 2016).

Indeed, despite significant progress, Nepal is still in the transition to peace (United Nations Peace Fund Nepal, 2017). More than a decade after the signing of the 2006 CPA, differences and injustice still exist, and many grievances of the war are unattended. Those grievances are related to the loss of family members, property and other life opportunities, including lack of employment opportunities and rejection from the government and society. Despite repeated and simultaneous efforts, internal and external agencies have failed to persuade successive Nepali governments to pursue accountability for those charged guilty of human rights violations during the war (Rawski & Sharma, 2012). In addition, late formulation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), vested interest of the key political parties and inability of the government to make the transitional justice mechanism effective, seems to encourage impunity (Einsiedel & Salih, 2017).

Even if Nepal is now a republican and secular country, endemic poverty and group inequality, two of the most important structural causes of violent conflict in the country (Einsiedel & Salih, 2017), have not been fully addressed. This has led the country to experience a post-constitutional conflict, mainly in the Terai/Madhesh region, where a movement started immediately after the CPA was signed between the government of Nepal and the CPN (Maoist). The Madhesi community felt the CPA failed to properly mention or address the issue of federalism through adequate power sharing among diverse groups in the country. The Madhesh uprising, which took place immediately after the Interim Constitution was promulgated in 2007, led to the first amendment in April 2007, which guaranteed a federal structure for Nepal (UNDP, 2014).

Another round of post-constitution violence erupted in the Terai/Madhesh as fringe political parties from the region felt that the new constitution of Nepal was regressive compared to the interim constitution. They claimed that it did not ensure power sharing and inclusion through adequate political and economic representation and participation of Madhesis in comparison to the country's northern hill people (Einsiedel & Salih, 2017). This resulted in several rounds of violence and killing of demonstrators, police and the general public. The Madhesh movement gave rise to a number of armed groups in the Terai that have contributed to a widespread sense of insecurity with a rise in small criminal outfits engaged in extortion and abductions.

In addition, regional inequalities have made poverty a rural phenomenon that carries a potential of fueling mass grievances among the rural population as well as facilitating recruitment into violence (Bary, Leiv, & Mansoob, 2003), particularly in a context where various dividing factors such as caste/ethnicity, religion, and regionalism prevail.

In sum, the sense of deprivation that was exploited by the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN, Maoists) in 1996-2006 still prevails (Einsiedel & Salih, 2017) – in expanded forms and at a deeper level. Nepal is one of the most ethnically diverse – and socially stratified – countries in the world, with 36% of its population belonging to one of the more than 100 different indigenous nationalities, having their own language and traditional culture, and the caste system is still

applied despite its abolishment by the Constitution. Discrimination emanating from socio-cultural traditions, norms and practices maintains social exclusion and must be addressed in Nepal's legal and policy frameworks, including the Constitution of Nepal, the Three Year Plan, and the Peace and Development Strategy (OHCHR, 2012).

Youth, defined by Nepal's Youth Policy as citizens within the age bracket of 16 to 40 years, have suffered a lot both during the war and in the post-conflict era. Representing 40.4% of Nepal's population (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Nepal, 2015), they are identified as one of the 19 vulnerable groups by the United Nations Country Team Nepal (2012).

Such long-standing deprivation and suffering have been tapped by radical elements to misguide and radicalize young people, who are found to have a strong sense of being discriminated against and are alienated from the larger society. Thapa (2017) shows that 'gradual radicalization' narrows the individual's social circle and their mindset, and in some cases desensitizes them to violence, which is a great threat where a close nexus between extortionists, gangs and political leadership becomes evident. There is a growing concern that Nepal has a great risk of radicalization, extremism, violence and even terrorism that may engulf the country as a whole.

Youth participation in peacebuilding is limited. The United Nations Peace Fund for Nepal (UNPFN, 2017) found that only a third (33%) of youth are involved in activities for promoting peace and development in Nepal but not necessarily in a leadership position, because of persisting hierarchical and patriarchal social norms that limit young people in general and young women in particular, to access decision-making roles.

Recognizing the urgent need of engaging youth creatively, several policy frameworks have been developed including the National Youth Vision 2025 and the Ten Year Strategic Plan. The Youth Vision 2025 and the Ten Year Strategic Plan stress unity, equity, justice, harmony and inclusion for the overall development of the young generation. Specifically, the Youth Vision 2025 has developed four 'S' principles, of which two – 'protection and promotion' and 'participation and collaboration' – resemble the pillars outlined in UNSCR 2250.

The National Youth Policy has proposed some strategic actions related to youth empowerment and leadership development; participation and mobilization; freeing the youth involved in crime and violence; youth participation in establishing sustainable peace and conflict resolution; and partnership among others that are related to UNSCR 2250. It describes Nepali youth as pioneers of economic, social, political and cultural transformation; and notes this group as important contributors to the development of Nepal because of their courage, innovativeness, inquisitiveness and high level of self-confidence, which makes them powerful agents of change.

However, despite the policy frameworks in place, implementation is weak. There was a common understanding among different stakeholders, including Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Youth & Sports, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Youth Self-employment Promotion Board and other civil society organizations, during the post-study dissemination workshop held in Kathmandu on 24th September 2017, that these frameworks have not been implemented fully, and risk being a failure if we don't find ways to successfully engage youth – all youth – including the ones who participated in the study.

Meaningful engagement of all youth requires having a deeper understanding of hard to reach youth's voices, concerns, experiences and challenges. Such detailed accounts are still too scarce in the current literature. In order to maximize the potential that those youth carry, and to make peacebuilding efforts inclusive and a success, it is crucial to understand the perspectives of hard to reach youth, hear their voices and recommendations and think of ways to respond to their needs.

5. Findings

In this context, this study has attempted to gather stories that highlight young people's experiences and perspectives on issues of peace and security, as a starting point to draw out examples of the challenges they face, and how they can be meaningfully engaged in consolidating peace. The following four stories give a glimpse of the lived experience of some of the conflict-affected youth who were part of the study. While each story is unique, it exemplifies many of the issues that came up during conversation with all the young women and men that we interviewed.

Sita,[1] 31, female ex-combatant (Khairi-10, Rajapur Municipality, Bardiya District)

"Thousands of people like me dedicated our youth to the war. We fought for social justice and political change. Many people gave up their lives. People lost their parents, children, and relatives. Many people are still living in destitution. The ex-combatants have not been properly rehabilitated. In such a scenario, how long can we tolerate this state of affairs?"

Sita was just 17 when she joined the militia (People's Liberation Army) to fight her country's autocratic regime. With high hopes that this political war would bring complete social transformation, she dedicated three years of her life to the cause. Sita lived away from her home for two years, fought battles and was directly involved in attacks against the Royal Army barracks. After being severely wounded in the head, Sita started to reflect on the war and came to realize how people like her, powerless, were fighting against other powerless people. *"It was us, the poor people and the general public who were being forced to fight and lose their lives whichever side of the war they were on. When we killed the police or army personnel, we were killing people just like us."*

When the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed and the war came to an end, Sita had become a Platoon Commander of four sections of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). To her disappointment, she was discharged and deemed unqualified to serve on the Nepal army. *"Then, they gave us 5 lakh rupees (~ 5,000 USD) in two installments. I was not happy. I wanted to join the national army and serve my country. We fought such a devastating war with our fellow countrymen, and in the end, it seemed as if we had done all of this for that five lakh rupees."*

Returning to normal life has not been easy. Sita struggles financially, and has been the victim of social stigma. Her husband – another ex-combatant – had to seek employment abroad to sustain

---

[1] To protect the confidentiality of respondents, all names used in this case study are pseudonyms.

her and their daughter. Community members have accused her of being a killer, of sleeping with countless guys during her time in the army. With the passing of time, her community is slowly accepting her. Following training, she knits sweaters at home to supplement family income, but cannot engage in broader transformation. *"I still feel that I can lead and bring change in my community, but in the absence of my husband, and with a daughter to take care of, I can't do anything substantial."* Sita worries about the future of her country. *"Many ex-combatants like me are not happy. Our people are still very poor. All the war victims have not received justice. The families of the martyrs and the forcibly disappeared people are still in a very vulnerable state. The remnants of monarchy and feudalism are still there. Therefore, I can't say with guarantee that conflicts won't occur in Nepal in coming days."*

Meena, female ex-combatant, Kailali District
"I am frustrated to some extent – I spent my youth with no substantial gain. I wish, if ex-combatants like me could meet, and discuss our common problems, we may have chances of being heard."

When Meena was a child, her family came under suspicion by the State security agencies. Most of her family members were tortured, imprisoned or killed by the State police. *"I was just a child then, but I knew that all the suffering my family had to go through was unfair. Therefore, I decided to join the Maoists. Their goal of achieving an equal society and rights for everyone through class based struggle also appealed to me."* Meena had different roles with the PLA, including that of a spy, and a combatant in battle. She lost many friends during the war. When the war ended, she was still a minor, and was moved to a cantonment where she stayed for six years, until being released in 2012 through a voluntary retirement scheme that provided her with NRs. 500,000 (approximately 5,000 USD). *"It would have been better if we were provided with some form of employment. It would have made everyone secure with a job, reducing the risk of youth being unemployed again."* *"I feel joining the Maoists has empowered me. I can do public speaking, and I got a chance to explore many places, almost all of Nepal. It has helped me enhance my knowledge of different issues; I have become smart and intellectual. My involvement in the party came with a cost though – I couldn't finish my education in time. But I am doing my best to become an independent person, as I do not have any political power to protect me. I served in the Maoist Army, and hence my network is limited to those with whom I worked. I had to leave my studies before completing them, and now I feel helpless when it comes to doing many practical things such as submitting any proposals to my municipality – I can't write one."*

Prabin, 32, male ex-combatant, Thawang Rural Municipality, Rolpa District

Prabin's childhood dream was to join the Indian Army. His passion for singing gradually drew him towards the Maoist Party, which he joined hoping he could sing and dance with his fellow members. After Prabin received weapons training and was involved in the front lines of battle, his family was tortured by the police. Following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, he retired voluntarily, received six hundred thousand Nepali Rupees and started an offset press newspaper. This new start gave him an opportunity for self-improvement and he was able to use his past experiences to conduct his business better. Through media, he is now trying to reduce class and caste-based discrimination in Nepali society. Through his life experiences, he came to realize that violent conflict may not result in a better society, and peaceful debate and disagreement can

lead to positive change. Having earned a name for himself as a journalist, he feels self-pride at what he has achieved, which helps him to forget the negative experiences he had in the past. Looking back to the civil war that has had negative consequences on many people, he is now able to understand the extent to which war can destroy lives.

Omprakash, 28, male participant in the Madhesh movement (Gamhariya Parbaha, Saptari District)

Omprakash is a middle-class young man who was influenced by his friends to join the Madhesh movement that aimed at ending structural and political discrimination against the Madhesi community. One day, while put under police supervision, he was very scared of losing his life. He once saw a video footage of a strike where both strikers and police officers were injured and he felt very bad. This experience prompted him to realize that he could be responsible for injuring innocent people, or getting himself injured. Eventually, he learned that no matter the reason, violence is not the right path and only makes things worse. He learned that good change can only come peacefully. He is now a social activist who works with youth towards social development. He has started working in an NGO and resumed his education. He thinks that because of the violence in which he participated, many of his neighbors still do not trust him. However, he believes that by doing good work, he can eventually regain their trust.

5.1 Youth Reflections on Violence and Participation in Violent Movements

To better understand the young people interviewed, we asked them to reflect on violence and their motivations to get involved in violent conflict and movements. The respondent youth do not favor violence as such, however, they do express pride and ownership of having been part of the movements that sought to promote social justice. The majority of youth consulted see some benefits of the violent conflicts they were a part of at some point. This feeling is scattered mostly among politically active youth.

They strongly feel that they have sacrificed their personal interest for the national and collective interest of changing the prolonged social injustice in its different forms. Irrespective of their location, youth from different caste/ethnicity, age and sex categories think that the people's war was successful in improving social justice by making significant changes in the feudal social structure. The voice of a group of youth from Kailali best represents the voice of those ex-combatants from different study districts:

"Despite many youth losing their life and shelter [...] there are remarkable changes achieved in the country as a result of violent conflict [i.e. people's war]. Landless people and people living in slums got access to land and shelter; and voiceless people are now able to raise their voice. Most importantly, exploitation of landlords is no more now." (FGD participants, 15-29 years old, belonging to disappeared families in Kailali).

For those who participated in the civil war, the conflict helped to make Nepal a democratic republic, to establish the agenda of social justice and inclusion, and to sensitize marginalized people to their rights, among others. Similarly, youth from the Terai strongly believe that the violent movement in the Madhesh/Terai helped establish federalism as a national agenda and draw attention to and recognition of the identity issue.

Leadership development is another perceived benefit of having participated in or taken an active role in conflicts, including for young women. There is also a strong feeling among the youth that some of their comrades, who used to fight against the autocratic regime, are now leading parties as well as occupying leadership roles in the public sector, including local government, which would not have happened had there been no political movement of that gravity. This feeling is common among ex-combatants, both male and female. Some even consider the civil war provided opportunities to rural women in occupying leadership roles during and after the conflict, including at the national level.

Young people discuss their experience during a focus group discussion

However, only very few young people are able to enjoy such opportunities in the changed context. Those left out compare themselves to their advantaged peers. Sometimes they reflect on the situation and feel that they would have enjoyed the same leadership opportunities had they had better education and other skills, which they missed being a combatant.

"I think joining the Maoists has empowered me. I can do public speaking, and I got a chance to explore many places, almost all of Nepal. It has helped me enhance my knowledge of different issues; I have become smart and intellectual. My involvement in the party came with a cost though – I couldn't finish my education in time. [...] I had to leave my studies before completing them, and now I feel helpless when it comes to doing many practical things such as submitting any proposals to my municipality – I can't write one. I am frustrated to some extent – I spent my youth with no substantial gain. I wish, if ex-combatants like me could meet, and discuss our common problems, we may have chances of being heard," shares a female ex-combatant in Kailali.

As the next section of the case study highlights, positive social outcomes of the conflict are not reflected into the current narratives about young ex-combatants, or in their relationships with their fellow community members, driving pain, isolation and stigmatization into their lives, and undermining opportunities of leading normal and fulfilling lives. The perceived benefits of being part of violent conflict are therefore weighed daily against many challenges.

5.2 Main Peace and Security Challenges Affecting Young People Consulted

5.2.1 Marginalization and Stigmatization of Ex-Combatants

Overall, there is a strong grievance of youth who participated in the conflict. While they are proud of their having taken part in movements for social change that addressed - at least in part - both the structural and political violence, they also feel highly frustrated due to a lack of social acceptance and their gradually deteriorating living conditions. They are stigmatized and disadvantaged, despite having fought for greater social justice. Their role is not recognized and they lack opportunities to meaningfully engage in society today. This leaves them with the sense

that they lost opportunities (education, employment, their youth, and other life opportunities) while they were involved in the conflict, with little in return for these sacrifices.

Living with a "killer tag"
Stigma against youth with prior engagement in violence during the decade-long people's war was a common factor identified by the research. Almost all of the youth consulted feel that they are being marginalized and stigmatized for their prior involvement in violent activities. Even if they have tried to go back to a normal life and seek to engage in non-violent activities in their communities, they are not trusted. Their participation in violent conflict has labeled them with a "killer" tag that they have difficulty getting rid of, years after the CPA was signed. A young female ex-combatant from Rolpa shared that even if she behaves like other community members, the community's feelings towards her and other ex-combatants are not positive and they are not accepted in the neighborhood. A 24-year-old female ex-combatant in Kailali adds: *"My involvement with Maoists came with some social costs. Some people in my community still gossip and make negative remarks against me. They say that no one should speak to us because we have killed people".*

Young men and women involved in more recent incidents of violence also faced this type of stigmatization. Young women and men in the hilly regions shared similar experiences. In the Terai, it was mostly young men, since young women's participation in the Madhesh movement was more limited, due to restricted mobility young women from this region generally face. Youth who were active in the Madhesh movement shared that when they returned back to their hometown, they experienced their community's disapproval, some levels of mistrust and rejection.

A sense of betrayal and loss
For many of the youth consulted, this social stigma is connected to the State's treatment of the ex-combatant issue. They feel that the government has purposefully marginalized them by failing to publicly acknowledge their contribution and vulnerabilities, and encourage their full reinsertion and active participation in post-conflict Nepal. As a result, it is more difficult for society to accept them. This phenomenon is found in the regions where the Maoist movement was intense and killings of civilians were frequent. Most of the youth who were a part of that movement now want the government to publicly acknowledge their contribution to encourage social acceptance of the ex-combatants. For them, it is important to recognize that young people were drawn into a conflict, had to play the roles they played, and went through some pain: loss of friends and family members, loss of other opportunities. Youth from hilly regions such as Rolpa and Ghorka, most of whom were part of the 10-year civil war, reminded that without an armed struggle, the social change would not have been possible. *"Though some of the youth have got political leadership position in their parties, most of the youth who sacrificed their productive life in the war are nowhere now as they lost various opportunities. They have no education or skills for a good job. On top of such pain, we are still suffering from the social bias. We are not recognized for what we did."* (A young male ex-combatant, 30 years old, Rolpa.)

Other grievances are compounded with the challenge of this social stigma: *"Caste-based marginalization exists even in the epicenters of the Maoist movement such as Rolpa. Those youth who believed that the war would ensure justice and eliminate such social evils are frustrated that [...] despite such a long war, it seems that the caste-based discrimination has not been reduced significantly and maybe another similar movement would be needed,"* shares a 32-year-old male

ex-combatant from Rolpa. This young man's account demonstrates a great sense of betrayal. Youth joined – or were made to join – the war with a strong belief that it would end with a complete social transformation, resulting in an ideal situation that they had dreamt of. However, the current status of caste-based discrimination, though it has been reduced to some extent among youth, does not represent the ideals for which they fought and risked their lives. He argues that existing marginalization makes them feel that youth who literally gave their youth to the cause have been cheated.

"Youth did not get anything they thought they would get after the movement. They lost all the working background. A few who became close to leaders might have got something," shares a 26-year-old man from Kailali. A vast majority of youth consulted during the study had a strong feeling that due to their involvement in conflict, particularly in the 10-year civil war, they have lost a very productive time of their life and several other life opportunities. As they dropped out of their schools, they could not complete the basic education required for different jobs, and find themselves poorly prepared to compete for scarce employment opportunities. Some of them do not have time to prepare for examinations (for example, Public Service Commission) because they are either too old or will be by the time they complete educational requirements. As they have witnessed, their status of unemployment – which will be explored in a subsequent section – becomes an additional factor to trigger stigma against them, resulting in further isolation.

5.2.2 A Sense of Insecurity

Overall, most youth interviewed do not feel safe. This feeling is worse for those who do not belong to or are not affiliated with political parties in power. Treatment of police force is also seen as biased against youth and their political party affiliation. Finally, rural youth have a more acute sense of insecurity than their urban counterparts.

A feeling of insecurity among minority groups often triggers the use of violence. In the Terai/Madhesh region, Pahade groups (people of hill origin) and religious minorities (mostly Muslim) feel insecure, both physically and economically, whereas those ex-combatants throughout the country feel insecure due to a fear of retaliation and their poor financial situation. Minority groups live with a strong fear that they are vulnerable to any kind of attack. Youth explain that many groups felt the need to protect themselves, unite and act upon those fears.

Youth associated with large political parties as well as the ruling parties feel more secure than others who are associated with fringe political parties. There is a strong feeling that police response and behavior towards youth depends on political party affiliation. Youth also blame security forces and community members for acting upon a stereotyped perception of youth. Associating youth with violence and vandalism, police are quick to suspect them for all ills and incidents. According to the consulted youth, police treatment often entails abuse of their rights. If one or two ill-motivated youth take violent action, many more youth get held up, detained or abused. *"The feeling of insecurity is so intense, that even when the police make a telephone call and ask 'where I am and if I am secure' it makes me very uncomfortable and I feel insecure,"* shared a 29-year-old female student leader from the All Nepal National Federation of Student Unions. A 23-year-old female student leader from Saptari and member of the student wing of Sanghiya Samajwadi Forum added that as youth are feeling insecure, their frustration and irritation to any minor issue might trigger violent responses. Police behavior pushes many irritated youth to live up to the stereotype of violent youth, in a situation where they pelt stones

to the police whenever there is a demonstration or rally. Some even choose arms to protect themselves.

In addition to the police, the consulted youth feel that society considers them as an irresponsible and immature group and hence they don't stand together with them when needed. This also makes the youth feel insecure and unsupported.

Insecurity was perceived as being the highest among rural youth, given a higher participation in violence and a more pronounced vulnerability to violence. The different dimensions of this vulnerability are explored in subsequent sections of the study.

5.2.3 Widespread Unemployment

Unemployment is a problem that seriously concerns most of the respondent youth, especially those from rural areas. It makes them vulnerable to manipulation in exchange of financial support or income, and to violent criminal activities to gain money.

Unemployment rates among youth are claimed to be higher in rural villages than in cities. Lacking minimum qualifications and access to capital to start their own business, rural youth are pushed to take action to escape this situation. Youth migration to other countries as well as in country, in search of income opportunities, is increasing. Internal migration is also a factor that exhibits the weakened trust among diverse groups. For example, migration to the Terai is very high and fuels existing tensions between Pahade and Madhesi as Madhesi people feel that it is due to the population influx from hill to Terai that their livelihood is increasingly challenged.

Young people are under tremendous amounts of pressure to find employment, start earning, support their families and get rid of poverty. Their parents often compare them to others in the neighborhood who are working abroad, or earning salaries for the family locally.

Young people who were part of the conflict are frustrated that they, their families, and the families of those who lost their lives during the conflict, are struggling to fulfill their basic needs and have decent livelihoods. *"The government should generate enough employment opportunities to keep everyone occupied, and growing. It is the only way to mitigate the backlashes of the conflict,"* comments a 24-year-old female ex-combatant in Kailali. According to some, such frustration is likely to make youth join rebel groups to achieve two immediate purposes – financial gain as well as taking revenge or expressing their dissatisfaction toward an unfair system. Whereas they are frustrated with the establishment, there is a growing political awareness of their rights. Many, unaware of other peaceful means of successfully holding the government accountable, choose violence as a means of short-term financial gain and to satisfy their need for justice.

5.2.4 Gaining Status

Youth respondents shared that many youth and adults engage in criminal activities to access "the 3 Ms" (Money, Mobile and Motorbike), scarce and precious commodities that are associated with gaining status in the community. The status is mainly determined by someone's access to prestige, property and power. Nepali society is characterized by a widespread and deep-rooted feudal mindset, where the ascribed status is largely enjoyed by so-called high caste groups and elites. For those groups who don't benefit from the ascribed social status, it is only the power

(largely political) and property (largely money and other physical assets) that they earn on their own which help them achieve better social status. The patriarchal nature of society also exercises pressure on young men to earn 'bread and butter' for their family. Massive unemployment gives those youth fewer options and pushes some towards criminal activities – for example abduction and even killing in the study areas. A young man shared that Saptari district alone saw more than 50 cases of abduction last year. In many cases, youth were found kidnapping even their own relatives for a ransom purpose.

5.2.5 Political Manipulation of Youth

Discussions uncovered a strong conviction that youth are manipulated by politicians, with the effect of creating divisions among youth rather than collaboration. Youth participating in the research believe that political leaders apply a 'divide and rule' approach. They manipulate youth sentiment and fuel aggression in them to be used against their political rivals. Youth receive biased information and analyze from the same biased perspective. Instead of analyzing ideas, they judge them based on whose idea it is. Political stereotyping divides youth and they are likely to be used in violence by political elites, which poses major challenges to peace and security.

A group of Tharu young people from Tikapur, Kailali gave an example of how youth are mobilized by the political parties: *"A large number of youth involved in the Tikapur violence were addicts (either drunks or drug abusers). Some of them were not related to any political parties. Politicians misused the Badghar, a traditional institution in the Tharu community as no one disobeys its order, to mobilize youth in the incident. High profile politicians placed their cadres and other youths in the middle of the battleground and left them to 'kill or die'. They were not accepting the existence of each other. Politicians wanted to create their space within their party and the political sphere with the help of such violence."*

A 25-year-old woman from Bardiya whose family members were disappeared added: *"Earlier all of the youth here were affiliated with a single club. However, when political leaders used these youth during political campaigns in election, the situation changed for the worse. Now the youth are divided based on their political affiliation and it has been difficult to collaborate. It is evident that political leaders are trying their level best to split youth for their benefit."*

"We know that youth are united when there is an opportunity for corruption but they don't unite for the good cause. Youth leaders associated with different political parties are afraid of collaboration, that their opponents get credit for the success." This Saptari male student's claim suggests the existence of a political culture that encourages youth to be violent and corrupt. Another youth from Siraha added: *"Those who are violent during demonstrations catch the attention of political leaders and gain popularity in a very short span of time. They are encouraged to be violent."*

5.2.6 Radicalization of Youth

Political radicalization of youth and adults is seen as one of the major peace and security challenges for young people throughout the country. A consequence of extreme political manipulation, this radicalization is performed along ethnic, religious, regional and linguistic lines, as well as within groups of shared identity/ies. Most of the youth consulted during the

study feel that political parties are exploiting youth and putting them at risk. Some also recognize the role of the media in propagating and exploiting these tensions.

The youth consulted considered that radicalization in Nepal occurs in the name of a range of identity parameters: political doctrine, caste, ethnicity, religion, language, topography, geography, etc. The fact that Nepal is such a diverse society is giving countless motives to ill-minded politicians and other criminal groups to manipulate youth in the service of their interest. Youth spoke of a sharp divide based on political ideology and other identity attributes, including divisions within groups of shared identity. Conflicts keep getting more complex with the increase in the number of social attributes that are associated within a particular context. For example, even within a group of youth and adults with same political doctrine there exists caste/ethnicity and language-based conflicts. For example, Pahade (people with Hill origin) and Madhesi (people with Terai origin) are sharply divided, and Yadav and Tharu (two different caste groups with Terai origin) are in conflict in Saptari district. Similarly, Magar people from Rolpa have a serious intra-caste conflict on whether Kham or Pang is their authentic language.

Tensions between religious groups also increase risks of violence erupting, if the tensions are not dealt with care. In the Terai/Madhesh, where Muslims are a minority group, these tensions are particularly acute. Research participants shared the example of the Gaur incident during which a Muslim youth was killed, and for which the Pahade group was blamed and attacked, based on multiple assumptions and grievances. *"Even a small event or debate between Pahade and Madhesi takes a serious form. If a Madhesi pedestrian is hit by a Pahade cyclist, the issue will take a different form than if the Madhesi pedestrian is hit by a Madhesi cyclist,"* said a 25-year-old male civil society activist from Saptari.

For the youth participating in an FGD in Tikapur, Kailali district, the media is also responsible for entertaining and exacerbating such divisions. They had witnessed a demonstration in Tikapur that turned out to be violent, killing several security forces. While the demonstration was against the government, they claim the media portrayed it as Tharu versus Pahade. Their claim fits into an increasingly accepted understanding that media accountability must be improved in Nepal (FHI 360, 2017).

5.2.7 Criminalization of Politics and Politicizations of Criminal Acts

The factors highlighted above are aggravated by an overwhelming sense of impunity. The criminalization of politics and the politicization of criminal acts are increasing threats to peace and security. Most of the youth consulted strongly feel that politics and political affiliation are increasingly linked to youth adopting violent behavior and joining violent activities. Some youth think that political affiliation is a shield protecting their illegal activities, especially if they are associated with a large, preferably the ruling political party.

Impunity has been strongly rooted in the Nepali political culture. While it manifests in varying degrees, it is present across all geographies and sectors. It is a result of the post-civil war context where ex-combatants and their leaders who were charged of alleged involvement in extrajudicial killings enjoyed amnesty. The political cadres from the Terai region have also enjoyed amnesty despite their alleged involvement in criminal politics. A 22-year-old male journalist shared this as an example: *"In the Gaur incident 27 people were killed and there were about 100 people involved in the event. However, no one has so far been punished. As a result, youth have*

developed a feeling that with 'political protection' they can do anything they like. Baban Singh, an ordinary youth with no political background, became a hero after that incident and later won the Constitution Assembly election."

Impunity poses the continued risk of normalizing violence. For the consulted youth, it is a source of worry that violence is increasingly perceived as a common, day-to-day and inevitable phenomenon in some parts of the country. For them, impunity discourages people to raise their voice against any violent act and second, it further encourages such practices – both of which are challenges to peace and security.

5.2.8 Easy Availability of Small Arms

Youth also raised the fact that it is easy to buy small arms at nominal prices. If required, youth can have an easy access to such arms that help them to threaten others and kill them as revenge if that is their motivation.

5.2.9 Drug Addiction among Youth

In several instances, youth respondents mentioned the increasing problem of drug addiction as an additional threat to youth and their ability to lead peaceful and normal lives. It was believed that young men from rural areas were more vulnerable to drug addiction, which they believe is the result of mass frustration among youth due to massive unemployment, family pressure to earn livelihood, and peer pressure. Drugs are also an escape from the poor governance in the country that prevents them and their family members to enjoy a decent life. Drug addicted youth face increased risks of being manipulated, pulled and involved in criminal activities or groups. The impact of drug addiction goes beyond the family sphere. Increasing drug addiction has been a threat to society. Drug addiction is claimed to be more common among males than females and it is more common in the Terai than in the hill regions.

5.3 Factors Preventing Youth Involvement in Building Peace

In addition to living in conditions of insecurity, with a high vulnerability to violence, unemployment, and radicalization, young people consulted were found to live in an environment that does not favor their participation in peacebuilding. Major challenges included family pressure to ensure their livelihood; social discrimination and exploitation; influence of political leaders and a corrupt system; restricted mobility of young women; low societal trust towards young people; drug addiction; and motivations for revenge.

Young people discuss their experience during a focus group discussion

5.3.1 Family Pressure to Earn Livelihood

Many youth shared that their parents discouraged them from engaging in social activities, which are perceived as voluntary activities that bring little to no income. While social work is respected in Nepali society, the expectation and understanding is that it should be free of any financial gain. Philanthropy and engagement in social work are therefore perceived as an ideal for well-off people or individuals with regular earnings, not for young people from marginalized

backgrounds whose families are struggling financially. This is especially true for young men, who experience patriarchal social norms that put pressure on them to ensure their family's livelihood, including their parents'. This pressure intensifies when parents compare young sons to others in the society who, either locally or abroad, are employed (engaged in service sectors, preferably government and private organizations) and criticize them for their inability to secure similar sources of income and status. In a situation where employment opportunities are very limited, especially for those with low levels of education, youth seek other means of earning than social work.

5.3.2 Persistence of Caste-Based and Other Forms of Discrimination

The persistence of widespread social discrimination is seen as a major obstacle to youth participation in peacebuilding. Most of the youth consulted (either ex-combatants or youth engaged in the Madhesh movement) see that the discrimination they wanted to uproot still prevails. Instead of being encouraged to engage in peacebuilding activities, youth see in this discrimination a reason to revolt, which for most of the youth consulted, is synonymous to joining a violent movement. A group of Muslim youth aged 19-25 in Kapilavastu shared that it was difficult for them to imagine leading peacebuilding activities when Muslim youth themselves face persisting stereotypes: *"There is a projected impression that Muslims are mostly criminals and are getting international support to continue their criminal activities."*

Young men and women from non-political orientation consider that the fight against social discrimination and exploitation is a long process and youth engagement in non-violent movement will help address the situation. However, youth are disheartened that in most instances, political leaders and government do not listen to their demands, even constitutional rights, unless the demonstration becomes violent, which they believe has encouraged youth to use violence.

In a highly divided social context, it is very difficult for young people to engage in peacebuilding activities aiming to foster social cohesion and unite people across divisive lines. Although younger generations do not accept the caste system as much as previous generations (this was also observed within the group of respondents), it is still challenging to take a public stance against it. A young male reporter from Saptari shared: *"Though youth are not serious about the untouchability [untouchable 'caste'] issue, they don't dare to speak against such malpractices in their community."*

5.3.3 Divisions among Youth and Influence of Political Parties

As seen earlier, political leaders exploit youth's vulnerability in their favor, with youth becoming likely to be opposed in violence driven by political elites. This creates divisions of youth along political lines, and as a result they face increased challenges in collaborating and engaging in activities that promote social cohesion, violence prevention and peacebuilding. *"They purposefully and in a planned way don't let youth collaborate beyond their political ideology or some other attributes as they need youth to pelt stones to police or other institutions during movements,"* shares a 29-year-old man in Saptari. Even when people take initiative, they face corruption. *"The political parties are the biggest trouble makers. If anyone tries to do something good, the cadres of the parties would demand their share [...] Our communities are full of irregularities, bad practices, and corruption,"* explains a 24-year-old female ex-combatant in Kailali.

In some cases, absence of youth collaboration has led to failed development initiatives: *"There was Rs 20 million allocated in Rupani Village for a drinking water scheme. As there was no consensus among youth, despite the fact that villagers were ready to contribute their land to make the scheme a success, the Village Development Committee (VDC) did not allocate the land and the project was a complete failure,"* shares a 21-year-old young man from Saptari District.

Youth are concerned about the long-term consequences of such divisions among young people. Lack of collaboration between youth from different backgrounds is a missed opportunity and poses risks. Youth become more isolated, when they could instead work together, develop collaborative and leadership skills and propose solutions that benefit their age group, as well as society as a whole. Continuation of such situation limits the chances of peace and increases threats of violence among youth. Another implication could also be that youth continue to be perceived by society as violent and untrustworthy troublemakers.

5.3.4 Discrimination and Violence Against Women, Restricted Mobility of Women

The mobility of women, both vertically and horizontally, is largely restricted in most communities, which affects their ability to participate in peacebuilding activities. Though restrictions on women's mobility are common throughout the country, it is a more widely noted phenomenon in the Terai region among Madhesi high-caste groups. It is noticed in hilly regions such as Rolpa and Gorkha as well. Despite having a record-high participation of women in the civil war from hilly regions and especially from ethnic communities, it is found that women from ethnic communities in Rolpa also suffer from restrictions. Even young women who took on leadership roles during the conflict now find themselves in situations where their husbands, families, or the family of their husband restrict their mobility.

Discrimination and violence against women, including domestic violence of different forms, prevails throughout the study areas, which makes it very difficult for young women to take part in activities. *"Females are not free to express themselves as their male counterparts. [Even when] one was encouraged to study law and join the police, most of them [parents] were against the decision as there is no point letting daughters to move forward,"* says a 21-year-old woman in Bardiya District. *"Even teasing and molesting are very common, and parents don't allow young women and girls to go out due to the fear of potential threats of this sort. Molestation sometime has resulted in further violence once girls inform their families, especially elder brothers fighting the accused"* adds a 25-year-old program coordinator. Young women face risks on the road to, as well as during activities: *"Cultural programs that are supposed to be a platform for nourishing and extending social harmony, also turn out to be violent sometimes where women are teased and the situation goes beyond control once youth from different communities get involved,"* shares a 25-year-old man from Saptari.

As a result, young women have limited opportunities for leadership development. Despite their interest, most of the women consulted felt unable to contribute to, initiate, lead or sustain peacebuilding initiatives.

5.3.5 Youth Are Not Trusted to Participate in Social Institutions and Decision-Making

In almost every social setting, youth are encouraged to collect donations during social and cultural functions. As a group they collect money and get applauded – a form of social acceptance. With such encouragement they develop a sense of collective achievement and gain

confidence that as a group they can raise money. However, in contrast to this sense of collective confidence, youth widely discussed how Nepali society places the highest respect in its elders, and believes that youth are 'unable to make the right decision'. This social norm discredits the ability and potential of youth and prevents them from being considered eligible for leadership roles or participation in decision-making processes. Youth with prior involvement in conflict face the additional barrier of not being trusted because of their violent past.

"Although there is a traditional local mechanism called 'panchayat' that resolves local issues and conflicts, youth are not engaged in this mechanism. It is considered the job of senior citizens in the society. As a result, youth leadership is not developed and moreover, they feel unheard and carry their frustration all along," explains a 25-year-old female student leader from Saptari. Because youth are persistently barred from participation in such processes, they do not have opportunities to develop appreciation for or abilities in formal, peaceful means of conflict resolution. Many respondents saw this as marginalizing young people who, with limited avenues to participate, may be pushed towards violent alternatives to make their voices heard.

Youth from the Tharu community in Tikapur, Kailali District, explained that they are strongly discouraged to do anything against their elders' will, which includes taking initiative to address any type of social issue. If anyone in their community starts doing something new or interesting, their family sees it as a risk. The family fears social sanctions (such as being boycotted). Such phenomenon exists mostly in communities where traditional forms of leadership are widely practiced and respected. For example, in the Tharu community, Badghar and Bhalmansa are two forms of leadership, which influence decision-making. Though the Badghar and Bhalmansa are democratically elected, the community rarely challenges or has a say in its decisions. Those who don't follow these institutions' decisions risk social sanctions, imposed by the traditional leadership. Hence, without the consent of these leaders, new initiatives will not receive social approval. However, such institutions could be mobilized to include the participation of youth, to make further positive contributions to peacebuilding.

5.3.6 Stalled and Incomplete Reconciliation Process

A long political war pushed people to two opposite ends. The consulted youth believe that family members of combatants and rebels who lost their lives are still harboring feelings of revenge towards those whom they believe are responsible for the killing or disappearance of their family members. Youth say that a delay of justice, unknown status of the whereabouts of their family members, their deteriorating social status and financial situation are some of the factors that fuel those feelings. Similarly, the same feeling of 'mistrust and revenge', and having no recourse, is claimed to have developed between Muslim and Pahade youth, after the killing of Mohit Khan, a Muslim in Kapilvastu.

Despite some efforts made by the international community in partnership with local civil society, youth perceive that the current peacebuilding initiatives have not successfully promoted reconciliation among different opposing groups. The consulted youth were of the opinion that many grievances are still unattended. People who lost family members during the war, who were tortured and/or whose property was destroyed or seized during political violence may not express their frustration and anger in public, but their body language clearly indicates that they are not ready to accept what happened to them and their family members, and move on. *"If we look at the situation from outside, then we feel like things are fine and change has occurred. The guilty*

are moving around freely who had set houses of the Tharu community on fire. It seems like we are living in harmony but not from inside because the incident still hurts us," shares a 26-year-old man from Kailali. According to them, a sense of revenge still exists in some people, and must be addressed positively.

However, the consulted youth and their families are frustrated with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Slow progress gives them the impression that the TRC was established as a formality to diffuse tensions. Civil society and the international community had to put a lot of pressure on the government to establish the TRC, and now that it is established, youth do not see a strong commitment by the government, TRC members and other political actors to make it functional. Youth understand that TRC members are loyal to different political parties, which makes it difficult if not impossible to manage conflicts. Frequent disputes between government legal advisors and TRC members stall progress on key issues and sometimes make the TRC dysfunctional for months at a time. Frequent changes in government and legal advisors create confusion and doubts regarding the actual functioning of the Commission. Youth's perception is that the TRC does not consult or trust the people affected by the civil war. Frustration is mounting among civil society actors and families of the disappeared because those found guilty of extra judicial killings by a Supreme Court verdict have not yet been punished. According to the youth consulted, it is because of their strong affiliations with political parties. In addition, impunity granted to those involved in violence in Gaur, Kapilvastu, Kailali and Saptari events has communicated a negative message to young people. Most of the youth with whom the study team interacted were not happy with the government's decision to withdraw cases against those involved.

As a result, the youth affected by the civil war and the Madhesh movements have lost faith in the current truth and reconciliation process and its possible outcomes. This suggests that youth are therefore skeptical of the actual potential of consolidating peace. Actions may be undertaken, but real transformation and moving forward in a positive way is limited.

5.4 Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention Activities by Young People

Overall, peacebuilding activities in the areas of the research are found to be scarce, particularly with regards to the engagement of the youth interviewed during the research. As seen in the previous section, the youth interviewed faced many challenges to their involvement in such activities, such as discrimination, division among youth, intervention of corrupt politicians, mistrust from the community, and difficulty in conducting activities against their families' or elders' will.

While there are very few initiatives with a broader scope of addressing structural and political violence, or connected to formal peacebuilding mechanisms, there are nonetheless examples of young people's positive social engagement in their communities. Youth mostly shared examples of small-scale initiatives as well as stories of individual transformation. These include initiatives to heal the wound of violence, promote development and social cohesion, lead informal dispute resolution and prevent violent responses to conflict. Youth use local clubs and civil society organization platforms – but also informal channels – to address issues of social discrimination, marginalization, violence, poverty and unemployment. They are also able to mobilize other youth in the process.

5.4.1 Promoting Collaboration and Understanding of Different Identity Groups

Participation in initiatives that allowed people of different identity groups to collaborate, exchange, and develop new appreciation for each other, was found to be very important for young people. Youth of disappeared families in **Bardiya** shared that a group of young people belonging to different political parties in their community have jointly started an agriculture farm on leased land where they grow vegetables and rice. The project receives support from the Youth Self-Employment Fund, an initiative of the government of Nepal. The respondent youth highlighted the two most important benefits of

A young ex-combatant works at a farm, an initiative he started that brings together youth of different political ideologies to collaborate and earn livelihoods

this project for them: First, such collaboration encouraged a culture of tolerance and collaboration among youth of different political views; second, youth engaged in the project had the opportunity to increase their income. This example of financial independence and successful entrepreneurship could motivate other youth aspiring to employment.

"A group of young people once organized a blood donation program in coordination with the Rotary Club. Most of the blood donors in the program were Pahade youth. A few days after the blood donation, a young boy from the Madhesi community got injured in a road accident. The Rotary Club supported that boy in getting blood from the Blood Bank. As a result, the Madhesi community has started to develop a more positive image of the Pahade community," explains a 30-year-old man from **Shivaraj** municipality.

Other youth also shared that they were able to take joint responsibility and collaborate on certain issues, for example, protecting crops from wild elephants, a major threat for that community. Youth believed that such joint action created cohesion among youth of different identities and political ideologies and created a ground for future collaboration on more specific peacebuilding initiatives. *"I think there is truly no way for different people to live together unless we change our attitude and how we look for happiness. We should look for enjoyment in doing social work, rather than in drugs and alcohol because social work can help improve the country. With a desire to increase social harmony, I have created an organization that includes people from both the Yadav and Kulwar communities that works on behalf of both,"* shared a 25-year-old man from **Saptari**, with pas involvement in violent conflict with the Maoist party.

In **Kailali**, youth used rituals and cultural events to foster social cohesion. They organized a Rakshya Bandhan program where sisters and brothers exchange 'Rakshya Bandhan' (protection thread) to strengthen the brother-sister relationship. As youth from different communities were invited to the program for exchanging the protection thread, it helped strengthen broader bonds: between brother-sister, men and women, and youth from different communities.

5.4.2 Addressing Different Forms of Violence in their Communities

Youth in **Saptari** have started addressing different forms of violence in their area - what they identify as prominent social evils: *"Through an organization known as 'Dahejmukta Mithila' (Dowry-free Mithila), we have campaigned against child marriage and dowry and moreover*

produced and disseminated a case-based documentary/Public Service Announcement highlighting the suffering of child marriage and dowry in various locations." Similarly, Shanta Bikasshin Nepal, a local organization from Saptari, has supported domestic violence survivors to access justice through formal justice mechanisms. To prevent violence, it has also facilitated a dialogue to solve a land-related dispute.

In **Kapilvastu**, different activities were organized in the wake of conflicts between Muslim and Pahade communities to promote collaboration and hold dialogues across divisive lines. A football tournament was organized after a riot to encourage collaboration. According to the youth from the FGD in Kapilvastu, *"youth had a chance to realize that together, with contribution of different set of skills from different people, they can achieve their goal."* An organization implemented a project of road construction and engaged locals in it, paying them for their labor. As a result, people from both rival communities participated in the initiative and had the opportunity to work together. Similarly, an organization engaged youth in building a *'Pratikshyalaya'* (waiting room for commuters) and the place has now been used to discuss common issues as well.

5.4.3 Collaborating with Institutions

Other youth shared examples of how young people can collaborate with different institutions, helping to restore social order. After an incident in Tikapur, where armed protesters killed police officers and even a child, police from **Bardiya** (adjoining district) were scared. While they were about to go to the district headquarters, local youth tried to assure them that there will not be any event of that kind in Bardiya. Despite this, the police post was removed. However, local youth took the initiative to collaborate with the political parties to re-establish the Manau Police Post. Another group added that the construction of a temple (Hanuman temple) in Rupani, Bajrang tole, was a success due to collaboration among youth.

In **Manau, Bardiya,** youth have set an example of mobilizing other youth to raise their voice against the mismanagement of the budget at the local level. They peacefully staged a sit-in at the Village Development Committee office (local government), and persuaded leaders to organize a public audit. Other examples, from outside the study area, were mentioned. Local civil society organizations have collaborated with local government in establishing a grievance handling desk at the government office and ensuring people could benefit from this mechanism by providing technical assistance, as needed, to the local government. The consulted youth thought this was a successful modality that could be replicated, with necessary adjustment in the changed political context, and scaled up to widely mobilize youth in peaceful means of promoting governance.

5.4.4 Stories of Individual and Generational Transformation

Others have stories of personal transformation, that inspire them to act as agents of peace in their community and inspire others to do the same. An 18-year-old man, who serves as district child club network advisor in Saptari, shared: *"If the Local Government engages youth in constructive and innovative activities, peacebuilding in the community is possible. Before joining a child club, I was mostly engaged in violence. However, after joining the club, I am fully transformed and now I am engaged in social work. What happened to me can happen to other youth as well."*

There seems to be a growing realization among the consulted youth that they are exploited and manipulated by political parties and other forces to be engaged in violent activities. Many have

had a serious reflection on these matters, realizing the loss they had to bear, and reflecting on other avenues they could explore. *"I have learned that nothing good will come from violence and conflict. We should take decisions in life by thinking wisely. Development is possible only through collaboration and cooperation, not through conflict. The decision to be involved in a conflict is regretful even if you discover transformation in your personality,"* reflected a 24-year-old female ex-combatant from Kailali. *"During the Maoists' armed struggle, I was filled with arrogance. I refused to listen to anyone else, because I felt powerful due to my political affiliations. I don't feel the same arrogance anymore. I have learned to become more flexible and listen to what others say,"* shared a 25-year-old man from Saptari. A youth from Kapilvastu added: *"We know that we will just be used and thrown away. So, we will not join any activities that will promote violence and conflict. We will rather mobilize youth in peacebuilding."*

Among the consulted youth, those who have been part of initiatives promoting social cohesion feel proud of their achievement. Increasing social acceptance between different groups as well as addressing some of the key issues they or their community face locally is something they would like to pursue. Moreover, they feel that some social issues are best addressed by local initiatives and local youth. For example, youth from the Terai/Madhesh region were of the opinion that initiatives from local youth could better address local issues, such as dowry-related domestic violence, which has high incidence in their area. Similarly, local youth in Bardiya identified local resources well and managed to start collaborative businesses such as group farming, which they think would not have been possible had it been a project from other agencies outside the district.

5.5 Enhancing Young People's Contribution and Leadership in Building Sustainable Peace

The examples shared in the previous section show that despite challenges, young people have a deep understanding of youth experiences and local realities. They are motivated and able to make a positive difference. Leveraging these initiatives, with the collaboration of elders, local government and other institutions such as the police, would contribute to increasing young people's potential and their contribution to consolidating peace.

5.5.1 Education and Capacity Building

Youth want to achieve more and better. Capacity building is seen as a critical dimension to enhance their contribution. Capacity building could be offered to establish groups of youth who can analyze the risks of violence in their areas, engage different stakeholders to prevent such violence, and even facilitate dialogue and dispute resolution in the cases of conflict. *"Facilitation skills training should be provided to youth to resolve conflicts and promote peace in the district,"* suggests a female student leader in Saptari.

Moral education, which used to be part of formal education during the autocratic Panchayat regime, was removed from the curriculum. It was criticized by political parties for manipulating education in favor of the monarch. However, a young journalist from Saptari saw immediate need to introduce updated and progressive civic education (moral education) in the formal and non-formal education system to empower young people to engage civically and develop critical thinking skills.

While some youth have collaborated on a number of issues, they express the need for more concentrated effort to promote collaborative leadership skills among them, and eliminate youth

divisions along political and other lines. In doing so, selection process for the training on collaborative leadership and facilitation skills should take in account equity issue by ensuring the representation of youth from minorities and disadvantaged communities.

The use of information technology and social media was suggested as an innovative way to bring youth together. Traditional ways were also suggested. In a diverse society, rich with festivals and rituals, there are several opportunities to bring people together – either physically or virtually and such opportunities could be best used to exchange messages that develop respect, mutual understanding, non-violent means of addressing social issues. Youth were found to be interested to be a part of such initiatives.

5.5.2 Changing Social Norms

A majority of the consulted youth, especially those between the ages of 15-24 years, want to eliminate social discrimination, especially caste-based. However, they find that elders maintain this social order and support processes that sustain and reproduce existing inequality, in the name of religion, customs, or culture. This generation gap limits the potential and impact of youth initiatives that seek to eliminate social inequalities and other forms of injustice and violence in their society. To enhance the positive benefits of actions they take to bring people of different castes, ethnicities and religions together on shared goals, they may need allies to work with elders and the rest of society on changing mentalities.

5.5.3 Rule of Law and Trust in Government Institutions

The consulted youth were of the opinion that transparency and the rule of law are essential conditions for the peaceful transformation of society. They need to believe in and trust their country's institutions, as well as the different processes and mechanisms put in place to promote reconciliation. Without this, they fear many young people will continue to be inclined towards violent alternatives to address their concerns. As for other youth who work on initiatives promoting peace and social cohesion, their initiatives will only have limited impact. Youth therefore need to see a strong commitment from their government and national institutions to promote the rule of law and accountability of all stakeholders, as well as inclusive governance. Other ways to promote the rule of law could be by raising awareness and strengthening civil society's ability to advocate for this cause. Mainstreaming governance in the programs of civil society organizations and capacity development of CSOs in youth engagement and evidence generation for advocacy were suggested.

Engagement of youth in social accountability processes is critical for them to believe in peaceful means of creating a just society. The specific case of Nepal drives home this point. In recent years, youth have been part of or witnessed violent movements for social transformation. They have persistently seen people take up arms and use violence against systems of exclusion, with the hopes of restoring social justice. Young people need to see that there are valid, meaningful options of affecting systemic change, and that these options are open to their participation. For this reason, young people must be included in formal processes and processes of decision-making at all levels. Partnership with local government, elders, and other national institutions is, therefore, essential.

5.5.4 Increasing Participation and Representation of Young People in Decision-Making

Despite adult domination in politics, the recent local elections have successfully mobilized youth below 40 years not only in campaigns, which have mostly been peaceful, but also placed a good number of youth in local government structures with important responsibilities. They are in a position to influence the governance mechanism and outcomes by addressing issues pertinent to youth, including their engagement in peaceful social transformation. The election of youth in local government shows broader society's progressive acceptance of their capacity for leadership and decision-making. Young people see this as a great opportunity, and a trend on which to capitalize. Empowering elected members of local governments, including elected youth, in further mobilizing young people to participate in politics, governance and peacebuilding could yield even greater results.

Stakeholders attending the consultation workshop after the field study suggested that organizations working on youth and peacebuilding issues, including local governments and civil society organizations, first need to work together in mainstreaming a government plan that is aligned with SCR 2250 at the local level. This plan should be actionable with clearly defined indicators of success and monitoring mechanism to track the progress and draw lessons.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Partnership for an Enabling Environment

Work on the creation of an enabling environment for youth participation, through collaboration and partnership with different actors.

To local government: Take a proactive role in formulating programs that create a conducive environment for youth to be meaningfully involved in social projects and decisions that impact the community positively. Engage youth in various committees at the local government level and gather their inputs on their long-term vision of governance in their district and beyond.

To the government of Nepal and CSOs: As the government of Nepal has expressed its willingness to work on localization of SCR 2250,[2] there is a great opportunity for alliance building and collaboration among stakeholders to work on this localization, including the preparation of a National Action Plan on UNSCR 2250 that can guide local governments in mainstreaming the five pillars of SCR 2250 in the local contexts. National Action Plans should be developed collaboratively through the contribution of youth, CSOs, government representatives and other stakeholders.

Example of Multi-stakeholder partnerships: Use ICT's in promoting peacebuilding messages and fostering reconciliation process: The increased use of information technology and social media could be an innovative way to bring youth together through the exchange of messages that promote tolerance, forgiveness, peace and collaboration. Moreover, engaging youth in

---

[2] *This was expressed by the Secretary from Ministry of Youth and Sports, Mr. Mahesh Dahal during the post-field study consultation workshop held by Search in Kathmandu on September 24, 2017.*

monitoring sledging or hate speech – of political leaders and others – both through social media and other media, can support them to avoid any potential conflicts and violence, as well as act as positive role models to other youth and the broader community. A multi-stakeholder partnership is needed for such initiation, including collaboration with the media to combat stereotypes rather than disseminate them. Local government could function as a focal point in creating a Youth Desk, which in partnership with and technical support of civil society organizations, can develop peacebuilding messages appropriate to the local socio-cultural contexts and disseminate through various media.

6.2 Reintegration: Social Acceptance and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants

Social reintegration of ex-combatants is an urgent task to prevent them from further isolation and from joining emerging rebel groups, especially in the hilly regions. Different steps are recommended: Ex-combatants want the government to actively work with communities to help them understand and acknowledge their contribution to the social and political change that occurred in Nepal. Reintegration goes hand in hand with reconciliation. Reconciliation programs need to be supported to allow communities to move forward and accept ex-combatants as active members who can contribute positively to society. Youth clubs and local CSOs should be mobilized to facilitate such initiatives.

6.3 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

The young people consulted recommend to ensure a "forgive but not forget" approach in managing TRC issues for a win-win situation to make lasting peace in Nepal with a trust and confidence of young people. More specifically, they ask that the Government (Ministry of Youth and Sports, Youth Council, Local Governance and political leaders) facilitate a process in which even if rebels from the People's Liberation Army and the State/security forces accused of different war crimes are forgiven, all cases should be thoroughly recorded and documented in order for the country to learn from past mistakes. All stakeholders, including State and rebels, must accept this process, in order to avoid further grievances and need for vengeance. Work should be done to ensure this acceptance. These elements would help increase the trust that young people would place in the TRC and its ability to manage the process of reconciliation effectively. Finally, the TRC should conduct more awareness raising with young people in order to interest them in the reconciliation process, help them develop more critical understanding of how it works and how its efficiency and impartiality can be ensured. Youth-friendly information about the functions, roles, responsibilities, scope and accountability of the TRC should be made available to young people in all districts of Nepal, especially those most affected by the conflict, and those harder to reach and less involved in civic and political participation. Getting young people interested in the process and understanding of reconciliation is a key element for generating trust and acceptance of its outcomes and ultimately, sustaining peace.

6.4 Prevention

Promote meaningful employment schemes and income generating activities for youth and ex-combatants: Any employment scheme should first aim at generating a sense of respect for all types of work, and the possibility of working without any prejudice. Promoting the value of a variety of occupations is important not only among young men and women, but also among their

parents and the rest of society, so that youth can choose and enjoy their work without family pressure. This could also reduce the pressure to migrate for work. The government should develop programs and incentives that guide and support families in mobilizing the remittances they receive from labor migration (a main source of income for many households). These can include savings programs, support in launching businesses and investing in income generating activities. Mobilization of skills that labor migrants bring back to the country should be a priority to support other youth in developing such skills and engage them in income generating activities locally. Moreover, special provisions need to be in place to support ex-combatants in succeeding in the job market and access other employment opportunities, including with government initiatives, to support the loss they have experienced through the conflict.

Address the livelihood needs of conflict-affected families: Youth, and especially those who were engaged in violent conflict, believe this investment is necessary to ensure lasting peace. Focus on the health, education and employment opportunities of parents, as well as children, of conflict-affected families.

Increase community and family support programs: Develop and implement programs to support parents (of youth-at-risk) in caring for young family members. Work with parents on the importance of giving their children emotional support, and encouraging their children's education, empowerment, and emotional wellbeing, instead of pressuring them to start earning at any cost and get government jobs.

Address drug abuse: Increase programs to prevent and treat drug abuse and addiction. Motivating youth to abstain from or get rid of drug addiction requires a serious effort where youth could play a significant role as peer educators. For the consulted youth, this can significantly reduce violence at the household and community level, including violence against women. They also see it as an important step to change the negative perceptions associated with many youth, especially the marginalized ones. Peer educators can provide crucial emotional support to isolated and at-risk youth, and work with them to develop confidence, life skills and a support system to say no to drugs.

6.5 Protection: Reform the Security Sector

Many youth are concerned that security forces, mainly the Nepal Police, are biased against youth. They feel targeted and badly treated during investigations. Youth recommend focusing efforts less on punishment of youth and more on improving behaviors - of youth as well as behavior of the police. Programs can be developed that work on improving interaction, trust and collaboration between youth and security forces.

6.6 Participation

Local government in collaboration with other actors

Engage youth in social accountability processes: Youth have very limited access to official channels of decision making and little opportunities to provide their input and ideas on issues that directly affect their lives. Violent means of social transformation are thus more readily available to them. Engaging them in social accountability processes is a strategic investment that would a) help them to gain confidence in peaceful means of social transformation and see the longer term benefits of such approach; b) help them gain leadership, decision making and

collaborative skills; allow youth's ideas and solutions to benefit youth and the community; c) encourage youth to collaborate meaningfully with each other and other community members, ultimately increasing community's acceptance of them. Possibilities include initiating a youth-led Panchayat (local council), linking it to the existing Panchayat, a well-accepted panchayat in the Terai region.

<u>National and International Development Organizations</u>

Encourage and support conflict-affected youth in designing and implementing their own initiatives: Youth are already developing some initiatives and have identified a number of issues they would like to work on. National and international development organizations can:

- Support small-scale initiatives of conflict-affected youth.
- Offer capacity building: Youth want to learn more on how to analyze the local context, design appropriate strategies and project interventions, and engage other stakeholders in promoting accountable, inclusive and responsive governance.
- Work with young people to organize a geography specific 'Innovation Haat Bazar',[3] through an open call at the local level so that even those marginalized youth can share their ideas of peacebuilding and promote locally rooted solutions to local issues.
- Address barriers to women's participation: Ensure women's safety in traveling to or at the space of activities; think of options to support the participation of single mothers or mothers whose husband work abroad, for example by coordinating time of activities and options for child care.

Offer capacity building of diverse youth in conflict mitigation and resolution: There are some examples of young people's leadership in facilitating local level dialogues, informal dispute resolution and conflict prevention. These call for capacity building initiatives that can not only support youth with additional knowledge and skills in conflict mitigation and resolution but also help build their confidence in leading such processes. This is especially important for young people who are marginalized on the basis of their past experiences in conflict or their social attributes (sex, caste/ethnicity, location, religion, language). Identification and selection of potential trainees should be transparent and inclusive to avoid the risk of fueling more grievances or conflict among youth. Interestingly, some youth believe that external support of capacity development, though needed should be provided on a short-term basis only to avoid making youth dependent.

Document and disseminate success stories of youth promoting peace: This can inspire and give other youth ideas on how to be innovative in addressing their local problems. It is also crucial to raise positive visibility of the role of youth in their communities.

---

[3] *Haat bazar is a traditional form of open market, popular throughout the country, where people buy and sell their products without any intervening individual/institution in place.*

7. Bibliography

ADB, DFID, and ILO. (2009). Nepal: critical development constraints, Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank.

Bary, J., Leiv, L., & Mansoob, M. (2003). *Nepal: Economic Drivers of the Maoist Insurgency.* Lynne Rienner Publishers.

UNDP. (2014). The Federalism Debate in Nepal, B. Karki & R. Edrisinha (Eds.). Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal (SPCBN), UNDP Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal. Retrieved from:
http://www.np.undp.org/content/dam/nepal/docs/projects/UNDP_NP_SPCBN_participat ory-constituton-making-vol-1.pdf

Einsiedel, S., & Salih, C. (2017). Conflict Prevention in Nepal. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. *Conflict Prevention Series: No. 1.* Retrieved from:
https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2530/ConflictPreventioninNepal-Apr-2017.pdf

FHI 360. (2017). *Public Perception Survey for measuring the level of understanding and confidence in the role of Civil Society Organizations and media in Nepal.* Kathmandu: FHI360.

Karkee, R. & Comfort, J. (2016). NGOs, Foreign Aid, and Development in Nepal. Front Public Health, 4(177). DOI 10.3389/fpubh.2016.00177
Retrieved from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4995364/

Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Nepal. (2015). National Youth Policy, 2072 (2015), Kathmandu, Nepal. Retrieved from:
https://www.unescogym.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NEPAL-National-Youth-Policy-2072_2.pdf

Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2015). *Youth Vision -2025 and Ten Year Strategic Plan.* Government of Nepal.

OECD. (2016). Aid at a Glance by ODA Recipients: Nepal. Updated December 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/aid-at-a-glance.htm
https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDDACAidataglancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:e mbed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no)

OHCHR. (2012). *Addressing Discrimination and Human Rights in the CCS/UNDAF: A good practices from Nepal.* Geneva: OHCHR.

Rawski, F., & Sharma, M. (2012). A Comprehensive Peace? Lessons from Human Rights Monitoring in Nepal. In S. v. Einsiedel, D. Malone, & S. (. Pradhan, *Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace* (pp. 175-200). New York: Cambridge UP.

Thapa, R. R. (2017). An Overview of Youth Movements and Youth Radicalization in Nepal. In *Countering Youth Radicalization and Violent Extremism in South Asia* (pp. 63-70). Kathmandu: COSATT.

United Nations Country Team Nepal. (2012). *United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Nepal (2013-2017).* Kathmandu: United Nations.

United Nations Peace Fund Nepal. (2017). *Youth Involvement in the peaceful and Sustainable Development of Nepal.* Kathmandu: UNPFN.

8. Annexes

Case Story 1: Encouragement helped Omprakash change the course of life

My name is Omprakash and I am a middle-class youth from a small village, called Gamhariya Parbaha – 6, of Saptari. My family consists of my grandparents, parents, two sisters, a brother, and me. I am the oldest son of the family. My father is overseas, and the money he sends is enough to support my family.

After passing the SLC in 2068 B.S., I returned to Rajbiraj to continue my education. The political atmosphere in Nepal was very heated at the time. During the writing of the constitution, there were strikes organized by the Madhesis because they thought that they were discriminated against by the state. Even though I was not a member of any political party, I was influenced by my friends to go to strikes. The strikes would happen in many forms. At times, they would turn violent. Day after day, I started becoming more active in such strikes.

I think that there is a lot of discrimination against the Madhesis, and their voices are not heard, which is a primary reason for these strikes. Due to this, there was a six-month long strike in the Madhesh last year, and India started a blockade against Nepal. I also participated in these strikes. During that period, many violent incidents occurred and a lot of people died. Learning how strikes were often suppressed by the police made me even angrier. I started participating in events like creating slogans and throwing rocks. During one of the strikes, a man was killed by the police who was on the roof of a home in Saptari. One day, I was put under police supervision. I was very scared that I would lose my life. I started to remember my father and family, and how they had pressured me not to join such activities.

I once watched a video of a strike where both strikers and police officers were injured. I felt very sad after watching this, and realized that a stone I threw could have injured someone in the same way, or I could have been injured myself. After my participation in these demonstrations, some of my previously close friends ceased to contact with me. My uncles and neighbors from the village would often complain to and reprimand me for joining the strikes. They would often ask me to leave the path I was on.

Eventually, I learned that no matter the reason, violence is not the right path and it only leads to a worse situation. I learned that positive change can only come peacefully. These days I live in Saptari district and involve myself in social work with the youth. I have also started taking more responsibility in my family. I have started working in an NGO and resumed my education. I have recently completed a three-year Bachelor's degree in Education. I am trying to spread awareness about child marriage in my social group. Because of the violence I participated in, many of my neighbors do not trust me. I hope that by doing good work, I can eventually regain their trust.

Looking at societal ills such as child marriage and social discrimination makes me feel sad. Many youth are split politically and it is difficult to get them to work together. Even when working for societal progress, there are challenges such as people talking behind my back and blaming me for no reason. However, I think that for real change, young people need to take

responsibility. If the youth become more active, it will be easier for them to achieve progress in many aspects of society and financial resources will be used properly.

Because of what happened in the past, I was not able to study the way I wanted. I intentionally did the wrong things, but I want to advise young people to find something positive to participate in and excel in that field. If young people start working peacefully and think about others, we can dream of a more peaceful future.

Case Story 2: Peaceful contributions to society promote social acceptance

I am Raju from Rupani of Saptari district. I am 25 years old. I was born in a lower middle class family. My family belongs to the Madhesi community, which is disadvantaged and backward. My father, Panchakrishna, used to teach in a high school. People of Pahade descent would often look down on us. I grew up hearing taunts about being a Madhesi.

When I was in grade eight, I joined a political party. One day in Rajbiraj, I saw an old man asking a shop owner for half a kilogram of rice. But he did not have money to buy the rice and the shop owner refused to give it to him. The old man looked very weak and hungry. I was haunted with the thought that the old man would die of hunger if he did not get to eat that day. I started to think of all hungry people and asked myself why people have to die of hunger.

In 2058 BS, I heard Dr. Baburam Bhattarai being interviewed by the BBC. During the segment, he talked about how we could be liberated from our difficulties. This interview greatly inspired me because I wanted to be liberated from the discrimination I was facing. It was exactly what I wanted to hear then.

After this a local politician helped me join the Maoist party. I went to Kathmandu and joined a student organization.

I also joined the training given by the Maoist party, but I did not learn how to use weapons. I joined the combatants when they attacked the police station in Thankot. I participated in battle when we won it in Rupani. During the Maoists' armed struggle, I was filled with arrogance. I refused to listen to anyone else, because I felt powerful due to my political affiliation. I don't feel the same arrogance anymore. I have learned to become more flexible and listen to what others say. As soon as the Maoists started the peace process, I left the organization and felt very scared.

If I had not joined politics or armed struggle, I might have fallen under a bad influence. Living under strict discipline, I gave up many of my bad habits and became politically aware. Had I only thought of making money, I may have a comfortable life now. But this is not what I wanted. I wanted a job in a decent and peaceful society. As I have done positive work, I have earned the respect of others.

I want to work in the community and bridge the gap between the rich and poor. I would like to strengthen the cooperative organization I have opened. I am also helping build an organization for the Tharu community. A farm cooperative started three years ago with a small capital is now worth NRs. 3.5 million. This is the result of collaboration. I have also started a cooperative called "My Debt and Savings Cooperative". I hope to make it very successful so that it can offer financial support to the people to become self-employed.

Due to divisive ethnic leaders in the Terai region, I fear that the country could be divided by politicians. I think there is truly no way for different people to live together unless we change our attitude and look for happiness. We should look for enjoyment in doing social work, rather than in drugs and alcohol. Social work can help improve the country. With a desire to increase social harmony, I have created an organization that includes people from both the Yadav and Kulwar communities that works on behalf of both.

I decided to start a cricket club in my community, so I could help the youth stay away from alcohol and drugs. A youth from my own neighborhood was made captain of the club. He remained so busy in the club activities that he stopped drinking alcohol. Now, he is free from all addiction and has started a grocery store in Kathmandu. Many of the youth in my community are looked down by the people as they are addicted to alcohol and I want to do something for them.

Case Story 3: Prabin, 32, male ex-combatant, Rolpa

My name is Prabin and I am 32 years old. I have been educated up to the twelfth grade. We recently moved from ward number six of Thawang Rural Municipality, Rolpa District.

My father used to work for the Indian Army. My grandfather repeatedly told me to join the Indian Army. When I was in the sixth grade, at the age of twelve, I joined a student organization. Since I was interested in literature from my young age and enjoyed singing, I continued my education even after I joined the Maoist party.

In 2057 BS, when I was in the ninth grade, the Maoist Party went underground for 6 years. Initially, I joined the party because I thought I could sing and dance with fellow members. However, after talking to friends and attending the party meetings, I came to know the true purpose of the movement. Our objective was a full transformation of society, from a discriminatory one to the one where all people would be equal. Seeing this, I thought this would be a good option for Rolpa in its development and started working with full enthusiasm. At first, I enjoyed singing songs and dancing; Maoist songs made me feel completely happy.

However, while I was receiving weapons training and heading to the front lines of the battles, there were problems with my family. The police and military would come to my house and harass, intimidate, and beat them. Due to this, between 2057BS and 2063 BS, I had to live in hiding with the party people. When I thought of my family, I was scared as to what would happen to them, if my identity as a Maoist fighter was known publicly.

While the Maoist party was underground, everyone in the People's Liberation Army, from common soldiers to commanders, got land. After starting work at Shanti Parkash, I believed I did not have to go to the cantonment camp anymore. From 2063 to 2068BS, I worked as Chief of Training and Head of Communications for five divisions. After a voluntary retirement from Sohi Division, I received six lakh rupees. With that amount of money, I bought an offset press and started publishing a newspaper. This gave me another opportunity for self-improvement and I was able to use my past experiences to help build my own business.

Through media awareness, I am trying to reduce class and caste discrimination in the Nepali society, and move it into a new direction. While I have been raising my family with the earnings from my own newspaper, many of my friends have moved to Kathmandu or overseas and are struggling there. Through my life experiences, I have come to realize that while violent conflict

may not result in a better society, peaceful debate and disagreement can lead to a change. Having earned a name for myself as a journalist, I feel self-pride at what I have achieved, which helps me to forget the negative experiences I had in the past. When I think of the Civil War, and how many people are still being negatively affected by it, I now understand how war can destroy lives.

In 2061BS, while we were planning for an attack on Khara of Rukkum district, I felt scared but I was boosted by my friends. The thrill of battle made us forget hunger and thirst. During the attack, I was shot but my friends treated me and got ready to go into another conflict again. In the Gandak Campaign in Butwal, we searched for the military to attack them and many of my friends died in the ensuing battle. I feel I was saved by God.

Case Story 4: Thakur, male ex-combatant now leader of a youth club

My name is Thakur. I am 27 years old and currently working as the president of a youth club. My community, the Tharus, have always been backward and uneducated. We are simple folk, reliant on sustenance agriculture and unable to fight against injustice that happened to us. Seeing the number of males from the Tharu community, young and middle-aged, addicted to alcoholism makes me feel sad. I have thought of improving the lives of the Tharus since I was in secondary school. From then, I started forming clubs for the Tharu community to enable them to participate in debates and quizzes. In an attempt to minimize early marriage and increase interest in education, we started performing street dramas. Though the public opinion on the campaign has been split, I persisted in my work.

My economic condition is not sound. I want to make progress in it and develop my village. My belief is that education is the key element to this. Because of this, I went to Nepalgunj to pursue higher studies. In order to continue my studies, I worked at a stationary shop. During this period, I wrote stories related to social transformation. I also participated in various public awareness-raising programs in Nepalgunj through literary campaigns. I would go to different villages and study the situation of the people there. Based on what I saw, I would compose different types of literary genres. During the Civil War, both sides harassed youth groups, Maoists and state-owned army and police, and it was difficult for us to stay in the villages. Maoists would attempt to recruit us as soldiers, and the army would bother us thinking that we were Maoists. Though I possessed revolutionary aspirations to transform society, I did not want to join Maoist activities. I wanted to enact social change in my own way. Due to this, most of my writings were created in Nepalgunj.

After some years, I returned to my village without having completed my studies. This was because I did not have enough financial resources. Upon my return, I made my new plan to lead local youths on the right path. Despite my challenges, I thought it was important to return to my village and develop it. At the very least, I would be able to guide young people in my community and mobilize them against government corruption and malpractices at the local level, to form a more civilized society. If I were successful, I would have a group of like-minded individuals working towards improving society and creating progress in the country.

Once I returned to the village, I formed a youth club and registered it in the district administration office. When we started youth improvement initiatives we had a divisive society. My work made me popular and I was offered a candidacy in Ward Committee Member by CPN

(UML). During the election campaign, I saw children being used by the Maoists. I talked to one of my friends, who was a former Maoist cadre regarding this issue. Upon my question about children being used in the rally, Maoists became angry at me and they mishandled me. I stopped my team members who wanted to fight back. I got several phone calls and was threatened. Once I came to know that they wanted to kill me, I informed the Police administration. The Police facilitated a dialogue and I was assured that I would not be physically attacked.

This event made me frustrated with politics and I decided to continue my social work. Though sometime, when I see poor governance in local government, I think of joining politics to change it. I have been working my level best to change the society through social work. I think that there should not be any space for revenge. Different people have different political ideologies, which is fine but such ideologies should not divide us. So, the youth club has convinced its members (youth) with different political ideologies in this regard and engaged them in vegetable farming. Youth are now taking interest in it, as they see that it will benefit them financially. They are working hard.

I believe that youth engagement in income generation activity will develop positive thinking in them. It will give them a hope and they will not be engaged in any counterproductive activities. We need to develop in them a culture of respecting work –whatever it is. Economic empowerment is a key element.

Case Story 5: Meena, female ex-combatant, Kailali

My life was normal in a joint family of 32 members. I used to go to school, study and do some light works of house. I joined after mid-term examination of grade five even though I was an excellent student. Politically, my family was crushed because people used to doubt that we were Maoist. Police said that our house is the place to hide Maoist. They came into our house and searched for them. They arrested my father, killed my uncle considering him a Maoist and sentenced another uncle. Police tortured most of the people physically.

After all these incidents, feelings of revenge developed inside me. Those who can work and speak were all Maoist in the eye of police. I was just a child then, but I knew that all the suffering my family had to go through was unfair. Therefore, I decided to join the Maoists. Their goal of achieving an equal society and rights for everyone through class based struggle also appealed to me. At first, I was in Tikapur then central office of Masuriya. Others had to visit villages, gather people and give speeches but I was too young therefore, I had to go watch activities of police in my school dress. All fights were planned so, I was in a defensive group and had to manage injured ones. But when there used to be sudden fights then, some friends died. Until 2061, I was involved in such activities.

Once in 2061, a fight continued for 12 hours (4pm to 4 am) and I lost one brother. He loved me so much because I was small. It was five minutes before the peace agreement. I feel really bad remembering this incident. If it was five minutes earlier then I would not have lost him forever.

After the peace agreement, I stayed in the cantonment from 2063 to 2068. During that time, government committed to provide salary but I did not get any. Financially, it was difficult because the party had to feed us from donations. Later, the party also did not give because government had said to give. We used to get 2-300 rupees and we had to use it just for soap and

detergent powder. I took voluntary retirement and at some point, I feel that I am able to do something on my own after I joined the Maoists.

I feel joining the Maoists has empowered me. I can do public speaking, and I got a chance to explore many places, almost all of Nepal. It has helped me enhance my knowledge of different issues; I have become smart and intellectual. My involvement in the party came with a cost though – I couldn't finish my education in time. But I am doing my best to become an independent person, as I do not have any political power to protect me. I served in the Maoist Army, and hence my network is limited to those with whom I worked. I had to leave my studies before completing them, and now I feel helpless when it comes to doing many practical things such as submitting any proposals to my municipality – I can't write one. I even do not know how proposal is submitted in municipality. I am frustrated to some extent – I spent my youth with no substantial gain. I wish, if ex-combatants like me could meet, and discuss our common problems, we may have chances of being heard.

At present, there are few people who comment that one should not speak with us because we have killed people. I feel really bad when I hear such comment. But I had full support from family since they have understood why I did not make to army. I used to listen to Satsang and it preaches helped me to analyze what did I achieve from the people's movement.

Youth are formulating clubs and collecting some amount for helping and sometimes provide loan with certain percentage of interest. From my side, I am teaching my skill of beautician to others, especially girls. Sometimes I teach good things to teen girls who could not differentiate between right and wrong. I have also trained combatant friends with discount. I converted football player so, when I used to go to Kathmandu for games, I could see many beautiful people hence, I wished to be a beautician. I invested my own five lakh rupees and started my business. Now I teach basic and diploma courses in 3500 and 10000 per month respectively. I make at least 20000 each month and it goes higher during festivals and wedding season.

The long-term impact of conflict is that people are injured for life long. We were given five lakh but it would have been better if we were provided with some form of employment. It would have made everyone secure with a job, reducing the risk of youth being unemployed again. Most of the youth are abroad, in Gulf countries. They earn some amount, come back and will have nothing to do here, that might invite conflict. I could see frustration of youths from Facebook. As consequences, I can see possibility of conflicts. It is important for government to create environment where youth can be self-employed. If they could run some business in local community then they could fine-tune with community.

Even when youth try to participate in some activities for community then political parties create obstacles. If youth make any plans then they are charged of financial scam. Many deformations are taking place in communities, therefore governments have to generate opportunities of employment and support putting them at the center in an equal basis for the management of conflicts. Youth are used in elections and in negative activities. Youth who can afford are abroad and who cannot have gone to India for labor work. I am contributing by providing beautician training on discount.

Though I learned many things from this time, as consequences of people's movement, I am not well physically even at young age. No injured marks are seen on my body but I cannot stay without medicine during cold days. In the winter season, my whole body starts to feel pain.

I would like to say to youth that nothing will be good from too many murder and fights in life. Take decisions by thinking wisely. Development is possible if works are done collaboratively. Decision to be involve in conflict is regretful even if you discover transformation in your personality.

Case Story 6: Sita, 31, female ex-combatant, Bardiya

When I joined the People's Liberation Army in 2003, I didn't come home for two years. In the army, I fought in the battles of Badaipur and Arkoya. I was also directly involved in the attack on the Rambhapur barracks of the then Royal Nepal Army on June 24, 2005. During the battle, we fought throughout the night. While fighting, a bullet hit me in my head, and I fell unconscious. My friends rescued me, took out the bullet and saved my life. By then, I had become a Platoon Commander of the People's Liberation Army. I had four sections under my command.

After the battle, I felt really bad. I started to question if we were doing the right thing. It was us, the poor people and the general public who was being forced to fight and lose their lives whichever side of the war they were on. When we killed the police or army personnel, we were killing people just like us. Whenever we captured police or army personnel, we used to tell them the same. We used to tell them that our fight was not to kill them but to topple the exploitative regime.

When the peace agreement was signed in 2006, I was overjoyed that I didn't have to kill people anymore. When we lay down our arms and came into the public, we were welcomed and well received. It made me happier.

After the peace agreement, the verification process started. They deemed me unqualified in the process. They asked us to name the weapons in the process. Being uneducated, I could not tell or write the English names of those weapons. I think that's the reason I failed the verification process. Otherwise, I had been commanding four sections of the army, how could I be unqualified?

Then, they gave us 5 lakh rupees (~ 5000 USD) in two installments. I was not happy. I wanted to join the national army and serve my country. We fought such a devastating war with our fellow countrymen, and in the end, it seemed as if we had done all of this for that five lakh rupees.

But the war stopped, and it was a great achievement for all of us. I felt very happy to meet my parents on returning home. In 2009, I got married to a guy whom I had met in the People's Liberation Army and fallen in love with. I gave birth to a daughter in 2012.

Our financial woes never left us though. Five lakhs is not a lot of money these days. We used the money to buy a piece of land, but it was not enough for us to survive. Therefore, my husband went abroad seeking employment opportunities. His income is sustaining our family. I have also taken training on knitting sweaters. A few people knock my door for sweaters in the winter, but I have not been able to make significant income from it.

Returning to normal life was also a challenge for me. Many people accused me of being a killer, murderer. Some of them even accused me of sleeping with countless guys. But what else could I do besides listening to them in silence? I did try to reason with some of them and succeed in changing their mind. But most of the time, I remained silent. Gradually, the society began to accept us. Tharu people are open and understanding. Therefore, slowly I got reintegrated into the community.

I still feel that I can lead and bring change in my community but not having my husband beside me and having to take care of my daughter is preventing me from doing anything. Our society has changed a bit, but there is a lot to be desired with the political change. Our politics is still very messed up.

I think the conflict still exists, although in a dormant state. Many ex-combatants like me are not happy. Our people are still very poor. All the war victims have not received justice. The families of the martyrs and the forcibly disappeared people are still in a very vulnerable state. The remnants of monarchy and feudalism are still there. Therefore, I can't say with guarantee that conflicts won't occur in Nepal in coming days.

Thousands of people like me dedicated our youth for the war. We fought for social justice and political change. Many people gave up their lives. People lost their parents, children, and relatives. Many people are still living in destitution. The ex-combatants have not been properly rehabilitated. In such a scenario, how long can we tolerate this state of affairs?