SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND IN NEPAL
PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Search for Common Ground commenced full operations in Nepal in February 2006, although it has been working in Nepal for several years in partnership with The Antenna Foundation; a local NGO that produces media content for social change. Using media and community-based activities, SFCG aims to foster the participation of key sectors of the population in Nepal in peacebuilding, with a particular focus on youth.

Country Context

2006 was a year of surprises and rapid change in Nepal. In April the Seven Party Alliance (SPA), the Communist Party of Nepal- Maoist (CPN M), and civil society took to the streets to protest the direct rule of King Gyandendra. After 20 days of protests, curfews, and strikes, King Gyanendra agreed to the reinstatement of parliament on 25th April 2006. The SPA elected octegenarian G.P Koirala as Prime Minister, his fifth time in office since 1990. A ceasefire between the CPN-M and the Government was soon declared, power over the army was stripped from the King, and peace negotiations began.

In November 2006, the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist (CPN-M) signed the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement to end the civil war that had lasted for ten years. In a televised ceremony, Maoist leader Prachanda and Prime Minister Koirala signed the agreement and declared the war over. The agreement lays out a road map for a peace process in which a transitional government is formed, a new constitution is drafted, and a constitutional assembly elected and convened. The Maoist soldiers, the People's Liberation Army, are currently in UN –monitored cantonments, and constituent assembly elections are slated for mid 2007.

Despite the many breakthroughs, Nepal continues to be plagued with shutdowns, blockades, and violent protests, as ethnic groups that have traditionally been excluded from power, such as the Madheshis in the Terai plains, fight for political inclusion in the structure of 'New Nepal'. There is a need for those who have been engaged in adversarial conflict for so long to shift how they interact with their opponents, to reach out across dividing lines, to promote co-existence on a national level and to build lasting peace. There remains, however, the enormous task of addressing the root causes of the conflict, the caste system, discrimination, poverty, lack of health care and education and social exclusion.

SFCG Approach in Nepal

Using media and community-based activities, SFCG in Nepal is strengthening the role of key sectors of the population – including youth, media, and civil society organizations – in peacebuilding, and giving civil society actors a voice in reconciliation, conflict prevention, and resolution. With support from the European Commission, UNICEF, and the World Bank, SFCG works to improve the conditions in which the peace process can be successful and lead to sustainable peace.

Tools and Approach

Media Programs – using media formats that are relatively new to Nepal, such as radio soap opera and live radio discussion programs, SFCG uses the media to reach a broad cross section of people across the country. Current radio programs, produced in partnership with the Antenna Foundation Nepal, include a soap opera for young people that models the roles that young people in rural areas can play in peacebuilding and conflict transformation and a live discussion program about the role of youth in the peace process, specifically the issues related to reintegration of youth who are formerly associated with fighting forces. SFCG also works with its partners to produce media messages that support the peace process, in the form of discussion programs, public service announcements, and music.

Media Capacity Building - SFCG works with journalists from print and radio on how to cover the issues related to children affected by the armed conflict in a 'common ground' way.

Leadership Development – SFCG works with members of civil society, including youth leaders, providing training in leadership skills, and coaching in how to use their sphere of influence in peace building. SFCG's youth program works in 10 districts in the Mid and Far West of Nepal, working with youth leaders to help them understand the root causes of conflict, and to support them to create community level peace building projects.

1. Radio soap opera

In partnership with The Antenna Foundation Nepal, SFCG produces a soap opera, *Nayaa Baato Nayaa Paailaa (New Path, New Footprints)*, which broadcasts three 15-minute episodes per week. The drama aims to create role models to foster the direct youth involvement in promoting peace at local and national levels. The radio soap is about the ongoing story of a group of diverse young people living in a village in the hills of Rolpa district. Together, they go through the ups and downs of the conflict and the peace process, building bridges across dividing lines to find ways of contributing to peace. For instance, one of the storylines in *Nayaa Baato Nayaa Paailaa* tells the story of the return of a young former Maoist combatant to his village. The characters were role models, showing how different people helped him to reintegrate, and to overcome some of the challenges and prejudice he faced in school and among other villagers.

The soap is broadcast nationally on Radio Nepal and other FM radio stations, and is targeted to reach approximately four million youth, from all seventy-five districts, including those living in hills districts and other remote areas worst affected by the conflict.

Nayaa Baato Nayaa Paaila is produced with direct involvement of young people from across the country.

2. Discussion Program – Children and Armed Conflict

SFCG, in partnership with the Antenna Foundation of Nepal, produces a weekly talk show on the role of children in the peace process. The program uses a live format and is broadcasts simultaneously to 25 FM stations around the country. Each week, children are given a chance to engage in dialogue with adults to talk about how the peace process is impacting their lives and what they need in order to be protected. One week, for example, three young people served as guests; one was a young man who lived on the streets of Kathmandu, the second a young woman who had been involved in the war, and the third a privileged young woman who attends one of the top schools in Nepal. One Saturday morning, they came together on the radio to speak to the country about the role that youth play in the peace process. Listeners call into the program and priority is always given to children who can give their opinions directly to decision makers.

2. Youth Community Peace Building Project

The radio soap opera models positive roles for youth in peacebuilding and how they can organize to address the root causes of conflict. Outreach and community peacebuilding efforts reinforce the messages of the soap, and facilitate the shift from attitudinal to behavioural changes.

Reinforce messages of the Soap:

In order to facilitate the change of attitude into behavioural changes, SFCG has developed a set of outreach activities in those communities most affected by war and conflict. This includes catalysing listener groups to discuss programs and participate in activities that are designed to reinforce the messages of the soap opera, and apply them to everyday lives.

Youth Leadership for Peace

Youth have been deeply affected, and involved, in the conflict. The peace process has created an opening for youth to reassess their role, and to play a part in peacebuilding, particularly at a local level. Youth have the potential to decrease the erosion of the community cohesion and to organise to address some of the impacts of the conflict in their villages. SFCG works with youth-led organizations and clubs in rural, war-affected areas to facilitate their involvement in peacebuilding and reconciliation at the community level. Our team works in communities to identify those young people with the most potential and to create dialogues, bringing young people together from across political, caste and ethnic lines. During such sessions, youth groups identify shared concerns, map root causes of conflict in their communities and develop projects that they can implement. With support from SFCG, youth groups have worked cooperatively to implement a range of projects including the use of sports for peace, campaigns against caste discrimination, dialogues for peace, etc…