
Search for Common Ground Nepal
Key Findings from External Evaluation
Enhancing Youth Participation in Decision Making in Nepal
2009

In March 2009, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) concluded the implementation of the project “*Enhancing Youth Participation in Decision Making in Nepal*”. The project, funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), had the overall objective of *building leadership capacities of youth to analyze and address the root causes of conflict, and to foster the process of democratization at the community level*. The project was implemented through 18 locally formed youth clubs in four districts of eastern Terai namely Dhanusha, Mahottari, Siraha and Saptari. The project lasted for 12 months and involved two major components: Training of Trainers (ToT) followed by District Youth Leadership Development Workshops and Community Peacebuilding projects implemented by the participating youth clubs under the seed grants provided by SFCG.

EVALUATION SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

The objective of this evaluation is to disclose and underline the results of the project funded by National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Since the project was implemented as an entry point for a deeper and wider engagement in eastern Terai in the near future, SFCG decided to conduct an internal and formative evaluation to draw qualitative lessons for the next steps. It intends to inform the program leadership and staff to make decision on how to move further SFCG’s program in eastern Terai, both in terms of programmatic objectives and in overall methodologies.

The scope of the evaluation rests on looking into three aspects, process/methods of the project implementation, output of the projects and the result achieved, though the feedback of the youths targeted by the project. The field visit of the evaluation was carried out during the second week (9-14) of February 2009. The evaluation team collected data and information from different sources. The evaluation plan was prepared based on the consultation with the Program Director, the Program Manager, the Youth Program Coordinator and the Associate Youth Program Coordinators stationed in the field. The evaluation was carried out taking into account the information and data gathered through the program staff, document reviews, focus group discussions with the participants of the TOT, District Leadership Development Training, Community Level Training on Youth Leadership and Conflict Transformation organized by youth clubs/organizations, individual interviews with program staffs and leaders of the club, Key Informants Interview (KII) with civil society people and observation of the field programs. The interviews and Focus Group Discussions were organized according to semi structured questionnaires prepared in advance

KEY FINDINGS

The main results of the projects are summarized below:

- A group of 34 youths who have undergone a training of trainers (ToT) are equipped with the skills of organizing Youth Leadership and Peacebuilding Training in the future. Further, a group of 60 youths have been trained on basic tools of conflict analysis and peacebuilding with particular focus on youths' role in community peace and harmony.
- The majority of youth clubs organized youth leadership and peacebuilding training in their communities, as a result of which 464 youths have been made aware on the basics of conflict analysis, conflict transformation and peacebuilding and youth leadership skills. This is an encouraging achievement in such a short span of time working in a high conflict sensitive zone.

- The youth clubs in Dhanusha are already organized into District Youth Network, whereas those in other districts are discussing among each other to form such networks.
- The youth mobilization through the project has resulted in the adults' and political stakeholders' in the community recognition of the youth power in their community and are regularly inviting them formally in all meetings and social gatherings.
- The youth clubs working with SFCG have already been successful in convincing at least seven youths involved in armed groups to return to communities.
- The project implemented by the clubs through the seed grants given by SFCG has played a vital role in mobilizing the youths in the community. Youths are gaining recognition of the community by utilizing seed grants for the 'common good' of the community.
- The peace rallies, dramas, debate competitions have been able to reach a broad public and generate awareness among the critical mass in the community about community harmony, empathy, reconciliation and coexistence.
- The sport festivals organized under the theme "sports for peace" have been able to bring large number of people together, especially youths from across various dividing lines, to value friendship and harmony in a divided society.

Challenges

The project was not free from shortcomings. No base line assessment was done prior to the project implementation, which posed challenges to measure the progress over the duration of the project. For some unavoidable political circumstances (the election of constituent assembly), the project was delayed by two months. Even after the start, the project could not generate momentum and the ToT was organized only in August 2008. The seed grant disbursement took place only on October 2008 and, as a result, some of the community peacebuilding projects were yet to be completed at the time of evaluation.

The project lacked systematic project implementation (process guidelines) and financial management guidelines, which, to some extent, created minor hindrances to smooth implementation of the activities. There was also not enough communication with and monitoring of the activities of the clubs, which resulted into minor conflicts in few clubs regarding financial transactions and into a delayed or disrupted progress of the community peacebuilding projects. The objective of bringing together youths across the dividing lines, with special focus on Madhesi and Pahade youths became secondary priority. The project has in fact focused more on bridging dividing lines among the different groups of Madhesi communities.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- SFCG should avoid discontinuing the project at this moment and leave the youths in a limbo where they have just started to contributing in building peace and harmony in their own community. More youths need to be trained in peacebuilding practices and a larger mass of young change-makers need to be developed.
- It is advisable to develop the trainings conducted at the district and community level for five days to achieve a more exhaustive and intensive preparation and a higher level of knowledge.
- SFCG needs to put effort in selecting working areas with mixed population from Madhesi and Pahade communities so that the ethnic antagonism existing can be minimized by mobilizing youths from both communities.
- Finally, SFG should come out with some innovative ideas about how the community peacebuilding projects implemented by the local partners/youth clubs can be made more effective in promoting harmony, empathy and reconciliation among different communities in the project areas, especially among youths.

*Source: The majority of this document was taken verbatim from the Evaluation of Search for Common Ground Activities in Nepal, February 2009. For the full evaluation o, please refer to:
www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html*