
Search for Common Ground - Nepal Key Findings from 2009 External Evaluation Children's Voices project

The Children's Voices, a UNICEF co-funded project, was established at the first national-level DDR working group, the Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) Working Group. The project aimed to provide a platform for children and youth's voices in the transition to peace so as to prevent the further manipulation of youth to violence. The key project components are: a) the production of a radio program by children, *Sunau Bolau*, b) intergenerational folk media (Dohori) and the engagement of children and youth clubs in community peacebuilding, and c) communication campaigns such as posters, leaflets, public service announcements on radio, 45-minute drama cassettes and hoarding boards on return and reintegration of former CAAFAG.

EVALUATION SCOPE

The evaluation was undertaken to assess the effectiveness and relevance of Children's Voices, a project for CAAFAG funded by UNICEF (including all co-funded activities) and implemented by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Nepal. The goal is to analyze how the two-year emergency response to the return and reintegration project has impacted the community, and what the lessons learned were, both in terms of program objectives and implementation methodologies.

KEY FINDINGS

Over the past two years, the project has been extremely successful in the transformation of the environments and conditions of the targeted beneficiaries. Two of the main successes of the project were the creation, for the first time in Nepal, of a space for children's voices and the promotion of dialogue in communities on the importance of bridging intergenerational gaps and on the return and reintegration of children in armed conflict.

Some of the other major findings of the project are:

- *Sunau Bolau* has obtained 27% of the share, as confirmed by an informal survey done in six districts of Nepal (Sunsari, Salyan, Dang, Kailali, Accham and Siraha), with 480 samples. In the evaluation of the four districts of Dang, Salyan and Surkhet plus Kathmandu, 96 people interviewed (out of 150 respondents) said they had listened to *Sunau Bolau*. In 31% of cases discussions on the program occurred.
- Personal and relationship transformations have occurred especially among those directly involved in the project components i.e. *Sunau Bolau* and intergenerational Dohori. The project participants have gained knowledge on issues regarding children in armed conflict and their difficulties and intergenerational divides. Moreover, they have spread the lessons learnt on intergenerational gaps and appropriate behaviors towards CAAFAG to their friends, families and community members and they have put those lessons in practice by performing dramas.

- Community members have a comprehensive knowledge about former CAAFAG. This pertains to all the key actors (CAAC WG, political parties, community members, etc) who have contributed to the change in perception towards CAAFAG.
- Intergenerational Dohori has received a great response among both participants and the audience of the events. It has also allowed the obtainment, for the first time, funds in two VDCs from the local government for youth and children.
- The communication campaigns, especially posters and cassettes, have been largely appreciated and were discussed immediately after their broadcasting.

Challenges and Limitations

One of the main difficulties encountered was the postponement of the formal DDR, which resulted into designing the project for children who were informally released or were disqualified during the initial verification. Another drawback was the project duration, which was too short to allow an efficient implementation of each component, i.e. the planning, the scheduling of activities and the mobilization of resources. Program-wise, the main challenge was having a media production that was hard to monitor due to limitations in resources and the lack of a comprehensive distribution strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continuity of the child-produced radio program, *Sunau Bolau*, maintaining it as a local production as it was able to successfully create space for children's voices and enhance children's knowledge on broad issues.
- Participatory planning is needed while implementing components of the project. It is important to engage the participants of the project from the very beginning especially concerned stakeholders i.e. children, youth, local government, etc. This is in line with a project objective, i.e. to promote ownership of the activity.
- A longer-term approach is needed to implement the project components efficiently and to achieve effective results.
- Programming should include broad array of issues concerning children. Some of the critical issues to discuss are: psychosocial trauma, continuity of education, campaign against manipulation of children in political activities, intergenerational dialogue, child marriage, and income-generating opportunities for adults.
- Intergenerational Dohori should continue in more VDCs and proper follow-up is necessary.
- While implementing any children's programs, it is imperative to work with the children's parents/guardians, community members and, in general, with all the adults who are responsible for their well-being.
- The visibility of any media productions, including outreach materials of any programs, need to have a clear distribution strategy. The strategy needs to address key questions such as: to whom are the posters delivered? How many? Where are they going to be put – in schools, town centers, clubs, FM stations? How is the follow-up organized?
- Clear and frequent coordination mechanisms need to be established with district-level government bodies, international and national non-governmental organizations, journalists, youth networks and loose networks. This is important for the district bodies to understand SFCG programming and for SFCG to identify the various organizations working in the district.

- Better coordination between these bodies and CAAC WG is needed in order for them to benefit from each other, especially for media products.
- While designing and implementing components of different projects, it is recommended to choose homogenous areas or locations of implementation in order to achieve a deeper impact. It will also help community members perceiving SFCG programming as more than a one-off event.
- It is imperative to create conditions to monitor the media programming in areas where the target beneficiaries live. A first option is to produce an intense advertising campaign in the area; a second option is to have regular focus group discussions, monitoring forms, and implementing at least one component of the community peacebuilding project in the area.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation makes use of a blend of qualitative and quantitative types of information, collected in three districts (Surkhet, Dang and Salayn) of Nepal plus Kathmandu. The evaluation used a mixture of research methods to arrive at its conclusions. The quantitative information was obtained primarily from the listenership survey carried out in five districts in Nepal and the qualitative information derived from various interviews, focus group discussions and desk research.

Sources of Information

- The evaluation has relied on two different sources of information: primary and secondary. Primary information has been collected in three different districts including Kathmandu through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and informal listenership surveys. Secondary information consists of the Rapid Assessment Report published by the CAAFAG Working Group in 2006, SFCG monthly reports, partner reports, children's program tracker, scripts, monitoring reports and other documents.

Means of Analysis

- In order to be able to identify SFCG's contribution, the team has compared existing log frames and developed an evaluation framework with the indicators. Key questions have been formulated as indicators to verify the information. These indicators have helped to compile data and analyze the information. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data has been used to draw conclusions on the relevance of the project, its impact and outcomes, social transformation and SFCG's contributions

*Source: The majority of this document was taken verbatim from the Evaluation of Search for Common Ground Activities in Nepal in 2008. For the full evaluation o, please refer to:
www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html*