Reintegration of ex-combatants has been a key factor in the ongoing peace process in Nepal. However, efforts to reintegrate two key groups of ex-combatants—Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLR) and Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG)—have met with a number of significant challenges. Search For Common Ground (SFCG) Nepal, with financial support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), successfully developed the “Capacity Building in Youth and Peacebuilding” project to support and enhance existing reintegration programmes carried out by UNICEF and implementing partner organizations (IPs) for both VMLRs and CAAFAGs. This one-year project was a continuation of SFCG’s 2009-2010 “Capacity Building in Youth and Peacebuilding” project, which targeted eight implementing partners of UNICEF. The 2010-2011 project built on both the reflections and lessons learned from the previous year, and scaled up to provide training to 42 UNICEF partner organizations.

The overarching goal of this project was to facilitate social-reintegration of verified minors and late recruits into their community and to enhance their participation in the peace process as agents of change at the local level. To reach this goal, SFCG Nepal established three main objectives, designed to develop the capacity of UNICEF IPs to incorporate youth leadership training and peacebuilding activities throughout their reintegration programmes. These objectives were as follows:

1. To develop resource materials for implementing partners and youth to carry out social reintegration and youth peacebuilding activities.
2. To build the capacity of UNICEF implementing partners to incorporate youth and peacebuilding into their overall programmes; and
3. To support youth groups in carrying out local-level peacebuilding initiatives.

To assess the project’s achievements in light of these objectives, the evaluation and narrative report drew upon quantitative and qualitative data collected through interviews and focus group discussions, surveys, training pre-and-post tests, and evaluator observations. This report summarizes the key findings from the final report and evaluation of the Capacity Building and Youth and Peacebuilding project, conducted by Search for Common Ground Nepal in collaboration with an external consultant.

**SFCG INCREASES SOCIAL COHESION AND FOSTERS PEACEFUL REINTEGRATION OF EX-COMBATANTS**

Through leading youth peacebuilding and leadership trainings, SFCG made significant progress toward its overarching goal: to facilitate social-reintegration of ex-combatants and to enhance their participation in the peace process as agents of change at the local level. These trainings reached a broad base of youth participants, and empowered youth groups to create social change through carrying out local peacebuilding events. The scope of SFCG’s work in this area can be summarized as follows:

Over the course of twelve months-

- 784 CAAFAGs and VMLRs were trained on peacebuilding and leadership.
- 70 youth leaders (including 21 female leaders) from different UNICEF working districts were trained on peacebuilding and leadership.
- 73 youth groups were mobilized in peacebuilding programmes.
- 114 peacebuilding dialogues and events in communities were organized by youth clubs with CAAFAGs and VMLRs.

Such trainings were critical in promoting social cohesion and fostering peaceful reintegration of ex-combatants. Particularly among CAAFAGs and VMLRs, who demonstrated high rates of aggression and hostility before entering the reintegration programmes, peacebuilding and leadership trainings provided participants with valuable skills and opportunities for building positive relationships with the broader community.

Evaluation data confirmed the positive impact of these trainings on participating youth. For example:

- VMLRs interviewed said that the peacebuilding activities were ‘very helpful’ in building their relationship with other youth who participated in the peacebuilding events.
- Youth leaders interviewed by the evaluation team unanimously said that the training was ‘extremely helpful’ in developing leadership skills. Youth leaders note that they have applied these skills in their local communities.
- Pre- and post-test data among youth participants showed dramatic increases in peacebuilding and leadership knowledge. For example:
  - Basic conflict analysis skills increased by 18 percentage points.
  - Understanding of a “common ground approach” to conflict increased by five percent.
  - Knowledge on the fundamental meaning of leadership increased by 18 percentage points.

SFCG STRENGTHENS EX-COMBATANT REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES

While the UNICEF IPs already had programming on child protection, few of them had any experience on programming specifically targeting youth and peacebuilding. During the project period, implementing partners were given tools to incorporate peacebuilding activities throughout their reintegration programmes.

Evaluation data showed that SFCG Nepal not only built the capacity of IPs to train youth on peacebuilding and leadership, but also enabled participants from implementing partner organizations to work with youth more effectively.

- Among surveyed programme managers of IPs, 81 percent found the “Reflection of Youth and Peacebuilding Practice” (RYPP) training to be 'highly relevant' to their work.
- Among surveyed programme managers of IPs, 82 percent found the ‘conducting peacebuilding dialogue’ training to be 'highly relevant' to their work.
- 67 per cent of participants in the RYPP training said they had begun incorporating peacebuilding components into their overall programming.
- 34 per cent of IP participants surveyed said that their ability to work with youth has increased significantly; another 55 per cent of participants said that their ability improved slightly.

SFCG CREATES EFFECTIVE TOOLS FOR PEACEBUILDING AMONG YOUTH

In order to develop sustainable, ongoing peacebuilding programming in Nepal, SFCG developed a number of resource materials on youth and peacebuilding. These materials, which were distributed in
both English and Nepali, proved to be very useful for CAAC Working Group members, UNICEF partner organizations, youth-led organizations and clubs, and other interested parties. These resources included:

- A 5-day course module, titled *Youth Participation in Conflict and Peacebuilding for Peacebuilding Practitioners*, to support IPs in developing comprehensive peacebuilding trainings for youth.
- A guide for facilitators with tools and techniques for conducting peacebuilding dialogues.
- Three youth and peacebuilding videos, covering themes such as youth using sports, folk music (*dohari*) and leadership for peacebuilding. These will be distributed to all partners and utilized in SFCG’s community peacebuilding programmes in 17 districts.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following is a complete list of recommendations for future work:

- Conduct a robust analysis of the conflict context in Nepal. This will help to ensure that future reintegration programming continues to meet the needs of VMLRs.
- Expand peacebuilding training sites to include not only regional centers, but also VMLRs’ communities of origin/relocation. Programmes should be further expanded to include life skills training for participants.
- Develop protocol for improving and streamlining communication among implementing partners and other peacebuilding actors. This will allow decisions to be made more efficiently.
- Continue to support IPs, youth groups and other interested parties in incorporating youth peacebuilding and leadership activities throughout reintegration programmes.

Source: This document is a summary of the final project completion report, “Capacity Building for Youth and Peacebuilding,” by Serena Rix Tripathee, and the Internal Evaluation Report by Tulasi R Nepal and Shiva K Dhungana. A copy of these documents can be acquired by contacting Nick Oatley, Director of Institutional Learning at Search for Common Ground at noatley@sfcg.org

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