This booklet consists of ten stories that reflects the change in knowledge, attitude, behavior, and practice in youth from Sunsari, Morang, Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusa, Mahottari, Sarlahi, and Rautahat on issues related to conflict, violence, and youth – government collaboration. The stories reflects the change in youth who participated in European Union (EU) funded Youth Engage (YE) project, and echoes their commitment to collaborate with local government agencies and like-minded organizations to pedestal and promote youth issues and challenges in local and national decision-making level.

The stories are reflection of the determination and resourcefulness of youth to change their community, and foster a sense of partnership for collaborative solutions to address pressing problems, and curb violence through creative solutions.

We, at Search for Common Ground would like to acknowledge, consortium partner Youth Initiative (YI), All People’s Empowerment Center (APEC), New World (NW), and Association of Youth Organization Nepal (AYON) for their meaningful role in implementing the Youth Engage (YE) project, and for their support in story collection.

For more details about the Youth Engage (YE) project visit: www.sfcg.org/nepal

HAIL THE YOUTH SPIRIT
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**HAIL THE YOUTH SPIRIT**

- Fair play  
- From 'I' To 'We'  
- Leaders Engaging Youth project: Giving wings to leadership dreams  
- Tuned in: Maithali language radio drama, 'Sangor' changes Gunja's life  
- Precious Story of Priceless Life  
- "Civic leadership School (CLS) has taught me the importance of participatory leadership" – Bijay Shah  
- From a violent protester to a non-violent leader: Indra Kumar Jha's story  
- Meet Menuka Das, the first female president of her district  
- CLS training has been a eye opener: A journalist's tale of change  
- A football stars commitment towards the society: Saaj Kumar Aale's story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Of Contents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fair play</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From 'I' To 'We'</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leaders Engaging Youth project: Giving wings to leadership dreams</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tuned in: Maithali language radio drama, 'Sangor' changes Gunja's life</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Precious Story of Priceless Life</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;Civic leadership School (CLS) has taught me the importance of participatory leadership&quot; – Bijay Shah</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From a violent protester to a non-violent leader: Indra Kumar Jha's story</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet Menuka Das, the first female president of her district</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CLS training has been a eye opener: A journalist's tale of change</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A football stars commitment towards the society: Saaj Kumar Aale's story</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the Jail field ground at Inaruwa, Sunsari, spectators watch the football game in excitement. There's tension in the air, as the final football match between the blue and yellow team leads to a penalty shootout. The two sets of players look anxiously at each other. The blue team had already scored four out of five times. Now it was the turn of the yellow team to take the final kick. The fate of the two team depended on one penalty shot!

Player number 1, Kuber Jung Thapa, a youth activist from the yellow team, positions himself. The referee blows the whistle, and Thapa sharply kicks the ball. The crowd erupts in euphoria, as Thapa scores the winning goal. “…. And the winner of Hamro Team Maidanma ("Our team on the pitch") is team yellow,” screams the commentator. Dagal Limbu, a traffic policeman and one of the players of team yellow, rushes to congratulate Thapa.

They hug and celebrate with their other teammates. Thapa and Limbu met three days ago at a football clinic. That was the start of their friendship. “At first, I didn’t talk to Dagar, as he was from the police. I have always feared the police and thought it wise to maintain distance. But when we were divided into groups both of us were placed in the yellow house,” shares Kuber. During the football clinic, both Kuber and Dagal became a part of various indoor and outdoor activities. They, along with their team members, were challenged with games on collaboration, leadership, communication, peace and conflict transformation and trust building. “I noticed that the youth who were part of the football clinic were hesitant to talk to us at first. But later, they slowly started to communicate with us. I made many friends, and one of them is Kuber,” shares the traffic policeman, Dagal, with a smile.

The football clinic—an evidence-based training session—encompasses thematic issues of peace-building, conflict transformation, gender sensitivity and collaboration through various indoor- participatory lectures and outdoor game sessions. The highlight of the training is the football match between the four teams comprising of both youth and police. The clinic—organized by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Nepal with support from UKAID and European Union—aims to bridge differences between the police and the youth, and pave the way for collaboration to uphold security and peace in the society.

Participants are coached by professional football players and are groomed for the final football match. The football match provides a unique opportunity for youth and police to interact and impresses upon them the value of teamwork, fairness, discipline, inclusion, mutual respect, solidarity and peaceful coexistence.
Superintendent of Police, Posh Raj Pokharel, Sunsari, one of the guest speakers, acknowledged that the relation between the police and the youth had been stained because of the recent political unrest in the Tarai region. The football clinic aimed to rebuild their relations.

“The football clinic has helped address differences and promote the human face of the police. The creative use of football promotes peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding,” he said. He stressed that the young people were “police without the blue uniform”, and the police is eager to collaborate with the youth to ensure security and safety in the society. “The police are humans as well, and we have failed to recognize that. They have similar stories of struggle. But peace and stability are our common missions,” shares Mamta Shah, a student. Participants stressed that public perception of the police has been often partial, and there’s a need for platforms to discuss problems, and identify solutions. The participants from the police hinted that the Nepal Police is on the verge of transformation. They informed the youth about various programs such as ‘service with a smile’, ‘police and public hand in hand’, and ‘peace angles’ to address misconceptions, and strengthen police-public relation.

The end of the football match was characterized by smiles, friendship, and trust. The youth and police clicked selfies, exchanged phone numbers and whispered notes of farewell with a gentle reminder that they would meet again. The victorious yellow team reached out to the other teams and started chanting slogans together, “Hamro Team, Ramro Team, Sangai Cha Hamro Jeet, (“Our team, the best team, together we all win”). Assistant Inspector of Police, Tika Devi Shrestha, from the blue team, says that she doesn’t feel bad about her team’s loss, as the three-day football clinic has taught her a valuable lesson. “To celebrate someone else’s victory is not a sign of defeat. It’s a sign of peace and friendship,” she said.
FROM ‘I’ TO ‘WE’:

STORY OF RAGINI JHA, A PARTICIPANT OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP SCHOOL (CLS)

Ragini Jha, 27, looks anxiously at her watch and murmurs to herself. “It’s 12:45 pm they are still not here.” She looks around waiting for the members of the village women’s group network. A group of girls enters the village development committee premises. “Sorry, we are late. We got caught up in household chores,” shares one of the girls. Ragini shakes hand with the girls, and with authority in her voice states, “we need to have a common voice tomorrow at the budget meeting. We need to decide whether we want the budget to be utilized to make gender-friendly toilets for women, or invest it on roads.” All the members of the women’s group network decide to recommend the village development committee members to invest in the local budget in constructing gender-friendly toilets. Ragini takes note, and they all enter the village development committee building.
“Successful local governance is all about proactive citizens,” quotes Ragini, the President of the village women’s group network of Suga village of Mahottari. “I give credit to the Civic Leadership School of Search for Common Ground for making me realize my potential to positively influence local governance,” shares Ragini with a smile. The realization that young people are the building blocks of successful governance started when she participated in the Civic Leadership School (CLS), a capacity building component of the Youth Engage Project of Search for Common Ground Nepal. CLS targeting youth is designed to impart critical information about local governance, by impressing upon them collaborative skills which are required to make governance successful. “At CLS, I learned that the only option to solve pressing problems is dialogue and collaboration,” opines Ragini. This very thought inspired her to be a part of the village women’s group network. She shares that the CLS training was successful in changing her perception towards issues and problems. She initiated weekly discussions in the women’s group network to talk about issues that girls and women had to face in the society. “The participants of the women’s group network used to talk freely about issues like education, health, and society. But there was hesitation talking about local governance. But local governance influences all the issues and problems that we witness in the society today,” shares the young leader.

Ragini was successful in making the members of the women’s group realize that ‘governance’ was not a separate topic, but it’s interlinked with our daily lives and issues. Topics of women empowerment, leadership, discussion on current issues and the role of women, and ideas to strengthen the meaningful participation of women in decision-making dialogues were frequently discussed. The weekly gathering of women and girls in the village development committee was successful, and people started taking notice of the group. “Nowadays, we get an invitation from the village development committee office to attend meetings,” shares Ragini. Today Ragini has become a champion of women empowerment in her village. She perfectly balances her work, as a teacher and responsibility as the president of the village women’s group network. Her future plans are to initiate a village level dialogue program with influential stakeholders to promote the participation of women in decision-making structure, and design activities to involve boys and men to collaborate with them to establish women as major actors of development. She shy’s away from the mention that she is a leader, as she believes that ‘leadership is all about teamwork’ and this thought is what empowers her.
Driven by the thought that the youths of the nation need to positively contribute to the society by becoming leaders, Bijay Kumar Yadav, 28, joined the Madhesh Democratic Party. His quest for leadership was answered when he got a chance to participate in Search for Common Ground’s (SFCG) Leaders Engaging Youth (LEY) training.

Talking about the training Bijay shares, “The training not only gave me an opportunity to understand the beauty of positive leadership but also helped clarify many misconceptions related to conflict and violence.” In the two-days long training, he learnt that ‘conflict and violence’ although sounded similar, were different ideologically as “positive conflict leads to development, whereas, violence leads to destruction.”
The discussion on youth policy orientation session on the working of government as well as the various government facilities provided to the youth was helpful for the LEY participants. This also helped them develop a ‘positive’ and ‘embracing’ attitude towards the state. Sharing his opinion on the session Bijay states, “The session made me realize that young people have become too negative towards the state, and this negativity directs us towards violent behavior.”

After the training, Bijay gathered his party cadres and other locals to discuss the problems faced by the youths. Problems ranging from – caste discrimination, drug and substance abuse, migration were considered major youth problems. All the participants in the discussion agreed that youth problems culminate to violent activities, and this issue should be addressed immediately. “That’s when we decided that we had to do something about it,” shares Bijay with a smile.

He, along with his friends initiated a youth farmer’s group to address the growing problem among the youth in their community, and also involve them in meaningful work. “After being a part of the LEY training I understood that leadership is not a – one-way road – leadership can only strengthen if we involve others. I have been doing my part in making youths in the community realize the beauty of participatory leadership, and have been encouraging them to discuss problems openly, and agreeing on common solutions,” concludes the energetic youth leader.
The members of Saraswati child club look at Gunja Chaudhary in awe, as she walks sporting a smile, her head held high. This 15-year old girl has become a mascot for girl's empowerment in her village. Gunja who is also the President of the Child Club, explains, “The people in our village are very conservative. They tell us that girls need to keep quiet, and if we don’t keep our opinions to ourselves, then we will be unhappy,” she says adding that is why many girls in her village don’t speak up, but she’s not like them.

Hailing from a very conservative society of Siraha where girl’s mobility is almost a taboo, Gunja initially had to face the wrath of her family when she expressed her desire to join the village child club. Her dreams were vetoed by her uncle and her brother, who thought that becoming a part of the child club would not only stain her character but also harm the prestige of their family. “But then Anupama came into my life,” shares Gunja with a smile.

TUNED IN: MAITHALI LANGUAGE
RADIO DRAMA, SANGOR’ CHANGES
GUNJA’S LIFE
Anupama, the protagonist of the popular Maithali radio drama ‘Sangor’ or ‘together for change’ not only reminded Gunja of the hardships that she had had to go through as a girl but also made her realize the power of having a voice. She narrates, “Anupama, the strong headed, vocal character represents all the girls who live a suppressed life. But her determination to live life on her own terms, and the fearless battles that she fought with her family to achieve her dreams has inspired me.”

Motivated by the drama character Anupama, Gunja decided to talk to her uncle and brother once more. This time, she invited her aunt who was a graduate of the child club. It was a herculean task to convince her family members about the benefit of being a child club member, but after constant coaxing, and promises that she wouldn’t stray, they finally agreed. She also introduced the radio series to her family members and it became an instant hit among them. Gunja narrates, “Due to the familiarity of language my family started listening to the radio drama. Like me, my mother and grandmother were also impressed by Anupama. They now tell me that I have to be confident and brave, just like her.”

Gunja also uses the radio drama as an ice-breaking tool in her child club. With reference to the radio drama, the members of the child club discuss various issues that are seldom talked about in public. “We have also started a weekly sexual and reproductive health class for the club members,” the young club president shares with pride. The radio series not only informs its listeners about the various issues in their community through soulful dramas, but also strongly advocates from creative discourse among people to solve problems, and to mitigate any possibility of conflict. In a time when global media is increasingly shaping itself to a more digital structure, the presence of radio as a tool to change people’s life has constantly been debated. However, the success of radio drama like ‘Sangor’ prove the critics wrong, and plinths the fact that radio still has a hold on people’s lives, and can influence behavior, as well as attitudes. The radio drama not only crafts, local issues to realistic story plots, and characters, but it also recognizes the power of the local language as a powerful medium to bring about change “Local language play a vital role in sustaining radio medium. It not only connects them with the listeners but also evokes a sense of belonging inside them. This encourages them to take positive action,” says Maithali language expert, Dr. Rajendra Bimal.

According to him, the use of regional language not only generates high-level of acceptance from the listeners but also empowers people with critically required information without sounding preachy. The radio drama with its realistic plots and characters have created a loyal fan base in the Eastern and Central Tarai region. A recent listenership research conducted by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) indicates that 70 % of radio listeners in both the Eastern and Central Tarai listen to the radio series every week.

The radio drama that started in 2009 recently completed its 200 episodes. It has dealt with various contemporary issues ranging from child marriage, girls’ education, dowry, politics, small armed groups, a constitution and rights, and more. “The drama has become a part of the general life for many,” expresses Anita Tharu, the writer of the radio drama. A lot of research goes into writing a radio drama and the drama writing team employs various participatory tools such as local story clinic sessions to brainstorm on story ideas, use of listener responses received through email, SMS to build stories, interaction with target audience and stakeholders, and feedbacks from thematic experts on drama plots and stories to convey the right message. The participatory approach, which is the heart of the radio program not only helps sustain the radio drama but has also been successful in inspiring locals to champion various social issues through solution oriented dialogues and community programs. The benefits of participatory local language radio dramas not only sustains the radio medium, but also helps change behavior, and cater information to target audiences who do not have the luxury to access other popular media forms.
HAIL THE YOUTH SPIRIT

मैथिली रेडियो नाटक
सड्गेर
शनि दिन साँफ़ ७:०० से ७: ३० बजे
पपुलर एफ.एम. ९९.५, इनसवा, सुनसरी
छिन्नमस्ता एफ.एम. १००.४, राजविराज, सप्तरी
समग्र एफ.एम. १०७, लहान, सिराहा
रेडियो रुद्राक्ष १०२.४, जलेश्वर महोत्तरी
रेडियो धडकन ८९.६, मिर्चिया, सिराहा

शनि दिन साँफ़ ७:३० से ८:०० बजे
रेडियो फिनिन्स १००.८, जनकपुर, धनुषा

शनि दिन साँफ़ ६:२० से ६: ५० बजे
जानकी एफ.एम. १०६, जनकपुर, धनुषा

शनि दिन साँफ़ ६:३० से ७:०० बजे
रौटहट एफ.एम. ९०.८, गीर, रौटहट

शनि दिन साँफ़ ८:३० से ९: ०० बजे
रेडियो मधेस ८९.३, मलंगवा, सलाही

शनि दिन ११:०० से ११: ३० बजे
हेरडाइन्स एण्ड म्युजिक एफ.एम. १००.५, ललितपुर

बुध दिन बेरिया ३:३० से ४:०० बजे
बि.एफ.एम. ९१.२, विराटनगर, मोरड
Six months long Madhesh movement halted life in the Terai region. The Madhesh based political parties voiced their dissatisfaction towards the constitution drafting process and started a protest. These protests were introduced as non-violent, but the rage was such that things turned violent. News of violent clashes dominated the national and local media, and a sense of fear was imprinted in the people. But among the Terai districts that witnessed violence and conflict during the Terai movement, no death or violent activity was accounted for in Sarlahi. The credit for peaceful demonstrations and non-violent protest programs was credited to many youth leaders, including, Digeswhor Nayak, a graduate of Youth Engage project’s ‘Civic Leadership School’.
Nayak shares that the 5 days Civic Leadership School (CLS) honed his leadership skill, and enabled him to articulate and inspire his fellow friends towards non-violent solutions. Nayak reflects upon his journey, and shares, “When I was elected as President of the Party for the district level, I had to face many challenges. The major challenge was to collaborate with various Madhesi parties, and garner consensus to implement development projects in the community. Civic Leadership School (CLS) exposed me to the working of the government, and also contributed in polishing my networking skills. In the CLS, we were informed about VDC budget allocation and important aspects of working with the government. This has further empowered me and widened my leadership horizon.” After participating in CLS, for the first time in the district, Nayak was successful in channeling youth-focused budget from 25 VDCs, amounting to five to eight percent from each VDC, to be spent on youth development. This included distributing various sports equipment to the local youth club, vocational training’s and exposure visits for youth, etc. Recalling his experience during the CLS, Nayak adds, “I hadn’t imagined that I would be able to make a five-year plan for myself. The learning on teamwork, benefits of working with stakeholders and opportunities for youth at the local level have been very useful to me.”

Nayak explains how CLS imprinted the value of non-violence, and positive collaboration in him, “During the Terai uprising, many of my friends wanted to upscale the protest through violent measures. But I disagreed with them. I made them realize that loss of life and property was not an option, and violence was not the solution. Thus, we came up with non-violent activities like a sit-in, dramas, discussions to garner the attention of the government towards the grievances and concern of the people regarding the constitution.”

He believes that leadership can only sustain if it is participatory, and for the best interest of the people, and the country.

"I hadn’t imagined that I would be able to make a five-year plan for myself. The learning on teamwork, benefits of working with stakeholders and opportunities for youth at the local level have been very useful to me."
I am a young politician from Dhanusha. My job involves raising political, economic and cultural issues of my district. These discussions are often solution oriented, and everyone comes to a consensus. From the very beginning, I have been very interested in youth issues, and as a result, have spearheaded many campaigns. These campaigns are solely for the good of the youth – ranging from protesting against the recent petrol price hike, transportation fare to zero-tolerance movement against obstruction of classes in schools and colleges due to the political situation.

“CIVIC LEADERSHIP SCHOOL (CLS) HAS TAUGHT ME THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATORY LEADERSHIP”: BIJAY KUMAR JHA STORY

I am a young politician from Dhanusha. My job involves raising political, economic and cultural issues of my district. These discussions are often solution oriented, and everyone comes to a consensus. From the very beginning, I have been very interested in youth issues, and as a result, have spearheaded many campaigns. These campaigns are solely for the good of the youth – ranging from protesting against the recent petrol price hike, transportation fare to zero-tolerance movement against obstruction of classes in schools and colleges due to the political situation.
I have grown up listening to politicians tell us that, “we are the future of the nation.” But critically reviewing the process, I feel they don’t walk the talk. So, the question that haunts my mind is, “what can youth like us do?”

The answer is simple: “We, the youth need to take the lead, voice our concerns and do what is right in a non-violent manner.”

In my quest to establish youth leadership, I came across Youth Initiative (YI), a youth-led organization that has been working in Nepal for a long time. I got involved in Youth Initiative (YI), and I got an opportunity to attend the 5 days Civic Leadership School (CLS) organized by YI with support from the European Union and Search for Common Ground Nepal.

The Civic Leadership School (CLS) challenged my stand as a youth. Constant questions of youth in the decision-making process, youth as collaborators for the nation’s development were constantly tossed at me. In the CLS, I realized that I have been working alone, and I need to collaborate with like-minded people and organization to solve pressing problems in the society. After attending CLS, I feel empowered. “Leaders look at problems from a positive lens and think of sustainable solutions,” that's what CLS has taught me. Initially, I used to see every event happening in my community from the perspective of impact it would bring, and the benefits I would be able to get; now I see every conflict through a lens of positivity.

I have been working for Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) for last 14 years under the party’s student organization: All Nepal Free Students’ Union (Revolutionary). Having worked for the party in various armed and peaceful movements, I had used the words like armed conflict, violence, and peace for hundreds of thousand times. But, no one had bothered to explain the true meaning of these words to me. I am very grateful to Search for Common Ground Nepal’s Youth Engage project for selecting me for the Civic Leadership School (CLS) program.

CLS has planted the seed of participatory leadership inside me. After the CLS, I was quite clear that leadership is not an individual quest. Therefore, with the support of my fellow politician friends and youth activist, we started an awareness campaign to ensure the holistic participation of people in the constitution drafting process. “CLS has not only enriched my leadership ability but has made me more responsible towards others as well.”

"We, the youth need to take the lead, voice our concerns and do what is right in a non-violent manner"
During his teenage years, Indra Kumar Jha started questioning the social structure. He was tormented by the preconceived notions of people towards the Terai region, and the humiliation that the people of Madhesh were subjected to by the state. “The very thought that you felt like an outsider in your own country haunted me,” states Jha. But after being a part of Youth Engage project’s activity component, ‘Civic Leadership School’ (CLS) he realized that preconceived notion of the people could be removed through consultation, dialogues, and open discussions.
In his quest to defy preconceived notions, and herald an environment of dialogue and respect for social unity, he joined the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum. There he was given the task of mobilizing youth. “I worked with my heart and soul to empower youth, but I realized that the youth was deprived of meaningful participation inside the party.” He later joined another political party, but the grievance of youth being deprived of decision-making power prompted him to exit the party.

“In order to make ends meet, I started teaching. But the hunger to lead, the hunger to join politics couldn’t be extinguished.” Therefore, he joined the ‘Terai Madhesh National Campaign.’

He was later nominated for the Civic Leadership School (CLS) and the five days training changed his perception about leadership and various social issues. “For long I have lamented about the state not giving heed to the problem of the youth. But in the training, I realized that we the youth should not feel powerless, we have the power to make state bodies accountable.” He shares that the CLS training and his interaction with fellow youths imprinted the value of collaboration, cooperation, and respect. Acknowledging his enthusiasm and positive thought towards youth development, and leadership, he also got a chance to participate in two days ‘Leader Engaging Youth’ (LEY) program under the Youth Engagement (YE) project.

Reflecting on the LEY training, he shares, “teamwork is vital for nation’s development. It doesn’t matter if you belong from different geographical areas, or speak a different language. If you have a common goal, and if you respect people for their differences, and seek common solutions then everything is possible. Youth leaders like us need to realize this.”

After the CLS and LEY training, the youth leader spearheaded the formation of ‘Madhesh Adhikar Sangarsha Samiti’. The main objective of this platform was to provide a common avenue for youths to raise their concerns towards various social and political issues. Jha was later appointed as the Chief Advisor. The Samiti has representatives from various political parties, youth clubs, and development organizations. “The power of inclusion needs to be respected, and everyone needs to listen to diverse voices. This is the learning I derived from CLS and LEY training,” shares the young leader.

His leadership ability was tested during the Terai uprising. “The other leaders wanted to initiate violent activities against the state. But I negotiated for peaceful solutions, and convinced the other youth leaders that a spark of violence could destroy peace and jeopardize social harmony.”

“I believe in non-violence and this is my leadership mantra,” shares Jha. According to him, the journey of non-violence is not an easy one. There will be adversarial thoughts, and dominant views. But if leaders listen to all sides, and strongly advocate for non-violent politics then the quest for peace, development, and prosperity will not be a distant dream. For now, Jha, along with like-minded leaders have started a campaign to strengthen social harmony and herald positive discussions around the constitution and its implementation.

“"I worked with my heart and soul to empower youth, but I realized that the youth was deprived of meaningful participation inside the party."
From a very early stage, Menuka Das, 20, wanted to change the pre-conceived notion that the society had towards women leaders. “In a patriarchal society, leaders are often men, and women leaders are limited to public appearances.” With this very thought, she joined politics and later became the first female president of the students’ wing of Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party in Saptari.

The presidency was a huge accomplishment, but Menuka had to go through many hurdles. “I was young, and people took me for granted. I used to feel suffocated when people did not listen to me. I realized that I had to hone my leadership skill, and my dilemma was answered by Civic Leadership School (CLS) and Leaders Engaging Youth (LEY) activity under the Youth Engage (YE) project.”
In the CLS and LEY training, Menuka interacted with youth and local leaders. “All the people that I spoke to agreed that collaboration between various youth clubs and political parties was the answer to many problems in the society. Everyone also agreed that youth should take a positive leadership role.” In the training, Menuka, along with other participants were introduced to participatory tools and method, interaction series on peace, conflict transformation and non-violence, the role of youth in the decision-making process, and principles of collaboration and partnership. “The learning from Youth Engage (YE) training, not only empowered me, but motivated me to network with like-minded people and organization to pedestal youth leadership, and create an environment of mutual respect and political collaboration for problem-solving,” reflects the young leader.

Menuka believes that the CLS and LEY training has given her a new identity. “Before people used to call me ‘Bachcha neta’ (Child politician). But now, I am not affected by such comments. Senior leaders of my party are surprised too. Many tell me that I have become more pro-active, and it’s a good thing.” She also shares a behavior change which she credits to the CLS and LEY training. “I used to freeze with the very thought of facing the public. But after the CLS and LEY training, I have overcome that fear. I write and practice my speech, and till date I have given speech in Rajbiraj, Lahan and Biratnagar. The microphone which was my enemy has become my friend.”

The young leader believes that “politicians are a bridge between the system and the people.” Menuka has used her influence as the student body president to provide scholarships to students with low economic status. During the April earthquake, Menuka, along with the CLS graduates collected relief materials for the most affected districts. “During the April earthquake, the CLS graduates grouped together and collected relief materials. In the CLS and LEY training, we were taught that mutual respect, collaboration, trust, and cooperation were the pillars of peacebuilding, and we the leaders – the graduates of CLS and LEY have internalized this thought,” shares the young leader with a smile.

All the people that I spoke to agreed that collaboration between various youth clubs and political parties was the answer to many problems in the society. Everyone also agreed that youth should take a positive leadership role.”
Naagendra Kumar Karna, 30, is a well-known journalist of Mahottari. People know him, acknowledge his writings, and consider him a voice of change in the society. His passion for ethical journalism is applauded by the intellectual circle, and he is often invited for intellectual discourses around various social issues. But Naagendra’s belief in ethical journalism is a newfound virtue. “Before, I was obsessed with by-lines. The news that I wrote were negative, as I believed that negative news would grab people’s attention. At times, I even reported unverified news stories to garner public attention,” shares the journalist.
His obsession with getting recognized derailed his professionalism. “I was blinded by fame. I didn't even listen to my seniors when they cautioned me about my ethical stand.” Naagendra was nominated for Youth Engage (YE) projects ‘Civic Leadership School’ (CLS). “I thought it was like the other training that I had participated earlier. But the CLS was unlike any other training, it changed my perspective, and triggered me to change my behavior.”

In CLS, he met with youth from different walks of life. There they indulged in discussions revolving around accountability, transparency, and a critical review of skills that could help develop the society, and establish youth as the backbone of development. “It was then that I realized my mistake. As a journalist, people looked up to me, but I was involved in malpractices. I knew that I had to stop,” reveals the seasoned journalist. The CLS challenged the journalist’s mindset and prompted him to think about ‘actions’. Participants stressed that every action had an impact, and one should be mindful that people’s action shouldn’t impact the society in a negative manner. The indoor and outdoor sessions of the CLS provided Naagendra with a fresh perspective.

He started questioning his actions and started interacting with fellow participants on channelizing his skills as a journalist to aware people about youth and their issues. “Drug and substance abuse were highlighted as major youth issue by the participants. I shared my commitment to writing about this issue to draw the attention of the government towards this problem.”

After the CLS, Naagendra in collaboration with the CLS graduates started reporting cases of youth involvement in violence and harmful practices. His in-depth analysis of problems has been helpful for local government bodies to understand the problem of youth in Mahottari. “Earlier, I used to write baseless news. But today, my news stories are evidence-based and are written with a purpose for social change.” His belief in ethical journalism and evident support for youth development has made him a household name. “My negative attitude has been washed way, and I feel responsible towards the society. This new found sense of accountability towards the society and youth is all because of CLS,” shares the journalist who today works for a national gazette.

“I was blinded by fame. I didn’t even listen to my seniors when they cautioned me about my ethical stand.” Naagendra was nominated for Youth Engage (YE) projects ‘Civic Leadership School’ (CLS)
At 40, Saaj Kumar Aale looks fit and healthy. The former football star is the President of Kasturi Club, one of the leading football clubs in Lahan. Rai shares, “People knew me because of football, and that recognition from the society fueled my determination to do something in the field of youth development.” His determination and quest to invest his energy for youth development were answered after he participated in Youth Engage (YE) project’s Civic Leadership School (CLS) and Leaders Engaging Youth (LEY) activity component.

“When I got selected for the CLS and LEY I knew that my dreams of contributing to youth development would materialize.” In the CLS and LEY training, he interacted with youth and leaders from different walks of life. They not only discussed youth participation in local and national level, but debated on the perception of youth, and factors that diluted their image. “For the first time in my life, I came across so many youth problems. With problems also comes solutions. We discussed the importance of collaboration, and everyone agreed that positive discussions and rational thinking were important to address the problems of youth.”
HAIL THE YOUTH SPIRIT
After the CLS and LEY, Rai organized a training on drug abuse for the local youths. “In the training, drug and substance abuse was cited as a major problem in Siraha district. Therefore, I called for support from like-minded organizations, and participants of the CLS and LEY to organize a training to aware youth about the hazards of drug abuse,” states Rai. He shares that the CLS and LEY provided him with a clear direction. Networking with local youth and leaders helped him garner support from the local government offices. The training on drug and substance abuse was later supported by the Lahan Jaycees and Area Police Office (APO). “People who saw me as a football star started praising my social work. Many even came to support us.”

After the devastating April earthquake, Rai gathered his fellow CLS and LEY graduates and discussed on support mechanism to channelize help to the most affected areas. “The support from LEY and CLS graduates was overwhelming. We also got support from local organizations. The Area Police Office (APO) provided us with vehicles to collect relief materials.” Witnessing his dedication and leadership quality, the Lahan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CoCI) selected him as one of the team members to dispatch relief materials to Okhaldhunga. There he not only supported in the distribution of tarpaulin, medicine, and food, but also ran psycho-social camps for the survivors of the earthquake. His heroic work during post-earthquake relief work was praised by the society and was also featured in many mainstream newspapers. With a smile, he concludes, “If not for CLS and LEY, I would have never met like-minded youths. I would have never explored opportunities outside my comfort zone. The lesson of collaboration, partnership, mutual respect and positive dialogue that I learned in CLS and LEY has imprinted a sense of responsibility inside me. I will continue to work for the youth, and let’s hope that one day, we the youth will lead the nation.”