Welcome to the first quarterly bulletin of Search for Common Ground (Search) Nepal. The bulletin enlists, news and information about ongoing projects, and includes best practices, innovative and promising approaches in the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

This edition of the bulletin consists of baseline findings of our school governance project, ‘Hamro Shikshya’ (Our education), and insights of the justice and security status research in Terai. Success stories from project, Pahunch (Access) and Netritwa (Women Leadership) provides testament of innovative people-centric practices which are designed to spark dialogue, discussion, and awareness among target beneficiaries.

We hope that the enlisted content will be effective in honing the readers understanding of our work, and the innovative approaches that we employ in addressing conflict and peacebuilding issues in Nepal.

Do send us your feedback at sfcgnepal@sfcg.org

Search Nepal works with governments (including security and justice actors), civil society, state institutions, youth, media organizations and other stakeholders to promote peace, tolerance, and collaboration across dividing lines. Conflict and differences are inevitable. Violence is not. We work at all levels of society to help build sustainable peace.

Since 2006, our programs in Nepal aim to support the development and long-term peace, focusing on five areas: strengthening governance and democratic participation; promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation; enhancing access to justice and security; supporting the development and economic growth; and developing leadership and a culture of dialogue. Currently, Search Nepal works with 24 NGOs, 13 FM stations, and relevant government line agencies and local government units in 20 districts of the country.

SEARCH IN NEPAL

Search for Common Ground (Search) is an international peacebuilding organization that strives to transform the way the world deals with conflicts, away from adversarial approaches towards collaborative problem-solving. Search is working in 35 countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, South America, Europe and the USA. Search Nepal works with governments (including security and justice actors), civil society, state institutions, youth, media organizations and other stakeholders to promote peace, tolerance, and collaboration across dividing lines. Conflict and differences are inevitable. Violence is not. We work at all levels of society to help build sustainable peace.

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CHANGING LIVES THROUGH THE RADIO WAVES

Gauri (pseudo name), 39, was forced to live in the shadow of violence bestowed upon her by her in-laws. “My in-laws accused me of having an extra marital affair, and constantly abused me,” shared the mother of two. Her in-laws even convinced her husband to divorce her based on speculation.

“I was devastated when my husband, a migrant worker in Malaysia refused to meet me when he came here for his holidays.” She felt suicidal, as she couldn’t bear the tyranny of her in-laws. “Without any notice, I was forced to leave the house,” narrates, Gauri.
But a radio report aired from Radio Chinnamasta of Saptari changed her life. The radio report was on domestic violence and provided information on security and police protection services of Nepal Police.

The message was empowering. That’s when, “I decided to go and seek help from the police.” Gauri reported her case to the police, and her in-laws were summoned to the police station. “In the women cell (of police station)– the police constable spoke to my in-laws, and also educated them about the laws that protected the rights of women. For the first time in my life, I didn’t feel alone. The police were on my side,” shared the plaintiff with a smile. She credits the radio report produced under the UKAID funded project, ‘Pahunch’ (ACCESS), and shares, “the radio show convinced me to take action by filing a case at police station. It empowered me. If I had not listened to that radio report, I would still be trapped in the cycle of violence.”

For the first time in my life, I didn’t feel alone. The police were on my side.

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL GOVERNANCE THROUGH EU FUNDED PROJECT ‘HAMRO SHIKSHYA’

Only 43% surveyed people are aware of the existence of School Management Committees.

Search conducted a baseline survey for its 3-year school governance project, ‘Hamro Shikshya’ (Our Education) funded by the European Union. The baseline survey conducted with 1,110 respondents in the three project districts – Mahottari, Siraha, and Dhanusa reflected lack of knowledge and understanding of school governance among public, school management authorities, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Through head teacher training, social accountability tool development, fact sheets on school governance, Information, Education, and Communications (IEC) materials, and radio programs on school governance and accountability, Search Nepal intends to enhance the knowledge of concerned stakeholders to increase their participation in school governance. The baseline provides evidence that only 43% people surveyed are aware of the existence of School Management Committees (SMCs), and 19% people surveyed understand the working of the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs).

The research also indicates that CSOs are not proactive, and further demonstrates their lack of collaboration, effort, and influence to strengthen school governance. Only 26% of the respondents stated that CSOs have an influential role to collaborate with SMCs and PTAs to ensure the meaningful participation of the public to strengthen internal school governance. The baseline survey report is available at www.sfcg.org/nepal.

Are you Aware of any Legal Provision and Policies on School Governance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siraha</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahottari</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhanusa</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 26% of the respondents stated that CSOs have an influential role to collaborate with SMCs and PTAs to ensure the meaningful participation of the public to strengthen internal school governance.
STATUS OF ACCESS TO SECURITY AND JUSTICE IN TERAI

Search Nepal recently conducted a study to understand status of the access to security and justice services in Terai. The study was conducted in Sunsari, Saptari, Rautahat, Mahottari, Dang, Rupandehi, and Kapilvastu, and included 1,959 respondents. The survey was designed to identify gaps, challenges, and perception of the public towards justice and security services. The results derived from the survey contributed as a course correction indicator for the on-going UKAID funded project, Pahunch (Access).

The research provides evidence that a majority of respondents believe that the police are the gatekeepers of security in their community, and 76% reported to have reached out to the police for support. Knowledge level disparity regarding of the functions of the police was also witnessed. Many respondents stated that they were not clear about the work of the police, and the service being provided. Whereas, only 7% of the respondents were well versed about the work of the police, and could clearly articulate the police help line number ‘100’.

To further reinforce the lack of awareness regarding the role of the police, the survey suggests that 73% respondents believe that the police are the custodians of justice. This further indicates that the Nepal Police should strengthen people-to-people campaign to aware and educate the public about the services being provided. In behest of the alarming rise of domestic violence cases in Terai, the survey also recommends the need for a strategic public reach-out campaign to educate and aware the public, especially the marginalized women about the women cell of Nepal Police, and its domestic violence survivor protection programs.

Secondly, 19% of the respondents shared to have visited the district court to seek legal remedy. The survey suggests an attitude shift of the public towards Community Mediation Centers (CMCs). A majority of respondent states that the CMCs were effective, reliable, trustworthy, and unbiased. 86% respondents stated that their problems were solved after visiting the CMCs, and 73% shared that the CMC process is impartial and unbiased. Download the full report from our website: www.sfcg.org/tag/ nepal-reports/. (Project is being implemented by CSJS, CeLRRd and HUCODAN in 11 Terai districts).

61% people do not report cases of violence
7% respondents stated that they remember the police helpline telephone number
21% visit Community Mediation Centers (CMCs) to solve disputes and grievances

LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO THE HEAD TEACHERS

Head teachers from 42 targeted schools under the ‘Hamro Shikshya’ project were provided with a holistic school leadership-training course to improve their understanding and knowledge of school governance and accountability. The training also focused on their role as member secretary of SMC and academic leaders. National Campaign for Education (NCE) one of the consortium partners of the project delivered a three-day specialized course on May 26 to 27, 2017 in Janakpur.

“The course helped us understand the key functions of being a head teacher, and enabled us to realize our role in strengthening the relationships between an array of stakeholders to strengthen school accountability,” shared, Mahesh Jha Roshan, one of the participants of the training. The participants discussed theories and practices of leadership for social accountability and governance and were also introduced to legal framework and policies of governance. The course also included collaboration and problem-solving skills to enhance citizen and CSOs involvement in school governance. After the training, the participants shared their commitment to employ the social accountability tools in their respective tools, and act like ‘gate-keepers’ to strengthen internal school governance. For more information about the project and its approach visit: www.sfcg.org/nepal

SINGHA DURBAR TV SERIES: FINALIST OF CLASSY AWARDS 2017

Our recent media offering, Singha Durbar - a TV series on good governance and collaborative leadership was nominated as one of the finalists for the Classy Awards 2017 (www.classy.org/collaborative). The Classy Awards acknowledges non-profits and social enterprises that channel innovation in their work for development. Singha Durbar was nominated along with two other Search programs, ‘Communicating for Peace’ from Search – South Sudan, and President – a reality TV show from Palestine. Search is the first organization in the history of Classy Awards to have three finalists.

Singha Durbar TV series has been acknowledged as a meaningful development communications tool to inspire, educate and aware the public on the importance of good governance, and collaborative leadership through real-life characters. The TV series generated a viewership of 4.79 million in a matter of three months. Youth, women clubs, and government officials are using the series as a tool to herald discussions on good governance, women's rights, and leadership. Season two of the TV series is in the making and will focus on governance, election and collaborative federalism. For more information visit: www.sfcg.org/singha-durbar
CELEBRATING SHE-ROES IN POLITICS

Malhari Devi Paswan, 60 from Siraha looks anxiously at the crowd. She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes to recollect herself. The audience greets her with thunderous claps. She acknowledges their greetings and starts her speech on the need for an Open Defecation Free Zone. She confidently puts forward evidence and weaves logic in perfect articulation. “If you have a toilet in your house, it will not only ensure a healthy and happy family, but will also fetch you public trust, confidence, and social prestige.” The public confidence towards Paswan is unprecedented, and there’s no denial of her stature as a leader in Siraha – the eastern region of Nepal where women leadership is often questioned and challenged. “There’s a problem with women being taken seriously as leaders in my community. I need to change that!” explains Paswan. There was a point when she gave up active politics due to political muddling, and allimined role for women in her party. But the realization that women can never be leaders if they bow down to pre-eminence of socially constructed behaviors. This triggered her second inning in politics.

A recent study conducted by Search Nepal provides evidence that women leadership in Terai is still considered a ‘western manifesto’, and that the society still views politics through a masculine lens. The research findings echo the fact that people still believe that “Politics is a man’s world,” while women are stereotyped as weak, emotional, best suited for cultural roles and that they cannot rational decisions to prove their competence. A Key Informant Interview (KII) chapter reveals that ‘women who are active in politics are considered ‘bad women’, and their character is always questioned.’

On the other hand, outspoken and critical women are considered bad influence to the society, but the treatment varies for outspoken and critical men – as these attributes are considered manly, and essentials for leadership. The mobility of women outside their house also poses a challenge, as suggested in an interview, “We need to travel to places to attend meetings, take part in discussions and dialogues, and collaborate with our male counterparts. This is a taboo. Women who speak to men who are not related to them, and travel a lot are considered lewd.” These statements echoes that the society, that harps about textbook equality and empowerment, is still reluctant to accept women leadership.

‘Nepotism’ is also one the reasons for lackluster attitude of women towards joining politics. Many women strongly believe that women in the forefront representing them. And their issues are ‘tokens’ and a result of nepotism – that endorses camp culture, and appointment of leaders who are not competent. A background fact-check of women leaders proves that most of the women leaders are someone’s wives or daughters. But then, what about the women leaders who are not related to political lineage and camps? Development practitioners suggest that these discussions on women’s leadership should not be conducted in a silo effect, and the media should report on women leaders to make their mandate and contribution visible. There’s also a need for Leader-to-Leader mentoring and sharing platforms to discuss challenges, strategies, and way forward. “Collaborative leadership’ should be promoted through knowledge sharing platforms, and system where differences are accepted to create an enabling leadership environment for women. For many women, being a leader is associated with respect and dignity.

Understanding this gap in terms of access, skills and knowledge of collaborative leadership, Search Nepal trained 24 women leaders of Siraha under the project, ‘Netritwa’ funded by National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The women leaders were provided with skills on collaborative leadership, gender-sensitivity, public speaking, and were involved in discussions related to collaborating with male counterparts to herald the dawn of women leadership in the society. “Women leaders should not feel shy to accept their weaknesses and should have the confidence to work on improving their leadership skills. If people are not listening to them, then revisit your approaches, and generate support from like-minded people,” explained Paswan. There’s one distinct goal for Paswan, “I want to contest in the upcoming local election, I want to get a ticket (from my political party) and represent my district at the national level,” added Paswan with unprecedented confidence.