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LEARNING PAPER

A legacy of learning

Lessons from 25 years of
peacebuilding in Nepal

Written by Rabina Shrestha

Acknowledgements

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Rabina Shrestha

Asia Director

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Abstract

This learning and legacy paper reflects on International Alert's 25 years of peacebuilding work in Nepal, documenting key achievements, approaches, partnerships and lessons learned. Since the early 2000s, Alert has worked alongside civil society organisations, government institutions, media, conflict-affected communities, women's groups, and development partners to promote peace, social cohesion, inclusive governance, gender equality, and justice. The paper examines Alert's contributions across major political transitions, including the peace process, constitutional reform, federalisation and transitional justice efforts.

The paper draws on programme experience, institutional learning and reflections from both International Alert Nepal staff and partner organisations. It highlights the importance of locally led, conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches to peacebuilding. It demonstrates how long-term partnerships, community empowerment, policy engagement and adaptive programming have contributed to sustainable change. The paper also captures key lessons and good practices that remain relevant for future peacebuilding and governance initiatives in Nepal and beyond. As International Alert concludes its presence in Nepal, this publication serves both as a record of its legacy and as a resource for practitioners, policymakers and organisations committed to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

List of Abbreviations

AL	Accountability Lab
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DRL	Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FFP	Friends for Peace
FNJ	Federation of Nepali Journalists
FWLD	Forum for Women, Law and Development
IHRICON	Institute of Human Rights, Communication Nepal
LACC	Legal Aid and Consultancy Centre
SASN	Sancharika Samuha Nepal
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Nepal
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WPS	Women Peace and Security

1. Introduction

1.1 Nepal's conflict and political transition

The history of armed conflict in Nepal has shaped the country's political landscape. In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal's (Maoist) leaders met and submitted their 40-point demands to the Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. One of the major points was to overthrow the Nepali monarchy and declare a federal republic. Within two weeks the CPN Maoist took up arms against the government of Nepal, marking the beginning of a violent conflict that continued for a decade.

In 2006, the armed conflict ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the CPN Maoist and the government. The CPA laid the foundations for the peace process and paved the way for a state restructure to address the people's grievances, inequality and injustice and support sustainable peace in Nepal. However, in the decade following the CPA, Nepal went through a tumultuous political transition characterised by unstable political governance, small arms proliferation, rampant protests, and weak safety, security and law and order.

Despite the prolonged period of various social and political contestation, the new constitution was eventually endorsed in 2015, declaring Nepal a federal state. The state's governance structure has since been divided into local, provincial and federal levels. This federal restructuring marked a historic shift aimed at addressing deep-rooted exclusion, marginalisation, social divisions and the legacy of a centralised system of governance. Framed as both a governance reform and a peacebuilding measure, federalism promised to decentralise power, ensure representation of diverse groups and communities, and bring historically marginalised communities including Madhesi, Tharu, Janajati, Dalits, women and youth closer to decision making.¹ Despite significant political shifts, several policy reforms and a restructuring of the governance system, people's hopes for peace, prosperity, access to justice, equality and accountable governance have remained unmet.

Now a decade into Nepal's practice with federalism, these unfulfilled expectations have been compounded by frequent changes in government, weak governance and corruption, all of which largely fuelled the Gen Z protests in September 2025. During the protests, many young people lost their lives. This tragic moment turned into escalating violence, and within 48 hours, the government collapsed and an interim government was formed with a mandate to hold a fresh election.

The election to form a new government was held on 5 March 2026, in which all political parties participated on the basis of their political agendas and with strong enthusiasm. However, the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), a newly emerged political party, won with an overwhelming majority. Balendra Shah, the former Mayor of Kathmandu and a popular figure among young people, became the Prime Minister of Nepal. The election results have once again created high public expectations for the majority government to deliver stability, peace, good governance, and the rule of law.

1.2 Purpose of the paper

After 25 years of operation in Nepal, International Alert is closing its office in the country. It is in this context that it has decided to document its key learnings and operational experiences, reflecting on the peacebuilding approaches and principles it has applied and that have defined its presence and impact over the course of its work. We believe that our grounded experience and knowledge in Nepal can offer important lessons for future interventions, both in Nepal and in similar contexts across the region.

1.3 Methodology

This learning paper is primarily based on internal reflections conducted with current and former members of Alert and its partner organisations. Key programme documents, evaluation reports, publications, and relevant organisational materials have also been reviewed to contextualise and triangulate those reflections. Due to time and accessibility constraints, it was not possible to include reflections from all former staff members, partners, and stakeholders associated with International Alert. Thus, this paper does not fully capture the breadth of Alert's programming, learning and challenges documented over the years.

2. International Alert Nepal

2.1 Nepal's democratic transition before and after the CPA

The armed conflict between the CPN Maoist and the government was at its peak when Alert started its work in early 2000. Many parts of the country were in active conflict, and the security situation was terrible. Alert's early engagement was shaped by a fundamental question: what role should an international peacebuilding organisation play during armed conflict? Maintaining relationships with all sides during a violent conflict raised difficult questions around neutrality, legitimacy and political positioning. Alert continuously grappled with broader dilemmas facing international NGOs in conflict settings: should peacebuilding organisations remain neutral, or should they take explicit positions against war and injustice? How can organisations funded by international donors maintain independent political analysis and credibility? Retrospective reflections suggest that these questions shaped Alert's institutional identity during its formative years in Nepal.²

Alert played a role as a technical resource organisation to support locally led peace initiatives. The primary focus in the early 2000s was to understand the evolving conflict dynamics and share analysis with stakeholders, including donors, civil society, women's and human rights activists, and international actors, to inform their peacebuilding initiatives. Alert had a strong focus on gender equality from the early days. A global campaign '*Women Building Peace: From the village council to the negotiating table*' in the late 1990s brought together women's rights activists from around the world, including from Nepal. The campaign was completed in October 2000 and contributed to international policy efforts promoting women's role in peacebuilding, leading to the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.³ Alert supported women's rights activists and their networks, most notably Shanti Malika, to advocate for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in Nepal. Over the years, this network became a leading platform for advocating women's meaningful participation in the peace process and subsequently contributed to developing the first National Action Plan on Resolution 1325.

Nepal's peace process is often held up as a success story in other parts of the world (rightly so), but looking back, the road has been far from smooth. We once invited Ed Garcia, Filipino human rights activist and one of the authors of the Philippine constitution, to speak to the newly elected parliamentarians following the first post-conflict elections. He spoke of the need for a 'marathon mentality' when it comes to peacebuilding – I didn't realise then how true this would turn out to be: the CPA wasn't a guarantee of long-term peace and stability in Nepal, civil society, politicians and people needed to put in over a decade of work (and will continue to do so) to make peace stick.

– **Rebecca Crozier, Former Country Director International Alert Nepal (2006-2012)**

Alert also facilitated exposure visits and learning opportunities for influential political actors, peace negotiators and human rights activists to engage with peace practitioners from countries such as South Africa and the Philippines. These exchanges provided valuable opportunities to reflect on comparative peace processes, negotiation strategies and conflict resolution experiences. Senior peace facilitators and activists Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Daman Nath Dhungana appreciated Alert's efforts that enabled them to draw lessons from international experiences and adapt them to Nepal's context.⁴

Alert worked closely with local civil society actors to support establishing a resource centre named Friends for Peace (FFP) for information on peace processes around the world in 2006. Alert helped by bringing together and supporting the Friends for Peace board, which included senior human rights activists, academics and key peace negotiators. Some members of the politically diverse board were directly involved in facilitating peace negotiations between the Government of Nepal and the Maoists, contributing their expertise, networks, and credibility to support dialogue and advance the peace process. Alert worked with FFP through the early years of the signing of the CPA and consolidation of the peace process, when international case studies of DDR and SSR processes were seen as important learning for Nepal.⁵

Alert's engagement evolved alongside Nepal's political transition across critical phases of violent conflict, the peace process, political transition, the establishment of federalism, and its ongoing implementation. Its early initiatives enhanced the capacity of human rights defenders and activists to strategically influence and sustain the peace process. A key lesson from this phase was that trust-building with diverse stakeholders is essential and serves as the foundation for effective and sustainable peacebuilding work.

After the CPA, the armed conflict was ended officially. However, unrest in the Terai and intense political debate over federalism highlighted deep divides in the country. Alert shifted its focus to ensure equitable access and meaningful inclusion (particularly based on ethnicity, region, gender and age) after it became clear that historically marginalised groups were not benefiting equally from the peace process. In partnership with local civil society organisations, the private sector, and the media, Alert continued to create spaces for dialogue on key issues such as security and justice sector reform, and to facilitate engagement between groups such as the police and young women and men, especially from ethnic minorities and marginalised communities such as Tharu, Madhesi and Dalit. It also focused on the need for the inclusion of marginalised groups in federal governance and integrated conflict and gender sensitivity approach in all its interventions and its strategy.

2.2 Partnerships for peacebuilding

Over the years, Alert has directly collaborated with more than 100 civil society organisations across thematic areas including women, peace and security, gender equality and inclusion, transitional justice, community security and justice, youth empowerment, climate change, media, governance, and federalism. Alert has worked not only with civil society organisations, but also with the police, the Supreme Court, the National Judicial Academy, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the National Information Commission (NIC), ministries, and more than 100 local municipalities.

One of the strengths of Alert's work in Nepal came from the long term (and often multi-project) form of engagement in key topic areas. By focusing on issues such as institutional media strengthening and gender justice over more than just a short project cycle, Alert was able to showcase three main advantages of this approach: improved results, better partnerships, and stronger in-house capacity and expertise.

This kind of long-term engagement is a model of how peacebuilding should be done, and it is to the detriment of the sector that donor priorities often mean there is limited opportunity for this kind of work.

– Ben Francis, Former Senior Programme Design and Assessment Officer, International Alert

Alert's partnership approach in Nepal centred key values of mutual respect, collaboration and transparency, which enabled us to remain contextually grounded and responsive throughout the country's political transition. Each partner was engaged as a strategic collaborator rather than a mere implementer of a project. Their lived experiences, contextual knowledge and networks directly informed our programme design, implementation and monitoring and learning process. This co-creative approach helped build ownership and trust, fostered mutual accountability, and ensured that interventions reflected both national priorities and local aspirations. Partner capacity building was a core element of sustaining our programmes and their impacts beyond the project cycle. Alert therefore also focused on strengthening partners' institutional capacity to continue peacebuilding and inclusion work beyond projects.

Alert's accompaniment model helped to ensure that each partner and programme was conflict- and gender-sensitive, and strengthened partners' organisational, programme, and management capacity. It also ensured that partners and their teams were able to monitor, evaluate, and document programme learning and challenges using the outcome harvesting approach. Alert has been able to transfer knowledge and skills to local civil society organisations on conflict and gender sensitivity analysis, the use of peacebuilding tools and approaches, outcome harvesting methods, social accountability tools, and collaborative dialogue. Alert has trained 500+ journalists and thousands of local leaders in conflict-sensitive reporting and governance. Our partners and trained participants are now able to apply these skills to different degrees on their own to help sustain peacebuilding initiatives.

Alert has maintained long-term partnerships with many local organisations, including the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), the National Business Initiative (NBI), and the Legal Aid and Consultancy Centre (LACC), to enhance access to security and justice for marginalised communities, promote media independence and inclusive transitional justice, and strengthen gender and social inclusion (GESI). These long-term partnerships have empowered local partners to effectively design and lead programmes while sustaining their impact over time.

International Alert and FWLD have partnered on a range of initiatives focused on peacebuilding, gender equality, democratic reform of the justice and security sectors, addressing gender-based violence (GBV), and enhancing access to justice. Our 15-year partnership demonstrated that effective peacebuilding requires long-term, trust-based collaboration rather than short-term project cycles. Navigating Nepal's transition to federalism, the partnership has used a community-based approach to empower local institutions and citizens to manage conflict, improve access to justice, and ensure sustainable, independent outcomes

– Sabin Shrestha, Executive Director Forum for Women, Law and Development

One of the examples is International Alert's decade-long partnership with the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ). The decade-long partnership helped FNJ to shape its vision and continue its work on journalist safety and security and media independence and accountability. It also enabled them to build strategic collaboration with multiple stakeholders to address the challenges faced by the media and journalists.

The partnership with International Alert to advance peacebuilding, gender equality, and access to justice in Nepal represented a valuable opportunity for LACC. Throughout this collaboration, key contributions included demonstrating mutual respect toward partners, strengthening institutional and strategic capacities, and fostering a culture of deep learning and knowledge sharing. These elements played a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the partnership, making them among the most significant achievements. Alert's conflict sensitivity and the outcome harvesting approach within the programme emerged as a particularly effective result of our collaboration. These approaches enhanced the program's ability to adapt and respond strategically to Nepal's evolving political and social context.

– Anita Thapalia, Executive Director, Legal Aid and Consultancy Center (LACC)

However, some challenges linked to donor funding affected Alert's partnership approach. One example was the 2025 closure of US government-funded projects in the middle of implementation. The unexpected termination created chaos and impacted organisational plans, programmes and partnerships. Alert staff were left unable to explain to partners whether and how their programmes would be sustained, which strained relationships with local communities and organisations. This experience demonstrated the difficulty for international organisations in upholding their local partnership approach when they lack sufficient resources. A more localised plan for financial sustainability could help ensure continuity, local ownership and the ability to sustain activities during funding crises.

2.3 Key peacebuilding programmes in Nepal

Alert's key programmes focused on gender and inclusion, access to justice, governance, media accountability and research. In collaboration with civil society and key stakeholders, Alert worked to strengthen systems and advance policy reforms to ensure that historically marginalised groups could more fully benefit from the dividends of peace. Alert also carried out various research initiatives and produced knowledge products and analytical outputs. A gender-relational approach to peacebuilding is one of Alert's core programming approaches in Nepal. It focuses on understanding how gender roles and relationships shape conflict and peace and ensures that women, men, boys and girls and gender minorities are meaningfully included in peacebuilding processes. During the period of the 10-year armed conflict, women and girls were the most affected and often victimised by the conflicting parties. In the late 1990s, Alert's global campaign "*Women Building Peace: From the Village Council to the Negotiating Table*" brought together women's rights activists from around the world, including Nepal, to advocate for what later became United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security. In Nepal, this engagement by Alert led to further collaboration with local civil society such as '*Shanti Malika*' (Women Network for Peace) to do evidence-based research and advocate for UN resolutions 1325 and 1820. Over time, this network became a leading platform for advocating for women's meaningful participation in the peace process and subsequently contributed to the formation of the Nepali National Action Plan on Resolution 1325.⁶

Alert's Nepal programme continued to build on this legacy of success in supporting the prominence of gender in peacebuilding by advancing the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities within peacebuilding, governance and social inclusion programming. This contributed to a shift in treating LGBTQI+ issues not only as human rights concerns, but instead connecting them with broader questions of conflict, peace, citizenship, governance and social justice by facilitating their integration into the broader WPS agenda. As a result, LGBTQI+ issues were recognised in the second Nepali National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 and also supported the advancement of LGBTQI+ recognition in a partner donor government's NAP. This critical engagement has meant that Alert's contribution has been able to facilitate and strengthen sexual and gender minorities' collaboration with the broader gender and women's rights movement of Nepal. The Nepal programme approach to the women, peace and security agenda also contributed to Alert's global work on addressing patriarchal gender norms and masculinities in conflict settings. Grounded insights from its engagement with women-led civil society raised understanding on how gendered power relations and socio-cultural norms drive exclusion and undermine peacebuilding outcomes.

The Nepal programme has prioritised working on strengthening citizen–state relationships involving women, youth, marginalised communities and conflict victims to build trust in governance systems and processes ensuring their meaningful participation in decision making. Alert facilitated collaborative dialogue on critical issues such as security and justice sector reform, fostering engagement between key groups including police and youth, and promoting the inclusion of marginalised communities in governance and peace processes.

The social accountability approach and tools such as the Community Score Card (CSC) have been integrated into programming to strengthen mutual accountability among community members and security and justice providers in line with local government priorities.⁷ Around 200 police officers and 100 local government officials were trained along with 100 community members in the CSC tool. The CSC tool has been used to create a platform for constructive dialogue and collaboration between communities and the police. The Alert Nepal programme's approach to working with the Nepal Police to institutionalise this approach has helped police officers better understand community needs and expectations, while communities have also gained a clearer understanding of the police's role and challenges. As a result, police have improved their services, and community perceptions of the police have become more positive.

Following the success in Nepal, the CSC tool was also adopted in Alert's Nigeria community police partnership programme. The Nepal and Nigeria teams exchanged lessons learned, promoting organisational learning on social accountability approaches to build collaboration and trust between police and communities in both nations.

Alert's research and analysis have shown that federalism⁸ is not only an administrative restructuring process, but also a peacebuilding process closely linked to inclusion, identity, justice, social justice and the redistribution of power. The recent "Peace Audit" research examined whether federalism has truly expanded representation and ensured more equitable governance particularly for historically marginalised groups. The report highlights key implications for sustaining peace and building a more inclusive state, and recommends strengthening inclusive governance mechanisms, advancing substantive gender representation, combating corruption, supporting provincial autonomy, reforming political party structures and incentives, and integrating conflict sensitivity into policy design.⁹

Alert programmes such as Sundar Shanta Nepal have supported capacity building, created platforms for dialogue, and facilitated engagement with local and provincial governments on policy issues. This

programme contributed to debates on federalism, inclusion, decentralisation, and citizen participation in governance at local and provincial levels. These dialogues took place at a crucial time when local and provincial governments were drafting their first policies.

Transitional justice in Nepal remains one of the unresolved areas of the peace process. Alert has worked with conflict victims and networks such as Conflict Victims Common Platform (CVCP) and Conflict Victims' Women National (CVWN) to support victim-centred dialogue, policy advocacy, research, inclusive consultations, and public debate on local accountability, reconciliation, and long-term peacebuilding. Alert's increased activism at the local level has supported local governments to better understand the needs of conflict victims and implement support measures to address immediate needs of victims. Alert also provided physical and mental health, and psychosocial counselling services to large numbers of victims, survivors and their families. These services have contributed to improvements in the psychosocial, emotional, and mental well-being of conflict victims and survivors. Following counselling, improvements were observed in recipients' relationships, behavioural challenges and psychosomatic pain. As a result of Alert's gender and economic empowerment sessions under the gender transformative and family centred approaches, significant positive changes were observed in the behaviour, attitudes, and social interactions of participating victims and their families. Improved behaviour among the family members and strengthened relationships between spouses and in-laws led to more equitable treatment in daily household affairs. The economic empowerment sessions also led to improvements in their small businesses and savings.

Alert used a gender-sensitive and socially inclusive participatory approach to design and implement dialogue to ensure participation and engagement of diverse stakeholders as often as possible. Alert was one of many national and international human rights organisations, CSOs and victims' groups and networks who carried out a series of one-on-one meetings and dialogues to advocate with the government to amend the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act (TRC Act) and ensure the victim-centred transitional justice process on dealing with the wartime cases and conclude the transitional justice processes. From early 2018 to mid-2024, International Alert organised more than 100 local level, eight provincial level and eight federal level dialogues on the transitional justice process and TRC Act amendment engaging policymakers, government officials, politicians, CSOs, and conflict victims and their networks. The programme has significantly contributed to the *amendment of the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act (TRC Act)*. The newly endorsed TRC amendment Act has included several provisions recommended by the Alert's position paper and dialogues. One particularly significant amendment is the explicit recognition of rape and other severe forms of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as serious human rights violations. This marks an important step towards addressing the long-standing exclusion and invisibility of survivors within Nepal's transitional justice process. The amendment strengthens the legal basis for investigation and accountability, formally acknowledges the harms suffered by survivors, and helps ensure that victims of CRSV are entitled to recognition, justice, and reparative measures. More broadly, the reforms reinforce a victim-centred approach to transitional justice by enhancing opportunities for victims to participate in truth-seeking processes, strengthening access to justice, and promoting greater inclusion of women and marginalised groups. As a result, conflict victims now have stronger legal recognition of their experiences and greater opportunities to seek truth, accountability, and reparations through Nepal's transitional justice mechanisms.

Alert's locally led and victim-centred approaches, particularly in transitional justice work, enhanced legitimacy, relevance, and policy influence in politically sensitive contexts. These approaches often operated beyond formal state mechanisms, focusing instead on the engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs), traditional governance actors, and community-based processes such as healing initiatives, traditional rituals, and informal mediation.

An impact assessment of International Alert's work with local governments to advance transitional justice in Nepal, June 2025

Alert's programming on **media and accountability** in Nepal focused on strengthening free, independent and responsible media as a cornerstone of democratic governance. The programme has supported improved press freedom, journalist safety, and gender equality within the media sector, while addressing emerging challenges in media integrity and accountability. In partnership with the FNJ, Alert established the Free Media Network (FMN) across all seven provinces, creating a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together local governments, security agencies, legal experts, human rights defenders, the private sector, and media professionals to address local accountability and governance challenges.

The programme also advanced gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) within the media sector through policy advocacy and institutional reform. In collaboration with Sancharika Samuha, Alert supported advocacy efforts to promote the adoption of GESI policies by media houses and media institutions. The programme also contributed to the establishment of a GESI Award, recognizing media institutions that demonstrate commitment to inclusive, equitable, and gender-responsive media practices. These initiatives will continue beyond the project partnership.

The Alert Nepal programme has regularly carried out conflict analysis and political economy analysis to understand the changing context and inform its programming, strategy, and partnerships. These analyses provide an evidence base for programming and help partners, donors, and international development actors design conflict- and gender-sensitive interventions. This work has not only strengthened the Nepal programme internally but also influenced policies and programmes in both government and non-government sectors. For example, the political economy analysis that Alert conducted during Nepal's 2021 Household and Population Census contributed to the design, implementation, and dissemination of the census. Similarly, context analysis that Alert conducted on transitional justice and its dissemination has helped advance Nepal's transitional justice process. Overall, this evidence-based approach has supported more informed, responsive, and conflict-sensitive governance and programming in Nepal.

3. Lessons and challenges

Understanding the local context and designing locally owned, conflict-sensitive programmes is critical for sustainable peacebuilding.

Alert's experience in Nepal shows that investing in partnership, building trust and collaboration among diverse socio-political actors and systems bring positive peacebuilding outcomes. Despite frequent government turnover, intense identity politics, and tensions around federal restructuring, Alert contributed to policy and legislative reforms. A key lesson is that effective policy influence depends on connecting local realities with national-level policy discussions. In contested contexts, this requires sustained engagement with diverse stakeholders, patience, and long-term commitment, along with the flexibility to adapt to changing political realities while remaining firmly grounded in local priorities

Working closely with local civil society organisations, community leaders, women's networks, youth groups and marginalised communities has helped ensure stronger contextual relevance, ownership, and credibility. However, engaging with such diverse stakeholders is complex, as each group has different expectations, interests, and levels of trust. Furthermore, the shrinking civic space over the years and post-conflict political sensitivities limited open and consistent engagement. These challenges were coupled with tensions around the political transition, constitution drafting process, elections, and the implementation of federalism, where historically marginalised and excluded minority groups increasingly asserted their rights within these shifting dynamics, contributing to social friction, deepening divisions, and heightened political contestation in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and complex society. A key learning from this experience is that programmes that continuously adapt to changing dynamics and regularly analyse risks are more effective than rigid programming models. As a result, the programme adopted a more flexible, inclusive, and pragmatic approach to participation, continuously adapting engagement strategies to sustain meaningful collaboration as contexts evolved.

Conflict-sensitive approaches help to avoid reinforcing inequalities and enable programmes to respond effectively to emerging tensions. The Nepal programme demonstrated both the value and complexity of embedding conflict sensitivity into practice. While partner organisations sometimes required further support to strengthen structured guidance and shared understanding of conflict-sensitive approaches, Alert's flagship conflict sensitivity approach provided an important foundation for strengthening practice across organisations. Within Alert, conflict sensitivity guidelines were flexible and encouraged country programming to adopt context-relevant approaches to applying it in practice. Taking a contextual approach to different projects created challenges in terms of adaptation and understanding. Over the years of programming, applying conflict sensitivity as a tool provided lessons and highlighted gaps. This reinforced the importance of investing not only in tools and frameworks, but also in the reflective practices among practitioners for ongoing learning. Ultimately, conflict sensitivity proved important to make sure we were identifying the right type of initiative and entry points for navigating tough social and political sensitivities.

Peacebuilding is most effective when interdependent activities are implemented together to create the conditions under which societies recover from conflict and prevent its recurrence.

This includes addressing dialogue, inclusion, governance reform, and socio-economic recovery simultaneously, rather than treating them as separate or sequential tracks. For the Nepal programme this meant focusing on sustained cross-sectoral partnerships and coordinated engagement among a wide range of actors, linking local, national and institutional levels. As Nepal navigated post-

constitutional democratisation alongside an evolving peacebuilding and transitional justice process, the programme intentionally supported the requirements of that broader transition rather than treating peacebuilding as a single-issue activity. It supported the enabling conditions for transitional justice and democratic consolidation, including memory and acknowledgement processes, socio-economic reparations, and restorative justice mechanisms. At the same time, it worked to strengthen more pluralistic and equal participation in public life, including through media, state–society relations, inclusive governance, and institution-building. These mutually reinforcing interventions focused the programme on more effectively supporting relations horizontally between communities and vertically between citizens and the state so that they became more constructive, inclusive and forward-looking as they supported both democratic transformation and social repair.

Sustainable change in peacebuilding happens most successfully when local partners and communities are not treated merely as beneficiaries, but as co-designers and co-leaders of the process. In the Nepal programme, our long-term partnerships were central to this approach and empowered local partners to design and lead programmes effectively while sustaining their impact over time. A key element of strengthening both the quality and effectiveness of partners' peacebuilding work was the emphasis on adaptive learning and reflective practice. The programme used approaches such as outcome harvesting to strengthen internal monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems, which shifted the focus of our partners' capacities away from donor-driven compliance towards a more reflection and learning-oriented model of peacebuilding. These empowerment and partnership-based approaches ultimately contributed to more capable locally led peacebuilding. But it is also important to recognise that sustained efforts in conflict-affected places remain highly dependent on predictable and sustained funding. Reduced funding and cuts to peacebuilding, including those from major donor countries, have affected the sustainability of the Nepal programme and highlight a key tension that has always existed in peacebuilding: investment in peacebuilding, civil society, and social cohesion needs to be long-term and sustained, yet externally funded programming cycles too often remain short-term and fragile. Conflict dynamics are often evolving, requiring sustained engagement and continued partnerships among all those invested in peacebuilding processes. Long-term collaboration strengthens the resilience of civil society actors and enables more adaptive, responsive and effective peacebuilding approaches capable of supporting meaningful and lasting change.

Conclusion

Two decades after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Nepal's peacebuilding journey reflects both significant progress and persistent gaps. With the new Gen Z-led government, the country still needs to strengthen democratic institutions, rebuild public trust, and ensure that the constitutional promises of inclusion, justice, and development are meaningfully realised.

Alert played a significant role to support civil society, government stakeholders and communities to sustain peace in Nepal. Alert's legacy lies in its people, relationships, and programming approach, which have helped strengthen systems and processes that build capacities, create spaces, and foster dialogues for democratic practices and the rule of law. Our partnerships and networks built over the decades are part of Alert's legacy. It is important for Alert to prepare a roster of local organisations, CSOs, women's groups, and youth networks with whom Alert has collaborated and strengthened capacities, and share this roster with like-minded organisations to promote continued engagement and sustainability. Many civil society actors and organisations we have worked with over the years now have the capacity and resources to continue peacebuilding programming, research, dialogue, and advocacy. The research, analysis, knowledge products, and programming tools we have produced over the years will remain valuable resources and will continue to inform future peacebuilding and governance initiatives. They will also continue to have considerable influence within civil society.

Documentation of the knowledge generated through years of engagement in conflict transformation in Nepal can serve as a valuable resource. The lessons learned, evidence generated, tools developed, and methodologies applied will provide important references for civil society organisations, governments, development partners, and peace practitioners in shaping future policies and programmes.

Endnotes

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International Alert works with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. We focus on solving the root causes of conflict with people from across divides. From the grassroots to policy level, we bring people together to build sustainable peace.

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