

## Youth Perspectives on Community Security in the Eastern Terai



**Briefing Paper**  
January 2008



### **About International Alert**

International Alert is an independent peacebuilding organisation that has worked for over 20 years to lay the foundations for lasting peace and security in communities affected by violent conflict. With an office in London and 11 conflict-affected countries/territories, International Alert is one of the world's leading peacebuilding NGOs.

Our regional work is based in the African Great Lakes, West Africa, the South Caucasus, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Colombia. Our thematic projects focus on cross-cutting issues critical to building sustainable peace. These include business and economy, gender, governance, aid, security and justice. International Alert has been working in Nepal for the past five years.

### **About Friends for Peace**

Friends for Peace (FFP) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation dedicated to conflict transformation and peacebuilding in Nepal. FFP was established in May 2004 when a group of human rights activists and peace facilitators identified the need for a resource centre, after the two rounds of failed peace negotiations in 2003. The aim is to provide needs-based and research-oriented knowledge and expertise to all stakeholders engaged in conflict resolution and peacebuilding endeavors. FFP continues to provide this public resource in collaboration with different like-minded national and international organisations.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, Alert and FFP would like to thank the many young people in the eastern Terai who gave their time to the project, whose enthusiasm and energy demonstrate the importance of including Nepal's youth in the peace process. Thanks are also due to the individuals and organisations in each district for their expertise, guidance and support without which the project would not have been possible.

For their direct and committed involvement we thank our Youth Steering Committees, who brought a wealth of local knowledge and expertise to the project. In Morang: Sadhana Adhikari; Manoj Halwai; Pushpa Rai; Hemlata Rai-Mishra; Badhi Narayan Yadav; Birendra K. Yadav and Dharmendra K. Yadav. In Sunsari: Sita Biswakarma; Sanjay K. Choudary; Yubaraj Dhakal; Sanjeeta Ghimire; Thir K.C.; Muna Pokharel and Lakhan Lal Sah.

Thanks are especially due to our two local facilitators, Neeraj K. Mishra (Morang) and Umesh K. Shah (Sunsari) for organising VDC interactions and supporting the project in-district. Their local knowledge and experience was invaluable.

Last but not least we would like to thank our donor, OTI/USAID who provided financial and substantive support to the project, and without whom the project would not have been possible.

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

Young people comprise over 30% of the overall population of Nepal and the decade long conflict has had a profound effect upon their future. However, the generational hierarchy which pervades all sectors of social, economic and political life has resulted in the exclusion of youth voices from key arenas of debate and dialogue. This, in turn, has resulted in a general failure to recognise the particular needs and experiences of different groups of young people during policy making. Now, facing a lack of educational and economic opportunities, many of these young people are disillusioned, frustrated and angry.

A growing minority of young people are now resorting to violent protest because they are unable to get their voices heard in other non-violent arenas. This is particularly true in the Eastern Terai, where the social, political and economic impacts of the emergent conflict have meant that youth have not benefited from the peace dividends that have been enjoyed by other young people in more peaceful regions of the country. This has exacerbated tensions and resulted in yet more anger and frustration. If this segment of the population continues to be denied any ownership of the peace process and barred access to constructive channels through which to get their voices heard, it is unlikely that peace will be sustainable in Nepal. It is critical to work with youth to understand their security needs from a community perspective and to harness their energies for change.

### 2. The Project Process

Between September 2007 and January 2008 International Alert and Friends for Peace conducted a research and dialogue process with affected youth in Sunsari and Morang. The overarching aim of this project is to strengthen youth voices on community security needs and perspectives across different identity lines in the eastern Terai. The aim of this paper is to outline the key community security concerns voiced by young people in Morang and Sunsari districts and reflect these voices up to policy and decision makers at the national level.

### 3. Key Issues identified by youth in the eastern Terai

During this process a number of key issues relating to youth perceptions and concerns about community security were identified. These can be divided into four main categories: increasing criminality; ethnic, political and regional factionalism undermining a common youth identity; lack of access to opportunities and exclusion from decision making processes.

#### 3.1. Increasing criminality

Increasing levels of criminality in the region were identified as a key immediate threat to community security. Youth participants linked increasing criminality in the eastern Terai to a combination of factors:

- The open border between India and Nepal – leaves Nepal vulnerable to smuggling of weapons, drugs and saleable goods and gives a sense of impunity to criminals who can disappear back across the border.
- Increased activity of criminal gangs in the region – exacerbated by increasing difficulties in differentiating between political factions claiming to be fighting for an autonomous/secessionist Madhes state and criminal gangs.
- The impending escalation of violence – it is feared the situation could deteriorate very rapidly and that the riots and violence in Kapilbastu could be repeated. The concern is also that the security forces and district administration would be unable to prevent this.

### 3.2. Ethnic, political and religious factionalism undermine any common youth identity

The increasing division of society and communities along ethnic, religious and political lines was raised as a key concern by youth in both districts. The division of young people along various identity lines was attributed to two key factors:

- Self-interested political manoeuvring – which has led to the use of the ‘ethnic card’ by local politicians and political leaders in order to further their own political gain.
- Lack of education which has left youth in a position to be more easily exploited by groups claiming to represent a particular ethnic minority or identity group and/or offering political or economic protection.

### 3.3. Lack of access to opportunities

A lack of access to opportunities for young people is seen as a fundamental obstacle to peace in the eastern Terai. Particular factors emerging from, and contributing to, the lack of access to opportunities include:

- Nepotism and elite capture of resources – has exacerbated frustration and led to a feeling of powerlessness thereby reducing the incentive for youth to ‘prove themselves’ through study and hard work.
- Lack of access to basic services and natural resources (such as roads, higher education and electricity) – has contributed to the inability of youth to access opportunities, has increased feelings of insecurity in rural areas and, with inadequate irrigation and farming technology, meant few rural youth see a future in farming.
- Unemployment – the ongoing conflict in the Terai has meant the local economy continues to decline and economic opportunities are few and far between. There are high levels of unemployment and many youth see no alternative to going to India or overseas to make a living.

### 3.4. Exclusion from decision-making processes

The exclusionary nature of Nepali society coupled with strongly enforced notions of generational hierarchy, particularly in rural communities, means that young people have little say in community decisions. This exclusion is felt in a number of ways:

- Political party co-option of youth – alignment with political parties is seen by youth as the only way to get their voices heard but they are often recruited with false promises and, instead, used on the front line, for example to enforce *bandhas*.
- Government failure to constructively enlist participation of youth – lack of access to policy making channels has alienated voices from outside Kathmandu from the peace process. Neither local nor national level politicians are seen by youth to address their specific needs and concerns.
- Gender dimensions – exclusion has been felt particularly acutely by young women who struggle to be heard in the patriarchal society that prevails in the Terai. Even where opportunities do exist they remain sidelined and frustrated.

## 4. Youth priority areas for peace

During the course of the project youth in the districts identified several key areas in which **action by the government or international donor community** could bring about considerable positive change. The nature of the areas identified also demonstrates the integral link between development and peacebuilding priorities.

- Tighter border regulation – was seen as a key way of reducing criminality.
- Vocational training – targeted skills training could improve access to employment opportunities.
- Rural reform – could improve access to basic resources, such as water, land and forest, as the lack of access is seen as a barrier to sustainable peace
- Mechanisms to include youth in policy-making – through the establishment of a government mechanism which would focus on including youth voices in policy-making.

There was also recognition that youth could also take positive steps themselves to address these issues. Some potential **action points for youth** identified by participants in Morang and Sunsari districts include:

- Building VDC-level networks between youth groups, student organisations, sports clubs etc;
- Strengthening existing youth networks by building connections between them at the local level to strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising on key issues (e.g. between trafficking networks in relation to problems associated with the open border).
- Mobilising the local media to cover issues of importance to young people (for example by writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper about political party misuse of young people).

### 5. Conclusion

There is a broad consensus amongst youth in Sunsari and Morang about the issues and concerns affecting their community security and, more broadly, sustainable peace. However, there is a limited understanding of, and indeed scope for, how they can take action to improve the situation within the space created by the peace process.

There is a belief amongst the affected youth that there is no way for them to engage constructively in tackling the community security issues that affect them. In this context, it is therefore unsurprising that there is limited constructive youth-based action taking place on this issue in the eastern Terai. However, raised expectations amongst youth about their rights, combined with the feeling of impotence about how to take responsibility for claiming them, is only serving to exacerbate grievance.

This highlights the need for development and government actors to work closely with youth to build their capacity to identify ways in which they can act constructively, both individually and collectively, at local and regional levels, to ensure that their needs are recognised and addressed. The media and national level youth networks can also play an important role in building the confidence of local youth in their ability to constructively address problems.



## 1.0 Introduction

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance in November 2006 put an end, on paper at least, to over a decade of violent conflict in Nepal. Expectations ran high as the days and weeks that followed this milestone saw the country take steady steps into a peace process. An interim government was formed, combatants moved quietly into cantonments and army personnel back into the barracks and a date was scheduled for the election of a Constituent Assembly.

However, despite these achievements, Nepal's nascent peace process has so far failed to overcome a fundamental underlying cause of the conflict – the ingrained culture of exclusivity that characterises every arena of public life in Nepal. Instead, a struggle for political power behind closed doors has marginalised the majority of the population and undermined any role for the wider public in the peace process. Reminiscent of Nepal before and during conflict, key decisions continue to take place in offices in Kathmandu without any clear or sustained attempt to understand the real needs of communities at the district and village level. Exclusionary practices have generated an environment under which long-standing grievances have been allowed to fester, only to emerge in violent forms.

Nowhere is this process more apparent than in the eastern Terai region of Nepal, where security continues to deteriorate as existing fractures between Pahadi and Madeshi communities are exploited and deepened by an alarming cocktail of splinter groups and criminal gangs. The border with India's troubled state of Bihar further exacerbates the problem. The result is a situation of deepening community insecurity, with suspicion and mistrust running high. Furthermore, due to the ethnic, ideological and caste fault lines that rupture many communities in the eastern Terai, it is especially difficult for fluid government structures and civil society groups to generate sustainable community mechanisms that allow for peaceful dialogue and conflict resolution. The eastern Terai is, therefore, a boiling-pot for the re-ignition of Nepal's conflict. If no attempt is made to understand, and then address, the particular and unique dynamics of conflict and community security needs in this region Nepal's entire peace process will be in jeopardy.

The needs of young people in Nepal are of particular concern because they have been on the front line during the conflict and the conflict has had a profound effect upon their future. Youth made up the vast majority of combatants on both sides in Nepal and young people were a common sight on the streets of towns and cities across Nepal during the first and second Jana Andolans. Still more young people are engaged in civil society at both local and national levels, and are actively engaged in political parties. Despite this, and the fact that youth comprise over 30 per cent<sup>1</sup> of the population of Nepal, the generational hierarchy which pervades all sectors of social, economic and political life in Nepal has resulted in the exclusion of youth voices from key arenas of debate and dialogue. This has led to a failure to recognise the particular needs and experiences of different groups of young people during policy-making.

Now facing a lack of educational and economic opportunities these young people are disillusioned, frustrated and angry. As a result the youth of Nepal represent a fertile recruitment ground for new and emerging radicalised groups (for example the Young Communist League and the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha). This is particularly true in the eastern Terai where unrest is currently endemic. Unable to get their voices heard in other non-violent arenas, a growing minority of young people in this region are resorting to violent protest. The social, political and economic impacts of the emergent conflict in the eastern Terai mean that the youth

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Census of 2001 (last figures available), the total population of youths within the 15-29 year old age bracket constitute 25.9%, in the 15 to 34 year old age bracket 31.3 % and in the 15 to 39 year old age bracket 38%. Most independent youth organisations define youths as persons between the ages of 15 to 29 years, the National Census, however, defines youths as persons between the ages of 15 to 39 years.

of this region have been unable to reap any of the peace dividends enjoyed by their counterparts in other, more peaceful, regions of the country, resulting in yet more anger and frustration.

If this segment of the population continues to be denied any ownership of the peace process and barred access to constructive channels through which to get their voices heard, it is unlikely that peace will be sustainable in Nepal. It is critical to work with youth to understand their security needs from a community perspective and to harness their energies for change.

### **Aims of this paper**

This briefing paper is the outcome of a five-month consultative research and dialogue process based on understanding and strengthening youth perceptions on community security in the eastern Terai. The aim of this paper is to outline the key community security concerns voiced by young people in Morang and Sunsari districts<sup>2</sup> and reflect these voices up to policy and decision makers at the national level. In doing so it is hoped that this information will in turn inform and influence relevant national policy as well as donor, (I)NGO and civil society interventions. The paper is also intended to inform debate and consensus-building in a national workshop, being held as part of the third phase on the project, in January 2008

The following section outlines the project process and then section three goes on to describe the key community security needs identified by the project participants. Section four outlines some wider issues and key action points that project participants themselves identified as ways to take responsibility for constructively addressing their own community security needs. It also outlines entry points for policy-makers and the donor community to begin to address the needs of youth related to community security.

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<sup>2</sup> Morang is in the far-eastern development region and shares a border with Bihar, a highly troubled Indian state where Maoist rebels and armed criminal gangs exert considerable influence. Its proximity to the open Nepal-India border has made it vulnerable to cross border illegal activities such as trafficking, smuggling, robbery and kidnap. With a substantial proportion of its population consisting of people of Madhesi origin, Morang now finds itself in the midst of the recent Terai unrest. Research undertaken in this district by FFP and Alert in early 2007 highlighted the vulnerability of youth groups and the need for an understanding of their particular security needs to be taken into account when forming policy to tackle unrest in this region.

Sunsari is also in the far-eastern development region, sharing a border with Bihar. During the conflict Sunsari became a key point for the smuggling of arms from India into Nepal and the movement of both Indian and Nepali Maoists across the border. Sunsari has been chosen for this research as Brahmin/Chhetri, Tharu, Limbu and Muslim communities are present here in equal numbers and, as a result, ethnic tensions fuelled by splinter groups and criminal gangs are running high.



## 2.0 The Project Process

Research and dialogue on community security needs and perceptions has been a key pillar of International Alert and Friend for Peace's (FFP) work in Nepal since the beginning of 2006. This project builds upon initial research undertaken through 2006-2007 in four districts across Nepal, which highlighted the diversity of community security needs and experiences that exist across the country.<sup>3</sup>

The overarching aim of this project is to strengthen youth voices on community security needs and perspectives across different identity lines in the eastern Terai. The project has three phases:

- Phase 1: VDC and district-level interaction processes brought young people together to identify common community security issues.<sup>4</sup> This reflects the project's emphasis on constructive dialogue to deepen understanding and build trust between and among youth groups around the perceived and actual threats to community security in the region.
- Phase 2: A regional workshop brought 55 youth from Morang and Sunsari districts together to share experiences and work together to generate ideas around ways in which young people in the eastern Terai can work to constructively address key threats to their community security.
- Phase 3: A national workshop which aims to:
  - Inform national and international policy makers about aspects of youth community security in the eastern Terai
  - Raise national awareness of the nuanced threats posed to youth community security in the eastern Terai
  - Provide a forum for interaction and discussion between members of the Morang and Sunsari Youth Steering Committees, Kathmandu-based youth groups, and policy-makers, donors and I/NGOs

In addition, a substantial dimension of the project involves engaging with the media through mediums such as FM radio, print and television in order to raise awareness of youth and community security issues in the eastern Terai. Collaborations are planned with Equal Access, the Antennae Foundation and BFM in Biratnagar for coverage and talk shows in January 2008, timed to centre around the national meeting.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Nepal at a Crossroads: The Nexus between Human Security and Renewed Conflict in Rural Nepal*, International Alert and Friends for Peace, 2007 ([www.friendsforpeace.org.np](http://www.friendsforpeace.org.np)) and *Nepal at a Crossroads: Community Security in a Post-Settlement Context: Donor Briefing Paper*, 2007 ([www.international-alert.org/publications/312.php](http://www.international-alert.org/publications/312.php)).

<sup>4</sup> Interaction locations included Satarjhora and Aurabarni VDCs and Inaruwa and Itahari municipalities in Sunsari and Rangeli, Amar Daha and Daieniya VDCs and Biratnagar municipality in Morang

### 3.0 Key issues identified by youth in the eastern Terai

The community security issues that were identified by the affected youth in Sunsari and Morang during the course of the project can be divided into four main categories: increasing criminality; ethnic, political and regional factionalism undermining a common youth identity; lack of access to opportunities and exclusion from decision making processes.

#### 3.1 Increasing criminality

Many of the young people that participated in consultations at both VDC, district and regional level, pointed to increasing levels of criminality in the region as a key immediate threat to their community security. Participants linked increasing criminality in the eastern Terai to a combination of factors:

**The open border:** Both Morang and Sunsari share a considerable stretch of their southern borders with the Indian state of Bihar. Although armed police are in place at posts along the border, this frontier is largely unregulated and citizens of both countries come and go freely.

Key Issues:

- The open border between India and Nepal as a key factor fuelling criminality and on-going conflict in the Terai region. Stretches of unregulated border leave Nepal vulnerable to the smuggling in of weapons, drugs and saleable goods from India.
- The border giving a sense of impunity to many criminals, as they can easily cross the border outside the reach of justice. Young people felt strongly that this sense of impunity had increased cases of abduction, the trafficking of Nepalese women and other such crimes in the region. In particular there were concerns that it has fuelled the rise of Indian criminal gangs taking advantage of the situation of insecurity on the Nepal side of the border.
- The relationship between the lack of community cohesion in border communities and the impunity which the border provides criminals.

**Criminal gangs and the '3 M's' (motorcycles, money and mobile phones):** Many young people expressed concern about the rising levels of insecurity caused by the increased activity of criminal gangs in the region.

Key Issues:

- The difficulty in differentiating between some of the political factions now operating in the Terai who claim to be fighting for an autonomous or secessionist Madhes state and criminal gangs.
- The fact that many of the 'Terai factions' lack a clear political ideology or mandate and appear to be economically motivated, with hired *goondas* being controlled by leaders in India.
- The similarities between the current situation in the Terai with the situation during the ten-year conflict between the Government and the Maoists. Many claimed that while the Maoists were to some extent 'controlled' by their ideology and political mandate, the emerging Terai-based militia factions lacked any such political vision and would "kill without reason".
- According to participants, looting is now a commonplace occurrence in VDCs south of the highway, with motorcycles, money and mobile phones (the '3 M's') being the currency of choice for criminals.
- Young people are reluctant to speak out against the rising crime and violence committed by their peers for fear of becoming a target themselves.

***Impending escalation of violence:*** The current situation in the eastern Terai is seen as teetering on the 'brink of anarchy'.

Key Issues:

- The perception that the situation could very rapidly deteriorate. In particular, recent riots in Kapilbastu district caused many to feel that what happened there could easily be repeated in Morang or Sunsari districts, with respondents in Biratnagar feeling particularly acutely the fear that their city could become a flashpoint for future violence.
- A lack of faith in the ability of the security forces and district administration to be able to prevent the outbreak of such violence, or even to protect life and property if violence did break out.

As evidence of the increasing feeling of lawlessness in the region, participants pointed to the regular *bandhas*, which the district administration has been powerless to stop, no matter how small the group calling the *bandha* is, or how weakly it is enforced. *Bandhas* in this region often need no enforcement, fear keeps most residents inside their houses on *bandha*-days.

### ***3.2 Ethnic, political and religious factionalism undermine any common youth identity***

The increasing division of society and communities along ethnic, religious and political lines was raised as a key concern by youth in both districts. Many pointed out that divisions are also emerging within ethnicities along political lines, for example, those for and against Madhesi autonomy. It was felt that youth themselves are becoming increasingly divided and the resulting lack of a coherent youth voice further weakens the ability of young people to advocate for a change to the current status-quo. Failure of the government to address these issues was believed to be a major cause for an increase of insecurity amongst youth in the region. The division of young people along various identity lines was attributed to two key factors:

#### ***Self-interested political manoeuvring***

Key Issues:

- The self-interest of local politicians and political leaders which has led them to use the 'ethnicity card' to their own political gain, without any consideration of the consequences in terms of the impact upon local communities.
- The fact that political parties and local leaders have not been able to address the needs and rights of ethnic minorities constructively. Instead, it was felt that they this risked exacerbating an already tense security situation in the district by deepening existing ethnic divides as well as forming new ones.

#### ***Lack of education***

Key Issues:

- The lack of education and awareness amongst young people which means that they are easily exploited by groups claiming to represent the rights of a particular ethnic minority or identity group and/or offering political or economic protection.
- Many young people are unable to make informed choices or take constructive steps towards fulfilling their needs and often fall prey to groups offering non-constructive solutions to identified problems.
- A feeling of being trapped between many different conflicting sides and often not knowing which way to turn. This was a particular concern of young people from rural areas.

### **3.3 Lack of access to opportunities**

A lack of access to opportunities amongst young people was cited as a fundamental obstacle to peace in the eastern Terai. Whilst this is not necessarily an immediate threat to community security a lack of constructive opportunities can often lead to problems in the long term and youth engaging in crime or illicit activities. In fact many participants cited examples of childhood friends having joined criminal gangs and extorting money from or otherwise threatening people that they once played with as children. Particular factors emerging from and contributing to the lack of access to opportunities include:

#### ***Nepotism and elite capture***

Key Issues:

- The capture of resources and opportunities by a minority of the population was a major source of frustration for young people in the eastern Terai.
- Where opportunities do exist they are often monopolised by the powerful and well-connected.
- Feelings of powerless and a lack of confidence in the ability to gain access to opportunities such as employment or quality education without money or 'contacts'. The culture of nepotism takes away the incentive for young people to 'prove themselves' through study and hard work.
- Donor and government grants allocated to youth-focused programmes do not reach the youth themselves and are instead grabbed by local political elites.

#### ***Lack of access to basic services and natural resources***

Key Issues:

- Participants from remote VDCs cited a lack of basic government services (such as roads, higher education facilities and electricity) as obstacles to youth access to opportunities and key factors underpinning increased levels of insecurity in rural areas.
- Inadequate irrigation and a lack of modern farming technology and effective extension services means that very few rural youth see any future in farming. Without access to any other form of constructive employment, frustration among rural youth inevitably ensues.
- A lack of access to basic resources such as land, water and jungle (the three Js in Nepali) is seen as a major barrier to basic development, particularly where resources available are controlled by an elite minority.

#### ***Unemployment***

Key Issues:

- Even where educational and other opportunities exist, economic opportunities do not. High levels of unemployment in the region means that many highly qualified graduates and post-graduates remain jobless.
- Frustration that the on-going conflict in the Terai means that economic opportunities continue to decrease as the local economy struggles against continuous *bandhas*, sometimes up to fifteen days in one month.
- A feeling that youth in this region often have no other alternative than to go to India or overseas as wage labourers in order to make a living.
- A need for vocational training programmes in order to fill a gap in skilled labour in the region.

### 3.4 Exclusion from decision-making processes

Youth in the districts associated 'freedom', or lack of it, largely with access to forums through which they could get their voices heard and have a say in decision making processes. The exclusionary nature of Nepali society coupled with strongly enforced notions of generational hierarchy, particularly in rural communities, means that young people have little say in community decisions. This exclusion is felt in a number of ways:

#### **Political party co-option of youth**

Key Issues:

- Youth feel one of the only ways they can voice their concerns and make a change to the current status quo is through aligning themselves with a political party. For rural youth it was felt that affiliation with a political party also provides a feeling of security and respect from peer groups.
- The way in which political parties often use young people. Parties are accused of recruiting youth with promises of employment, security, power and a means through which to get their voices heard. However, the promises made by political parties often fail to materialise. Instead, youth feel that they are used as the 'front line' in politics, to enforce *bandhas*, recruit followers and disrupt the activities of rival political parties. Young people are therefore made more vulnerable as they become a key target in times of unrest.

#### **Government failure to constructively enlist participation of youth**

Key Issues:

- The failure of the government to provide effective and constructive means through which issues pertaining to youth can be addressed.
- A lack of access to policy making channels means that the national level peace process has so far alienated voices of those outside of Kathmandu and in particular the voices of young people. This was an area of particular frustration for young people in the eastern Terai who felt alienated from the national level peace process.
- The government and political parties are seen to have collectively failed to address, or even recognise, the issues that concern young people in Nepal. It was felt that neither the government nor political parties have any comprehensive 'vision' to offer young people.
- Disillusionment in both local and national political leaders, with local leaders disappearing to Kathmandu once elected and national politicians failing to turn words into actions.
- Participants pointed out the need for a government department or even a 'Youth Ministry' dedicated solely to understanding and addressing the common needs and concerns of youth across the country.

#### **Gender dimensions**

Key issues:

- Exclusion from decision-making arenas was felt particularly acutely by female participants. The patriarchal structure which prevails in many Terai communities means that women have little involvement in community decision-making processes. As a result, the particular community security needs of women, and young women in particular, are very rarely heard and even more rarely addressed.
- There are significant class, caste and ethnicity-based differences to gender roles and rights in the eastern Terai. However, even where opportunities exist, women remain sidelined. The belief is that even if a woman is educated, there is still discrimination against her role in decision-making and politics.
- Female participants belonging to the Madhesi community pinpointed marginalisation from decision-making arenas as well as little or no access to public mechanisms for security and justice as particular obstacles to their security. Lack of access to opportunities and power within the household and community was also associated with the entrenched dowry system.



## 4.0 Youth priority areas for peace

During the course of the project youth in the districts identified several key areas in which **action by the government or international donor community** could bring about considerable positive change. This would, in turn, contribute to sustainable peace and, as a result, improved community security. The nature of the areas identified also demonstrates the integral link between development and peacebuilding priorities.

### **Shorter-term:**

- **Tighter border regulation** – Given the perceived impact that the open border has had on increased criminality, impunity and declining community cohesion tightened border controls and regulation were seen as a priority by young people living along the Indian border. It was felt that a holistic approach to this would be most effective, with policy and programmes focused on awareness-raising within border areas as well as strengthening community cohesion in border VDCs.
- **Vocational training** - Concern was expressed about the lack of formal employment opportunities. However, it was widely recognised that there was a lack of skilled labour in the region and that employment opportunities were greater for those with vocational training. Young people felt that both donors and the government could address this gap through providing targeted skills training.

Participants pointed out the importance of a comprehensive analysis of market demand to ensure training for skills that are in need, as well as holistic programmes that include loans for setting up small businesses as well as financial management training. It was emphasised that training programmes should be all inclusive and focus on the economically marginalised regardless of other factors such as caste and gender.

### **Longer-term:**

- **Rural reform** - Youth in rural areas cited a lack of access to basic resources (water, land, forest) as one of the major obstacles to sustainable peace in the rural Terai. Many called for government reform of land distribution, as well as the equitable redistribution of resources.
- **Mechanisms to include youth in policy-making** - the lack of any government mechanism to include youth voices in policy making could potentially be a major obstacle to sustainable peace in Nepal. Participants felt that this problem could be addressed through the establishment of a government mechanism which would work to include youth voices in policy-making from the grassroots level to the national negotiating table. Suggestions included the establishment of a department focused specifically on youth issues, or even a youth ministry.

There was also recognition that **youth could also take positive steps** themselves to address these issues. Some potential action points identified by participants in Morang and Sunsari districts include:

- Building VDC-level networks between youth groups, student organisations, sports clubs (e.g. to write and distribute informative leaflets for local level policy-makers on ‘how to ensure the rights of youth’);
- Strengthening existing youth networks by building connections between them at the local level to strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising on key issues (e.g. between trafficking networks in relation to problems associated with the open border).
- Mobilising the local media to cover issues of importance to young people (e.g. by writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper about political party misuse of young people).

## 5.0 Conclusion

There is a broad consensus amongst youth in Sunsari and Morang about the issues and concerns affecting their community security and, more broadly, sustainable peace. However, there is a limited understanding of, and indeed scope for, how they can take action to improve the situation within the space created by the peace process. There is a belief amongst the affected youth that there is no way for them to engage constructively in tackling the community security issues that affect them. In this context it is therefore unsurprising that there is limited constructive youth-based action taking place on this issue in the eastern Terai. However raised expectations amongst youth about their rights, combined with the feeling of impotence about how to take responsibility for claiming them, is only serving to exacerbate grievance.

This highlights the need for development and government actors to work closely with youth to build their capacity to identify ways in which they can act constructively, both individually and collectively, at local and regional levels, to ensure that their needs are recognised and addressed. The media and national level youth networks can also play an important role in building the confidence of local youth in their ability to constructively address problems.

National and international policy makers also need to seriously take into account the security needs and concerns of youth in the eastern Terai, and in Nepal more generally. If youth continue to feel excluded from the peace process then there is a real danger that they will be further drawn into destabilising activities thereby jeopardising the potential for sustainable peace.

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