

Small Steps, Big Strides

Learning and Experiences from Community-Level
Campaigns on Peace and Human Rights



Human Rights Protection and Legal Service Centre (HRPLSC)

Small Steps, Big Strides

HRPLSC

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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the document with some learning and experiences that our human rights and peace campaign has generated over the years. These are project-generated achievements, but what runs throughout the pages is not the project reporting.

The document records what we think are the lessons that we have learned while travelling the murky road that we have travelled in the most trying times of our history. The travel was our own choice, a choice that we made aware of the difficulties we would encounter, and fully determined to rise to every challenge that would come our way. What gave us the courage to travel? It was fear, the fear of us being doomed to failure as conscientious human persons, and the fear of our hard-won freedom being succumbed to the politics of violence.

What you have picked up is by no means an academic document. It is rather a collection of our own moments of happiness, and small changes that we think we have effected at societal level.

We have tried our best to make the document as short and simple as possible. It is not because we had nothing to say more than what we have said. We had plenty to say. However, aware that you do not have time to read a thicker volume, we have kept it short in the hope that you would read all the pages.

We thank you all – donors, stakeholders, community people and well-wishers – for your support, trust and cooperation, and look forward to your feedback.



Top Bahadur Khadka
Executive Chief
HRPLSC

1. CONTEXT OF OPERATION

The learning and experiences discussed in the document are linked to the human rights and peace promoting projects that HRPLSC implemented in the Rapti zone in the context of the Maoist armed conflict that raged in Nepal between February 1996 and November 2006. During the period, numerous forms of human rights violations occurred: killing, maiming, disappearance, abduction, displacement, destruction of properties, and so on. These pains and difficulties were felt nationwide by people of all walks of life. However, their impact was harsher in the Rapti zone, which was the epicentre of the Maoist conflict. Rukum and Rolpa districts were believed to be the Maoist headquarters from where the 'People's War' was operated.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 21 November 2006 between the Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist (CPN, M) and the government of the day ended the armed conflict. With the CPA the parties to conflict jointly agreed to find a negotiated solution to the issues that triggered the conflict, and promised a number of measures, including investigations into human rights violations of the past and establishment of institutions for state-restructuring and socio-economic transformation. To the victims of the conflict, the CPA promised reparations as well as legal actions against the perpetrators.

Five years have gone since the CPA. However, except the elections to the Constituent Assembly (CA) and

formation of elected governments, nothing has been done to implement the provisions stated in the CPA. Land and properties captured have not been returned to the rightful owners. No investigation has been initiated to establish accountability for the past. Nor has there been any serious effort to strengthen law and order to provide security to the life and property of the people. Police posts destroyed during the conflict have yet to be reconstructed and reinstalled, especially in rural areas. Some police posts that have been reinstalled reportedly lack basic logistics to provide safety and security. The continued absence of local governments has created a huge governance and development vacuum. These deficiencies have impacted harshly on the lives of the people in rural hinterlands of Rapti.

Communities in Rapti zone are equally mired in structural violence. Inhuman and unhealthy practices, such as *chhaupadi*⁷, child marriage, polygamy and caste-based discriminations are rife in communities despite laws criminalising them. Such practices not only deprive certain groups of people, such as women and marginalised communities, of their right to equality in terms of participation in, among others, socio-cultural processes, but also divide a community into victims and perpetrators.

The hill districts of the Rapti Zone – Salyan, Rukum and Rolpa in particular – are one of the most socio-

⁷ *Chhaupadi* is a practice of segregating women from the family during a period. The women so segregated are, mostly placed away from home in a cowshed or a makeshift house, a place, which is mostly unsanitary and even risky in terms of physical security.

economically backward areas of the country. It is these districts that saw the first flare of the Maoist conflict, and, as such, bore the utmost brunt of it. When the insurgency was at its height, Salyan, Rukum and Rolpa were almost devoid of youths, who had either been killed or displaced. Families broke down and disintegrated. The number of widows and orphans alarmingly increased. And the reduction in the adult male population in rural areas adversely affected agricultural production, which solely depended on human labour.

Still worse, five years into the peace process, the political parties that have been part of the CPA have not yet given up the politics of intimidation and threat. In addition to forced donation and threat of physical action, there have been reports of the resumption of the so-called “people’s court” and “people’s government”. The failure of the governments and political parties to check such excesses and reorient their political cadres towards a peaceful way of political processes has made the violation of human rights an everyday currency in rural communities of Rapti Zone even today.

1.1 Constraints and Challenges

Within the broad context reviewed in the preceding section, the human rights and peace campaigns worked around constraints and challenges related to *post-conflict peace-building*. Right from the start, the peace-process became Kathmandu-centric. No serious efforts were made to have it connected to the communities. The

mechanism of Local Peace Committees (LPCs), which could bridge the gap between the local and the national, did not materialise for long. Where the mechanism was materialised, it soon became a platform for politicking as it was heavily influenced by the chequered national process.

Even NGOs and civil society organisations could not maintain the unity of purpose and the spirit of collaboration in their post-conflict engagement. As a result, no required attention was paid to the promotion and protection of human rights of the marginalised communities, especially of conflict affected groups and individuals, and their concerns and expectations could not be linked to the national debate and process on peace and justice.

On this backdrop, the campaigns addressed the following specific constraints and challenges in the way explained.

- ***Continued threat to personal security*** – The threat to personal security, which continues to stand as a major challenge, was addressed through enhanced human rights advocacy that based on trend analysis of violence in areas prone to violence, sensitization of security personnel to the impending threat and preparation of youth clubs and their networks to tackle the threat once detected.
 - ***Lack of unity and organisation of conflict affected people*** – This constraint was addressed by making the conflict affected people aware of the value of them being organised, facilitating them to be
-

organised, educating them about their *rights* and *responsibilities* and mobilising them in claiming and realising these rights through a process of collective intervention.

- ***Socio-cultural discrimination and exclusion facing women*** - This constraint, no less severe than conflict-induced suffering, was addressed through (a) awareness raising of affected women on *rights* and *responsibilities* and capacity building of them so that they would be able to demand and realise their rights, and (b) awareness raising of the entire community against the harms and damages the discriminatory and exclusionary practices would do on women as well as on the society as a whole in the long run.
 - ***Deprivation of services and resources*** – The hills districts of Rolpa, particularly Rukum and Rolpa, constitute one of the most socio-economically backward areas of the country historically. These areas have for long been discriminated in terms of allocation of development budgets and supply of other services. After the start of the Maoist armed conflict, these districts suffered additionally from both sides. As Maoist strongholds, they bore the worst impact of the War, not only in terms of killing and so on, but also in destruction of public infrastructure, such as police posts, Village Development Committee (VDC) offices, electricity towers, communication networks, and even suspension bridges. Considered to be the headquarters of the Maoist War, the State also put
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extra check and watch on these districts, which added to the difficulties in various ways. When the conflict was at its height, during 2004-2005, almost all the five districts of Rapti, and particularly Rukum, Rolpa and Salyan, were almost without youths and adult males. They had either been active in the conflict as such or had already been killed or displaced. The reduction in the adult male population adversely affected agricultural production in rural areas which solely depended on human labour. The after-effects of these destructions were addressed by linking the concerned groups and communities with state service providing agencies and other stakeholders, and building the capacity of the affected to participate in user committees formed to implement community level development projects and manage local resources, such as forest and water.

- ***Lack of justice*** – There has been a huge discrimination in the way relief is provided to conflict victims. The families of the police and Nepal Army killed by the Maoists have got a relief package of NPR 700,000 per family. The Maoist army combatants who were killed during the armed conflict initially got NPR 100,000 as an interim relief, and another NPR 200,000 is in the process of delivery. However, the families of the civilians, having no political connections, have not got any reparation. This lack of justice was addressed through awareness raising and mobilisation of the deprived people leading to their linkage with the

LPCs, the Office of the District Administration and Local Development to claim and realise relief supports and services. To give further back-up to this particular intervention, a series of issue-based awareness raising and advocacy events were organised around the issues of conflict victims, with particular reference to victim women and the displaced.

These awareness and advocacy events contributed to an environment in which the victims and service providing agencies came together to claim and supply supports and services. For example, victim women (widows) were educated about the importance of citizenship certificates, supported to obtain the certificates and were linked to state institutions to apply for, and realise, widowhood allowances, for which citizenship certificate is necessary. This applied to other services as well. HRPLSC massively mobilised its networks and youth groups to disseminate the information at the community level, and link the rights holders to the service providers in the districts.

Issues and Causes of Major Forms of Structural Violence in Rapti	
Issues	Causes
Chhaupadi and other forms of violence against women	Patriarchal worldview
Caste discrimination and related exclusion	Ideology of racial purity embedded in Brahmanism
Poverty	Biased development policy
Child marriage	Ignorance of the harms of child marriage



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2. HRPLSC AS A CHANGE AGENT

Human Rights Protection and Legal Service Centre (HRPLSC) is an NGO registered at the District Administration Office (DAO) in Rukum under the Social Organisations Registration Act, 1978 in 2000. It is also affiliated with the Social Welfare Council (SWC). HRPLSC works in the area of human rights protection and promotion, and peace-building through awareness raising, community capacity building and mobilisation, and advocacy. It envisions a just and equitable society wherein everyone exercises his/her fundamental human rights as a political equal. It fully commits itself to enhancing capacity of local people in order to enable them to take collective actions against human rights violations and injustices; make duty-bearers accountable for their human rights obligations to the people; and, initiate local-level actions towards constructive conflict transformation.

HRPLSC sees *human rights promotion* and *peace building* as complementary projects. Peace is a situation in which there is no human rights violation.

Promotion of human rights requires state institutions and people to work together. And, NGOs like HRPLSC should play a role to work as a bridge between state institutions and people. Once this interaction starts to take place, human rights violations rarely occur, and, if they do, they would be immediately addressed. When human rights violations do not occur or are addressed as they occur, there is less chance of anger and animosity to generate into destructive conflict. So the key to peace

is government institutions being able to respect human rights.

HRPLSC is both Rapti-based and Rapti-focused. It is the only organization to work across the Rapti zone on human rights protection, promotion and conflict transformation issues, and is one of a few organisations having networks and connections with like-minded agencies and institutions. It works closely with the National Human Rights Commission, is a member of the NGO Federation of Nepal and is in the loop of other national human rights NGOs and organisations.

Over the years, HRPLSC has worked with a number of bilateral and multilateral donors to implement various projects and initiatives. With the Community Support Project of DFID, it implemented a project for the improvement of school buildings and rehabilitation of flood victims. It worked with WFP and GTZ to promote food security and rehabilitation in Rukum district. With SPDI/UNDP, it firmed up networking among civil society organisations at the regional level, and its partnership with CCO disseminated the message of Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) of the development agencies. It was the partnership with DanidaHUGOU, Search for Common Ground, the Asia Foundation that enabled HRPLSC to specialise in protection and promotion of human rights and peace, an area that has now become a strategic focus of HRPLSC.

But it has been the ongoing “Building Local Capacity to Promote the Respect for Human Rights” project

being implemented with support from the Rights, Democracy and Inclusion Fund (RDIF)² that has enabled HRPLSC to expand its reach across all the five districts of Rapti and to implement activities that address post-conflict human rights and peace issues and challenges.

2.1 Organisational Values

HRPLSC has developed a few set of values that constitute its organisational culture. These values strictly apply to all settings and circumstances of its work, from its headquarters down to district offices and community-level structures. A breach of these values will be taken as a serious *offence* and *moral erosion*, and will be dealt with as such.

- Respect for diversity as the source of progress
- Promotion of inclusion and equality both in organisational structures and operational mechanisms
- Zero tolerance on discrimination on any ground and in any form
- Zero tolerance on corruption
- Transparency, accountability and political impartiality
- Zero tolerance on polygamy and child labour
- Democratic decision making and implementation

²RDIF is a multi-donor funding mechanism of DFID, Danida HUGOU, SDC, and AusAID.

2.2 Working Strategies and Modalities

2.2.1 Youth Empowerment and Mobilisation

HRPLSC works through, and with, youths organised into youth groups. Its campaigns create a platform for youths to engage in creative activities, develop their change potential and mobilise into action that fights injustice and promotes human rights and peace. HRPLSC empowered youths have been a force for a bottom-up process of change.

2.2.2 Human Rights Monitoring and Dissemination

Human rights monitoring and dissemination is the main thrust of HRPLSC campaign. Human rights monitoring is done regularly through community-based youth clubs and the findings disseminated through print and electronic media, radio in particular. A unique feature inherent in this strategy is that monitoring is done regularly at the lowest level, and the findings disseminated instantly on the radio.

2.2.3 Advocacy and lobbying

HRPLSC organises advocacy and lobbying at all levels, starting right from community up to regional and central levels. Local level advocacy and lobbying build on local issues of common concern, and aim to find solution to the issues concerned locally. Regional and central level lobbying aim to link local issues and experiences to policy debates.

2.2.4 Networking and Alliance Building

Human rights protection, promotion and peace building requires collective and synergistic efforts of a large

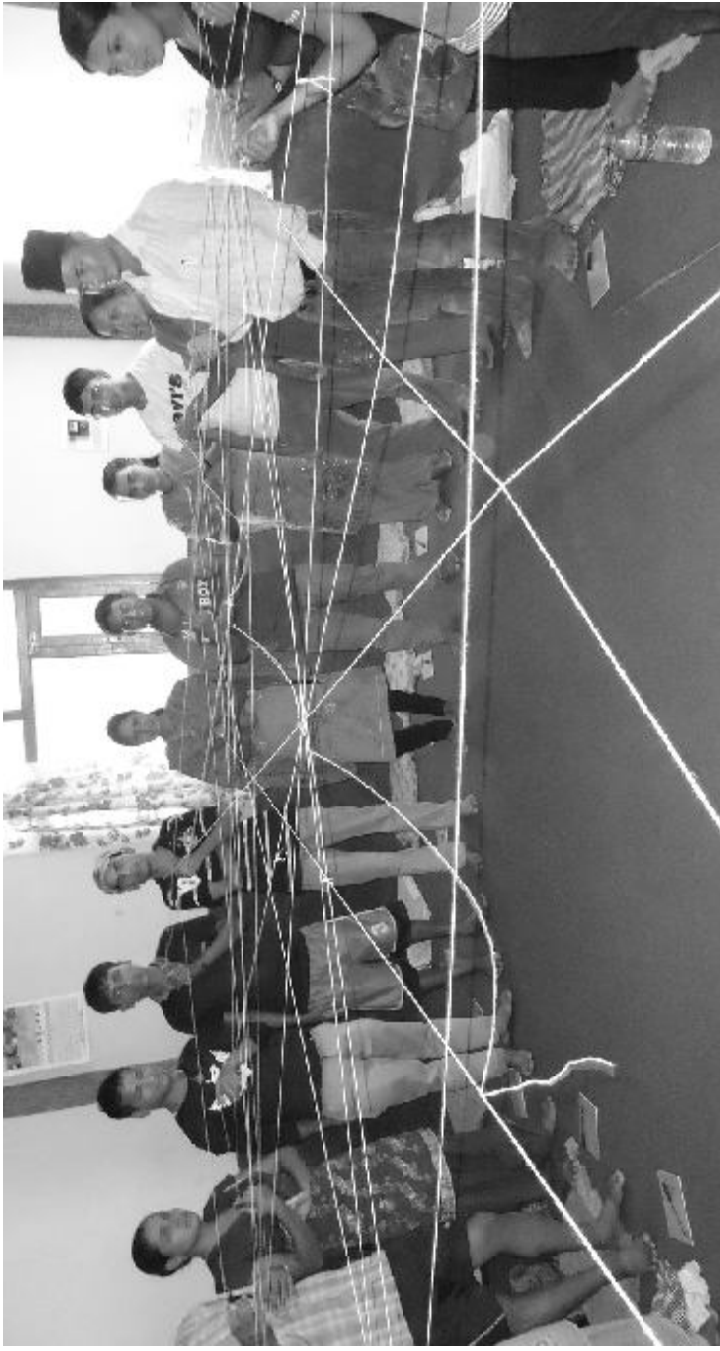
number of organisations and their networks. Mindful of this reality, HRPLSC has adopted the strategy of working closely with other human rights organisations and their networks both at sub-national and national levels. Networking and alliance building aim to share learning and achievements, add value to the work of others and learn from their experiences.

2.2.5 Local Capacity Building

Human rights promotion is as much a national (state-led) process as a local one. Sustainable change, which is the aim of human rights work, is not possible unless local communities are able to critique the prevailing socio-cultural values and worldviews, and are prepared to adapt to universal values inherent in the human rights discourse. To this end, HRPLSC works with communities to make the people aware of the value of human rights and prepare them, through training and education, for the change process.

2.2.6 Bridging People and the State

Human rights promotion and protection requires a live interaction between people and the state. It is a state in which people make 'right' claims that are necessary to live a life with dignity, and the state responds to the claims through 'just' and 'equal' distribution of available resources. To bring these two actors to this mutual interaction, change agents like HRPLSC have a role to work as a bridge between the state and the people. Aware of this imperative, HRPLSC campaigns implement activities that bring people and the state together, and enable them to work together.



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3. MAIN LEARNINGS FROM THE CAMPAIGNS

1. *Information is the key to awareness and awareness is a must to make an informed choice. As long as people are not able to decide for themselves freely, they run the risk of being swayed by imposed decisions.* At the time when violence was projected, and imposed, as a tool of change, HRPLSC initiated its human rights and peace campaign in Rapti. To speak of human rights and peace in such a situation was not only difficult but risky as well. Yet, determined that violence should not be allowed to be a way of life, HRPLSC chose this risky path and raised the banner of human rights and peace.

The campaign began with a radio programme called *Shanti Jagaran* (peace awareness). As the name itself, the aim of the Programme was to communicate widely the message of human rights and peace, make people aware of the importance of respect for human rights and ways to build and maintain peace. The programme also addressed those advocating for a violent means of social change. It informed them of basic norms of war laid out by international humanitarian law, and urged them repeatedly that these norms should be respected in all situations whatsoever. Since the aim of the 'People's War' was, to the proponents of it, to transform society, the transformation process being adopted should be constructive and respectful of other views, the radio programme underlined.

The message was heard and reacted to. One of them

My Journey to Peace

I was in class eight, when I first listened to the peace awareness programme on Radio Surkhet. The programme began with the difficulties triggered by the Maoist armed conflict, and appealed all concerned, the Maoists, security forces and people at large, to refrain from violence as it would violate the basic rights of the people. Already aware of the pain and destruction of the violent conflict in my surroundings, I was moved by the radio programme, particularly by its appeal for peace. In the appeal was a countervailing force. It also had issues that were different from those related to war.



It is the first pro-peace message that I got from the radio that encouraged me to follow the path of activism that I have followed. Using the contact address that followed each broadcast, I came in touch with HRPLSC. Hearing from, among others, Netra KC and Top Bahadur Khadka of peace awareness activities that we could implement in our communities, I decided to give a try to form a youth club and see if anything could be done.

On 27 June 2004, as we were preparing for a cultural event, a few youths, slightly elder than us, approached us and warned against the event. "Singing and dancing will not bring peace," they said to us, "you should each carry a gun and fight for it as we are doing." For an hour or so, we pretended that we were not listening to them. But they mounted pressure and threatened us with harsh consequences, which forced us to cancel the event. This disturbance was regretted on the radio, those involved in the incident were requested to cooperate, and the community people were urged to speak out against such peaceful events.

To our surprise, some 20 days later, I got an anonymous call with a person regretting the disturbance, and encouraging us to go ahead with the event. The caller also promised to support us. Then on, we did not face any disturbance. Our march for peace continued with a large group of people supporting us.

My journey of peace that began from Kailali continues to-date. Handing youth club activities over to the generation next to me, I joined HRPLSC as its full time staff, and now work as both Dalit rights advocate and peace activist. If it were not the radio programme on peace, I would probably be one of those who believed in the gun as the tool of change. I do not dare to imagine what that would bring to my life.

- Dhan Raj BK

Pyuthan (Formerly, a youth club chair and currently a HRPLSC staff)

to be moved by the message was Dhan Raj BK, a grade-eight student from Kailali. Another was Dhan Raj Dahal, a student at Birendra Secondary School, Rukum. On listening to the radio programme, both students initiated a campaign that was against the tide of the time. It was a campaign for peace, which entailed organising fellow colleagues, and engaging them in peace-promoting debates, dialogues and exchanges in the communities they belonged to. They encountered threats for doing so. But the threats did not deter them from engaging in peace-building efforts as the message of peace they got from the radio programme was more powerful and creative.

"The peace awareness programme not only came as an antidote to the suffering of the people of Rukum, it also added a new dimension to the dominant political debate of the day. At a time when violence was eulogized as the only tool of social transformation, the peace programme gave us courage to say 'no' violence."

*Dhanbir Dahal,
Human Rights and Peace Activist, Rukum*

It was the radio message that changed these schoolboys. While many of their fellow colleagues chose the path to carry a gun to transform the society, these two boys did not believe that firing a gun would change things for the better, and pursued a path which was quite different and even dangerous seen in the context of the day.

When the broadcast began, HRPLSC was not sure that the 30-minute radio programme would make the

difference it made. Among others, it produced over 2,000 youths as peace-activists, informed around 50,000 people of the basics of human rights and peace, and prepared them to stand against violence. The programme also added to the efforts made to transform those who believed in violence as the only means of social transformation.

Currently, in the post-conflict context, the radio programme has expanded its focus to also cover issues of transitional justice, reconciliation, state restructuring and socio-economic rights, and has tried to bring together both rights holders, including conflict victims, and service providers through a series of media mobile camps. In an immediate impact, the mobile camp that focused on the 2010 diarrhoea epidemic in Rukum made diarrhoea and such seasonal health hazards an issue of serious public concern across the Rapti Zone. The participants of the camp, particularly the duty bearers and service providers, not only committed to controlling such hazards, but also initiating preventive measures in a coordinated fashion. Subsequently, the commitment was realised by speedily supplying dehydration salts and basic medicines in all the five district headquarters of Rapti and also keeping stand-by a pool of health workers.

2. To build peace, and sustain it, requires investment in local infrastructures for peace. The basic infrastructure is a mass of youths trained in peace advocacy. It is not necessarily the issues of 'incompatibility' or certain roots that trigger a conflict. The primary trigger is, in fact, the availability

of youths to listen uncritically to an emotionally charged leader and follow his orders.

When HRPLSC conceived the idea of peace campaign, it also worked out the strategy to mobilise youths to propagate the campaign. Mobilising youths for peace was necessary for two reasons. The first reason was to stop the youths from joining the conflict or fleeing their villages. “Either militia or Malaysia³” was the slogan forced into the mind of the youths to force them to either join the war or flee the community so that there would be no youths left to oppose the war. Stopping the youths from doing both was not easy and risk-free. It needed a platform that would engage the youths in a third option, one that would hold youths from fleeing as well as from enlisting into the Maoist army. The second reason was to create a force to engage in peace advocacy in communities. This could be a force that would oppose violence and propagate peace while being sympathetic to the issues and concerns raised by the proponents of armed conflict.

Through the peace awareness radio programme, youths were called to join the campaign. They would do so forming into youth clubs, listening to the radio programme and communicating the radio message in schools and communities they come from. They were also encouraged to send the radio team poems, songs and stories on peace, and also reports of peace activities implemented in schools and communities. To encourage the youths, the radio team broadcasted their stories and

³Malaysia was then a popular destination for migrant workers

poems, and appreciated the good work they had done to establish peace in communities. Some of the active youths were also invited for live interviews and discussions. These small incentives made big impacts. Within months after the start of the radio programme, the number of youths organised into clubs increased markedly, not only in the districts of Rapti, but also in adjoining districts, such as Bajura and Kailali.

Now, youth clubs stand as the main vehicle of HRPLSC campaign. They have been an institution in themselves that monitor the human rights situation in communities, mitigate small disputes locally, organise awareness and education events around issues of local concerns, particularly the concerns related to the peace process, and link communities to district service providers. A friend in need of the people during the conflict, the youth clubs have been a voice of them in the peace process after the conflict. In themselves, the youth clubs have been a mechanism for youths to practise democratic decision making and build leadership. The clubs have, above all, been a local infrastructure for peace and justice in Rapti.

As to the inputs, the youth clubs receive training and mentoring support from HRPLSC, including some nominal office operation support, and mobilise other resources locally in order to sustain their mission. In 2011 alone, the clubs mobilised NPR 943,000. Currently, over 140 youth clubs are active in human rights and peace promotion in the communities of Rapti Zone. They have formed a network in each district to

coordinate activities at the district level, and are in a process to establish one at the regional level.

3. Schools are the base that triggers waves of bottom-up change. The small steps that schoolchildren initiate make a big and long-lasting stride. Even those who believe in violence, like the Maoists before 2006, enter schools hoping to win schoolchildren over to their belief. For peace advocates, if justice is what they advocate for, schoolchildren are a group to spend a good amount of time with.

Aware of the impact of the small steps, HRPLSC started educating school children about the basics of human rights and peace, and the small contribution they could make to better the society ruined by the elders. When HRPLSC entered schools with the message of peace, the Maoists were already all around asking schoolchildren to pick a gun and join the war as what they were studying in schools was only the bourgeois education. It was not easy to counteract the Maoist influence on children. HRPLSC had no option but to keep trying.

To do so, HRPLSC first developed a human rights and peace education curriculum to be introduced in targeted schools. Then, it consulted school teachers and members of school management committees, and initiated a weekly one-hour session focusing on issues the schoolchildren were familiar with. These were the

"We are proud of our children. We thank them for stopping the marriage of their minor colleague."

Yubaraj Adhikari,
Teacher, Jana Kalyan School, Dang

issues of *chhaupadi*, caste discrimination, family discrimination between a son and a daughter, and social discrimination between men and women. The children were told that these issues constituted human rights violations, and these were also the problems of peace. To address those issues, it was further added, the society needed to be aware of the value of equal treatment and the results it would produce in the society. It was in these areas that the help of children was sought – to bring the message of equality in the family and society.

The schoolchildren found the programme very attractive and responsive to the issues facing them daily. They started debating on the issues, both in schools and communities, and initiating steps in their communities against cases of violations as they came to know of. In an incident of its kind, children from Jara Kalyan Higher Secondary School at Dudharas in Dang disturbed a marriage ceremony of a minor girl, aged 13, a few months back. When the schoolchildren knew that one of their colleagues was marrying off, they not only intervened into the ceremony but also informed police and asked them to take legal action against the parents and others involved. To Annapurna Shrestha, one of the students involved in the interventions, “child marriage is a crime. If we had not stopped the marriage, her life would have been ruined.” It was not only a life that was saved. With the marriage disturbed, it was also a society that was protected from committing yet another crime.

Human rights and peace education is very popular among students and teachers alike. It is one of the highly

demanding areas of support from HRPLSC. However, within the available strength and capacity of HRPLSC, it has been able to provide support only to five secondary schools of each of the five districts of Rapti zone. The 25 schools have been engaging a total of 2,887 children in debates, discussion and education sessions on human rights, peace and justice issues.

4. Support the communities that are the most marginalised of the marginalised. Enabling a marginalised community to realise freedom and justice brings pride and the sense of justice to an entire society. HRPLSC has drawn this learning from its work with the people from the Badi community of Khalanga, Salyan. The Badi people, who are by some seen as more 'untouchables' among 'the untouchables', have for decades been forced to maintain their families through prostitution. Of late, they seem to abandon the traditional occupation and engage in such jobs as crushing pebbles, cleaning and washing, and security work.

Almost a year ago, HRPLSC organised a media mobile camp focused on the plight of the Badi people. In the camp, HRPLSC engaged the Badi people in a live interaction with district service providers, including Chief District Officer (CDO), police officers and political parties, in the presence of journalists and civil society representatives. The interaction was run live on the radio, which posed an enormous moral pressure on the service providers. As an immediate outcome, the CDO promised that he would help them acquire citizenship cards and the District Development Committee (DDC) promised to provide a support of

NPR 500,000 to help the Badi people to construct an embankment near their community.

"I feel that we will soon be free and secure," said a Badi woman referring to the CDO's commitment to support them with citizenship card. "Once we will get the citizenship card, we will get our identity as a human person like you and others." Sita Nepali, another participant, a Badi woman thanked HRPLSC for helping "us get our right to identity" and committed to "working independently, completely free of dominance and exploitation."

"Now I feel I have become a human being. Earlier, we were like animals, totally ignorant of what we could do other than what we had been doing. With the identity, we also got the support allocated for us."

- Nirmala Badi

"With the embankment that we have constructed with the DDC support of NPR 575,000, we are free from the fear of being flooded away. Thank you HRPLSC."

- Sirjana Nepali

For Sita and other Badi women who attended the interaction, nothing would be more liberating than getting the citizenship card which would give them the identity of a Nepali citizen. Without the citizenship card, they were a stateless people, condemned to live with violence, discrimination and humiliation. After the camp, the Badi people have been highly vocal and demanding. They keep visiting HRPLSC staff and activist for more help and support, which HRPLSC has been responding to as far as it can.

The interaction has been an event that changed both the rights holders and the duty bearers. The rights holders have been able to explore options to claim their rights, and the duty bearers have been prepared to respond to the claims. More than anything else, this event brought identity to those who had for ages been deprived of it.

Another marginalised group of people HRPLSC has worked with is the group of conflict-affected single women, specifically those whose husbands have gone missing or have been killed during the armed conflict. Already victimized and marginalized, these women constitute one of the most vulnerable social groups. Within the overarching organisational strategy of organisation, education and mobilisation, HRPLSC piloted a single women empowerment project in Sankha, Syalapakha and Mahat VDCs of Rukum. The

"I lost my husband, the breadwinner of the family. On losing him, I became helpless and lost sense as to how I would bear the consequences. Things started to change after getting involved in the group of single women. Among others, I got an opportunity to gain skills to make candle. I decided to run my own business, which HRPLSC supported also with raw materials. Then, I started to produce and sell candles earning around NPR 5,000 a month.

I thank HRPLSC for all this."

Kamala Kami,
A single woman from Sankha, Rukum

two-year project organised 695 single women into community-level forums, educated them about their rights, provided counselling and legal aid, and trained them in income generating schemes. All this resulted in

the women being linked to mechanisms providing support and services to them, with 49 of them initiating small income generating enterprises. Building on this project, HRPLSC has, since January 2012, started a three-year project focusing specifically on conflict women. Under this project, HRPLSC will organise conflict affected women, and will mobilise them, after providing necessary training, in specific actions promoting their rights as well as peace and reconciliation in the communities they belong to. No groups will be better suited than these women to work for peace and reconciliation as they are the lot worst-hit by the conflict, and they will be the ones to suffer the worst should conflict recur.

5. Work with both the state and the people. Create a mechanism for people and the state to work together on issues of human rights and peace. Protection and promotion of human rights is a joint endeavour of the people and the state. It is an interaction in which the people ask the state to do things that are necessary for them to live a life with dignity and equality, to which the state replies with policies and resources. It is also an interaction through which the people and the state make priorities in terms of allocation of resources.

Right from the start, HRPLSC has worked both with the people and the state. Its works with people, the rights holders, has focused on making them aware of their fundamental human rights, how those rights can be realised and what they should do as aware citizens to realise the rights. With the state, the focus has been on making concerned institutions aware of their human

rights obligations and how those obligations can best be fulfilled within the scarcely available resources. Between the people and the state, HRPLSC has been a bridge, and will continue to do so. HRPLSC feels the responsibility of a human rights NGO is to create a link between the state and the people, and put them in constant interaction to find a joint solution to their human rights issues and problems.

In recent years, HRPLSC has engaged state institutions, including the army and police, in human rights debates and interactions and participated in their educational processes to facilitate sessions on human rights and peace. In addition, in the last one and a half years, HRPLSC has also been a member of the Local Peace Committee (LPC) in all districts of Rapti. The LPCs are responsible for localising the peace process that has begun since the CPA of November 2006. However, due to inter-party rivalry and mistrust, it took a long time for the parties and state institutions to establish the LPCs. In some cases, in Rukum, for example, HRPLSC had to mediate a conflict between political parties and facilitate the process to set up the LPC.

Now, the LPCs have been active to facilitate the process of relief distribution, return properties, particularly land, seized during the conflict to the rightful owners and contribute to the peace process by linking local to the national and vice versa. Amar Oli, a conflict victim of Rukum, had to wait for the LPC to facilitate a process to receive NPR 100,000 as relief assistance. Through LPC he has also filed an application to get the remaining government-announced relief of NPR 200,000. Amar

Oli had lost his father during the conflict, and was for long an unworthy victim, forgotten both by the state and other concerned. With the relief he has got some hope that conflict victims would not be forgotten and

"HRPLSC facilitated human rights trainings have been useful to our army to be aware of basic human rights issues and values. We wish all the success to HRPLSC and hope to receive additional support in the coming days as well. "

**- Ramchandra Khanal,
Chief, Nepal Army Chaudhary Barrack, Pyuthan**

one day they would even be able to get justice they have been waiting for. Oli is only a representative of the many who have got reliefs through the LPC-initiated process of investigation and recommendation.

In another related intervention, HRPLSC organised a series of dialogues in district of Surkhet, Salyan, Rukum, Rolpa, Jajarkot, Pyuthan and Dailekh between people and CA members in order to bring people's voices to the constitution making process. The dialogues were a venue in which the people expressed their views which they wanted included in the new constitution, and asked the CA members to inform them what they had been doing in relation to constitution making. What was clear in the dialogues was the people were not happy at the delay, and the CA members had no specific reason to justify the delay. As in other events, the message of the

"With the joint initiation of HRPLSC and the Local Peace Committee, the seized land of Hariman Pun and of Swargadwari Temple was returned back to the owners."

**- Krishna Prasad Shrestha,
Coordinator, LPC, Pyuthan**

dialogues was spread on radio in order to communicate the message widely and also to generate pressure on CA members to take initiatives to conclude the constitution making as soon as possible.

As people and state institutions work together, such as in the LPC, and debate on policy issues, such as through dialogues between people and the CA members, they will be able to sort out specific problems, find ways to address them and finally be able to generate means and resources to do so.

6. What a human rights organisation does matters a lot. What matters more is how it does what it does. It is not necessarily an activity that promotes human rights and peace, what does so is how the activity is designed and implemented.

HRPLSC activities reflect the need of society, and are implemented in a way that 'do no harm' to the people involved and the communities targeted. HRPLSC does not implement events that create disconnection amongst people and communities with which, and where, HRPLSC works. It does not mean that HRPLSC is neutral to injustices and violence. To stand firmly against them is an organisational value of HRPLSC, which it promotes tackling violence and discrimination head-on without any 'ifs' and 'buts'. But it does so through a process and in partnership with those directly affected by the vices, aware of possible repercussions and reprisals.

HRPLSC works on the basis of a long-term vision and strategic plan. And the plan is developed through a participatory process involving workshops and interactions with HRPLSC staff and activists, youth

clubs, community people and other stakeholders. On a periodic basis, the usefulness of the plan is reassessed internally through review and reflection sessions, and, externally, through radio mobile camps in which people and stakeholders are invited to comment and critique the programme, and adjustments made as necessary.

Unlike many NGOs in Nepal, which follow a top-down process of action, HRPLSC works on a bottom-up approach with its central Office located in Rukum. Being based close to communities suffering from discriminations and marginalisation has given HRPLSC an advantage to develop programmes that respond to the pressing needs of the community people and make a difference in their lives even with a small support and intervention.

An initiative that responds to the need of the people is owned by the people and is sustained by them. To win people's ownership is not a small achievement. After all, it is the people who give a final judgement as to what works for them and what does not.



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4. A FINAL WORD

At a time when Nepal is struggling to conclude the peace and constitution writing process, nothing would be more relevant than to end the discussion with a call for attention of all the concerned to the logical conclusion of the ongoing peace process, a process whose conclusion has been a 'frantic' wait not only of Ekka Bahadur Oli, a youth activist from Rukum (read his poem in the box), but also of every Nepali. In fact, the future of Nepal and of the Nepalis will depend on how the ongoing process ends. A period of transition is perhaps the most difficult and uncertain of periods a society passes through in its historical development. Nepal is now in such a period. Supporting her to overcome the transition as soon as possible is the first priority Nepal watchers, supporters and sympathisers should make.

Peace and Constitution

Oh peace! Come to us
Sooner than later
With the rays of the dawning sun

Thousands sacrificed their lives
Thousands lost their sons and daughters
To search for you, and to embrace you

Come to us sooner than later
With a new constitution,
And new rays of hope

Take my life if you need
But you must come to the communities
To enlighten the lives remaining
So frantically waiting for you

- Ekka Bahadur Oli, Rukum

As we see from afar, the transition has stuck in Kathmandu, with political parties engaged in tearing each-other. Their self-destroying behaviour has created costs that the people afar are forced to pay. Organisations like HRPLSC are doing all they can to intervene in the ugly scene, but their reach and influence rarely reaches Kathmandu. Here, those having leverage larger than that of HRPLSC and similar organisations has a role to play. Or else, the hope of people, like that of Ekka Bahadur, will be dashed. Dashing a hope is a serious humanrights violation which no sensible person would commit to.

What we have presented is what we think we have gained and experienced over the years. These are the lessons that we have drawn for ourselves. However, if you draw any insights from our experience, we will have an additional reason to be happy.

In the journey, we might have missed as much as we have gained. But we do not think we have time to do the stocktaking of what we have missed, and we do not care about it. As has been said on the opening page, the road we have travelled was our own choice, and we began the travel aware of what it would bring to us.

As part of recollecting what we gained and learned over the years, we asked our colleagues at all levels to reflect on a few questions. They did so and came up with a number of interesting reflections. We present some of them as a final word.

1: What do you think you have learned from HRPLSC over the years, both as HRPLSC staff and activists?

- An organisation with a clear mission to change the lives of the people will reach the destination aimed at no matter how difficult the path would be. The people not only support such mission, they also own it as their own.
- To facilitate a change process in communities requires being aware of the social and cultural values specific to the community, and being prepared to work around those values.
- Positive attitude and determination to succeed are the hallmarks of change, which each change agent should possess.
- Change should begin from the advocates of change themselves. Change is a value to be embraced, and not a slogan to draw others' attention to.
- Human rights work is the work of protecting the lives of people from violence. A human rights activist should explore every opportunity to protect a life.

2: Do you think there is anything that others, including donors, should learn from HRPLSC?

- *Human rights* and *peace* should no more be limited to Kathmandu-centric discourses if they are really meant to trigger a process of transformation. As values and principles, they should enter communities, mingle with community issues and empower community people to think and act differently.
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- Think in a long-term perspective and support a process-oriented strategic vision. A project can make a difference. But a process makes many differences at the same time.
- Do not count on quantity. It is the quality that matters. See if projects or initiatives supported have brought about quality change
- Invest in capacity building of youths. They are the primary infrastructure for development.

3: *What do you think has been your main contribution over the years?*

- We could bring some sense of security and hope to the people who were hopeless in times of armed conflict and even thereafter.
- We could produce at least a few people who are aware of their *rights* and *obligations*, and are prepared to carry the banner of human rights and peace in the communities.
- We gave voice to the voiceless, and courage to those who were condemned to be weak, marginalised and divided.
- We protected a few people from violence, such as child marriage and *chhaupadhi*, and prepared some communities that are tolerant towards inter-caste marriage.
- We linked the most marginalised groups, such as single women and Badi women, with service providing institutions, and facilitated a process through which they have been able to realise services meant for them.
- We have also been able to initiate a process of inclusive democracy.





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The Might of Mice

We have mice all round
In villages and cities
In offices, quarters and headquarters,
Including singh Durbar

Witty rodents,
They speak without a word,
Travel without a wheel,
And enter into every opening available,
Including the minds of experts

Clever and slippery,
They live in depots and godowns,
Sleep on live electric wires,
And wine and dine in the
Constituent Assembly

Mightier than the Almighty,
The mice are an inspiration
Of the 'Nepal Nepal'

Dhanraj B K
HRPLSC Activist

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