Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Children in Nepal

Anjana Shakya
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The Scholar of Peace Fellowships, awarded by WISCOMP for Academic Research, Media Projects and Special Projects, are designed to encourage original and innovative work by practitioners, journalists, scholars, policymakers, NGO workers and other professionals. The series WISCOMP Discussion Papers in conjunction with WISCOMP Perspectives brings the work of some of these scholar-practitioners to a wider readership.

The seventeenth in the series of WISCOMP Discussion Papers, Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Children in Nepal is the outcome of a Special Project Fellowship awarded to Anjana Shakya to narrate the stories of women and children who have been first-hand victims of the violence as a result of the armed conflict in Nepal.

The objectives of this study were to identify the root causes of the armed conflict through the lenses of structural violence and human rights and human needs, to assess the overall impact of the armed conflict on women and children, to audit the ongoing peace interventions by varied stakeholders and their impact on women and children, and to provide recommendations for conflict transformation in Nepal. Since primary research for this project was carried out over a period of two years (2004-2006), the study does not take into consideration the impact of recent political developments on the status of women and children in Nepal. The analyses and conclusions of this study are therefore based on data collected till 2006.

Anjana Shakya traces the nexus between Nepal’s armed conflict and the violence women and children experience as a result by first outlining how and why the context of violence becomes central to the lives of victims. The effects of the armed conflict on the Nepalese economy and on Nepalese society are summarized to show how the poor and weaker sections of society are the worst sufferers of violence.

The lenses of structural violence and human rights violations are used as a prism to view the overall impact of the armed conflict on women and children with particular reference to their psychological, social and economic status. Shakya discusses the effects of the violence in two ways. First, she focuses on women and children as being specific
targets of gender-based violence and conflict recruiting respectively. It is found through her intensive research that women suffer from sexual harassment at the hands of both parties – the Maoists as well as the security forces. She also talks about the forceful recruitment of children as child soldiers by both parties to the conflict and the cataclysmic effect this has on their future, and indeed that of Nepali society.

Second, the author details the breakdown of governance in the state of Nepal and how that has mainly affected women and children. For that, she traces the transfer of political power and the outcomes of failed political processes as entailing arduous consequences for women and children. As citizens, the failure of governance to reach the populations, especially in the rural areas, has led to drastically deteriorated law and order situations in Nepal. In the rural areas, displacement has occurred across the board, with people fleeing their homes, belongings and livelihoods. Forced migration creates its own set of problems and stories from Makwanpur, Rautahut and other districts of Nepal are documented to show the psychological, physical and emotional trauma that these victims have endured.

Examining a broader framework, Shakya also refers to the tourism industry as a pointer of how international attention has arrived in Nepal in a counter-productive sense. Plagued by a slowdown in industrial activity owing to frequent bandhs and urban mayhem instigated by the conflict, Nepal has become less attractive as an investment destination. This adversely affects the economy, thus directly feeding into the woes of the working classes. Furthermore, often the male head of the family dies, is disabled or flees due to his participation in the conflict and the women and children are forced to fend for themselves and must deal with economic hardship coupled with social humiliation. The centrality of economic hardship as a cause and an effect of the ongoing social struggle becomes evident through the primary research that takes Shakya and her team to various parts of Nepal.

The Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Children in Nepal also includes a section on the participation of stakeholders in aiding post-conflict reconstruction and development. The monograph demonstrates how most advocacy and developmental activity has been undertaken without a proper assessment of the requirements of Nepali society. Through her research, Shakya builds a narrative for the least advantaged sections of contemporary Nepali society so that their concerns are
institutionalized into programs relating to conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Specific recommendations have been added, making the research policy relevant. This study has also provided material, which has been helpful for lobbying for issues concerning women, children and the armed conflict in Nepal at the 49th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Session (2005). Most of all, the research becomes imperative contextual reading in demystifying the linkages between structural violence, political instability, the armed conflict and their impact on Nepali society.

The WISCOMP Research Team
Acknowledgements

This research focuses on the stories of women and children from Makwanpur, Rautahut and other districts of Nepal who have experienced deep-rooted trauma in their lives. Without their willingness to share their heartfelt stories with our team, this research would not have been possible. I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to all the respondents who agreed to share their experiences during the field research. I am also highly indebted to my research team and to HimRights, Central Office and Field Offices, for their kind cooperation throughout the research phase.

I am thankful to WISCOMP for giving me the opportunity to conduct this research, which meets both my personal interest and my professional need. I hope to continue my research and programs as a follow-up. This research has also provided material, which has been helpful for lobbying for issues concerning women, children and armed conflict in Nepal at the 49th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Session (2005). The direct impact of this study is visible on the recent United Nations decisions on Agenda 19 as well as on teams monitoring Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Hopefully, the refugee status of Nepalis in India will also receive equal attention.

Anjana Shakya
Section 1

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

1.1 Country Background

Nepal is a land-locked country nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas. It shares its northern border with the Tibetan region in the People’s Republic of China, and its eastern, southern and western borders with India. The total area of the country is 147,181 square kilometers and its population, according to the World Bank, is 24.2 million with a GNI per capita of $240 per year\(^1\). Nepal is predominantly rural with only 14.2 percent of the population living in urban areas. Economic growth in recent years has not been adequate to bring about a significant reduction in poverty and 42 percent of the population still languishes below the poverty line.

Topographically, Nepal is divided into three distinct ecological regions – the mountains, the hills, and the Terai (or plains). For administrative purposes, Nepal has been divided into 5 development regions, 14 zones, and 75 districts. The districts are further divided into either Village Development Committees (VDCs) or into Urban Municipalities. A VDC consists of nine wards while the number of wards in an urban municipality depends on the size of the population as well as on political decisions made by the municipality itself.

Following the victory of the people’s movement against monarchy in April 2006, Nepal was declared a secular nation. More than 86 percent of its population follows the Hindu religion. The Buddhists are the second largest religious group at 11 percent, and Muslims constitute about 4 percent of the total population. Nepal is also a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. According to Krishna Bhattachan, there are 61 indigenous groups that have been officially recorded, mainly of the Tibeto-Burman stock, from the total population. The percentage breakdown of some of these major groups is: Chhetri and Thakuri (15.80 percent), Brahmins (12.74 percent), Magar (7.14 percent), Tharu and Rajbanshi (6.75 percent), Tamang (5.64 percent), Newar (5.48 percent) and Muslims (4.27 percent).

Krishna Bhattachan’s “Peace and Good Governance in Nepal: The Socio-Cultural Context” also lists 125 different languages and dialects prevalent in Nepal. Nepali is the official language of the country and is the mother tongue of over 50 percent of the population. The other two major languages are Maithali and Bhojpuri, spoken by about 12 percent and 8 percent of the population respectively.

Nepal, with its geopolitical location and unique political development, has more than two centuries of nation-state history and has undergone several types of political systems, such as the direct rule of the monarchy, the rule of the Rana family for over a hundred years (1847-1950), a decade of democratic system (1950-1960), thirty years of party-less panchayat system with the active role of the King (1960-90) and twelve years of parliamentary democracy (1990-2002).

Several changes followed suit. In October 2002, the King dissolved the parliament led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, and appointed Lokendra Bahadur Chand as the new Prime Minister of Nepal. Within six-months, the Chand government was dismissed and a government headed by Surya Bahadur Thapa was formed. Since this government was shaped without the consent of the political parties, there were massive protests and demonstrations against the government, jointly led by all the political parties. This forced the King to re-appoint Sher Bahadur Deuba as the Prime Minister. On the pretext of

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4 Shrestha, Chuda Bahadur (2004). ‘Nepal – Coping with Maoist insurgency’.
incompetence, the government was dismissed on February 1, 2005 and a State of Emergency was declared. As per a statement released by His Majesty’s Government of Nepal (HMN) for the United Nations, the State of Emergency was declared for the survival of democracy and the nation’s sovereignty, to prevent the untold suffering brought about by the rise of terrorism and because the past government was not being serious enough to initiate dialogue with the “terrorists”. Under the State of Emergency, all civil liberties were suspended and restrictions on the freedom of mobility were imposed. The State of Emergency was cosmetically lifted on April 29, 2005 although most of the restrictions on civil liberties remained intact till April 2006. Finally, the April movement of 2006 followed by the peace process paved the way for the Constituent Assembly. The people’s movement of 2006 brought about significant changes in Nepal. The movement, which started with demands for the reinstatement of Parliament and the establishment of democracy, achieved more than desired in just 19 days. It saw the involvement of a broad cross-section of society, including academicians, women’s groups, students, labor unions, employees and, homemakers. This culminated in a resounding victory for the Maoists in the April 2008 elections to Nepal’s Constituent Assembly. But questions remain about their use of violence. There have been several reports of party officials using violence against political opponents since the elections. According to the United Nations Development Program’s latest Human Development Index, Nepal is ranked 148 out of 177 countries in terms of per capita gross domestic product.

Since primary research for this project was carried out over a period of two years (2004-2006), the study does not take into consideration the impact of these political developments on the status of women and children in Nepal. The analyses and conclusions of this study are therefore based on data collected till 2006.

1.2 Situational Analysis of the Armed Conflict

In February 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched the “People’s War”, basing their strategy on the writings and experience of Mao Tse-tung, but also drawing on more recent experiences in Asia and Latin America. Pointing to the failure of the democratic regime instituted following the People’s Movement (Jana Andolan) of 1990, and of successive govern-ments to bring genuine democracy and broad-based development to the people of Nepal, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) argued that only a revolutionary armed struggle could
create the basis for the overthrow and replacement of the corrupt and inadequate ruling classes with a popular democratic republic representing the workers and peasants of Nepal. Although subjected to aggressive police operations in the early years, the Maoists were able to establish themselves in the mid-western region of Nepal, especially in Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot and began to extend the scope, control and influence of the movement across the country during the late 1990s.

The conflict escalated dramatically following the declaration of a State of Emergency by the government in November 2001; there was a more extensive deployment of the Nepalese Army (RNA) and operations on a larger scale by the Maoists. The Government of Nepal called on a number of foreign governments for support and received substantial commitments, including military assistance, from the US and UK governments as well as from India and, to a lesser extent, from China.

In 2006, the People’s War, as the Maoists refer to their revolutionary struggle, entered its tenth year. Despite the efforts of the state to re-establish control, the Maoists progressively extended their activities and scale across the country in a well-defined program. Also, with the termination and non-extension of the offices of elected local government officials at the district and village level from 2002 to 2006, many areas of the country had come under Maoist control.

In recent years, the armed conflict and its increasing effect on the Nepali economy and society has become a matter of central concern and debate, both within Nepal and abroad. The conflict in Nepal has proved the fact that the poor and weaker sections of society are the worst sufferers.
of conflict. It has affected the right to education. Women suffer from gender-based violence and sexual harassment by both conflicting parties; the use of child soldiers has increased; law and order conditions have drastically deteriorated; investments, both national and foreign, have become unattractive and, frequent bandhs and strikes have hampered the tourism industry.

The rural population is increasingly harassed and brutalized by the security forces and Maoists. Many people have been rendered homeless and have been displaced by the conflict. Those who have permanently left their villages have done so mainly due to the fear of being trapped in a crossfire, or the fear of being punished by Maoists for not supporting them, or in the fear of prosecution by security forces (who accuse them of being supporters of the Maoists).

The consequences of this armed conflict have been loss of thousands of lives and livelihoods in Nepal. The Royal Nepalese Army has lost more than 223 men. The Nepal Police has lost 958 officers, and by far, more than 1324 policemen have been injured. Twenty-nine internationally supported projects, 289 governmental and non-governmental projects and 105 of the Government of Nepal’s telecommunication centers have been attacked and destroyed since 1996-2004. Out of its 3,915 offices, 1,369 buildings of the Village Development Committees have been destroyed. Although accurate data is limited, it is estimated that to-date, over 12,000\(^5\) people have lost

their lives since February 1996, the majority of whom were from the marginalized sections of society\textsuperscript{6}.

1.3 Rationale and Focus of the Research

In times of social conflict, children and women are direct and indirect victims of the violence. In the context of Nepal’s situation, thousands of women and children have been forced to flee their homes. Children have been separated from their families and experiences of emotional trauma, while acting as child soldiers and women combatants, will have a long-term impact on their lives. After the male head of the household dies, is disabled or fleees, the women and children are forced to uphold their social responsibilities and face both economic hardship and social humiliation.

The focus of this research project is to ascertain the overall impact of armed conflict, through the lens of structural violence and human rights violations, on women and children with particular reference to their education, health, psychology and social and economic status.

Most advocacy and developmental activity has been undertaken without assessing the real impact and needs of the poor and disadvantaged groups of society. This research has attempted to create a platform where their voices are heard so that their concerns can be integrated into programs relating to conflict transformation. Consequently, the research has analyzed various dimensions and facets of the conflict, demystifying the power relations and ethno-cultural inter-linkages with conflict. Along with the findings of the research, this study also provides

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{focus_of_the_study.png}
\caption{FOCUS OF THE STUDY}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{6} The Himalayan Times (April 9, 2005). "Insurgency claiming seven lives a day, reveals INSEC annual report".
specific recommendations for the prioritization of key issues, with regard to women and children, and suggestions on possible capacity development strategies that can build on local strengths and solutions.

1.4 Objectives

➢ To identify the root causes of the armed-conflict through the lens of structural violence and human rights/needs perspective;

➢ To assess the overall impact of armed-conflict on women and children;

➢ To audit the ongoing interventions by varied stakeholders and their impact, both positive and negative, on women and children;

➢ To provide recommendations by ascertaining measures for conflict transformation.

1.5 Research Methodology

1.5.1 Area Coverage

The research does not attempt to provide a representative assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women and children in Nepal. Nevertheless, it seeks to be illustrative enough to serve the purpose of program guidance, information and advocacy on the issue. The research was conducted in the municipalities and VDCs of the following districts and was spread over the following Eco-Development Region:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecological Region</th>
<th>Development Region</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>No. of VDC/Municipality visited by team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terai</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Rautahat</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Makwanpur</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the above-mentioned districts, the research team leader also visited Banke and Morang districts, and collected pertinent case studies.

In these districts of Nepal, armed conflict is experienced with a higher level of intensity. Also, these districts are significantly different from each other in terms of terrain, demographics and ethnographic profile. Since HimRights has field-offices in these districts, and has
gained ample trust amongst the civilians and civil society groups, it was convenient for the research team to identify and meet the respondents.

1.5.2 Research Design

Target Respondents

In the research, the team ensured maximum representation of poor and disadvantaged women and children, especially from the indigenous groups. For women and children, the research team developed a respondent’s identification criteria that incorporated respondents from *dalit* and ethnic communities; indigenous groups; victims of Maoist, state and domestic violence; Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); single mothers and widows; and religious minorities like Muslims. One of the vital crosscutting issues in each of the above-mentioned groups was the requirement of the respondent’s personal experience as a victim of armed conflict.

In order to ascertain the impact of different ongoing interventions by various stakeholders to address the issues faced by women and children in situations of armed conflict, interviews were conducted with local NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, the respondent’s names, especially those of the direct victims of armed conflict, have not been disclosed and fake identities have been used in “quotations” and “case studies” sections of the report. All information provided by the respondents has been kept entirely confidential, and has not been quoted without their permission.

Literature Review

As an integral component of the research, the team collected official statistics and available literature and reports on the armed-conflict - its origin, nature, trend and pattern of growth and also, on the endemic structural violence fueling the armed conflict.

Also, secondary data from various sources at national and district levels was collected, reviewed and analyzed. This data was primarily quantitative in nature and the information was sourced through available records and reports from the Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and the Government of Nepal Social Welfare
Council. This data was analyzed to evaluate the relative status of districts and population groups (to the extent data available) on various dimensions of the impact of conflict, especially on women and children.

Field Research

The primary field research, participatory in nature, was carried out to obtain reliable and actionable information from women, children and various stakeholders working on conflict issues at the district and community levels. The respondents were interviewed one-on-one to obtain qualitative responses on specific issues with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire or via focus-group sessions with the aid of discussion guidelines.

Research Instruments

The research tools used were qualitative in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, observation, informal sessions and case studies for the purpose of attaining comprehensive responses on the key areas of interest under the research.

a) Focus Group Discussions and In-depth Interviews

The focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted to study people’s deep-seated perceptions, their experiences and the impact of conflict on their lives and above all, the needs and aspirations of these targeted groups.

Also, with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire, the research attempted to understand and analyze the interventions of different stakeholders, at the district level, in the context of conflict.

b) Site Observation

Though observation is always filtered through a researcher’s interpretive frame, the most accurate observations are shaped by scrupulous attention to detail, and by the preparedness of the researcher before visiting the site. The research team conducted site observations during the field visit for each district, to get a realistic picture of the case studies related by the respondents.

c) Case Studies

Likewise, during the course of the research, the team identified 10 case studies of the respondents, both women and children to illustrate and highlight pertinent issues of the armed-conflict.
1.5.3 Sampling Design

The following is the total sample size and distribution for each district:

Table 2: Sample Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Instruments</th>
<th>Total Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-depth Interviews</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Observation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breakdown as per individual respondents/institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local NGOs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Based Organizations (CBOs)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6 Limitations

- The findings are non-representative and only illustrative of the target segments of the districts visited and therefore, cannot be interpreted for the entire country.

- A few respondents were hesitant to give honest answers or to cooperate with the team. They were reluctant to disclose much due to the sensitive nature of the research.

- For in-depth interviews, the selected respondent may have been interfered with or influenced by any other household members or neighbors or colleagues.

- Though the research team had planned on interacting with other concerned stakeholders like government officials, capital-based policy makers, heads of political parties, the police and the army, the Ministry for Home Affairs, the National Planning Commission and the National Human Rights Commission, the changed political scenario in the country prevented the team from doing so.
Section 2

Root Causes of the Armed Conflict

*Through the Lens of Structural Violence and Human Rights Violations*

2.1 Background

Nepal is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and a multi-lingual country. There are 61 ethnic groups and 125 different languages or dialects in the country. Nevertheless, the country’s overall structure is highly dominated and influenced by Hinduism, the caste system, feudalism, and the Nepali language. An inbuilt system of suppression and oppression has continued for centuries in the religion, culture and tradition of Nepal.

In his book, “Reconciliation Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order”, Robert Schreiter explains that violence can be direct as well as indirect. He says, “Direct violence is physical violence, but there is often indirect violence, such as withholding resources to the extent of starvation. Economic oppression, then, is violence. But there are other forms of indirect violence that affect people’s mental health, their self-esteem or view of themselves, when they are told over and over again that they are inferior, both directly and systemically by racism or by the caste system.”

It is a well-established fact that, if human needs (material, social, and cultural) are not met, then overt, protracted conflict takes place. Rather than absolute poverty, the root causes of conflict most often lie in social

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and political exclusion, acute inequality and inequity in the distribution of resources and opportunities among different identity groups based on gender, caste, ethnicity, creed and other social dividing lines, as well as failure of political structures to address these issues.

**Internalizing structural violence as fate and karma**

During the research, many respondents from the indigenous and ethnic groups could not comprehend the issue of systemic structural violence and the ways in which it persisted in all spheres of their lives and the country’s governance system. This is because the majority of them have never questioned their situation and status beyond their karma. They feel that it is their fate that cannot be changed.

Likewise, the imposition of power and norms on to the lower caste and indigenous groups and the poor is accepted with no questions asked. Many people do not realize how others have suppressed their identities and how policies and programs formulated to date perpetuate the status quo. For them, they have no time to think of anything beyond their subsistence.

Also, many of these people do not possess the tools to critically think as to how the existing structure is instrumental in depriving them from their benefits. They cannot understand why they are unable to break the vicious cycle of poverty, and how they have not been able to capture better opportunities for their children and themselves. The cycle goes on: poverty – forced to work from a very young age – deprived of education – lack of required skills – no network to acquire jobs – discrimination over gender or indigenous or ethnic group – accompanied by language barriers – no political representation – no voice at decision-making level – no access to the amendment or formulation of law or constitution – internalizing the existing system as fate and karma – continue to remain poor.

When a 22-year old lama woman from Makwanpur spoke about her father’s alleged disappearance, she stated:”It has been one year since my father was arrested by the Army. Our family is still unaware of his whereabouts. What happened to him must be his karma. He was a religious man. He always treated people well. But we cannot change our fate, can we?” Thus, until and unless their voice is raised at the decision making level, these groups will continue to stifle in the whirlpool of poverty, misery, and oppression.
The single most important root cause of the armed conflict in Nepal is the widespread structural violence prevalent in Nepalese society, where even fundamental human wants and needs are not being met and instead are systematically denied. The human rights principle of non-discrimination, which stresses on the non-exclusion of groups on the basis of gender, opinion, or ethnicity is not practiced or implemented in this country, which in turn exacerbates the ongoing conflict situation. The research team has compiled case studies that explicitly depict how the conflict is the outcome of the grievances, suppression, oppression and rampant discrimination faced by these groups.

Also, both the warring factions – the Government and the Maoists – have embraced violent measures to acquire victory without looking into the real crux of the crisis. There is hardly any compliance with minimum human rights standards or any implementation of the notion of international humanitarian law, though Nepal is party to the Geneva Convention of 1949. Unchecked atrocities and incidences of dehumanization are routine. At present, the movement has spread all over the country; thousands of people have been victimized – tortured, raped, disappeared and killed in the conflict. In sum, there exists a total impunity for the atrocities committed by either of the warring factions, which in turn fuels the present armed conflict.

2.2 Root Causes of Armed Conflict

This section of the report seeks to analyze the root causes of the armed conflict through the lens of structural violence and human rights violations with the aid of illustrative case studies and quantitative data. Please note that the list on the issues of structural violence is not exhaustive and not mutually exclusive.
2.2.1 Through the Lens of Structural Violence

Fig 2: Impact of Structural Violence and Political Instability on the Armed Conflict

Caste Discrimination

The Nepalese caste system is a social institution, deriving sanctions from, and intimately interwoven with, Hinduism. The caste stratification is based on the **Chaturvarn** doctrine and division of work theory. **Varn** means color and denotes racial significance. It is believed that the “Creator” formed three groups from various parts of his body. From the head came the **Brahmin** (teachers and preachers), from the body came the **Kshatriya** (rulers and warriors), and from his feet and hands came the **Vaishya** (merchants). No rank was given to the **Shudra**, who provided services to others as unskilled laborers and servants and who were ritually impure and untouchable people (**Dalits**).

In Nepal, these structures still govern all the religious, social and economic activities of the average Nepali in the rural areas and to a decreasing extent in towns and cities. For instance, the Country Code of 1963 prohibits all forms of discrimination against the **Dalits**, but in practice, untouchability still exists as a pervasive socio-cultural phenomenon preventing the entry of **Dalits** into temples and monasteries and denying them access to village water sources. This clearly depicts how the provisions have not been realized in practice because of the
failure to introduce and enforce legislative instruments in the spirit of
the Constitution.

Thus, these impositions that label all Shudras and indigenous people
as impure, inferior, and powerless have created a structure of profound
structural violence, which in turn has fueled the armed conflict situation
of the country. These groups face a growing risk of being victimized
by both the warring parties – subjected to harassment under the label
of “Maoist”; physical tortures by both the State and the Maoists;
pressurized and forced to join the Maoists, alleged arrests by the Army;
extra judicial disappearances; and abductions and killings. This
commonly leads to these sections of the society entering into a cycle
of revenge by either joining the Maoists or the State.

Caste Discrimination: A Dalit’s Story

“My name is Maina BK from Rautahat. I am 38 years old. I have
eleven members in my family. I am a housewife and am also
involved in labor work. We are dalits, so we haven’t been able to
bring about much progress in our lives, especially due to the society
we live in and the old traditions we follow.

The majority of the people in our village are Brahmins and Chetris.
Our community lives separately. The upper-caste people have
progressed dramatically, but we have been left behind both
economically as well as socially. The rich and powerful people
always try to suppress us. For instance, we are allowed to fill water
from the public tap only after Brahmins and Chetris. If we happen
to accidentally touch the tap when they are filling the water, they
swear at us.

We feel very bad when we are asked to sit and eat separately at
social functions. Their treatment is inhumane. We are also not
allowed to enter the temples. We are also religious people, and we
should have the right to worship gods and participate in social
activities.

Sometimes, I feel like going against the society due to the existent
caste discrimination, and the disparity between rich and poor. When
human beings are not treated with humanity, it results in the conflict
that we are facing today.”
Discrimination and Oppression of Ethnic / Indigenous Groups

In the book, “The Strategy of Nonviolence Defense”, Robert J. Burrowes states that indigenous people should be respected for their extensive knowledge of their natural surroundings and land. But on the contrary, in Nepal, these people are looked down upon and condescended as “backward” locals; their local, indigenous comprehensions are disrespected and disregarded.

The process of cultural and monolingual homogenization after the unification of Nepal resulted in the loss of cultural diversity of the indigenous people, as some ethnic groups have often voiced. At times, even state policies have restricted the empowerment of these groups. Though, some positive initiatives like the National Committee for Development of Nationalities have been taken since 1991 to empower these people. Also, the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act, 2002 has been enacted with the overall objective of building an equitable society through the upliftment of indigenous nationalities. The 10th Plan has also framed a broad range of policies and strategies relating to the development of indigenous peoples to improve their access to development opportunities.

However, in Nepal’s social structure, the ethnic/indigenous groups, especially the women who are at the lowest end, have been constantly reminded and made to realize that they are inferior. This has led to indigenous women internalizing these perceptions as a reality of their lives – their “karma” –, making it very difficult to bring about societal change. Furthermore, this belief has been instrumental in sustaining the status quo of the privileged groups.

Journalist Li Onestos has traveled widely in Nepal, especially in the Maoist-affected areas to interview Maoist leaders and others. One of the interviewees, a 40 year-old Tamang Maoist said, “Government oppresses ethnic groups as lower caste. The main reason I joined the People’s Army was not only the economic repression, but as indigenous people, we can’t speak our language, read our mother tongue and the Hindu government suppresses us. So now, I have great hope and determination that we will be able to establish a new democratic system.

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that imbibes the theory of equality and will wipe out all the
discrimination done by the reactionaries.”

The inter-linkages of such prejudices on ethnic and indigenous groups with the current armed conflict are similar to those discussed earlier in the section on “caste discrimination”.

**The Domination of the Hindu Religion**

Hinduism was the official state religion of Nepal before 18 May 2006. The other religions practiced in the country include Animism, Buddhism, Bon, Kirat, Islam, and Christianity. Although there are no explicit hindrances for non-Hindu cultural and traditional practices by the government, there is no encouraging environment to promote or sustain them either. A tendency to subsume other religions into Hinduism is evident when the government proclaims, for instance, that Buddha is the tenth incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu.

As the dominant religion, Hinduism has also begun to erode the status of indigenous and other non-Hindu women. This is because women are considered as a subservient class in the Hindu religion and this lens on gender harms the much-enjoyed privileges of many indigenous women, who frequently had higher status and more rights under their own traditional cultures.

**Discrimination results in hopelessness**

“We are being discriminated against everywhere – in matters of political representations, education, language and so forth. People disrespect us in courts. The elite capture even our quotas on education and employment. The teachers who teach our language do not get any salary from the government.

We worship nature. Since our community did not have any land, we used government’s property for social occasions and for religious ceremonies. But people couldn’t even digest that. One ex-elected representative complained to the Chief District Officer (CDO) saying ‘Why should you give such huge land to Rais? They don’t need it’. The Hindus build so many temples, but we never complain. There are also no public holidays for our important festivals.

The government of Nepal has done nothing for us. Sometimes, I feel like joining the Maoists and fighting for my rights.”

– A 68 year-old Rai woman, Central Nepal

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Gender Discrimination

The social fabric of the country is built upon a patriarchal system, where a man is placed at a higher stratum, while a woman is given very low status in society. For hundreds of years, women have been discriminated against by men in all spheres of life – be it their fundamental rights like education and health or being subjected to gender-based violence such as rape and child marriage.

Nepal’s Constitution mandates non-discrimination and equality as fundamental rights of the people. Nepal has reaffirmed its commitments on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) – Outcome of the Fourth UN Conference on Women held in 1995, where it ratified 16 major conventions including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to work for equal rights and the inherent human dignity of women. However, the country’s traditional and cultural values and state laws are still discriminatory against women. The Tenth Plan has for the first time included gender and human rights as crosscutting as well as sectoral issues. Yet, women continue to face discrimination in the social, economic and political domains.

In spite of significant gains in female literacy, women lag far behind men in literacy and educational attainment. The participation of girls in school decreases as they get older with lower enrolment in secondary and higher education. The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) of Nepali women is among the highest in the world. Four-fifths of women of childbearing age are anaemic.

Women have limited access to and control over resources with only five per cent households reporting female ownership of land. Their access to credit is limited because financial institutions do not lend without collateral. Most women workers are confined in self-employed, unpaid and low wage informal sector activities with few job opportunities in the formal sector. About 73 per cent of economically active women are engaged in agriculture against 60 per cent for men.11 Outside agriculture, more women are engaged in informal sector jobs than men and are working at the lower skill level and in exploitative working conditions. Women occupy less than eight per cent of civil

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service positions. They face discrimination in the labor market in the forms of discriminatory wage rates, legal discrimination, sexual harassment at work and exploitative and unsafe working conditions. An increasing number of women candidates have stood for elections to the House of Representatives, but elected women members comprised less than six per cent in the dissolved House of Representatives.

These prevalent discriminatory attitudes and practices towards women lead to either their internalizing this system as their fate and karma, or rebelling against the societal norms, thus getting involved in the conflict, directly or indirectly, for equality and social justice.

**Language and Education Barriers**

The national language of Nepal is “Nepali”. No other language can be used in an official capacity, even at the local level. Dismissing local languages, thus, poses a major barrier to the ethnic/indigenous groups in the country.

This is of great disadvantage to the children from an ethnic or indigenous background. These children do not have a good command over languages that are unheard and unspoken in their community and are thus made fun of and humiliated for their accent and use of spoken or written Nepali. These children are viewed as less intelligent.

Likewise, women from ethnic/indigenous groups hesitate to speak, especially in public, because they cannot speak Nepali fluently and feel that others will tease and laugh at them. Unlike them, Brahmin and Chetri women speak quite confidently and do not feel awkward, one of the vital reasons being that their mother tongue is Nepali.

Also, ethnic/indigenous groups usually have “high context cultures”, which depend upon shared unspoken knowledge. Unlike them, the
Brahmins and Chetris seem to demonstrate more logical, sequential thinking and are able to present their ideas in a coherent and comprehensive manner, which helps them to take on leading roles, representing others who do not have such skills. Thus, their language and communication patterns have been major drawbacks for the advancement of these groups. This has a direct impact on opportunities and leadership roles.

Exclusion from Political Representation

The above-mentioned groups have minimal political representation or participation at the policy and decision-making levels. Earlier, the government felt the need to include representation of these diverse groups, and thus, there were few handpicked nominations for various positions. But during elections, hardly anyone won a seat due to the issues discussed earlier.

Table 3: Participation of different caste, ethnic and indigenous groups in policy formulation and implementation sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Brahmin/ Chetri (In %)</th>
<th>Tibeto-Burman (In %)</th>
<th>Madise (In %)</th>
<th>Dalit (In %)</th>
<th>Newar (In %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil administration services and Police Department</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial and Constitutional bodies, Ministers and Members of Parliament</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although these people in Nepal have a wealth of knowledge of their local environment, their knowledge is neither respected nor consulted by those in power. The government sends people, almost always Brahmin or Chhetri, from distant parts of the country to serve as administrators, experts, bureaucrats, and security personnel without any knowledge of the local people or their culture. For instance, a 45 year-old Tharu Mukhiya (leader) from Rautahat stated, “Where do you see the participation of the Tharu community at an administrative or bureaucratic level? A particular community’s representation in the
system is vital for the common people’s involvement and interest in use of that system”.

The orthodox parliamentary practices adopted in Nepal after 1990 overlooked the exclusionary social structure of society. Deep rooted social cleavages in terms of caste, ethnicity, gender and regional, cultural, linguistic and religious forms of discrimination provided fertile ground for the escalation of conflict. Besides the above-mentioned issues of structural violence, the country’s political and administrative system faced rampant corruption, nepotism, favoritism, and misuse of power. As a result, continued socio-political marginalization of the deprived sections perpetuated at a time when political awareness among the disadvantaged was increasing. Such diverging trends gradually started fuelling social contradictions in the existing discriminatory society.

2.2.2 Through the Lens of Human Rights Violations

“Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. All violations of this kind, including in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy, require a particularly effective response.”

– The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993

Adams and Bradbury write in “Conflict and Development: Organization Adaptation in Conflict” that poverty is not the only reason for armed conflict. They state, “Poor people rarely have resources to mobilize an armed conflict. Some of the poorest countries in Africa have never experienced violence, for example, Tanzania. On the other hand, in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia had major armed conflicts between various ethnic groups. Injustice, exploitation, and denial of human rights provide fertile ground for violence”.12

During the field visits, the research team felt that besides structural violence, a vital cause of the armed conflict in Nepal is the increase in human rights violations, as well as newly-emerged crimes like disappearance, torture, killing and rape, where both the State and the Maoists are perpetrators.

**Disappearances**

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances of the UNHCR has stated that Nepal tops the list of the countries with the highest numbers of new cases of disappearances in the world.

According to the respondents, the state authorities usually arrest people during the night without any warrant or other official documentation. When the family goes to inquire about the whereabouts of the missing person at the army barracks, they are told that they are not being held there. The disappeared person can only be tracked down, if pressure is built on the Army by the media and human rights organizations. Those who are abducted by the Maoists are usually conscripted to forced labor or to become their combatants.

**Torture**

Torture is a common strategy adopted by both the warring parties during the conflict situation. According to the respondents, various new forms of torture have been adopted, for instance, electrocuting a person with a pipe put through his/her windpipe in order to ensure no trace of physical torture, scraping by razor blades, hanging by toes and thumbs, putting a person in a hole and giving electric shocks, etc.

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**Women tortured by Army for having a sister in the Maoist People’s Army**

A 28-year old *dalit* woman and her 23-year old younger sister, along with their father, brother and brother-in-law were arrested and detained frequently in the Army Barracks. They were not given any warrant or any other written document during the time of the arrest. The *dalit* woman and her family were interrogated on the whereabouts of one of her sisters, who was a Maoist. On that pretext, everyone was suspected to be Maoist and was severely tortured, both mentally and physically. After their release, the younger sister also joined the Maoists. The security officials had threatened her, that if they arrest her again, they would rape her in front of her father.
**Gender Based Violence**

Women are generally vulnerable to rape and sexual exploitation in situations of conflict. Given the cultural and religious context in which rape victims face social ostracism and shame, it is likely that many cases of rape are not reported. Also, Nepal lacks legal and social policies for witness and victim protection, without which many survivors of gender-based violence may choose to remain silent.\(^{13}\) Such types of suffering can leave deep psychological wounds, which may remain hidden for a short-term but may build a cycle of revenge.

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**Two women raped and killed by Security Forces**

A group of army men, disguised as Maoists, arrived at a village in the mid-western part of Nepal. One of them told a village woman that he was the new commander of the area and sought help from her to find rest of the Maoist group. Apparently, the woman was the wife of the Maoist’s nominated ward chairperson. After much persuasion, she got convinced and asked her friend to accompany her. On their way, both the women were raped and killed. It took the family seventeen days to find the women’s bodies.

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**Killings**

Killings are taking place at a rapid pace in the current conflict by both the warring parties. During field visits, the research team found that the security forces also kill innocent civilians – Maoist sympathizers who are not active in the Maoist movement – along with active Maoists. According to a few newspaper reports, some officers involved in mass killings have been prosecuted by the military. The Human Rights Cell\(^{14}\) in the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) underscored that 1,923 allegations have been received against the RNA from different corners of the world. Military courts have so far punished 105 army men for a total of 39 cases of human rights violations. However, the absence of law

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\(^{13}\) Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (2005), ‘Caught in the Middle – Mounting Violations Against Children in Nepal’s Armed Conflict’.

\(^{14}\) The Human Rights Cell was established on 12 March 2003 by the Directive No.02/060 of the Royal Nepalese Army. The Cell has framed Guidelines on the rules of engagement to be followed by the Royal Nepal Army and the Unified Command (Armed Police) in the course of taking action against Maoist insurgents.
enforcement or the light sentences given to the perpetrators perpetuates the idea of violence; impunity continues unabated. Likewise, the Maoists target politically affiliated civilians and leaders, government officials, security force informers, zamindars (landlords), businessmen, students and the general public.\textsuperscript{15}

Table 4: People killed by Security Forces and Maoists in Armed Conflict (Feb 1996 – Dec 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Grand total (%)</th>
<th>By security force (%)</th>
<th>By Maoist (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Group</td>
<td>1763</td>
<td>21.33</td>
<td>13.78</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chetri/ Thakuri</td>
<td>1551</td>
<td>18.76</td>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>10.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>10.75</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other indigenous groups from Terai</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>3370</td>
<td>40.78</td>
<td>33.88</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8265</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>65.98</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.02</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


An alarming situation that has arisen due to the armed conflict is vigilantism. The strategies adopted to counter physical and mental threats or tortures or to take revenge from either one of the warring factions, has led to the formation of vigilante groups, who are usually armed groups of men, such as the Saantal Tribes from Morang district or the Madhesi Tigers from Rautahat districts who fight against the Maoists or the state authorities. This, in turn, opens a cycle of violence and fear among ordinary citizens.

Saantal Tribe: A Road to “Vigilantism”

The Saantals are an indigenous hunter-gatherer group, settled in the agricultural villages of Biratnagar, Morang district. They have formed their own security team after Maoists started to arrive in their village and demand expensive food and meat, and also abduct people and beat them up. The Maoists would sleep inside their houses and make the Saantals sleep outside. The tribe finally held a mass meeting of 2000 people. They collected their bows and arrows, and vowed to keep out the outsiders. Now, they surround any new visitors and beat them up. The Maoists were intimidated and have moved from that area.

This picture in Kantipur (April 10, 2005), a national daily, had the following caption: “The Hindu worshippers pulling ‘ajimas’ chariot towards hanumandhoka”. In reality, this is a Newari festival celebrating grandmother goddesses who are local and animist in nature. The characterization of the worshippers as ‘Hindu’ is an example of the religious and cultural hegemony practiced against the diverse groups of Nepal.
Section 3

Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Children

“The use of force to acquire meat and vegetables, as well as sexual favors, has left the villagers, mainly women traumatized. According to the women journalists who visited Rukum and Rolpa, villagers then had stopped raising goats and planting vegetables. The men had either fled the area or had joined the Maoist ranks. The women, who were mostly fending for themselves, the aged and the children, were in constant fear from both sides.”

– Rita Thapa, Founder-Coordinator, Tewa, Nepal

3.1 Background

As discussed under the section ‘Rationale and Focus of the research’, women and children are the hardest hit victims of any civil or armed conflict. At times of conflict, the incidences of human rights violations intensify and the eventual upshot of it falls on women and children. They encounter the toughest time in their survival let alone their education, health and social security status.

For a Nepali woman from a remote part of the country, the real experience of the armed conflict has not so much to do with the bombings, killings and destruction by both the warring factions; it has to do with the aftermath of this violence, which brings about years of hopeless suffering for her and her children. The armed conflict distorts and disrupts her pattern of responsibility and accountability. According to Meena Poudel, Country Program Manager, OXFAM-Nepal, the major consequences of the conflict on women are the lack of social safety and psychological trauma. With no male member in the family and no income, the woman has to bear all the responsibilities of her household - to educate her children, to earn money, to engage in agriculture, to raise livestock and to take care of her children, the elderly and the sick. Furthermore, it becomes more difficult for her if she has to flee her village with her dependents. According to the Global Internally Displaced Persons Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council,
approximately 80% of all displaced populations of Nepal are women and children under the age of 18.

Likewise, many young children and pre-adolescents in Nepal have become deliberate targets and active combatants in the armed conflict. Thousands of them have been separated from their families, and hundreds of them have died\textsuperscript{16} in bomb explosions, crossfire, landmines and other forms of violence. Years spent out of school, experiences as child soldiers, and injuries leave emotional traumas having long-lasting impressions and make them vulnerable to adverse circumstances. Also, problems like child labor, street children, child abuse, trafficking, sale

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\textsuperscript{16} According to the Informal Service Sector Center (INSEC) approximately 286 children have been killed since the outset of the “People's War” in 1996.
and commercial use of children for the sex trade has been exacerbated due to the armed conflict.

3.2 Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Children

This section of the report seeks to analyze some effects of the armed conflict on women and children with the aid of illustrative case studies and quantitative data to validate the argument. Please note that the issues discussed below are not exhaustive and not mutually exclusive.

3.2.1 Women Combatants and Child Soldiers

A significant percentage of women and children are indirectly involved in the armed conflict and also directly as women combatants or child soldiers. For some, it is voluntary participation while for others it is coercive action taken by both the parties to the conflict. Although both the Maoists and the government have denied the recruitment of children, there is ample evidence that suggests that these parties have been using women and children in highly dangerous activities and risky situations.

The Maoists have been able to involve women, especially those from marginalized and indigenous groups, by taking a stand on issues such as social justice and equality and opposing polygamy, gambling, alcoholism, domestic violence, and child marriage. Like-wise, they lure children to work for them by making them participate in their cultural programs – sing songs and dance – giving them gadgets like mobile and guns. The security forces also encourage children to act as informers for them through various means.

“...We were forced to join the Maoist’s Party. We were made to carry guns and become guards at their programs and watch points. We were forced to leave our classes and participate in their cultural programs – they asked us to sing and dance. Some of us tried to escape, but we were severely beaten. They made us sit outside in cold winter season with only our underwear on. Once, one of our friends refused to work for them. The Commander put a bomb on his body and threatened to blow him up.

The Police captured some of our friends. They tortured and threatened to kill them, if they did not confess to being a Maoist.

We are pressured by both sides. We do not know what to do.”

Focus Group Discussion of Children aged 12 – 20 from Mugu District, Nepal
The child recruits have reportedly been used as in some cases as fighters and human shields, otherwise as messengers and porters (to carry explosive materials) by the Maoists. They are also used to sing songs and dance in their cultural programs. Maoists normally use women to carry loads such as arms, foods and other war materials from one place to another. Likewise, the police also use children as informers on their patrols and force suspected Maoist supporters to sleep in the police station for their own safety.

3.2.2 Impact on Health (Physical and Psychological)

The health indicators in Nepal were already amongst the worst in the world before the outbreak of armed conflict in 1996, with Nepal ranking 124 out of the 137 countries on the UNDP’s Human Development Index that year. The armed conflict has further hampered access to health care, food and social services for many families, particularly women and children.\(^{17}\)

There has been a severe impact on women’s health, particularly in regards to childbirth and post-natal care in the remote parts of the country. Furthermore, women are likely to get malnourished when food becomes scarce owing to shortage of agricultural production or in the process of being displaced. This is because culturally, they are typically the last ones to eat and thus, hardly get to eat anything after feeding others. Likewise, Maoist looting, blockades and security checks interrupt the transportation of food supplies. At one point of time, the security forces did not even allow ordinary people to store food supplies beyond basic minimum needs in order to prevent access to food by the Maoists.

Also, during conflict, children don’t have much access to food, medicine and immunization. Studies conducted by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflicts have found that some children in conflict-affected districts have only rice water with salt for their meals.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{17}\) Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (January 2005). “Caught in the Middle: Mounting Violations Against Children in Nepal’s Armed Conflict”.

\(^{18}\) Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (2005). “Caught in the Middle’ Mounting Violations Against Children in Nepal’s Armed Conflict”. 
The lack of health facilities took several lives in Rautahat District

It has been several months that medical supplies have stopped arriving at Tejapakad-5 VDC of Rautahat district. The villagers now have to reach Gaur for medical treatment, since their VDC lacks medical officers and medicines. After 8 p.m., health officers refuse to go to the village area. It is almost impossible to take the patient to the health post, especially during night, because ambulance facility has been stopped due to the insurgency. Recently, an eleven-year old boy died due to a dog bite. Also, due to lack of transportation during night-time, two men died of diarrhoea and one woman died of complications during childbirth. The Maoists frequently loot drugs and medical equipment from health centers.

The governmental services and facilities such as health posts and clinics are either disrupted or lack medicines, medical equipment and medical officials. This makes women and children’s conditions vulnerable and in turn increases the probability of maternal and infant mortality. According to the Ministry of Health, three district health offices and 21 sub-health posts in 14 different districts have been partially destroyed, and many more at the village level have been damaged.

During the conflict period, many people have traumatic experiences, both as direct and indirect victims of war. These include the disabled, orphans, widows, internally displaced people and former combatants. Fear, stress and worries become a constant factor of their everyday life. Some of the direct victims of the armed conflict shared that their traumatic experiences had brought along severe health impacts – headaches, heart diseases, hypertension, to name a few.

“When my husband was arrested by the security forces, I lost my hope in everything. I could not concentrate on my work. I did not have sound sleep. Gradually, my memory started to fade away. All I did was worry about my husband and pray to God for his release. I cried all the time. I stopped trusting people.”

– A 28-year old Brahmin woman from Makwanpur

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According to Save the Children, Norway and the Center for Victims of Torture (CVICT), fear is an obvious and relevant psychosocial result of violence. Such fear instills itself in the lives of the children and may have different results; it may lay lead to more vigilance, it may result in nightmares and it may lead to increased levels of physical stress.\(^{19}\) Especially younger children, whose imagination forms an essential part of their being, may generalize such fright to other reactions to fear such as being afraid of the dark and being afraid of monsters.

3.2.3 Impact on Financial Status

“Things have become different since my father left home. We don’t get dal and vegetables like before. My mother no longer buys books and stationery for my younger brother and me. We cannot buy new clothes now. We do not celebrate any festivals these days.”

– A 13-year old Rai girl, Rautahat District, Nepal

Nepal remains one of the poorest countries in the world with no significant reduction in its ‘consumption/income’ poverty to date. With a shrinking GDP, especially due to the country’s collapse of tourism, agriculture and economically viable industries, the country’s economy is almost in dire straits.

The situation is worse for those residing in the rural parts of the country, where the armed conflict has weakened the economic status of a major portion of the population. This is particularly true for women-headed households and poor families from indigenous and marginalized groups. With the loss of the breadwinner in the family, a woman is suddenly pushed to find various means to support her family and earn her livelihood, which is usually unsustainable.

The people are in constant fear of Maoist and State atrocities; so they do not prefer to work in the field until late.

“\textit{We hide from the Maoists because as soon as they see us, they demand food. We have to contribute a certain portion of our crops to them after the harvesting season. At times, 12-15 of them come forcefully to our house and demand food and shelter. We already have limited food supplies, but they don’t understand that.}”

– Focus Group Discussion of Women aged 20 – 35 from Makwanpur District, Nepal

\(^{19}\) ‘Psychosocial Care for Children in Armed Conflict’, Save the Children Norway/CVICT. (p.3).
This, in turn, directly impacts their agricultural output, which has reduced drastically over the years. Their production does not last for more than six months, forcing them to engage themselves as daily wage laborers for the rest of the year. These cutbacks in local food production, caused by the exodus of merchants from rural areas, lack of access to markets, limited seed supply in markets, blockades by both the conflicting parties and the displacement of able members of the household, negatively impacts the income level of the rural household in particular and the community at large.

Furthermore, these poor villagers are forced to share their food with the Maoists and security forces. Anecdotal evidence indicates that these warring factions threaten to kill them if they don’t share or cook food for them. The Maoists further demand money as ‘chanda’ (donation) from the rural people, besides taking a share of a farmer’s produce. Likewise, according to a newspaper report, some security officers are also involved the extortion of money from poor villagers. Also, regular summons tariks (dates) for the alleged Maoists to the district headquarters by the Army and Police result in huge transportation and accommodation expenses for the accused.

3.2.4 Impact on Education, specifically relating to children

The Maoist People’s War has caused concern amongst various stakeholders in the sector of education, specifically with regard to children’s education. According to a recently published UNICEF report, on an average, in the year 2004, schools were open in the country only for 100 days. Teacher’s displacement, destruction of schools, forced closure of private schools, the use of school premises as battleground by both the Maoists and the security forces, bandhs (strikes), and schools targeted for attacks and used as ground for child recruitment and abduction are some key reasons for the decreasing rate of attendance and enrollment.

*Kantipur*, a daily newspaper, reported that the Maoists were digging trenches inside as many as 58 schools in different districts of the country.
to facilitate retaliation against security forces in case of attack. According to the report, the Maoists even coerced students, teachers and parents to participate in the digging effort.²⁰

Owing to the conflict, children are increasingly leaving villages, and gravitating to the district headquarters’ schools where the number of students has skyrocketed to more than the capacity of the classroom.²¹ Likewise, for women and the elderly, the informal education and adult literacy programs run by different donor agencies have virtually collapsed.

“It takes me one hour to reach my school. These days, I am afraid to walk to and from school. I fear that I might get killed in crossfire. I no longer participate in extracurricular activities. My parents also don’t allow me to participate. If I do, I will be forced to sing and dance in the Maoist’s program.”

– A 17-year old Brahmin girl from Rautahat District

### 3.2.5 Increasing number of female-headed households

It is a fact, that the ongoing conflict has pressured people, especially youth living in rural parts of the country, to either flee from their villages to seek employment elsewhere or to join one of the conflicting parties as combatants, laborers or informers. Similarly, a significant percentage of men have become disabled, displaced, and killed or abducted by the warring factions, leaving the entire burden of the household to a woman.

Many women, who are often unable to flee, have stayed back in their villages along with the elderly and children and face worsening poverty, food shortages, and harassment by the Maoist and security forces. Today, they are engaged in most of the fieldwork, to the extent of ploughing the land, as well managing their domestic chores. Additionally, they also have to bear the cost of whatever education their children can get. Women have to turn to other means of work, especially prostitution, when traditional methods of income generation fail. Children below the normal working age are also engaged in productive activities.

²⁰ Kantipur (October 29, 2004). ‘Maoist Dig Trenches in School in Achham’.
²¹ The Himalayan Times (April 16, 2005). ‘MoES to introduce shift system in schools’.
Besides being overburdened with responsibilities and being pressured by the Maoists and the security forces, these women and children are left to bear social punishments like being disowned by the family and the whole society looking down on them as widows/orphans. Also, there is the possibility of these families losing their protection and women having more chances of being raped, sexually abused and trafficked. These violent episodes have a deep psychological and physical impact on people who are already malnourished and traumatized and can severely undermine their capacity to recover.

3.2.6 Migration and Internal Displacement

According to the Global IDP Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council, the number of internally displaced Nepalese as a result of the armed conflict, is between 100,000- 200,000. Indian Embassy officials\(^{22}\) have indicated that during January 2003 alone, roughly 120,000 displaced Nepalese crossed the Indian border, fleeing from both forced recruitment by the Maoists and attacks by security forces.\(^{23}\)

On one hand, families and individuals tend to migrate and move on their own initiative to other regions of the country or abroad, usually to India. On the other hand, due to direct, indirect or perceived threat from the conflict, others get displaced or are made homeless, and pushed into vulnerable situations and in destitute conditions without even minimum protection from the State.

The pattern of conflict-induced displacement depicts that usually the displaced either get displaced to the nearby town or district headquarters or to major cities and the capital of the country, perceived as a safer destination and less conflict-prone. The population data for Kathmandu Valley reflects a demographic shift with a population growth rate of 3.6 percent and 5.2 percent between 1991-2001 and 2001-2005 respectively.\(^{24}\)

Many are displaced or have migrated due to insecurity, death threats, unreasonable imposition of ”donations” and extortion, charges of spying, the murder of family members, harassment, destruction and looting of homes, losing jobs, food insecurity, lack of access to


The Consequences of Armed Conflict
– Internal Displacement

In 2006, a group of 30-40 Maoists knocked at the door of Mohan Nepal, an ex-VDC chairman from Rukum District, at 1 a.m.. Mohan was affiliated to the Nepali Congress and the Maoists did not like him giving speeches about his party’s mandate to the villagers. After they entered the house, they hit Mohan with sticks on his knees and elbows. Mohan fell on the ground. In front of the entire family, they announced that they would kill him. Instead of killing him, they put acid in his eyes and escaped. Immediately, the family sought help from the District Police Office (DPO) and he was flown to Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu.

Mohan was bed-ridden for several months at the hospital. The Nepali Congress bore his initial treatment expenses, but later he had to pay all his medical expenses. He told the research team that his medical cost had reached 3-4 lakhs. The family constantly went to different Ministries for compensation but nothing has happened so far.

Mohan and his family could not go back to Rukum, so they migrated to Nepalgunj. Mohan’s wife has opened a teashop for the family’s survival. Two of his children have not been able to study further and they are unemployed. Mohan has not fully recovered and still needs medical attention. He has constant pain in his eyes. Besides the physical pain, the traumatic experience still haunts him everyday. Now a disabled man, he prefers to stay inside the house. The victim feels that though he had done many good things for the village, the Maoists did not appreciate his work.

The aftermath of displacement is the lack of fundamental needs like food, shelter, and clothing. More long-term effects include children being deprived of education, adverse impact on their health status including psychological problems, unemployment, difficulty in socialization and participation in cultural festivities and ceremonies,
increasing pressure on women, children and elderly, and increased pressure on urban settlement. Trafficking, street children, prostitution and the worst forms of child labor are other concerns arising from forced migration. Separated from their families, children find few alternatives to support their survival once they arrive in urban areas, and become even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.\textsuperscript{25}

3.2.7 Women and Children Empowerment

Women and children, in times of civil and armed conflict, get victimized in many different ways. Conflicts cause immense pain, both physical and emotional. But at the same time, it creates opportunities for self-empowerment of women which usually did not exist before in traditional gender segregated societies.

At one end, there are women who have joined the Maoist People’s Movement for social justice and greater gender equality; and on the other end, there are women who have entered the public domain, participating in community-based organizations, getting involved in village welfare groups, such as management committees. Their leadership and empowerment in some VDCs of Maoist concentrated areas have been found to be progressing at a steady pace. For instance, women were handling CBOs in all aspects like accounting, and management in Pauri VDC of Rautahat district in an effort to combat trafficking and child labor.

These women have gained self-confidence in their ability to improve their lives, and their capability to face any type of challenge, while respecting traditional beliefs and continuing to perform their domestic duties. They have found possibilities of working beyond the four walls of their house. With their near and dear ones missing, killed, or tortured, women are encouraged to network, negotiate, resist, and publicly speak and demand justice. Similarly, a few children who have been direct victims of violence have shown leadership abilities and qualities such as being articulate, vocal, tough and active. For instance, a 16-year old tamang girl from Makwanpur said that witnessing the atrocities of both the warring factions had made her stronger, and because of that, she was able to deny the offer to join the Maoist Movement.

\textsuperscript{25} ‘Selling sex to survive’, Nepali Times, Issue # 190, April 2004.
A Story of a Woman’s Empowerment

“My husband, a teacher, was arrested and detained for nine months on the pretext of being a Maoist. The truth was that he had spoken against the marijuana producers and they bribed the security forces and put him in jail.

When I found out that my husband was arrested, I could not think of anything. I cried for almost a week. That did not help much. My situation was either to sink or to swim. I decided to swim. I went to the police and directly confronted the Superintendent of Police. I told him that my husband was a good man and what had happened to him was injustice. He did not say anything. I then went to the Chief District Officer to tell him my story. I also cried in front of him. This continued for several months, but I did not lose hope. I asked several political party representatives from the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-UML), the Nepali Congress Party (NC) to lobby for my husband’s innocence and release. I also took the former Chairperson of the VDC to strengthen our case. I once told the SP that if he does not release my husband, my children and I should be imprisoned too. I knew no fear. I went to visit my husband regularly along with my children. I felt a need to prove to those marijuana producers that I could release my husband. My consistent plea that my husband was innocent was finally heard and he was released. I was successful.”

– A 28 year old Brahmin woman, Makwanpur District

Women take a back stage when male members of the household are involved

“I went to the Barracks once when my husband was arrested by the Army. The Army said that they have not arrested him. I did not go there after that. My father-in-law went there several times, but failed to know the whereabouts of my husband. I cannot do much. I am illiterate and I have to rely on my father-in-law and other members of the household. All I can do is to wait for him”.

– A 22 year-old Tharu woman, Banke District
3.2.8 Insecurity and harassment of families of men/women belonging to the Army and the Maoist

According to the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, in the current scenario, “an individual or a family may be forced to provide information on alleged Maoist activity or collaborators of the government security forces, leaving them vulnerable to Maoist and Security forces retribution. Children too are intimidated, detained and tortured by military and police personnel for suspected Maoist activity, or in an attempt to gain information about Maoist activities, and to find the whereabouts of an alleged Maoist parent. At the same time, they may face similar treatment by the Maoists for alleged support of the government.”

Residing in a Maoist-affected area is reason enough to suspect a person to be a Maoist, an informer or pro-Maoist. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the Army frequently conducts inquiries, arrests, rapes, tortures and searches houses and continuously harasses the families of the Maoists. Security forces accused the residents of Pandaun VDC in Kailali district of providing food to Maoists and threatened that the village would be bombed within a week if the local residents did not evacuate.

Likewise, the Maoists tend to abduct, torture and kill families of the Army and also demand shelter and food from them.

Today, Nepalese rural women cannot safely go into the jungle to cut grass and to search for firewood because of the prevalent risk – harassment, sexual exploitation and misbehavior especially by the security forces. Amnesty International reports that it has received an increasing number of cases of violence against women and girls, including cases of females shot dead by security forces, allegedly following rape.

3.2.9 Impact on Socio-cultural Status

In the remote villages of Nepal, the trends of celebrating festivals and religious ceremonies such as marriages have been largely impacted by the conflict – they are limited, performed at a low scale and usually guided by the Maoists. For instance, when a man gathered a hundred

26 ‘Caught in the Middle – Mounting Violations Against Children in Nepal’s Armed Conflict’, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (2005).
27 ‘Dead in villages, shelter in forests’, Himal (December 2003).
villagers for his daughter’s *pasn* (rice feeding ceremony) at *Paurai*-3 of *Rautahat* district, he had to pay a fine of NRs. 50,000 to the Maoists.

Also, at the community level, there is a general absence of trust amongst each other, roles for the elderly have weakened, and cultural norms have disintegrated. For the displaced individual and families, the armed conflict has had a severe effect on their socialization process with their cultural festivities and ceremonies slowly fading away with the changed priorities in life.

### 3.2.10 Death by Explosive Materials

The Maoists have been using untrained and unskilled women and children as porters and manual detonators for explosives. According to various reports, a significant number of them have been disabled and killed due to the lack of knowledge of the safe handling of these explosives. These days, the parents are in constant fear that their children might play with, touch or step on these explosives and might get killed. Hence, they do not send them outside the house.

### 3.2.11 Trafficking

Trafficking of women and girls into India for domestic servitude or work in carpet factories, circuses, farms, road construction and other purposes, as well as for sexual exploitation, have increased, most likely due to the armed conflict. For example, traffickers who previously preyed directly on women and girls in their communities are now able to access these women and girls more easily in urban centers after they have fled their communities due to the armed conflict.

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4.1 Background

The inter-linkages between conflict and development work are usually complex and contextual. Nevertheless, in general, two causal links can be established between them. One is that conflicts, especially violent ones, limit progress and often reverse gains previously made towards development. In countries that have been affected by insurgencies and clashes, which are usually very poor states, the achievement of development work becomes even more difficult, as the space for development in such environments is minimal. Conflict denies the rights of people to live the life they choose to live and it denies their right to development. A stable environment achieved through conflict resolution and transformation is therefore a precondition to achieving development.

The other link is that the lack of progress towards development can contribute to, exacerbate and sustain conflict. Development implies change such as the questioning of social structures or power relations, which might lead to social conflict even if not violent conflict. For instance, the awareness of rights may ignite a cycle of revenge for a *dalit*, who may have been oppressed by high-caste groups for many years.

All these factors create grievances and conditions, which make countries extremely vulnerable to conflict. Thus, how progress towards the development work is made is key to reducing risks of conflict and/or allowing conflict transformation to take place.

4.2 Interventions and their Impact on Women and Children

This section of the report seeks to analyze a few ongoing interventions of varied stakeholders, especially focused on women and children in the districts covered during the research i.e. *Rautahat* and *Makwanpur*. 
Please note that the stakeholders and interventions discussed below are not exhaustive and not mutually exclusive.

Also, as mentioned in the “limitation section of the report, although the research team had planned to interact with other concerned stakeholders like government officials, capital-based policy makers, heads of political parties, police and army, Ministry for Home Affairs, National Planning Commission, and National Human Rights Commission, the changed political scenario in the country prevented the team from doing so. Consequently, this section has only been able to provide limited information and has presented an overview of the areas of intervention of the stakeholders working in the two districts and the impact of armed-conflict on their work and vice-versa.

4.2.1 Potential Stakeholders working for Women and Children

The potential stakeholders, governmental, non-governmental and international non-governmental, working on the issues of women and children in Rautahat and Makwanpur districts are as follows:

**Governmental Organizations**

*Bal Kalyan Samiti*

*Local Government Program (LGP)*

*Mahila Bikas Karyalaya*

*Programs of District Development Committee (DDC)*

**Non-Governmental Organizations**

*Asmita*

*Bal Kalyan Samaj*

*Bal Kalyan Santhan*

*Gramin Uthan Abhiyan*

*Gramin Mahila Sewa Kentra*

*HimRights*

*Kanun Adhyan Tatha Paramarsh Kendra*

*Maiti Nepal*

*Manav Adhikar Jilla Samanway Samiti*

*Nari Sip Srijana Kosh*

*Pran*

*Plan Nepal*

*Rural Development Center (RUDEC)*

*Seto Guransh Bal Bikas Sewa*

*Social Organization District Coordination Committee (SODCC)*

*Women’s Independent Development Center (WIDEC)*
4.2.2 Areas of Intervention

The focus and scope of work of these governmental and non-governmental agencies is as follows:

**Interventions Focused on Women**

- Protection and promotion of women’s rights through awareness-raising campaigns, advocacy and lobbying;
- Training on income-generating activities, especially focused on the poor and the disadvantaged women;
- Programs to raise awareness on equity and equality of women in society, family planning, safe motherhood, marriage registration and reproductive health;
- Programs against human trafficking, rehabilitation and skill-development training programs for trafficked women and girls;
- Preparation of reports and case studies on human rights violations and impact of conflict on women and children;
- Programs on legal awareness on women and children’s issues;
- Adult and informal education programs;
- Micro-credit facilities;
- Psychological counseling to victims of conflict; and,
- Campaign against domestic violence and rape.

**Interventions Focused on Children**

- Pressure conflicting parties on issues of human rights violations of women and children;
- Protection and promotion of children’s issues and rights;
- Scholarship programs, particularly focused towards the poor and disadvantaged children;
- Establishment of child care centers; child development programs, district child network and child clubs;
- Construction of school buildings and play grounds, supply of nutritious food and medical aid;
- Programs on birth registration; campaign against child marriage and informal education programs.
4.2.3 *Impact of Conflict on Development Work*

In Nepal, the armed conflict has ravaged the development gains made over the last few decades and the future conduct of development activities has been hampered due to inadequate space for development.

Both governmental and non-governmental organizations working in *Makwanpur* and *Rautahat* have been severely affected, both directly and indirectly, by the armed conflict. Constraints such as blockades and *bandhs* by both parties, less community participation due to fear and perceived threat, illicit demands for donation, participation and vehicles put forth by the Maoist and state authorities, threat and unnecessary harassment of field-level workers by the warring factions, legitimate and illegitimate security points and prolonged security checks, the possibility of getting trapped in crossfire during programs also cause hindrance in the initiation, continuity and completion of projects and programs.

4.2.4 *Positive and Negative Features of GO and NGO Interventions*

The following are a few positive and negative aspects of the varied stakeholders, working on the issues of women and children in *Makwanpur* and *Rautahat*:

**Negative Features**

The closure of NGOs was one of the 40-point demands from the Maoists when they started their armed insurgency in February 1996. This was because though NGOs mandates stated that the development of the marginalized sections of society was their main agenda, it only benefited the elite. Most of the resources were consumed by organizations themselves, and hardly anything, if at all any, trickled down to the targeted groups.

At present, many programs are focused towards micro-credit, income-generation activities, rights awareness and advocacy for the poor and disadvantaged groups. However, there are very few substantial activities through which the target groups, especially women and children, have been able to break the boundaries of status quo, caste and feudalism evident in Nepalese society.

From the very beginning, the majority of the NGOs were donor-driven. The funding agencies had priorities based on international agendas,
which an NGO was obliged to agree to. Usually, this funding is insufficient and results in the lack of sustainability of programs in the long run. Also, there is the lack of coordination amongst concerned stakeholders and clashes between two or three programs in the same region.

**Positive Features**

A few NGOs have built effective networks to work on the issues of human trafficking and domestic violence. Also, many NGOs and CBOs working on women and children’s rights have developed and implemented successful programs on empowerment, adult education, women’s rights and early childhood development. Some organizations have also been able to conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the inclusivity of diversity, the recognition of existing diverse ethnicities, languages and religions. Efforts have also been made for the enhancement of income-generation in rural communities and the initiation of locally-focused programs.

4.2.5 **Impact of Development Work on Conflict**

As discussed earlier, development activities undertaken by various NGOs, INGOs, and GOs have produced both positive and negative inter-linkages with the armed conflict. A few areas where development work has exacerbated the current conflict situation are as follows:

When the programs are not sensitive towards the issue of the inclusion of diversity and concentrate, consciously or unconsciously, on the elite and privileged segment of the community, they fuel conflict as it directly increases the disparity amongst the various class, caste and ethnic groups in terms of knowledge, access to various opportunities, and economy.

When the programs raise awareness on rights amongst the poor and disadvantaged sections of the community, people realize how others have suppressed their identities and start to rebel and question their social structure. This can exacerbate conflict. At the same time, this is also an empowerment process for people where they understand that their inclusivity in the overall development process is a right, which they can demand. The best outcome of these integrated programs is the insights and understanding of the plight and human rights violations of individuals who are different from groups in the mainstream. It
provides a human face to marginalized people whose identity has been suppressed. For instance, in HimRights, in every program or activity, gender, caste and ethnic balance is assured. In various competitions conducted by the organization, children from rural, indigenous, dalit, backgrounds and from the female gender compete with added points to them. For example, if a girl is competing from rural, indigenous or dalit group, she only has to compete with 80 points as full score rather than 100. If it is boy, then the full competing score is 85. The full points have decreasing order in urban category in a similar manner. Likewise, these programs and national and international participations have created a high level of self-confidence amongst children and women. A rural, 17-year old Tamang girl (Buddhist) from Makwanpur who was part of various programs on human rights and was one of the participants of the first Child Mock Parliament, held in May 2004, participated in the Asia Pacific NGO Symposium, B+10, held in Bangkok in 2004. By Regional Mock Child Parliament, held in May 2005, she had won the election for House Chairperson and conducted the Parliament. She stated that she wanted to continue her education and, at later point in her life, she wanted to become a real parliamentarian, a policy maker to represent her community’s voices.

When the programs’ objectives and output do not meet the expectations and needs of the community, they contribute to conflict. For instance, in Rautahat district, a few cooperatives and banks promised to provide loans to small farmers and cottage industries, but charged high interest rates. This resulted in a huge uproar amongst the community’s people, who later decided to boycott their services and take the issue to the Maoists.
Section 5

Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Background
This section seeks to provide general and specific recommendations to the government, non-government and donor agencies to deal with the issues of women and children through the lens of structural violence and human rights violations in the context of Nepal. Some recommendations presented below have been drawn from the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict’s report entitled “Caught in the Middle: Mounting Violations against Children in Nepal’s Armed Conflict” (2005).

5.2 General Recommendations

- Analyze and assess the impact of the armed conflict on women and children through the lens of structural violence and human rights violations with the aid of a series of impact-assessment studies.

- Formulate projects and programs keeping the issue of systemic structural violence in consideration, being inclusive of the diversity factor, institutionalizing the concept and developing diversity-friendly and gender-friendly recruitment policies.

- Promote local capacity-building of individuals and community at large for development activities, since such decentralization efforts are likely to achieve a higher degree of ownership and accountability from amongst communities/local bodies.

- Focus programs with rights-based approach on the poor and disadvantaged sections of society since they have become extremely vulnerable in the present context.

- Coordinate amongst various NGOs to formulate and implement different programs and projects for the development of the marginalized and the indigenous groups in society.
5.3 Specific Recommendations

5.3.1 Government Organizations

- Formulate feasible policy options (short, medium and long-term) and mechanisms in relation to the mitigation of the challenges posed by armed conflict on women, children, IDPs and ethnic/indigenous/lower caste groups.

- It is vital that the Government of Nepal express a strong commitment and the political will to enforce policy reforms. It is necessary that the key priorities of these policies are sheltered and supported without any budgetary constraint.

- Formulate and amend the constitution, laws, and policies in such a manner that they prioritize the inclusivity of diversity and respect and legalize diverse languages, especially in the local context.

- End all violations against the security and rights of children and women. Improve compliance with all signed agreements. Uphold humanitarian laws and international human rights; particularly the BPFA, the CRC and the CEDAW.

- Ensure meaningful penalties for violations committed by the Maoists and government personnel according to international standards of justice for the perpetrators of crimes.

- Include the histories of various ethnic/indigenous groups in books for students of both public and private educational institutions. Also, inclusion of their languages in the curriculum is a requisite for the upliftment of these groups.

- Provide more high school and bachelor-level scholarships to children, especially girls from the lower castes and from ethnic communities with the least educational opportunities.

5.3.2 Non-Government Organizations/ International Non-Government Organizations

- Have a proper understanding of the priorities of poor and disadvantaged groups, through consulting them systematically when defining priorities through a participatory approach.

- Set up a larger support system for the poor, women and ethnic/indigenous/lower caste groups. A superficial response or mere token
participation of marginalized and disadvantaged sections of the society in activities and programs is inadequate.

- Establish Trauma Counseling Centers in different parts of the country with well-trained and experienced counselors for direct or indirect victims of armed conflict. Also, provide appropriate and accessible health and psychological treatment for girls and women survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence, and for girls/women involved in sex work. This care should be accessible inside communities and should include reproductive health care and education on nutrition.

- NGOs and INGOs, especially those working on human rights issues, should be able to provide sufficient guarantees of neutrality in their work and non-inclination to either one of the parties to the conflict.

- From the economic and social perspective, conduct awareness-raising campaigns and trainings on skill development, income-generating activities, vocational activities and educational opportunities, especially focused on women and victims of armed conflict to transcend systemic structural violence.

- Enhance skills and knowledge, especially of the field-level staff, to deal with human rights issues relevant to their work.

- As a part of the peacebuilding initiative, organizations should start their own affirmative actions to be inclusive of diversity as well as to incorporate gender balance.

**5.3.3 United Nations and other donor agencies**

The research team endorses the following recommendations of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict for United Nations and other donor agencies:

- The Government of Nepal has signed an accord with the United Nations to deploy international human rights monitors in the country. Such monitoring mechanisms should highlight issues pertaining to women and children.

- Strongly condemn the recruitment and use of child soldiers, killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, attacks against schools and hospitals,
trafficking, forced labor all other violations (UNSC Res. 1539, para.1).

- Endorse and call for UN support to the establishment of a broad-based civil society mechanism with a clear mandate to monitor local and national-level violations against children and women in armed conflict situations.

- Extend support to local district-based Nepali NGOs to ensure that civil society functions actively in the rural areas and increases its capacity to protect children and women against violations.

- Strengthen local NGOs and CBOs that represent the most marginalized communities in Nepal, especially ones that are themselves managed by communities.

5.4 Conclusion

The trauma from the conflict has been debilitating for those people, especially women, whose spouses have disappeared. The majority of the people in this country have experienced great physical and mental trauma in the past decade, directly or indirectly. The process of healing will start with the documentation of what happened to them. In this research, the team found that people are only able to talk about the direct pain that they are going through or have experienced in the past. However, the majority of women and children have not been able to articulate how it has impacted them negatively or positively and the short-term and long-term effects on them. They have great difficulty in addressing what they need, except for basic immediate needs or income generation. The psychological, emotional and social needs have not been articulated.

Organizations that have been working on the various aspects of the present ongoing violent conflict need to address women and children as the major stakeholders and agents of change. The ongoing conflict has opened the space for them to voice their concerns and to undertake power to bring about change. Most activists have seen women and children as only victims rather than as agencies for change in their potential capacity as leaders and counselors.

The armed conflict has brought about a need to address the issues of inclusivity of the diverse ethnic, indigenous, marginalized and religious
groups in all spheres of lives. However, internalization of this process is yet to take place at a personal and at an institutional level. Some organizations have initiated affirmative action, but the process has a long way to go. Hence, in the ongoing peace process, the role of women becomes vital in order to address social and structural violence, especially in the context of addressing the need for distributive justice in Nepal.
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