



# From the ground up

*Country focus:* Women's roles in local peacebuilding in Nepal

**act:onaid**

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**“The participation of women in governance remains nominal”**

1. The full report can be found at: [www.womankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/09/From-The-Ground-Up-FINAL.pdf](http://www.womankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/09/From-The-Ground-Up-FINAL.pdf) (accessed 19/12/13).

2. There are some exceptions. For instance, in the Sherpa communities, women often lead family businesses and are more likely than women in other communities to take an equal part in public and private decision-making (Onslow, 2010).

3. Shakya, A. 2009. ‘Social impact of armed conflict in Nepal: cause and impact’. Social Inclusion Research Fund.

Cover photo: Nepal  
Womankind

Despite the increased international attention to women’s participation in peacebuilding, the achievements and challenges facing women building peace at the local level have been largely overlooked. *From the Ground Up*, a research report published by Womankind Worldwide, ActionAid and the Institute of Development Studies in 2012, addresses some of these gaps by providing qualitative evidence on the roles of women in local peacebuilding in five countries: Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone.<sup>1</sup>

Research was conducted in each country, both through focus group sessions in conflict-affected communities, and interviews with staff of local and national civil society organisations, government representatives and community members working to support peacebuilding at the local level.

The research uncovered important commonalities across the countries, providing guidance on how women can be supported to build peace in conflict-affected communities. Certain contextual differences between the communities and countries were also identified, and much rich and insightful information was collected in each country. This paper provides a picture of women’s participation in peacebuilding in Nepal. It explores the national context,

examines gendered understandings of peace and peacebuilding, and explores the impact of women’s participation in peacebuilding. Barriers to women and women’s rights organisations building peace are identified, and recommendations to mitigate these are proposed.

**Women’s rights at a glance**

Nepali society is traditionally patriarchal, with strict gendered roles meaning that women are often within the home and focusing on childcare.<sup>2</sup> The daily struggle of women in Nepal is reflected in a high incidence of adolescent marriage, low literacy rates, lower enrolment rates in primary education, and lack of participation in decision-making processes. Dalit and indigenous women are particularly exposed to exploitation, violence and poverty due to both their gender and social status. In recent years, the number of women migrating to urban areas and other countries as domestic workers, together with trafficking in women and girls, has significantly increased.

**Women, conflict and peace: general context**

Approximately 13,000 people lost their lives, and some 60,000 were displaced during the ten-year civil war (1996-2006) between the government and the Maoist movement in Nepal.<sup>3</sup> Caste and gender-based

**Selected Statistics on Women in Nepal**

Indicator	Women	Men
Population (thousands/%)	15,632 (50%)	15,379 (50%)
Life expectancy at birth (years)	70	68
Population aged 15-19 ever married (%)	29	7
Population (+25yrs) with at least secondary education (%)	18	40
Economic activity rate (%)	80	88
Maternal mortality ratio	170 per 100,000 live births	
Adolescent (15-19yrs) fertility rate	86.2 per year per 1,000	
Women in national parliament (%)	33.2	
UNDP 2011 Gender Inequality Index (world rank/value)	102 (0.485)	

Sources: UN Statistics Division and UNDP. Latest statistics available for each indicator.

### 3 From the ground up: Nepal

discrimination, as well as feudalistic suppression, lack of political representation, a weak education system and economic inequality have been identified as root causes of the conflict.

Women were amongst those most severely affected by the war and the conflict brought a change to traditional roles. An increase in female-headed households resulted in women taking on the traditional roles of men to support their families. Women also joined the Maoist movement; it is reported that approximately 30-40% of Maoist forces were female.<sup>4</sup> There, women worked as soldiers, nurses, and cooks and took middle leadership roles. A large share of women's participation in the conflict can be attributed to forced recruitment. However, there was also significant voluntary participation because the Maoists raised issues important to women, such as equal access to inheritance rights, the elimination of patriarchal exploitation, equal payment for equal jobs and the vulnerability of low-caste women to sexual exploitation.<sup>5</sup> Although women largely returned to fulfil traditional gender roles once the conflict had ended, the voluntary involvement of women in the Maoist army gave impetus to the women's movement in Nepal.<sup>6</sup>

Women were also engaged in putting an end to the violence, through organising peace rallies, acting as local intermediaries between the Maoists and the government,<sup>7</sup> and through involvement in the People's Movement, which initiated the peace process in 2006.<sup>8</sup> Women's rights organisations, networks and alliances, including the Women's Alliance for Peace, Power, Democracy and Constituent Assembly (WAPPDCA), Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM), National Alliance of Women's Human Rights Defenders (NAWHRD) and Women for Human Rights (WHR), were involved both in securing the 33% quota for women in the national parliament and the development of Nepal's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.<sup>9</sup>

As part of the constitution-drafting process, a new Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly was formed in 2009 to ensure women were consulted in the drafting

process and that women's rights were addressed in the constitution document.<sup>10</sup> However, although new legal provisions to protect and advance the interests of women, as well as to recognise women's rights as a fundamental right have been adopted, the participation of women in governance remains nominal. In addition, despite being organised in many small non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups and as peace activists, women's opportunities to shape and influence peacebuilding activities and efforts have been limited.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, since 2006, the situation in Nepal has been characterised by an ongoing political struggle in which national and regional elections have been repeatedly postponed, meaning that a new constitution has not yet been agreed. This has led to widespread public dissatisfaction and different groups have repeatedly called for the different interim governments to respond to their needs. At all levels, these demands and needs seem to be neither acknowledged, respected nor protected, and the attention of leaders is gained through strikes and violent protests.<sup>12</sup>

#### Community profiles: Dang District

The research focused on Dang District, in the mid-western region of Nepal. The two communities visited are extremely remote and primarily engage in agricultural activities and animal husbandry, and are characterised by an absence of men due to large-scale economic migration. Community A is located in a very remote forest area with scattered villages. It has been a conflict-prone area with a high percentage of indigenous and Dalit people. The participants in the research in Community A came from two villages, one indigenous and one Dalit. Community B lies within an area populated by indigenous people. Two partners of ActionAid Nepal – the Society for Environmental Education Development (SEED) and Boat for Community Development (BCD) – are working with the two communities: SEED with Community A, and BCD in Community B. They work in similar ways, though the involvement of

4. See for example: Shakya, 2009 or Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), CEDAW Sub-Committee and HRTMCC. 2011. Shadow Report on the fourth and fifth Periodic Report of the Government of Nepal on CEDAW [pdf].

5. Shakya, 2009.

6. FWLD et al. 2011.

7. Geiser, A. 2005. 'Social exclusion and conflict transformation in Nepal: women, Dalit and ethnic Groups'. [pdf] Swiss Peace Working Paper 05/2005, Bern: Swiss Peace Foundation.

8. Falch, A. 2010. 'Women's political participation and influence in post-conflict Burundi and Nepal' [pdf] PRIO Paper, Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.

9. See [www.peacewomen.org/assets/files/nepal\\_-\\_nap.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/files/nepal_-_nap.pdf) (accessed 19/12/13).

10. The first women's caucus was established in Nepal in 2002 to ensure the inclusion of women's rights in state policies and programmes. The current Women's Caucus is the successor to this first caucus and was established on 2 January 2009. For more information, see: [http://womencaucus.gov.np/uploader/publication/Womens\\_Rights\\_and\\_Agenda\\_To\\_be\\_Incorporated\\_in\\_the\\_New\\_Constitution\\_English.pdf](http://womencaucus.gov.np/uploader/publication/Womens_Rights_and_Agenda_To_be_Incorporated_in_the_New_Constitution_English.pdf) (accessed 19/12/13).

11. CARE, 2010. From resolution to reality: lessons learned from Afghanistan, Nepal and Uganda on women's participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict governance. CARE International UK.

12. Shakya, 2009.

### **Supporting women's involvement in peacebuilding**

The following organisations work at the local and/or national level in Nepal, and participated in this research:

**SEED** was founded in 2001 with a focus on peacebuilding and governance activities in village development committees (VDCs). The formal partnership with ActionAid was established in 2004, extending SEED's focus to awareness raising and scholarship programmes. Since 2008, SEED has focused on education, health, food security and women's rights, aiming to support the economic development of deprived and marginalised sections of society by promoting awareness, advocacy and skills development. They have seen some success: four out of nine local council members are women, women have become more active members in community groups and are gaining elected positions such as the chair of school management committees or community forest groups, and the school enrolment rate of girls has risen to about 90%. SEED would like to extend its geographical coverage in Dang District and move to other villages.

**BCD** started working in 1994 functioning as a community development trust. Its main objective was to end bonded labour and the abuse of farmers by landlords. Over the years, BCD has carried out many different projects in areas such as education for older women, income-generating programmes, and empowerment of Kamaiya (indigenous) people. ActionAid has funded different programmes conducted by BCD since 2003, including a training institute for Kamaiyas. In 2005, BCD started working together with SEED on education programmes funded by ActionAid.

**Women for Human Rights (WHR)** established in 1994 is a NGO working for the human rights of widows in Nepal. With support from Womankind, it works in 73 districts and 1,050 Village Development Committees (VDCs), with over 84,000 members. WHR works in the area of socio-cultural, economic, legal and political empowerment of widowed women. One of their work programmes is Chhahari, a shelter which provides vocational and non-vocational skills training and capacity building to single women, and establishes links with other NGOs and associations. This programme is funded by Womankind.<sup>13</sup> WHR also holds weekly social mobilisation classes on the rights of widows, networks with local stakeholders, supports awareness raising campaigns such as street drama and publications on the issues facing widows, and supports widows to bring violence against women (VAW) and cases of property-right violations to local authorities.

**Consortium for Women's Rights (CWR)** started working in 2010. The team, consisting of seven lawyers, including six women, provides support for litigation of women's legal rights cases (for example, family matters and divorce cases), legal counselling through a hotline service, supports the registration of cases with the police and helps with fact-finding at community level. It also links its work to policy advocacy at national level, and has filed public interest litigation against some harmful traditional practices.

**Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM)** is active in 28 districts in Nepal with around 36,000 members, working on issues such as violence against women, harmful traditional practices, and women's right to lands and engaging in campaigning and policy advocacy at the community and national level prosecution.

**Saathi** (meaning 'friend' in Nepali) was established in 1992 to tackle the challenges facing women in Nepal. It works to eradicate violence against women and children, both through providing services to survivors and through advocacy at the national level. Saathi was the first organisation to open a shelter for survivors of VAW in 1995 and it now runs four shelters across the country. Saathi works with women survivors of VAW, trafficked women, conflict-affected women and women affected by HIV and AIDS, and is a partner of Womankind.

*(Continued)*

13. See [www.whr.org.np](http://www.whr.org.np) (accessed 19/12/13).

**Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO)** was founded in 1994 by a group of Dalit women and is a leading Dalit women's rights organisation in Nepal. FEDO works to achieve equity for Dalit women who face caste, gender and class-based discrimination throughout Nepal. Supported by Womankind, it has been working on a project to increase local women's participation in peacebuilding and democratic processes in four of the districts most affected by conflict. FEDO works to establish Dalit women's groups, pressure groups and awareness groups at the VDC and district levels, and supports Dalit women's access to justice, develops their skills, provides income-generation activities and enables them to participate in local governance.

**“Without the involvement of marginalised and excluded women in peace processes, there will not be sustainable peace in society”**

SEED has been much more extensive over the years (for more information on SEED and BCD please see box below).

### **Impacts of conflict at the local level**

Both Community A and B have been affected by the conflict and the villagers were under pressure from both government soldiers and Maoists, with disruptive effects. Villagers faced accusations of opposing allegiances, and were forced to attend political marches. Soldiers from both sides stole local resources such as timber from the forests and crops from the fields. Women reported being harassed and raped by army personnel, and forced to give money to and cook for Maoist forces. Local men accused of Maoist allegiance by army soldiers were kidnapped, tortured and killed. An estimated 20 men were killed by security personnel in the two communities, leaving women to head households alone.

As a result of cultural traditions and stigma, women in Nepal cannot easily remarry or access rights without a man, and it was found that:

**“There were many cases of women committing suicide because they could not take it on their own anymore”.**

- Female key informant, Community A.

Furthermore, the lack of political unity at the government level resulted in any economic development being severely hindered, as money that should have been used for local development initiatives was frozen. Lack of income-generating activities, low productivity and high rates of out-migration put high pressure on women.

### **Understanding of peace and peacebuilding**

The vast majority of the research participants in Nepal understood peace to be the absence of violence and conflict in the community and country, the absence of fear and freedom of movement. Some participants, particularly women, mentioned the importance of women's rights, of reducing domestic violence and other types of violence against women, and the importance of economic, social, mental and financial security.

**“[Peace is] a feeling, a perception, that differs from level to level and context to context, and person to person.”**

– Women focus group participant, Nepal

**“For Dalit women to have meaningful peace, they need to live in freedom from discrimination, intimidation and violence. Without the involvement of marginalised and excluded women in peace processes, there will not be sustainable peace in society.”**

– Durga Sob, President, FEDO

**“Peace for women means shelter, food and education for children. Above all, women need security in the home; they need to sleep well in their beds, knowing they are safe from violence. Violence can come from husbands, from neighbours or from family members. Domestic violence is a particular problem.”**

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

**“Many women see their role as confined to contributing to future peace through educating their children”**

**“Peace is to be able to move around freely and live free from fear.”**

– Female key informant, Community A

In addition to the absence of violence, the need for better infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, and the need for a constitution were important issues for both communities. One female focus group participant in Nepal explained: **“When facilities are provided that is when there is peace. We had no access to roads and couldn’t go anywhere when it rained. Now there are roads and we can go places even in the rainy season.”** Although many of the participants mentioned that the communities have experienced significant improvements in terms of security, they often stressed that there was no ‘proper peace’ yet because political parties were still arguing over the finalisation of the constitution. People believe that peace has to be built from the family level upwards, to the village, community and, finally, to the country level. Ultimately, many believe that politicians have a great share in the responsibility for peace in the country.

**“After the peace agreement, the Constitutional Assembly was elected and the government formed but since that time things are still not stable. There are many things that local people expected that have not happened yet. There is no constitution draft and it is impossible to maintain peace like that.”**

– Male key informant, Community B

**“To maintain peace nationwide, all political party leaders should agree. Local people want peace, they (the politicians) are steering.”**

– Mixed officials’ focus group, Community B

### **Women’s participation in peacebuilding and its impacts**

Women in both communities are active in one or more organisation, including peacebuilding forums, forest user groups, paralegal committees, civil society groups and women’s rights forums. However, women mentioned that their role in contributing to peace in their communities is very limited. They explained that what they refer to as “quarrels and disputes”, within

the villages are typically solved by eight to ten male elders and/or educated people gathering and discussing the issues. Women, who are largely uneducated, traditionally do not have a decision-making role within these meetings. Thus, many women see their role as confined to contributing to future peace through educating their children:

**“We are hoping that there will be peace and law and order in the community but directly we have not done anything as such, except for educating our kids which we think is a big responsibility.”**

– Female key informant, Community A

Despite these constraints, the various forums and groups that women have participated in have achieved notable results. The activities of peacebuilding forums range from supporting conflict survivors to access their rights and running communication and decision-making training for both women and men in the communities, to working on cases of domestic violence – the most common issue the forum dealt with.

The women’s rights groups support women whose parents were killed during the conflict, to acquire citizenship; they accompany, advise and support the women, and lobby for them. Citizenship for women in Nepal is accrued through male relatives, and is one of the requirements for access to public resources such as compensation for conflict survivors. The paralegal committee aims to solve disputes in neighbourhoods and between households, and protect single (widowed or unmarried) women from violence, abuse and discrimination. The committee identifies the issues and bring elders together to discuss and judge cases. Women and men who participated in the civil society focus group mentioned that they worked closely with the paralegal committee, in particular to help women survivors of violence, including domestic violence. Women’s groups are also active in supporting village development. SEED helped the women in one of the villages to form a women’s group that successfully pressured an electricity office to provide electricity. The government had collected fees for electricity, but the village had not been connected to the supply. The other

## Women in local peacebuilding in Nepal

Of significant importance to women are the government relief packages given to widows of the conflict. In order to receive these payments, forms have to be filled out – something many women need help with due to high levels of illiteracy. SEED, BCD and women's rights groups spoke of their work supporting women to claim their rights through this process.

In Community A, one widow, aged 23 with three children, was denied payment from the government because another woman from the same village had the same name and had already claimed compensation. With support from the women's group and SEED in the form of advice and assistance with paperwork, she proved that she was a different individual and managed to secure the relief package, which enabled her to send her children to school.

In Community B, women helped one another to gain citizenship and access compensation:

**“We have helped women to gain citizenship and therefore gain access to their compensation. Some women had no citizenship and then when their husbands were killed in the war they were left with nothing. We helped them.”**

– Female Key Informant, Community B

villagers (particularly men), once very sceptical about the women's group's activities, are now turning to it for help if they face other problems.

## Support to women's participation in peacebuilding

**“I was a housewife before I joined FEDO and now I am a social activist and am confident to talk about myself.”**

– Pabitra Bishwokarma, FEDO

Aside from conducting their own programmes, organisations such as SEED support the development of women's groups and thus the creation of wider spaces for peacebuilding work. One of the 'usual' criticisms of NGO work is the short lifespan of projects in communities and these feelings of frustration often occur with short-term programming. The appreciation of SEED's long-term approach was described by one of the key informants in Community A:

**“SEED helped in the beginning. It encouraged women and said they cannot confine themselves inside the household and cry and lament about what they went through. But instead come out and fight for your rights, and find a way to find peace [...] When the conflict just ended, SEED came here and has not left ever since. SEED is still working here... But the other organisations, they came in asked questions and took pictures and things like that, but they did not return**

**with more help. It has only been SEED which has been consistent.”**

– Female key informant, Community A

BCD also engages community mobilisers who have conducted awareness campaigns about women's rights and peace. They discuss women's rights and land ownership, and do advocacy work on behalf of women. With support from Womankind, Women for Human Rights (WHR) is working to support widows, a particularly vulnerable group of women in Nepal. Meena, a member of WHR describes the support she has received:

**“WHR has increased my self-confidence a lot. I used to be afraid to go out and talk to people, but now I go to women's groups to share experiences and comfort each other. Since I have been in Kathmandu, I have seen people from all over Nepal in the same situation as me and now I believe that widows can achieve just as much as married women.”**

Dalit women were particularly vulnerable during the conflict and yet they have been excluded from formal peace processes. As Asha, a Dalit woman described: **“Although Nepali law grants me equality, in reality I still face double discrimination as a result of my caste and my gender.”** With support from Womankind, the FEDO works to tackle discrimination and empower Dalit women throughout Nepal. As a member of FEDO explained: **“I first learnt about FEDO, when I heard the National President talking about it on the radio. FEDO has changed my life.**

**Before I joined I was shy and could not introduce myself, but it has given me training to build my confidence. Now I can go to the municipality and talk to people about my rights and those of other Dalit women."**

### **Barriers to women and women's rights organisations building peace**

Women are constrained from becoming involved in peacebuilding activities for a number of reasons. Women are traditionally responsible for the care of their children and their household, as well as contributing to income generation, which creates time constraints to their engagement with peacebuilding activities. Another constraint, disproportionately for older women, is a lack of education, which causes women to feel they are unable to contribute. Other obstacles include patriarchal societies and a traditional inhibition to discussing issues openly or in public. Local organisations aiming to support women have to earn their trust in order to 'break' the silence.

**"It is very difficult because first of all women are not very open in this society, they do not speak out about what is happening with them, and so a lot of women even come to a situation where they commit suicide rather than talk about their problems with others."**

– Female key informant, Community A

Further, the economic situation of households poses barriers and the need for trade-offs in women's engagement in peacebuilding. Women are not able to take time away from income-generating activities and therefore cannot join initiatives that do not immediately and directly benefit their families. Many of the active women participants in the research were questioned by their husbands and other household members about their whereabouts and the use of money for travel and activities when attempting to engage in peacebuilding initiatives.

**"If they are married it is the husbands that stop them, and later it is the society."**

– Female key informant, Community A

**"If a grassroots woman wants to attend some meetings but it does not come with some financial benefit for the household, the man would stop them attending"**

**"In many community programmes women cannot participate, for example in training because they have to work. If an organisation gives them the opportunity they are happy, but training such as awareness raising are not worth the time because they have to work to feed their families and there's no return on these training."**

– Mixed community members' focus group, Community B

**"If a grassroots woman wants to attend some meetings but it does not come with some financial benefit for the household, the man would stop them attending, it would cause conflict."**

– CARE, Kathmandu

Another key obstacle is the low level or lack of education of women. Both women and men in the two communities largely believed that women are not knowledgeable enough to participate in decision-making. As in other countries, women that aim for positions of power (for instance, chairperson), struggle against men who do not want to give up power. A lack of participation of women as voters in elections means that women are more likely to lose out, which compounds the problem.

**"Before joining FEDO, I was limited to just household work. Now I have boosted my confidence, and acquired knowledge and education. I realised that I needed to be more educated so that I could motivate and help other women, so I re-joined school and continued onto higher education. I also became District President of FEDO and was approached by the Nepali Congress Party to get involved after they saw my work with Dalit women. My ambition is to be a political leader and a role model for the Dalit community."**

– Pabitra Bishwokarma, FEDO President for Makhanpur District

According to key informants in Kathmandu, despite a 33% quota for women to participate in all governmental bodies, meaningful participation of women to influence decision-making is still nominal, even in local peace committees. The reason for this lack of recognition can be found

**“In a patriarchal society, it is extremely difficult for women to be heard, so it is important that women come together. Unless they act together, no one is going to hear them.”**

both in society’s traditional patriarchal values and in the current use of the political agenda. Even if women are trained and sensitised, the implementation of political negotiations at community and district levels often does not include issues considered important by women. Women that are active in policy-making belong to political parties. They are generally confined to parties’ programmes and priorities, which frequently don’t prioritise women’s agendas. Furthermore, political parties are accused of fulfilling their quota requirements by only allowing women to be candidates in areas where they know they will not be elected to office.

**“How we can define women’s role, their representation at the decision-making level is still a question mark for us. It is not only patriarchal, but it is also the political agenda.”**

– Kopila Rijal, Women for Human Rights, Kathmandu

Despite these obstacles, community members and staff of larger organisations who were interviewed reported that many groups have formed over the last year and women are more empowered in terms of raising their voices and exhibiting knowledge about political processes and rights.

**“Around 10 or 15 years ago, women were illiterate and unaware of their rights, and didn’t participate so actively. It is not like that now [...] Slowly, there is an increase in men listening to women voices, in families and the community.”**

– Male Key Informant, Community B

**“In a patriarchal society, it is extremely difficult for women to be heard, so it is important that women come together. Unless they act together, no one is going to hear them. They find security and strength in each others’ experiences.”**

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

However, organisations supporting women and their forums report facing their own challenges, particularly financial, which impacts on the number of training sessions and activities they can support, and

the geographical reach of their work. Funds to cover women’s loss of earnings during activities are limited or unavailable, which can make it difficult for women living in poverty to attend.

## Local to national links

**“Once I was in a community talking to women, and they said, ‘What do we care about the UN? Why does it matter to us?’ Water was scarce in that community, and one woman said to me, ‘Take this bucket of water – you can wash your feet with it, or you can use it intelligently and start from your head and wash your whole body.’ That reminds me why we need to join the dots and lobby at all levels.”**

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of Global Civil Society Advisory Group UN Women, Nepal

**“Yes, the government has a National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 [UNSCR 1325 and 1820], to ensure women’s participation. But it is not rolled out at local level and does not address discrimination in the community. It needs to include marginalised groups, including Dalit women.”**

– Renu Sijapati, Project Coordinator, FEDO

Many of the local organisations such as the paralegal committees and civil society groups are working together, trying to maximise their impact and spread of influence. They receive support from larger organisations, partially through partnerships, that operate on a wider district level, such as SEED and BCD, which in turn are partners of national level organisations supported by Womankind such as FEDO, WHR and Saathi. According to SEED, whenever other organisations in the area work on the same issues, they try to join forces to increase their impact. Saathi’s National Network against Domestic Violence is a good example.

Larger organisations and networks in Nepal do succeed in making an impact, not only at the local level but also at the national level. Geographical coverage allows for important issues for women to be made public on a larger scale, putting pressure on the



Above: Women engage in activities to mark World AIDS Day, Nepal

Brian Sokol/ActionAid

government and institutions nationwide. For example, women rights forums are active in 42 districts. Two key informants mentioned that if cases such as violence against women or discrimination against women appear, these forums coordinate and work on each case together. One example is the successful lobbying of the judicial system by women's rights forums across Nepal to investigate the murder of a woman by her husband and mother-in-law. Though the incidents took place in Nepalgunj, women across all districts joined and lobbied through protests and strikes for an investigation and legal prosecution.

Interviewees also told us that women's rights forums have been actively involved in drafting points for inclusion in the constitution. They first met in local communities and then developed a joint 16-point demand for action at the national level and handed this over to elected representatives for discussion in the constituent assembly. One of their points, the need to abolish the age limit applied to war widow's pensions, was considered and enacted along with the Supreme Court's verdict. The influence of women's networks during the writing of the constitution has also been mentioned as a positive example of the women's movement working

together by the members of national organisations in Kathmandu.

There are many other national-level organisations which are working to raise national awareness of the issues affecting women. For example, FEDO works to achieve equity for Dalit women who face gender, class, and ethnic-based discrimination throughout Nepal, while Saathi<sup>14</sup> is working to eradicate violence against women and children. With support from their partner Womankind, they have been able to raise community-level issues to national level, and are also engaged in developing the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.

**"The first time I heard about 1325 was in early 2004. In November 2004 I wanted to organise a meeting about it, and I couldn't find anyone – not a single person, not even a UN person – to come and talk about it...1325 means nothing to many women... When we talk about the things that matter to them, then let them know their concerns and needs are backed up by international legislation, that's when it matters and makes sense to them."**

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

14. For more information on these two organisations visit [www.fedonepal.org](http://www.fedonepal.org) and [www.saathi.org.np](http://www.saathi.org.np) (accessed 19/12/13).

## Conclusion

“With the support of various women’s rights organisations and other community-based organisations, women have increasingly participated in local peacebuilding groups”

This research has demonstrated that since the formal end to the conflict in 2006 many communities have experienced significant improvements in terms of security. A shared understanding of peace was identified among participants, who believed that it has to be built from the family level upwards, to the village, community and, finally, to the country level. As a result, they felt that ‘proper peace’ had not yet been established because the constitution making process is not finalised and political parties have not assured the long-term stability of the country.

Whilst women have overall been excluded from formal peacebuilding, it is notable that certain groups such as Dalit, Madhesi and Muslim women were particularly vulnerable during the conflict and continue to be marginalised during the ongoing peace process. However, with the support of various women’s rights organisations and other community-based organisations, women have increasingly participated in local peacebuilding groups. These groups have achieved notable results, including supporting conflict survivors to access their rights, running communication and decision-making training for both women and men in the communities, and working on cases of

domestic violence. Despite numerous obstacles, many local forums have continued to form over recent years and women are now more empowered in terms of raising their voices and exhibiting knowledge about political processes and rights.

However, women’s participation in peacebuilding at the local level has not always led to concrete outcomes at the district and national level, and political parties’ programmes and priorities frequently do not prioritise women’s agendas. In response to this, local organisations play a vital role in supporting women directly to maximise their influence as well as working together with larger networks and national organisations to raise community-level issues to the national level. Given these findings, it is clear that a gender-responsive approach to peacebuilding in Nepal should recognise the importance of women’s rights and gender equality, and ensure the inclusion of women who experience high levels of discrimination. Positive measures should be developed to support the important roles that women undertake within their families and communities as peacebuilders, and to bring these skills, experiences and priorities to the regional, national and international levels.

## Recommendations

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### Develop and implement concrete, coherent policy commitments

Just and sustainable peace, which includes meaningful participation of women and inclusion of women's rights, begins with coherent policy. All development, defence and diplomatic policy should have clear, strategic commitment to women's rights and gender equality including measures to promote women's participation. Women's rights and gender equality should be recognised in all peace processes, agreements and transitional governance structures, and national and local policy should incorporate views and lessons from women building peace at local level.

***To achieve this Nepal's Government should fully implement its National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in consultation with women's rights organisations at local, regional and national levels, and ensure adequate long-term resourcing and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.***

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### Ensure women's participation in peace processes

To ensure a durable and just peace, national and international peace processes must include women as decision-makers, and reflect the priorities and views of women building peace at local levels including the views of women from ethnic minority groups, widows, ex-combatants, survivors of sexual violence, displaced women, women with HIV/AIDS and disabled women. Further, all communiqués, declarations and agreements resulting from national or international peace processes should have dedicated commitments to women's rights and gender equality.

***It is vital that the minimum of 33% representation stipulated in Nepal's interim Constitution should be fully implemented, and that women and women's rights organisations are fully involved in ongoing peace negotiation processes.***

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### Provide long term support and funding to women's peacebuilding

Women's rights organisations are at the forefront of innovative peacebuilding work at a local level. For them to reach their potential, this work needs to be adequately and sustainably funded. Furthermore, all funding to peacebuilding initiatives should demand demonstrable women's rights outcomes, including support for women's economic empowerment which enables their participation in peacebuilding processes.

***In line with the United Nations target, a minimum of 15% of all funds in support of peacebuilding should be dedicated to activities whose principal objective is to address women's specific needs, advance gender equality or empower women.***

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### Tackle violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls is a pervasive element of conflict, and continues long after the laying down of arms. It is both a gross violation of women's human rights, a key barrier to their participation in peacebuilding and public life, and to building sustainable peace. Women need law enforcement and formal judicial mechanisms to be accessible and fair. In addition, no peace process, whether at the national or the community level, should result in impunity for serious violations of human rights such as violence against women.

***All peacebuilding policy, funding or activity should contain a gendered risk analysis, and include targeted action and ring-fenced finance, to tackle violence against women and girls as a key barrier to peace.***

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### Build an enabling environment for women's peacebuilding

In order for women's efforts in local peacebuilding to be effective, national policies and infrastructure must ensure women's rights and participation. Gender discrimination must be eliminated and women's rights promoted and protected in all public infrastructure and institutions including those in the legal and justice, healthcare, transport and education systems.

Collaboration between women's rights organisations and women in political parties, parliament and government should be promoted. Gender discrimination must be addressed at each stage of the political process including in citizenship, electoral registration and election processes. Targeted voter registration drives and political education campaigns should be targeted at women, particularly those in remote communities.

***In order to achieve this, the government must ensure that the provisions outlawing discrimination on the basis of gender contained within Nepal's Interim Constitution of 2007 are enacted immediately and in the future constitution. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women must also be fully implemented.***

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Above: Women in Nepal take part in a rally during the 16 days of activism against gender violence

Brian Sokol/ActionAid

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