



IPJ Nepal Project “Building Constituencies for Peace and Democratic Development in Nepal”^{*} 2005 – 2006

Success Stories

While Nepal receives increasing international attention the IPJ's five-year history in the country, and relationships with leaders ranging from the top political parties to grassroots organizations, provided a sound foundation from which this one-year project could develop. Peace is a verb; it is a process. Only a peace *with* justice will be a lasting peace. One key step towards peace with justice is inclusive, democratic development. In this manner, not only political democracy—state systems and models of representation—but also democracy in the social realm that promotes and respects the voices and participation of all sectors of society is required.

The lessons learned over the past year are rooted in these long-standing relationships and are part of the IPJ's collaborative and participatory process of peacemaking. The successes, often difficult to quantifiably measure, can be clearly seen as participants engage one another in small-group work or come in smiling the second day of a workshop saying that they were thinking about 'BATNA' all night. The following vignettes represent the range of people who both influenced and were influenced by the IPJ Nepal Project: a natural leader who strengthened her skills and extended her network for future political ambitions; a confident, soft-spoken politician finally recognized for her contributions to her party; a central committee member reinvigorated by reconnecting with his rural constituency; a visionary young man who connects his peers to the global community through media; and, marginalized sectors of Nepali society who found support from their neighbors when they spoke up for their rights.



Women and Marginalized Groups

Sangita Nirola, Founder of SWATI

"I am really motivated. We have to show our potentiality to men from the beginning of this time [April, 2006]." ~ Sangita Nirola

Having attending sessions in the IPJ Nepal Project series in December 2005 and January, February, April and July, 2006, Ms. Nirola stated that at each workshop or roundtable she learned something new about communication, negotiation, peacebuilding, democracy planning and problem-solving. She uses these skills on a daily basis through interactions with staff members in SWATI and with the women enrolled in her training programs. As important, she enjoyed making new contacts during each session of the series. Sangita indicated that through the IPJ Nepal Project, she has been able to reach out to political leaders. She hopes to run for political office and knows that building these coalitions will help her.

Sangita has increased the numbers of women, youth, and marginalized groups in her organization. In the future, she hopes to see more educational programs offered in Nepal that teach women about their human and voting rights in order to empower them and enhance their potential. She also thinks it is important to provide more training programs for women who want to run for political office, and she hopes to receive additional training in preparation for her debut as a candidate. Sangita believes that we all need to encourage more women to become involved in the socio-political arena and to train candidates in the next one to three years. She has asked the IPJ to "create more programs that center on the empowerment of women." Sangita is a leader, which has been reinforced by her participation in the IPJ Nepal Project.



Sangita Nirola prepares for a simulated negotiation (February 2006)

Political Parties and Policymakers

In the December 2005 workshop, “Promoting Civil Society Amid and After Civil Strife: Dialogues on Inclusion and Engagement of All Stakeholders in a Democracy,” two political leaders demonstrated the impact awareness-building programs, like the IPJ Nepal Project, have had on the discourse of conflict transformation in Nepal.

Suprabha Ghimire, Central Committee, Nepali Congress

“Voice is what counts. Voice rests on number. If the number is little, voice is not heard. This is what I feel intensely. Women are not heard.” ~ Suprabha Ghimire

Suprabha Ghimire is now Central Committee member of the Nepali Congress Party. In May 2004, she held no formal post but was selected to attend the IPJ strategic negotiations training as the IPJ required that at least one of the four party representatives be a woman. During those three days she finally had a platform to express herself and, more importantly, *be heard*. Through the exercises on negotiation and conflict management, Suprabha was able to gain valuable communication skills and her talents were recognized.

When she arrived at the December 2005 training she greeted the IPJ staff with big hugs. Suprabha thanked the IPJ for the opportunity to attend the previous workshop, and shared her good news: she had just been elected to the Central Committee and came to this workshop as an equal to her fellow party members. During the discussions she spoke surely, “Women’s equality is deeds, not words. For example my colleagues in other parties are willing to accept 33% [reservation]. That’s ok [for now] because we may not be as experienced as men, but women should not feel inferior, should not feel like they are worth only 33% of a man. They should demand equality.”

Advocating not only for women’s inclusion, but for a more comprehensive approach to the resolution of the conflict in Nepal, Suprabha said, “Conflict is caused by the lack of commonality. Once we have a common identity, the conflict can be resolved... We are one, so participation in the process must be by all. Through the conflict, we have realized that participation of all sections, women, marginalized groups, is necessary to resolve the conflict.”

During one of the breaks, we shared with her the *Toolkit for Advocacy and Action*, a resource that outlines the components of peacebuilding from conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction, highlights the role that women play in each phase, and is directed to women peacebuilders and the policy community. Suprabha poured through the pages, and asked for us to send her copies when we returned to the U.S. As a former professor of Political Science and Economics, Suprabha is still an avid student of peace processes and will continue to be a vocal advocate for equality in Nepal.



Suprabha Ghimire reads the Toolkit (Dec.2005)

Bhim Rawal, Central Committee Member, United Marxists Lenin

"If the question of security comes up. Peace and democracy addressed together, that will be the solution." ~

Bhim Rawal

*Bhim Rawal reports on
the Bishra District (Dec. 2005)*

On the morning of December 4, 2005, only a handful of the political party leaders had arrived before the student protests outside the Hotel Malla shut down the street until the afternoon. Bhim Rawal, Central Committee Member of United Marxists Lenin Party, and participant in the 2004 IPJ workshops, came in breathless, having just returned from a monitoring trip to the Bishra District. He reported that while it was true that the number of deaths had decreased since the Maoist unilateral cease-fire declared in September, little else had changed for rural Nepalis. He carried with him a "tax" receipt he had paid to the Maoists in order to be granted permission to travel back to the capital. "The rural and urban populations live in different realities in



Nepal," he shared. In Kathmandu, people cannot gauge what is really happening; "Nobody knows what is going on in the country side." In the districts, he reported, women are still intimidated into joining the Maoists, and children are asked to join the guerilla forces to fight, not only as informants and watchmen. Even within the Maoists, he said "there is a gap between the combatants and the policymakers." The political parties must devise a strategy that does not deal with the Maoists as a monolithic entity. "We must bring them [both the Maoist leaders and the rural cadres] to the mainstream with democracy as our hardware." While many rightly critique political party leadership as being removed from the realities of their constituencies, Bhim is an example of a leader who has worked to stay connected to the reality in the rural districts.

Bhim has referred to himself as a "gender-sensitive male." But, in discussion about the women's reservation in the December workshops, he stated, "I would like to add two things. Empowerment should be political, economic and cultural. Only social change, like education *and* legislation can change the inept laws that are discriminatory to the woman. We should work from these two sides as well." He, like Suprabha, sees the multiple ways in which Nepali society has been fractured – by the conflict and by its feudal, caste system. "In the last decades many changes have taken place. As a boy, I never drank water touched by Dalits. Now, in my house, I can take Dalits inside my house. What I want to say, if education and social change are combined, gradually [society] is changed. You have no other way out... We have to make cultural changes in social conditioning. It has been gradually changing, but not at the pace of what we need today." By directing the discussion to the role of civil society and its connection to political parties, this workshop enabled political leaders to consider their alliances outside the members of the seven-party alliance. They expressed the necessity of engaging all sectors of Nepalese society in order to address the root causes of the conflict and achieve a stable peace.

Emerging Leaders

Santosh Shah, Founder and Editor of Today's Youth Asia Magazine

"The negotiation and communication training is really proving beneficial in everyday life." ~ Santosh Shah

Santosh Shah is the son of village farmers in Janakpur. He was selected as one of the few students to attend one of the most prestigious schools in Nepal, where he studied alongside the members of the Nepal elite, including members of the royal family. Through this education, he had the opportunity to study and interact with diverse youth from all over Nepal, and from that experience, the idea for Today's Youth was born.

In 2003, Santosh founded Today's Youth, an organization preparing Nepalese youth with positive ideas and skills and providing capacity building to promote active contribution to the nation in crisis. Today's Youth facilitates a series of Youth Forums—platforms for Nepalese youths to speak out, discuss issues pertaining to the nation, and explore and experiment with creative ideas to address the situation in Nepal.

Santosh always brought incredible energy and insight to the IPJ workshops for emerging leaders. At 25, he had learned to network and was a skilled speaker. However, Santosh also demonstrated remarkable growth during the past year. The IPJ programs are designed with the flexibility to meet the diverse interests of the participants. During the earlier workshops, Santosh proposed themes such as "negotiating with one's parent about a career path." Later in the year, he called on his fellow emerging leaders to devise strategies to maintain the momentum of the people's pro-democracy movement. "We must make this our victory, we must claim it as our own," said Santosh, describing how the people must recognize their own role in bringing about the democratic transition, and not let the political parties take all the credit. "We are fed up with the violence. We have learned from the past mistakes of the political parties," reflected a colleague during the roundtable in April. "And we must plan now for what comes after the rejoicing ends," concluded Santosh. As the year progressed, Santosh proposed topics that reflected a deeper understanding of the role of emerging leaders in resolving Nepal's conflict.

Currently, the IPJ serves on the advisory board of Today's Youth Asia Magazine, a new initiative Santosh created to recognize the interconnectedness of regional issues. Articles in Today's Youth Asia Magazine will be contributed by emerging leaders around the world, and will approach international themes through a forward-looking lens. The first issue will feature the cover story: "Peace and Stability in Asia." In recent correspondence with the IPJ, Santosh, editor of the magazine wrote, "I am sure I will definitely need your support on the cover story. The subject is inspired by IPJ." While the energy and ambition are all his own, Santosh's participation in the IPJ Nepal Project has helped direct his efforts to look for comprehensive and creative strategies to advance peace not only in his family, but also in Nepal and around the world.

Santosh Shah (April 2006)



Peace Radio Project

The IPJ radio program engaged rural communities and marginalized groups by exploring issues that they are faced with, through programming that captures their interest. "The community people feel that the program has been able to contribute much for social change and awareness building. They found the program had started to create a system of discussion on social issues. The facilitators of the program said that they are happy to facilitate the program as they feel that in some way they were able to act as change agents for the development of their communities." Participants said "the programs not only enhanced their knowledge on rights, peace and conflict but also built their capacity to discuss social issues."



Community members shared a number of examples of how participating in the PRP has affected their lives. In Dhikurpokhari, Kaski district, a woman presented her widowed daughter-in-law with red clothes (challenging the existing prejudice against single women and the societal perspective that widows cannot wear red). In Babiya, Sunsari district,

participants from different castes have started eating in the same place after the discussion of caste discriminations. This community has also organized to work together on community clean up and beautification. An inter-caste married couple (Dalit and high-caste) in Yangsila had been keeping their marriage a secret from the community. During post-program discussions they decided to share their marriage and they have been accepted in the community.

Women in Hasposha, Sunsari district, reported that "they now feel like they can do something," and have decided to propose a woman candidate from their group to the local political leaders. In another community, the PRP was successful as it mobilized women ages 65 to 70 to participate (again challenging the prejudice against widows). The women expressed that "they can do something as old women and can show their energy for the democratic movement." Despite initial hesitation to allow their girl children to participate in the listening groups, parents in Dhikur Pokhari began to ask the facilitators if their girl children could join the listening groups. Although society in Nepal has been gradually changing, becoming more open to questioning caste distinctions and historic discrimination that threatens the likelihood of local-level democratic development, the radio programming provided a forum in which participants could directly address these subjects and be empowered to engage in greater democratic participation.



While these concrete examples demonstrate that the PRP has encouraged participants to take direct steps to change their society, particularly their daily practices at the local level, reports also indicate that attitudes and beliefs are changing and that the communities will be better prepared for national-level peace and democratic development. Listeners said the PRP has helped them understand peace through non-violence and constructive conflict transformation. Understanding the root causes of conflict has also increased. They reported that “the program helped them realize that caste discrimination and conservative practices that have existed in the society is [one of the] reasons [the community] is under-developed.” They realized that “Dalit and ethnic women in the constituent assembly and decision-making positions could bring positive change in their society.” As Nepal moves along the path towards greater democracy, rural and isolated communities must be included. The IPJ PRP is one mechanism contributing to this endeavor



For more information on the IPJ Nepal Project visit <http://peace.sandiego.edu>

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