THE
CARTER CENTER

Carter Center Update on Local Peace Committees
May 10, 2011

I. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an update to the Carter Center's November 2009 paper, "Observations on Local Peace Committees," which was shared with the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) and its partners.[1] The report focuses on the current status of Local Peace Committees (LPCs) around the country, their activities, and the challenges that they face.

The Carter Center commends the efforts of dedicated LPC staff, coordinators, and members who through their hard work and individual initiative have helped to improve LPC functioning in their districts. In several cases, the Center has heard reports of staff continuing to work even without a contract or salary simply due to their commitment to supporting the LPC. Additionally, the Center recognizes the positive efforts of LPC coordinators and members who, working as volunteers, have in some cases gone above and beyond expectations in their contributions to the LPC.

The report is offered in the spirit of cooperation and respect, and with the hope that the findings will be of use to the MoPR, LPC members, civil society organizations, and national and international partner organizations providing support and technical assistance to LPCs.

II. METHODOLOGY

Since June 2009, The Carter Center has been observing the peace process and constitution drafting process in Nepal, with small teams of national and international observers based throughout the country. The findings noted here are based on information gathered by Carter Center long-term observers (LTOs) between September 2010 and March 2011. During this period, observers collected information on LPCs in 33 districts and conducted individual interviews with LPC members, local government officials, political party representatives, civil society members, and journalists.

This short report briefly describes the background and mandate of LPCs, how their level of functioning has changed since November 2009, the main activities of LPCs, and the challenges that they face. The report concludes with several recommendations. Due to changing conditions at the local level and the long duration of the observation period, in some cases the current status of certain LPCs as reflected in this report may no longer be up-to-date. Whenever possible, the Center has attempted to ensure that the observations reflected in this report remain relevant to the LPCs described herein.

[1] In addition to the November 2009 paper, The Carter Center also published information about Local Peace Committees in its August 2009 and November 2010 reports on political and peace process trends, and in its December 2010 report on political dispute resolution at the local level. The reports are available at: http://cartercenter.org/news/publications/peace/democracy_publications/nepal-peace-reports.html.

III. BACKGROUND AND MANDATE OF LPCs

a) Background

Establishment of Local Peace Committees was approved by the government in 2006, and a Terms of Reference was agreed in 2007. However, national-level political disputes plagued LPCs after their initial inception; the committees were reportedly formed and disbanded twice before the present Terms of Reference was issued in 2009.

In November 2009, The Carter Center reported that "LPCs face multiple challenges and in the majority of districts they are either not functioning well or are largely inactive."[2] Key challenges reported by Carter Center observers at that time included: inter-party disputes over LPC composition, commonly over the position of coordinator; a perceived lack of support and guidance from the government and MoPR; lack of funds; and a lack of clarity among LPC members about their role. Additionally, many LPC secretaries appointed during the UCPN(M)-led government did not have their contracts renewed under the government formed by the CPN-UML in May 2009, and at the time of the Carter Center's report in November 2009 secretaries were still not in place.[3] This proved highly disruptive to LPC functioning.

Since that time, the MoPR has taken important steps to overcome some of the challenges that were hampering LPCs, including allocating funds, maintaining staff at the district level, and holding workshops for LPC staff and selected members. These efforts have yielded some success. Additionally, the Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) has recently approved funding for an MoPR proposal to increase oversight of and assistance to LPCs. However, despite these positive developments, LPCs at both the district and Village Development Committee (VDC) levels continue to face challenges regarding their structure, relevance, and capacity.

b) Current mandate

The mandate of LPCs is laid out in a ToR, which describes a role for LPCs in "resolving the remnants of conflict at the local level and systematically promoting the processes of peace and reconstruction through mutual goodwill and unity." The ToR lays out instructions for forming LPCs, mandates the creation within each committee of a secretariat of up to nine members, and gives each LPC the right to constitute VDC-level LPCs "if it deems necessary." It also includes a seven-point list of LPC duties and responsibilities:

4.1 To assist in the strong implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accord, keeping in mind Nepal's transitional period by promoting the peace building process and also by facilitating the peace promotion and peace building and conflict transformation process at the local level until the new constitutional system is in place.

4.2 To monitor the implementation of the Ministry's relief and reconstruction programs.

4.3 To render necessary support to the Task Force constituted by the Government of Nepal for the collection of the data on conflict affected individuals, families, and structures.

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[2] The Carter Center, "Observations on Local Peace Committees," November 6, 2009.

[3] LPC secretaries are government officers who serve on short-term contracts. Under the Terms of Reference, LPC secretaries are responsible for overseeing staff, keeping accounts, monitoring and reporting on MoPR relief and reconstruction programs, and sending periodic program and financial reports to the MoPR. In practice, they have taken on broader responsibilities for planning and implementing LPC activities.

4.4 To facilitate constructive conflict transformation processes in situations of debilitating political or social conflict.

4.5 To work on reconciliation, healing and trust-building.

4.6 To continuously monitor the political and social developments at the local level and to try best to defuse the tension by using conflict resolution processes if there is a political deadlock or potentiality of violence.

4.7 To disseminate information to members and the public on issues that affect national or local peace processes.[4]

Throughout the ToR there are references to the intended role of LPCs as peace building and conflict resolution bodies. Additionally, the MoPR has emphasized to the Carter Center that LPCs are supposed to work autonomously, with the Ministry providing backstopping support rather than detailed direction. Finally, although the ToR notes that all LPCs will be dissolved after the promulgation of the new constitution by the Constituent Assembly, the Cabinet has reportedly recently decided to extend the term of LPCs until December 31, 2012.

IV. LOCAL-LEVEL FINDINGS

A. CURRENT STATUS OF LPCs

1. The overall level of LPC functioning has increased since November 2009, when the large majority of LPCs were found to be either defunct or were largely inactive. Despite these advances, the degree of LPC functioning continues to vary significantly by district.

LPCs have been formed in 73 out of 75 districts, according to the MoPR.[5] Additionally, Carter Center observers have found that the overall level of LPC functioning has increased since November 2009 when the Center reported that, out of 18 districts visited, LPCs were either not functioning or were largely inactive in 14 districts and were not formed in two districts. Only two LPCs visited were reported as functioning and active at that time.

LPCs visited by Carter Center observers for this report can be classified according to four levels of functioning: not formed (3 districts[6]), formed but mostly inactive (9 districts), formed and active/meeting regularly (19 districts), and formed and highly active or effective (2 districts). From this comparison, it is clear that there has been a shift of LPCs from the "formed but mostly inactive" category to the "formed and active/meeting regularly" category.

While progress has been made in both the formation and functioning of LPCs, they remain at various stages of development. Some LPCs exist in name only, others continue to face internal disputes, and many have focused narrowly on collecting data and reviewing applications for interim relief from conflict-affected persons. A small number have embraced the broader peacebuilding mandate of LPCs and engaged in successful conflict prevention and mediation efforts. Ongoing challenges (discussed in

[4] "Terms of Reference of Local Peace Committees, 2009 (2065)." http://www.peace.gov.np/uploads/Publication/LPC-ToR-Eng-%202065-10-20.pdf.
[5] Gorkha and Tanahu are the only two districts in which LPCs are not currently formed, according to the MoPR.
[6] During Carter Center observer visits, Kavrepalanchok, Kaski, and Gorkha were reported as not formed. However, according to the LPC secretary in Kavrepalanchok, a coordinator was selected in late April 2011 and the LPC planned to meet for the first time in early May. The LPC in Kaski, also counted here as "unformed," was formed after the Carter Center's research.

Section IV.C. of this report), including both national-level policy issues as well as those arising from specific district dynamics, continue to face LPCs across the country.

2. **The increase in the overall functioning of LPCs can be attributed to: positive steps taken by the MoPR, the resolution of local-level disagreements among political parties, and the end of the UCPN(M) national boycott of LPCs.**

Both national and district-level developments have been precursors to the improvement in LPC functioning. Major factors identified by Carter Center observers are discussed briefly below.

a) *Positive steps taken by the MoPR, including the deployment of LPC secretaries, the provision of funds, and workshops clarifying LPC roles to members*

LPC secretaries were deployed in 2009 and have played an important role in bolstering LPC functioning at the district level. Most of the secretaries appointed by the M.K. Nepal-led government are reportedly still in place, and this continuity in staffing has facilitated improvement in the LPCs. Additionally, the allocation of funds by the MoPR to district-level committees has likely been one of the most significant factors to spur new LPC activities. Most LPCs were provided NRs. 600,000 in Nepali fiscal year 2009-2010, for which they had to submit a proposal of activities and a detailed budget. In the following fiscal year, an additional NRs. 700,000 was made available, first in a NRs. 200,000 installment followed later by a further NRs. 500,000. Finally, in response to requests for greater instruction about their mandate, the MoPR provided training and held workshops for LPC members and staff to clarify their roles and responsibilities.

b) *Local-level resolution of disagreements among political parties, including in regards to LPC leadership and composition*

Resolution of local-level disputes over LPC leadership and composition has improved LPC functioning in many districts. For example, in Udayapur the LPC was almost completely defunct for most of 2009 but in 2010, through initiatives reportedly undertaken by civil society organizations and the new CDO, the political parties agreed on a new coordinator and thereafter the LPC was able to hold regular meetings. In Pyuthan, the LPC had been inactive for much of 2009 due to disputes among political parties but, during the Carter Center's visit in March 2011, was expanding to the VDC level. Observers have heard similar stories in other districts, including Sindhupalchowk, Salyan, and Dolakha.

c) *End of the UCPN(M) boycott*

The UCPN(M) nationwide boycott of LPCs obstructed LPC formation and functioning for an extended period through 2009 and 2010. Following the Maoist decision to withdraw from government in May 2009, the party decided to boycott the LPCs as part of their policy of non-cooperation with the M.K. Nepal-led government. However, this boycott was not consistently enforced, and observers found several examples of Maoists participating in LPCs. With M.K. Nepal's resignation in late June 2010, the boycott appeared to end in most of the districts where it was previously enforced, and the UCPN(M) is now participating in LPCs in most districts. While observers reported continuing UCPN(M) boycotts in a small number of places, these appeared related to local dynamics as opposed to national policy.

B. <u>CURRENT LPC ACTIVITIES</u>

The ToR instructs LPCs to undertake a range of activities. At least four of the seven "duties and responsibilities" of LPCs are related to peace building and conflict resolution activities, two relate to interim relief and reconstruction programs, and one relates to information dissemination. However, in

reality, the majority of LPCs see their main role as reviewing and verifying conflict-affected persons' (CAP) applications for interim relief. Many have undertaken some additional activities, but only a small number appear to have made conflict resolution activities a major focus. Also, following instructions from the MoPR, most of the LPCs visited by Carter Center observers have made efforts to expand to the VDC level.

1. **Nearly all LPCs have continued to focus on reviewing and verifying conflict-affected persons' applications for interim relief as their main activity.**

Because the District Administration Office generally does not have the capacity to reach out to conflict-affected persons across the district or investigate applications for interim relief, Chief District Officers (CDOs), who have overall responsibility for managing interim relief in their districts, often request political parties or the LPC to facilitate this effort. Nearly all LPCs have focused on reviewing and verifying CAP applications for interim relief as their main task. Applications from CAPs either come to the LPC directly or are referred to the LPC by the Chief District Officer. The comprehensiveness of LPC review of applications varies by district, but in many districts the CDO has asked the LPC to verify that applications are complete, review any supporting documentation, and discuss whether the application appears to be genuine.[7] The Committee then selects which applications to send to the CDO with the recommendation that they be forwarded to the MoPR for final approval. In some districts, LPC members have traveled to VDCs to investigate and verify applications; in a few, VDC-level LPCs have assisted.

Despite the fact that reviewing CAP applications is only one component of the LPC ToR, many LPC members, staff, and other stakeholders have told observers that interim relief is the main, and most important, activity of the LPC. For example, all committee members interviewed in Kailali noted to observers that the major activity of the LPC was to collect and verify data to facilitate the provision of interim relief to CAPs. In Siraha, an LPC member said that, although the committee had undertaken some other activities, its main role was to forward interim relief applications to the CDO. Comparable statements were made by many other LPC members and stakeholders interviewed by the Carter Center. Numerous interlocutors, including LPC members themselves, alleged that political bias tainted the review of applications, a concern that is discussed later in this report.

2. **Most LPCs are also undertaking activities beyond interim relief data collection, such as livelihood support training to conflict-affected persons, peace education activities, and training of LPC members on conflict mediation. However, the impact of these activities remains unclear.**

Under a provision by which LPCs can submit activity proposals to the MoPR and in return receive funds for programs, a large majority of functioning LPCs have undertaken some activities in addition to the review of interim relief applications. The list of activities is similar across districts, and certain activities appear to be driven by central-level MoPR priorities.[8] Activities fall into three broad categories: direct support to conflict-affected persons; promotional and public awareness activities; and training for LPC members themselves. Although these programs are organized by the LPC, they mostly appear to be implemented by outside experts ("resource persons") identified and hired by the LPC.

[7] A 2010 report notes that, "The role of the Local Peace Committee (LPC) in the intake stage [of CAP applications] varies enormously between districts and is not regulated through the policy guidelines." International Organization for Migration, "Report on Mapping Exercise and Preliminary Gap Analysis of the Interim Relief and Rehabilitation Program," December 2010, p. 6.

[8] The MoPR has indicated that limited capacity by LPCs to draft proposals has led the Ministry to take a more active role in shaping LPC planning documents, although this is in some tension with the Ministry's vision of LPCs as autonomous bodies.

LPC direct support to CAPs has focused principally on vocational or skills training. LPCs have organized candle, incense, pickle, and bamboo furniture making training for CAPs, as well as other skills training such as computer operation. Several LPCs provided some support to discharged PLA combatants, such as the LPC in Panchthar, which reportedly organized computer skills training for dischargees. A secondary focus has been activities to promote awareness of the LPC and other general publicity about peace. For example, LPCs in some districts have broadcast regular radio programs on local FM about the LPC's activities and its mandate. LPCs in many districts have sponsored essay writing competitions, poetry, debate and public speaking contests, street drama, publication of news bulletins, and peace rallies, such as for International Peace Day. Finally, many LPCs have organized conflict mediation training for LPC members at the district level and, much less often, at the VDC level.

However, thus far there has been no evaluation of the effectiveness of LPC activities, making their overall impact difficult to ascertain.[9] While it is positive that LPCs are conducting activities beyond verifying CAP data, it is important that the effectiveness of these activities be assessed in order to understand their overall contribution in the district. As one indicator, interviewees at the district level (other than LPC members and staff themselves) rarely mentioned LPC activities to Carter Center observers apart from review of interim relief applications and, in a small number of districts, conflict mediation. The MoPR reports that an independent evaluation is currently underway, to be completed by July 2011. This is a positive step.

3. A small number of LPCs have built local reputations for being highly active and effective. These LPCs have mediated conflicts and built good relations with civil society and local government officials.

LPCs in Surkhet and Bhaktapur were widely recognized by local interlocutors as being highly active or effective, and several other LPCs were also recognized for some positive work. These LPCs mediate conflicts, hold regular meetings, have demonstrated successes which are recognized by others in the district, and have positive relations with the CDO and other stakeholders. Successful engagement in conflict mediation, in particular, appears to make a positive impression, and is what most interlocutors highlighted when praising these LPCs.

In Surkhet, where the LPC was found to be respected among political parties, civil society and government officials alike, interlocutors emphasized that it had successfully intervened in and resolved several conflicts. In May 2010, the committee helped to calm political tensions in the municipality that arose from incidents during the UCPN(M) protest program. In mid-September 2010, the committee again calmed tensions after a bus driver was killed by irate locals following a vehicle accident. In another case, LPC members helped to resolve a dispute between the local Khampa community and the District Forest Office over the building of a statue in a forest reserve. Many interlocutors pointed to the effective leadership of the coordinator, a member of the Rastriya Jana Morcha party, who had been selected after the NC, UML, and UCPN(M) failed to agree on who amongst themselves would be coordinator.

Similarly, in Bhaktapur, multiple party, civil society, and government interlocutors praised the LPC for helping resolve a dispute between brick kiln owners and local residents. The LPC also received praise from parties, human rights defenders, and the police for calming tensions between police and villagers after a vigilante killing of two people suspected to be child abductors. Additionally, the LPC published a book on conflict victims, "Bhaktapur in Conflict." Finally, the LPC also conducted a one-day workshop for conflict victims, their relatives, and political parties, which brought victims of the state and the Maoists together, and which party leaders and the LPC spoke positively about. As in Surkhet, several

[9] Although the Carter Center's methodology enabled a broad overview of LPC functioning, LTO teams did not have the capacity nor the training to conduct a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of LPC activities.

stakeholders believed strong leadership from the coordinator was a crucial factor in the LPC's effectiveness, and worried that the LPC would become less effective if and when the coordinator was rotated.

A small number of other LPCs have also received local praise for instances of effective involvement in conflict mediation. For example, in Dhankuta, several interlocutors praised the LPC's efforts to resolve disputes among political parties related to development projects and school management committees, as well as its development of a Code of Conduct for parties in the district. However, not all of the conflict resolution efforts were successful, and during observers' most recent visit to the district in January 2010 the district LPC had reportedly not been involved in conflict mediation for over six months.

Given the small sample size, it is difficult to determine why some LPCs have had particular success. However, many interlocutors pointed to effective leadership from their coordinators as one key factor (in some cases, LPCs have decided to extend the tenure of effective coordinators beyond six months). Also, in several of the better-functioning LPCs, no Maoist boycott was observed at any point. Finally, various local factors, including local political relations, have enabled these LPCs to partly overcome the challenges that have reduced the functioning of their counterparts elsewhere.

4. Finally, LPCs in many districts are establishing LPCs at the VDC level. A small number of these VDC committees have worked on interim relief, skills training for conflict victims, and other projects.

In a majority of districts visited, LPCs of up to nine members have been established in some VDCs. According to the MoPR more than 1,000 VDC-level LPCs and 19 municipal LPCs have been established. In most cases, activity at these new locations has been limited to district LPC members organizing a meeting to form the LPC, with no subsequent follow-up or programming. In a few cases these meetings have been followed by orientation or training. According to the ToR, the VDC secretary serves as the LPC secretary; other VDC LPC members are typically political party and the civil society representatives. Also according to the ToR, financing is intended to come from the VDC budget, though it is unclear to what extent this is happening.

In most cases, VDC-level LPCs are inactive or defunct, having undertaken no activities since their formation. However, some positive activity has occurred in a small minority of these VDC LPCs. For example, in Parsa, while all other VDC LPCs remain inactive, one VDC containing a high number of conflict-affected people is reported to have an active LPC which, in addition to collecting CAP data, had also conducted a wax candle skill training for widows and families of the conflict affected, reportedly attended by 45 people. In Dhankuta, observers were told of a VDC committee engaging in local-level conflict resolution by helping the community reach consensus about where to rebuild a campus building destroyed during the conflict, and of another VDC LPC overseeing the reconstruction of government building.

C. COMMON CHALLENGES FACING LPCs

Carter Center observers have identified a number of challenges facing LPCs, including questions of relevance, politicization, support, inclusion, and capacity, which are described in brief below.

1. Many LPCs continue to face local skepticism about their relevance and utility.

A number of LPCs visited by Carter Center observers, including many LPCs that are undertaking at least some activities, face widespread perceptions that they are not relevant or useful. For example, in one district, the CDO said the LPC was "nothing better than a post office that receives CAP applications and

forwards them to me." In several districts, observers noted that political party leaders did not take the LPC seriously. In a Mid Western region district, a journalist said that "the LPC is not doing anything, just carrying bags and wearing their hats." And, in a Far Western region district, observers heard that the LPC has produced "few activities and no results." The frequency with which observers heard such comments indicates that in many districts even somewhat active LPCs have not been able to demonstrate their utility.

Several factors appear to be responsible for the skepticism about LPCs. First, many stakeholders question the impartiality of the process of interim relief to conflict victims; because many people see interim relief as the LPC's main task, perceptions of bias and inadequacy in processing applications are especially damaging to the overall image of the LPCs. Second, particularly with regard to conflict resolution, LPCs must compete with more established mechanisms, such as all-party meetings (often used to resolve political disputes), and various local informal or indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms that are often used at the VDC level.[10] Given the range of conflict resolution mechanisms available, the added value of the LPC is often not clear. Third, there is disagreement over the proper scope of LPC activities. For example, LPCs in Dang and Bardiya have attempted to address lingering conflict-era disputes, such as over allegedly seized land, but in the absence of political will have not been able to make progress; a UCPN(M) representative in Dang stated that land was a national-level political issue, above the mandate of a district body such as the LPC.

2. **There is also widespread belief in many districts among government officials, civil society, and LPC members themselves that some conflict victims are not receiving relief or are unaware of the process, and that party dominance of LPCs has increased the level of political bias in the process of interim relief for conflict-affected persons.**

Many interlocutors believe that the dominance of political parties on LPCs has tainted the processing of applications for interim relief with political bias.[11] In particular, there is a belief that political parties are using LPCs to recommend interim relief applications of their supporters, including so-called "fake" applications from people who are not conflict victims. A party-affiliated interviewee in a Western region district expressed a common sentiment: "The real victims are not getting compensation, only the people with political connections." A senior police official in the Far West said he believed that party cadres were favoring their own people for interim relief and that they had an "unspoken pact" to let each other benefit. In the absence of an audit of interim relief applications, it is difficult to know the true scale of the problem.

Limited LPC resources, capacity, and leadership have also limited the committees' ability to reach victims in remote areas or from marginalized communities. Outreach in the interim relief process, whether by LPCs or other local bodies, remains essential. In a recent study by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) 40 percent of victims interviewed were still not aware of the government's interim relief program. Conflict victims who were illiterate or from rural areas, as well as women, were least likely to have accessed interim relief.[12]

The LPC, as a body that supports the Chief District Officer in the interim relief process, does not have sole or even primary responsibility for outreach to conflict victims. Moreover, concerns about the politicization of interim relief are not limited to the role of the LPC. However, for many people the LPC and interim relief are closely associated, and the widespread belief that the LPC has politicized the

[10] See The Carter Center, "Brief Overview of Political Dispute Resolution at the Local Level in Nepal," December 30, 2010.
[11] See also International Center for Transitional Justice, "From Relief to Reparations: Listening to the Voices of Victims" (forthcoming), pp. 24-25; International Organization for Migration, op. cit., p. 7; and Advocacy Forum, "Discrimination and Irregularities: The Painful Tale of Interim Relief in Nepal," 2010, p. 31.
[12] International Center for Transitional Justice, op. cit., p. 20.

interim relief process, and that a large number of "real" victims have not received relief, has in many districts tainted the perception of the LPC among members and non-members alike.

3. **LPC members and staff continue to cite insufficient communication and support from the MoPR, including a need for additional instructions, guidance, and training. Some also mention a need for increased funding, and prompt release of funding once approved.**

In the absence of proactive local leadership or broad local consensus on a clear role for LPCs, committees look to the MoPR for instructions. Unfortunately, LPC staff and members report that such support has not always been forthcoming. Without clear instructions and consistent funding from the central level, few LPCs appear able to be proactive in identifying and responding to local needs. Many LPC members and staff emphasize that if the MoPR wants committees to be active, it is the responsibility of the central level to provide clear instructions, sufficient funding, and training for staff and members. An LPC secretary in the Far West complained that "there is almost no communication between authorities at the Ministry and the district-level LPC," and that oftentimes their phone calls to the MoPR go unreturned; although his complaint was stronger than most, his frustrations were shared by many of his colleagues.

Members' responses to training sessions and workshops – both those organized by the MoPR and by the LPCs themselves – have been generally positive, and often are accompanied by requests for further training. The regional workshops for LPC coordinators and secretaries held in 2010 were clearly helpful in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of LPC staff and members. However, LPC staff and members generally say that MoPR outreach, while helpful, to date has been insufficient.

Finally, limits on funding and other resources have also discouraged some LPCs from working on issues beyond interim relief. In Myagdi, a civil society representative said, "The MoPR wants us to do too many things from too small an amount of money." The coordinator of one district, when asked about the possibility of focusing on activities beyond interim relief, replied that the LPC's task was already difficult enough and that further expansion was not feasible; two other members in the same district argued that the broad mandate of the ToR was irrelevant unless accompanied by sufficient resources. In other districts, LPC staff and members complained that delays in the release of funds were hampering activities, and that the contracts of LPC staff were often slow to be extended.

4. **In many districts the dominance of political parties on LPCs has undermined the degree to which LPCs function as inclusive bodies.**

LPCs are designed to be broadly-inclusive bodies; the committees have quotas for political parties, civil society, conflict victims, and several categories of traditionally marginalized groups. At least one-third of the membership is required to be women. Although most LPCs visited by Carter Center observers appear to be formed in accordance with the Terms of Reference, LPCs vary in the degree to which the full range of membership participates in decision-making. In some districts, it appeared that a full range of members participated meaningfully in LPC decisions and planning, sometimes through membership in issue-based sub-committees. However, in many LPCs there was concern that members affiliated to political parties had outsize power as compared with representatives of civil society, conflict victims, and others. In a small number of districts, observers also heard complaints that LPC secretaries and coordinators did not consult with members in decision-making.

Complaints that the "peace committee" was actually a "party committee" were common. In Sindhupalchowk, for example, multiple civil society members complained that, rather than civil society organizations agreeing on who should fill the civil society quota on the committee, the political parties

made all the nominations.[13] In another district, numerous interlocutors complained that the LPC coordinator was treating the committee's office as a party office; when asked about the situation, the secretary admitted, "The committee could not be much more politicized."

5. In some districts, LPCs report a difficult relationship with the CDO, including tensions over budgetary autonomy.

In some districts, LPC members complained that they did not have enough autonomy in financial matters and had to apply for approval from the CDO for even small financial transactions, such as purchase of office stationery.[14] This is particularly a problem in districts where there is tension between the CDO and LPC, as was reported in several cases. For example, in one district LPC members reported tension between the LPC and CDO over whether the committee needed "permission" to spend funds; they complained they could not buy "even a pen" without the personal approval of the CDO. In another district LPC members were angry about the "dominating" attitude of the CDO. In several districts, CDOs themselves stated that they did not believe the LPC had enough autonomy and that it was too reliant upon their office. LPC members in one district suggested that the LPC funds be managed by the District Development Committee (DDC), which they believed had greater capacity to manage finances than the CDO office.

6. There is very low public awareness of the LPCs at the local level.

Despite an increase in LPC formation, functioning, and activities, there does not appear to have been a parallel increase in awareness about the LPC at the local level. In most districts visited, citizens are overwhelmingly unaware of the existence of LPCs, even where VDC-level LPCs have been formed. In Dhankuta, which has a relatively active district LPC, and where outreach activities have been reported, numerous district and VDC-level interviewees noted that awareness was still very low. In one VDC, where the VDC LPC coordinator had reported the distribution of notices about the LPC to all wards, no villagers interviewed were aware of the LPC's existence. When asked to explain why awareness was so limited, committee members cited a requirement for additional funds to support public outreach.

7. In the absence of support and guidance from the district level, few VDC-level LPCs have been active.

Many VDC LPCs face challenges similar to those of district-level LPCs, including issues related to coordination, training, management, capacity and financing. Observers noted that some VDC LPCs are largely unattended by committee members and, where members are interested, they often lack guidance and training. In several districts, journalists and human rights organizations stated that while VDC-level LPCs may exist on paper, in reality they are either inactive or non-existent. In most cases, following formation and initial training, little or no guidance on activities to be conducted has been given by district LPCs. Many VDC committee members, when interviewed by observers, expressed a lack of knowledge of their terms of reference and cited poor guidance from the district level as a reason for their inactivity. Similarly, some district LPC coordinators have attributed a lack of activity by VDC-level LPCs to low levels of understanding of their purpose and unfamiliarity with mediation mechanisms.

LPC secretaries in several districts said they did not understand what a VDC-level LPC was supposed to do; they said they had been told to form them but not what instructions to give them. In one Mid-Western

[13] The Carter Center reported on this concern in its reports of August 2009, November 2009, and November 2010. Other organizations have also noted this issue. See, for example, International Center for Transitional Justice, op. cit., p. 6.
[14] LPC secretaries were originally envisaged as Class 3 officers in the civil service, with authority to directly manage funds. In practice, they are contract staff, and authority over the LPC budget lies with the Chief District Officer.

district, the district-level LPC secretary said he did not understand the mandate of the VDC-level LPCs or how to make them function and predicted that, when formed, "they will be in the same shape or more miserable than we are here in the district headquarters." In another district, an LPC coordinator stated that VDC committees have been formed because "[we] were told to do so, but [we] are unsure of what to do with them now."

The MoPR in Kathmandu has been challenged in monitoring and providing guidance to more than 70 district-level LPCs, and it seems likely that district-level LPCs will continue to face similar challenges in attempting to coordinate and provide instructions to multiple, and in some districts dozens, of VDC-level bodies.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the information gathered by Carter Center observers on LPCs presents a mixed picture. On one hand, there has been a clear positive shift across the country in LPC formation and functioning since November 2009. On the other hand, despite all of the support, funds, and training that have been directed towards LPCs, 12 of the 33 LPCs visited by the Carter Center for this report were either not formed or were formed but mostly inactive. An additional 19 LPCs were active and meeting regularly, but their overall effectiveness and impact was unclear, and most were not living up to the broad mandate envisioned for the committees. Only two LPCs observed during this period were widely considered by local stakeholders to be high-functioning.

In a proposal to the Nepal Peace Trust Fund, recently approved for funding, the MoPR recognized some of these challenges and developed a plan to address them. In particular, the MoPR plans increased monitoring of LPC activities, improved communication between district-level LPC staff and the MoPR, training for members and staff on the LPC mandate, conflict mapping exercises, and efforts to encourage LPCs to coordinate with other district-level stakeholders. The new MoPR initiative hopefully will address some of the challenges in LPC "inputs" – that is, skills, knowledge, and focus. However, LPCs will likely continue to be challenged by a lack of clear relevance, politicization, and limited resources. Overall, "soft" factors such as dynamic leadership, conducive political relations, and interest among local stakeholders appear to be the key ingredients for effective LPC functioning.

The Carter Center offers the following recommendations in the spirit of cooperation and respect, and with the hope they will prove useful discussion points for future action:

<u>To the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) and its partners:</u>

- **Focus effort and funding on high-functioning LPCs to ensure they receive the necessary finances and training to continue their effective work.** A small number of LPCs have earned positive reputations in their districts for undertaking effective peacebuilding work, and particularly for engaging in successful conflict mediation efforts. Members and staff of these LPCs credibly state that with additional funds and training they could have a greater positive impact. The MoPR and its partners could also identify LPCs that appear to have the potential to become high-functioning and provide them additional support to see if it is possible to shift them into this category.

- **Make continued financial support to low-functioning LPCs contingent upon the results of a rigorous impact evaluation of the activities conducted by LPCs to date.** It is unclear that the majority of low-functioning LPCs, if given additional funds and resources, will put them to effective use. The MoPR and its partners should assess what effect LPC activities conducted to date have had, and carefully evaluate whether to continue providing support. Finally, MoPR

should ensure that no funding goes to LPCs that are not formed or are inactive, such as was the case in Gorkha in early 2011.

- **Increase awareness-raising and outreach efforts about the government's interim relief program, and investigate all credible claims of political bias and malpractice in the interim relief process.** Outreach work should be particularly targeted towards individuals from remote areas or marginalized communities, people who are illiterate, women, and others found to be left out by the program thus far. Additionally, the role of the LPC in the interim relief process should be assessed, including in the verification of CAP applications, and all credible claims of political bias and malpractice should be investigated.

- **Ensure there are sufficient resources within the MoPR dedicated to supporting LPCs in order to facilitate clear and prompt communication with LPCs that request guidance and timely processing of staff salary payments and contracts.** In its proposal to the NPTF, the Ministry pledged to extend the contracts of LPC secretaries for a full fiscal year and to increase the level of communication with LPCs, both of which would be positive steps. Additional staffing or resources at MoPR dedicated to LPC support may be required. Finally, in the 22 districts without LPC secretaries, the MoPR should train and deploy new secretaries at soon as possible.

- **Assess which body at the local level is best placed to manage the funds allocated to LPCs.** Currently LPC funds are managed by the District Administration Office; however, there are a number of other local bodies, including the DDC, which could be considered as alternatives. A review of which local office is most suitable for managing disbursement of LPC funds could be beneficial.

To district-level Local Peace Committee members and staff:

- **District-level LPCs should only form VDC-level LPCs if they have the capacity to provide sufficient support and guidance, rather than creating many new VDC-level LPCs at once to fulfill broad mandates.** VDC-level LPCs should be issued clear, limited mandates, and provided with ongoing support from the district level. Although some VDC-level LPCs may embrace broader roles and begin to function autonomously, the experience of VDC-level LPCs so far is that they require consistent monitoring, guidance, and funding. Given limited resources of staff and funding, district-level LPCs will be unlikely to provide such support to a large number of VDC-level LPCs simultaneously. Planning for VDC-level LPCs should reflect this fact.

- **Consider forming issue-based sub-committees to involve a wide range of members in planning and decision-making.** In some districts, including Lalitpur, Surkhet, and Myagdi, LPCs have formed sub-committees to address issues and plan LPC activities. Although not a complete solution to problems of inclusion and resources, these committees have strengthened the LPCs in their districts by allowing a wider range of LPC members to participate meaningfully.

To Nepal's political parties:

- **Direct party cadres to support LPCs and to participate constructively in their functioning.** In some districts, LPCs have suffered from a lack of interest among political party members in activities beyond reviewing applications for interim relief. If given clear instructions from their parties to support the peacebuilding mandate of LPCs, local party members may help address the challenges of relevance faced by many LPCs.