SAJHEDARI BIKAAS PROGRAM

Quarterly Conflict Assessment
(May 2014)

Produced by Pact

(Contract No: AID-367-C-13-00003)

Program Areas/Program Elements: A06/A025, A08/A036, A06/A026, A08/A025, A08/A036, A18/A074

Submitted to

THE DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE OFFICE
THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID)
NEPAL MISSION

Maharajgunj, Kathmandu, Nepal

Submitted to USAID
May, 2014

Contracting Officer Represenative
Meghan T. Nalbo

Submitted to the DEC by

Nick Langton, Chief of Party, Sajhedari Bikaas Program
PACT Inc. Nepal
Sushma Niwas,
Sallaghari, Bansbari, House No 589
Budhanilkantha Sadad, Kathmandu, Ward No 3
Post Box No. 24200,
Kathmandu, Nepal

This report was produced and converted to pdf format using Microsoft Word 2010. The images included in the report are jpg files. The language of the document is English.

USAID | NEPAL
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Sajhedari Bikaas Project

Partnership for Local Development

Quarterly Conflict Assessment

(May 2014)

Attitudes and behavior of young men towards and linked to sexual harassment in Sajhedari Bikaas project districts in Nepal's Far West and Mid-West Regions

Sajhedari Bikaas Project

Partnership for Local Development

Quarterly Conflict Assessment

Attitudes and behavior of young men towards and linked to sexual harassment in Sajhedari Bikaas project districts in Nepal's Far West and Mid-West Regions (May 2014)

Assessment conducted by Saferworld for the Sajhedari Bikaas Project (Under Contract no. AID-367-C-13-00003)

This study/assessment is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Sajhedari Bikaas Project and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Introduction

The Sajhedari Bikaas Project is a USAID-funded five-year project aimed at empowering communities to direct their own development. The project is being carried out in six districts of the Mid-West and Far-West Regions, namely Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Surkhet, Kailali and Kanchanpur.

Existing and emerging conflicts are, or have the potential to become, obstacles to community development, inclusive and accountable decision-making, and improved governance. As such, Sajhedari Bikaas (SB) specifically aims to promote community mediation mechanisms to reduce or prevent conflicts. In order to do so, the Project found it crucial to get an overview of conflict issues in the target districts. The purpose of the assessments is to inform the Sajhedari Bikaas project about those conflict issues and to provide recommendations on how the project can effectively address and/or constructively engage with them, including with potential opportunities and risks resulting from the issues identified.

The past conflict assessments have shown that widespread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the SB target districts can be considered as one of the main areas of community-based insecurity. It is especially an obstacle to women's and girls' ability to live their lives and pursue development in a dignified manner without suffering insecurity, humiliation and discrimination. In Nepal, specific forms of violence such as sexual and gender-based violence and violence against women are considered some of the main issues of insecurity for women. More than 80 percent of women from Dang and Surkhet districts of Nepal reportedly face recurring domestic violence.[1]

It is often young men who are perpetrators of SGBV. In particular, they are known to engage in verbal and gestural sexual harassment, often euphemistically referred to as 'eve-teasing'. Thus, this assessment report focuses specifically on the attitudes and behavior of young men towards and/or linked to sexual harassment. The participants in this assessment were young men from the SB target districts, most of them between the ages of 17 and 25. This age group was chosen not only because this group is often perceived to be involved in sexual harassment, but also because its members can be role models for other young men and boys.

Participatory research tools (PRTs) were used for the assessment. Initial desk research examining existing literature, informed and complemented the collected field data. Subsequently the assessment engaged with 45 young men from the six SB target districts in three two-day workshops. The participants represented different caste, ethnic and religious groups living in the SB districts. Six participatory rural appraisal exercises in the workshops were complemented by 36 group discussions (GDs), which allowed people with different views and from different backgrounds to express their thoughts freely. Other tools such as '3-D man' exercises (which involved modeling a male figurine to elicit certain perceptions about masculinities) and role-plays (in which participants adopted male and female roles) were also implemented during the workshop.

An overview of the survey outlines common findings from the districts, highlighting the main commonalities between the locations researched. This is followed by district chapters that cover key issues and findings specific to each district. The report concludes with some recommendations for the SB project on key issues, and puts forward priorities to consider in the upcoming project phases.

[1] Saathi/ UNFPA, 2008, Situational Analysis of Gender-Based Violence in Surkhet and Dang Districts Nepal

Table of Contents

Sajhedari Bikaas Project 2
Introduction 3
Abbreviations 5
1. Summary 6
2. Common findings in all districts 6
3. District Assessment 8
Banke and Bardiya 8
Kailali and Kanchanpur 10
Dang and Surkhet 12
4. Conclusion and recommendations 15
Conclusion 15
Recommendations 15

Abbreviations

GD	Group discussion
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PRT	Participatory research tool
SB	Sajhedari Bikaas Project
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SGM	Sexual and gender minorities
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village development committee

1. Summary

Widespread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls remains a major safety and security concern in Nepal, including in the SB target districts. It is particularly young men who engage in forms of SGBV such as sexual harassment. This report seeks to understand young men's perceptions of women and girls, their attitudes and behavior towards sexual harassment, and the linkages between these perceptions, attitudes and behavior. The report finds that while young men are not only frequently involved in sexual harassment, they are often also holding women and girls who challenge 'traditional' gender norms responsible for being sexually harassed. However, there is scope for change, and several young men think they should be involved in efforts to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV.

2. Common findings in all districts

There is uncertainty about what is considered as SGBV

There seemed to be a fair amount of uncertainty among participants about what counts as SGBV. Many participants had never heard of the term SGBV or were not aware that certain acts such as sexual harassment or 'eve-teasing'[2], rape or trafficking of women constituted SGBV. Knowledge of laws regarding SGBV, including what forms of sexual harassment are punishable, varied widely. Regardless of their level of knowledge, participants from all districts admitted to having eve-teased or made lewd remarks to girls in the past.

Women and girls perceived as behaving against traditional gender norms are held responsible for being sexually harassed

One idea that was repeated in many of the districts was that a family's honor or '*ijjat*' is tied to the behavior and appearance of the women in the family, which means that men have strong opinions about how their wives and sisters should be dressed and perceived by the community. Similarly, it was repeatedly mentioned that 'good girls' – those who wear traditional attire and do not behave in what is considered a promiscuous manner – are not sexually harassed, and that it is girls who wear tight trousers and miniskirts, or those who walk or talk in a 'sexy' manner, or are perceived as being promiscuous, who are sexually harassed. Some participants even suggested that it is the women and girls who are primarily responsible for being sexually harassed.

Patriarchal norms continue to shape gender roles

The participants' views on gendered roles seemed to be shaped by patriarchal norms and structures. The participants often associated behavioral attributes such as caring and nurturing with their mothers, wives, sisters and girlfriends. Women were seen as having responsibility for the family and household. There was talk of it being good or fair for women to be able to pursue work outside of the house, but within the confines of established norms of acceptability. The relatively new role of 'girlfriend' was seen as not having as many restrictions as the roles of other women within the family, though this varied from district to district. In all districts, participants wanted their wives and sisters to wear more traditional clothes so as not to attract men's attention.

Understanding concerning the LGBTI community is very limited, and sexual orientations other than heterosexuality are perceived by many as 'not natural'

There is very limited understanding concerning the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex

[2] 'Eve-teasing' is a euphemism used in many parts of South Asia for sexual harassment and abuse of girls and women in public places. The assessment report refers to 'eve-teasing' at times as this is what participants used themselves; however, Saferworld acknowledges that the term is problematic and that some people consider it as offensive.

(LGBTI) community. Participants in Banke and Bardiya referred to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community with 'third gender' (*tesro linga*) (and most of them associated *tesro linga* with homosexual men) and they noted that the third gender is, in theory, accepted in Nepali society. In the other districts, however, participants had little knowledge of the LGBTI community. Furthermore, they stated that they consider only sex between a man and a woman to be 'natural' and palatable to their society.

There are specific factors that increase the risk of sexual harassment

Public areas and gatherings were repeatedly mentioned as places where sexual harassment occurs. Festivals, public transportation and bus stops, rivers and educational institutions were frequently mentioned as hotspots for such acts. Other fuelling factors that participants highlighted were the consumption of alcohol (especially during festivals and public fairs) and group dynamics – it was said that men and boys, if they were in a group, were more likely to eve-tease and harass women and girls. Additionally, participants in all districts reported that text messages, social media and the Internet are being used to send women and girls sexually lewd messages and pictures and to harass them.

Men of different age groups are involved in sexual harassment

There does not seem to be a particular age group of men that is more or less involved in SGBV, but participants in all districts voiced the opinion that younger men and boys are more involved in sexual harassment, whereas older men are reported are be more involved in domestic violence – here, alcohol was frequently mentioned as a contributing factor. Participants in a few districts saw women and girls as primarily responsible for reducing sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV, in line with their view that it is the behavior and/or appearance of women and girls that cause much of the reported sexual harassment.

Young men want to involved in efforts to reduce SGBV

When asked for recommendations, participants in all districts mentioned the need for awareness-raising activities, especially those that target men and boys, as many previous awareness-raising activities on SGBV have targeted only women. Similarly, stricter and/or better-enforced laws were a common recommendation in all districts. A recommendation made by participants in several districts was to address the unemployment of young men, which is seen as a contributing factor to the sexual harassment of women and girls. Participants in a few districts saw women and girls as primarily responsible for reducing sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV, in line with their view that it is the behavior and/or appearance of women and girls that cause much of the reported harassment. However, after completing the role-playing exercise, some participants said that the change towards reducing sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV should start with boys and men.

3. District Assessment

Banke and Bardiya

Perceptions and understanding of SGBV

Most participants in Banke and Bardiya understood SGBV as serious cases of sexual violence such as rape, attempted rape and sexual molestation. There were, however, a few participants who were unclear about the SGBV domain, and others who viewed acts such as rape and sexual molestation as separate acts rather than categorizing them as SGBV. All participants were unaware of laws and regulations that prohibit sexual harassment, and hence were practicing some forms of sexual harassment themselves, such as making lewd sexual remarks about women's or girls' attire, eve-teasing them during the evening time by blocking their path, trying to catch their hands, or sending them sexual text messages through mobile phones without their consent. All these activities were considered acceptable.[3] Only participants from Banke mentioned one case in which the victim had reported to the police after being sexually harassed. However, this did not lead to any legal action against the culprit. Rather, it was mediated within the community, in the presence of the police.

The participants felt that social and cultural changes had led to more acceptance in terms of non-traditional attire and appearance, as they showed greater acceptance towards girls wearing more modern clothing. Also, for girls to have male friends and to mingle with male friends of similar age is gradually becoming more socially acceptable, according to participants. However, they said the same does not apply to married women, as the broader society still views social relations between married women and other male friends/colleagues as suspicious and bringing disgrace to the family.

Perceptions and understanding of female-gendered roles

There were mixed views on women taking up employment to earn money. Some participants felt that having ambitions for a personal career would not allow a woman to carry out household work that a woman should be happy with the income her husband and son bring homes.[4] Other participants saw it as an asset if mothers, sisters, girlfriends or wives were educated and had jobs, as they would contribute to the overall family income, which was an important factor for the youths.

The role of girlfriend is a new female role that young men across all ethnic, caste and religious groups have accepted, but which was rare 30-40 years ago. Most participants were accepting of this role, including those who came from what are perceived as conservative cultures such as upper-caste Hindus and Muslims, and they said they discuss their girlfriends with other male friends.[5]

Participants said that they often use local festivals ('*melas*') and holidays such as Holi, Dashain, Tihar, and Maghi (of the Tharu culture) to meet with the opposite sex. Boys and girls engage in flirting during such festivals and fairs, with sing-songs and dancing in groups.

Attitudes and behaviour towards women and girls, and how they link to sexual harassment

[3] PRT Day 1 and 2, Banke and Bardiya, 17–18 April 2014
[4] PRT Day 1, Banke and Bardiya, 17 April 2014
[5] PRT Day 1, Banke and Bardiya, 17 April 2014

Similar to other Saferworld research focusing on notions of masculinity, participants felt that the honor and prestige of a girl depends upon what is seen as her purity or '*shuddha*'.[6] However, if the group of boys outnumbers the girls' group by a lot, it increases the chance of sexual harassment from the boys' side, and flirting can easily shift into sexual harassment.[7]

Young people also reported frequent interactions with the opposite sex through modern technology such as mobile phones, the Internet and social media, particularly Facebook. Other research carried out by Saferworld showed that these forms of indirect interaction are preferred for contacting individuals one is attracted to, due to lack of fear of public rejection.[8]

Spaces of interaction and harassment

Local festivals and fairs were cited as some of the main spaces and occasions where sexual harassment takes place. These events usually go on until 2 or 3 a.m., with girls and boys attending in large numbers, along with friends and/or families.[9] One key reason for sexual harassment during festivals and fairs is the availability of alcohol, which is sold and openly acceptable to drink, so that many men and boys get drunk and engage in flirtation and sexual harassment.

Importantly, Internet cafes were identified as spaces where sexual harassment takes place, as boys often use Facebook to interact with girls and women that they are interested in.[10] However, most participants felt that women and girls belonging to their village development committee (VDC) are not people that they would sexually harass. They said that they would think carefully before engaging in such acts with them, alluding to their perception that the girls within their villages would be considered as respectable in nature and appearance.

Participants said that a few cases of physical sexual violence (such as rape and attempted rape) had occurred in broad daylight in solitary spaces such as the nearby jungle and in houses removed from village settlements.[11]

Actors involved

Only male members of society were thought to be involved as perpetrators in SGBV by the participants.[12] Some participants were of the view that it is mostly men and boys from affluent and upper-caste groups who are involved in sexual harassment, because they assume that they are unlikely to be prosecuted, either because of their political connections and influence or because they can buy off their victims.[13]

Participants remarked that it is mostly women who are victims of SGBV and sexual harassment. Referring to specific cases they had heard of, they pointed out that women with mental disabilities and those who come from poor economic backgrounds (such as from Tharu and Dalit communities) face more sexual harassment, because they work as laborers and as household maids in other people's homes where they might suffer SGBV.[14]

Involving young men to reduce SGBV

[6] The 'purity' of a woman or girl was perceived to be linked with her virginity (within this research) and is the most important element of a family that needs to be protected fiercely; once she loses her purity, she brings shame upon herself and her family. Forthcoming Saferworld publication on notions of masculinity and SGBV (2014)

[7] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014

[8] Forthcoming Saferworld publication on notions of masculinity and SGBV (2014)

[9] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014

[10] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014

[11] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014

[12] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014

[13] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014; it should be noted that the participants who had those perceptions were mainly not from so- called upper-caste groups.

[14] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014

One key cause cited by participants as to why young men engage in sexual harassment is poverty and unemployment.[15] Often, young men find it hard to shoulder the social pressures of finding a respectable job and living up to expectations set by their parents. In the participants' views, failure to meet the family's and society's expectations often leads to antisocial behavior.[16] Therefore, as a remedy, programs aimed at improving young men's employment opportunities, such as skill-based trainings and income-generating activities, were suggested by participants. Young men also argued that any awareness activities on reduction of SGBV should include both men and women, and all age groups, as they felt that most awareness programs thus far have been women-centric.[17]

Kailali and Kanchanpur

Perceptions and understanding of SGBV

Youth participants from Kailali and Kanchanpur were unclear about what constitutes SGBV. Many were aware of types of harassment and SGBV endured by women in their respective communities, such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape, forced prostitution or trafficking of women, but most seemed unable to identify these acts falling under the broader SGBV heading. A few participants, however, seemed to have a fair amount of knowledge about which acts are against the law. While discussing eve-teasing, many of the youth participants forthrightly mentioned that it is a punishable crime.[18] A few participants pointed out that the use of mobile phones to send lewd text messages to women and girls is rampant, but they also pointed out that if the victim was to go and report such harassment to the police, then the police could investigate, apprehend and prosecute the culprit.

Perceptions and understanding of female-gendered roles

Most participants in Kailali and Kanchanpur shared the view that the perceptions and understandings of gendered roles are social constructs that vary between communities. The Tharu and Brahmin participants agreed that there are some differences in their perceptions and cultural norms. However, in general, female family members were given a different status to the male family members; in the public realm they are considered 'sacrosanct' as anything they do or say is directly linked to family honor or '*ijjat*'. According to the Madheshi and Muslim participants, honor and prestige are so critical in their respective communities that they do not allow women and girls to venture out without a male companion from the family. This is done to deter any unwarranted attention or advances from other men. The women and girls too seem to accept this as a norm, the participants reported.[19]

While participants desired their partners to be beautiful in appearance, they also felt that having a very beautiful wife, or a wife who wore attire that was considered provocative, would draw too much attention from other men. This in turn would make the husband feel uncomfortable and suspicious, and could even result in harassment of the husband while travelling with his wife. Many also mentioned that they would not want a wife with any physical or mental disabilities. They argued that having a spouse with a disability would be difficult for the family, as she would find it hard to perform responsibilities expected from a wife such as the household chores and the husband too would be ridiculed by society.

There were similar expectations for sisters as there were for mothers and wives in terms of physical appearance, as participants felt that unwarranted attention would have negative implications for

[15] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014
[16] Forthcoming Saferworld publication on notions of masculinity and SGBV (2014)
[17] PRT Day 2, Banke and Bardiya, 18 April 2014
[18] PRT, Kailali and Kanchanpur, 19–20 April 2014
[19] PRT, Kailali and Kanchanpur, 19–20 April 2014

their families' prestige and honor. As with prospective spouses, men did not want their sisters to have any physical or mental disabilities, which would make it hard to find a suitable groom and so the family would have to keep sustaining them and caring for them e throughout their lives.

Participants' expectations from their girlfriends were in line with their expectations from mothers and sisters. They wanted a girlfriend who was helpful, even-tempered, and friendly, without any physical disabilities, supportive, disciplined, punctual, trustworthy, educated, and modest. Most did not want to see their girlfriend dressed in a way that could be considered as provocative, and neither were they comfortable with the thought of a girlfriend who had had a sexual relationship with another man in the past. However, they were amenable to the idea of having multiple girlfriends at one time. While some regarded having multiple girlfriends as unacceptable, others thought that it is a sign of masculinity. The distinction participants drew between a wife and a girlfriend was that while a girlfriend is someone who is not one's own, a wife belongs to the husband, so a man has more rights over a wife than a girlfriend.

Attitudes and behaviour towards women and girls, and how they link to sexual harassment

Context reportedly plays a determining role with regard to sexual harassment. For example, if an area is secluded and with not much human activity, then it provides both an opportunity to harass girls. Participants in Kailali and Kanchanpur said they are more likely to sexually harass those who are not from their own neighborhood. A woman or girl from the same community is less likely to be sexually harassed because of the perception that it would lead to uncomfortable situations and resistance from community members. There is also a level of fear that one's actions would get reported to one's older family members, which also discourages such acts.

Spaces of interaction and harassment

In both Kailali and Kanchanpur districts, the spaces of interaction were found to be somewhat similar. Movie theatres, isolated spots in forested areas, bus stops, market areas, temples, river banks, fields, and educational institutions were cited as some of the places where the opposite sexes intersect. According to the participants, these interactions generally take place during the late afternoon or evening. Local bars[20] or tea shops where youth and men gather, and their vicinities, were also reported as sites of eve-teasing. In Kailali district, there was also mention of a reservoir where women and girls go to wash clothes and bathe.[21] Reportedly, young men often loiter around that area to eve-tease and harass girls.[22]

Participants reported that cases of girls being sent sexually offensive and lewd messages through mobile phones and on social media sites are on the rise. Unlike boys, who have many public spaces to convene and hang out with friends, there are few or no such spaces for girls, compelling them to instead spend time with friends at their own or friends' houses. However, even that privacy is being violated, as they are reachable through their mobile phones or personal computers.

Actors involved

Actors involved in sexual harassment are not a homogeneous group. Instead, the range is wide and varies with context. Boys and young men from a certain age group, usually 15–30 years, were seen by participants as being more involved in eve-teasing. Young boys in particular were said to be

[20] Bars in this case refer to *bhattis*, where one would go to drink the local brew.

[21] PRT, Kailali and Kanchanpur, 19–20 April 2014

[22] See also Saferworld (2011), *Creating safer communities in Bangladesh*, http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/562-creating-safer-communities-in-bangladesh

involved in teasing or harassing girls of their age or slightly older.

Involving young men to reduce SGBV

The participants came up with a list of recommendations in relation to involving young men to reduce SGBV. Similar to Banke and Bardiya, they believed that with strict laws and strong enforcement, young men can be deterred from committing SGBV. There were even suggestions such as banning the sale of alcohol and cigarettes and banning young people, both men and women, from gathering in public spaces, as these were deemed to be the root causes of eve-teasing.

Dang and Surkhet

Perceptions and understanding of SGBV

Men were perceived as the family head, whose responsibility is to earn and provide for the family, whereas women were mostly expected to remain at home and take care of family and household chores. Women who engage in economic activity outside the home and are publicly visible reportedly often face negative consequences, as such behavior is often perceived negatively by society, resulting in discrimination and social harassment. A youth participant from Surkhet stated that: "Women who participate or become active in development work will become victims of criticisms and comments from society. Society will raise several questions to those women or girls. Such gossip and comments will be directed to her husband and other family members."[23]

Participants identified patriarchal social structures – such as confining women to the home, a preference for male children, gender-bias in providing education to sons and daughters, and women being economically dependent upon male family members – and alcohol consumption as key causes of SGBV in Dang and Surkhet. Alcohol-related violence was identified as a key issue that has negatively affected women's lives. Participants also noted that an intoxicated man beating his wife, within the home, was more likely to happen than a man getting into a physical fight with other men, as his wife would not show resistance or fight back the way other men might. Such thoughts reflect the participants' notions of masculinity, as men are considered physically strong and brave, and more likely than women to put up a fight. This was highlighted by a participant from Dang, who commented that: "They [men] would not fight with others since they might be beaten by others. They are safe at home because women tolerate any behavior from their husband. This is how women are socialized."[24]

Perceptions and understanding of female-gendered roles

Participants highlighted conservative sociocultural challenges and said that it would not be easy to improve women's standing due to existing social values that confine women to household activities.[25] Similar to Kailali and Kanchanpur, it was said to be unacceptable for a wife to have had sexual relationships in the past. While participants were open to marrying their girlfriends, they felt that their family and society would be against it, especially if it were a marriage between different caste groups.[26] Dang and Surkhet participants had a different view about girlfriends than participants in other districts. They said it is very important that wives should follow societal values and not go against them, whereas girlfriends would not necessarily need to meet all those social expectations. Some participants even expected a girlfriend to wear short skirts and tight trousers because they would want to show her off to male friends, which would make

[23] PRT with young men, Dang and Surkhet, 17–18 April 2014
[24] PRT with young men, Dang and Surkhet, 17–18 April 2014
[25] PRT with young men, Dang and Surkhet, 17–18 April 2014
[26] PRT with young men, Dang and Surkhet, 17–18 April 2014

them feel superior, proud, and reinforce their notion of masculinity. The same expectation did not exist for wives, as they saw marriage as a social institution and felt that a wife, as part of that institution, had social expectations to meet.

Attitudes and behaviour towards women and girls and how they link to sexual harassment

The perception that '*Marda ko dash woti*' (men can have ten women) shows that women are often seen as objects who can be treated the way men want. Some of the youth participants admitted that they did persistently send sexual messages through phones, the Internet and social media to girls without their consent. They also thought that whereas society would have no problem if a boy wore shorts, there would be objections if a woman or girl wore short skirts or shorts.

Spaces of interaction and harassment

The youth participants identified locations where eve-teasing, sexual exploitation and other forms of harassment take place. For instance, while travelling in the buses, boys sometimes sexually harass girls by moving their hands to touch the girls in sensitive areas. If the girls make no objection to whatever the boys do to them, the degree of sexual harassment increases. Likewise, during the summer the boys reportedly sexually harass girls in the river, where both girls and boys go swimming. One youth participant from Surkhet said: "In summer, boys and girls go to the local river to swim. Some boys harass the girls by touching the girls' sensitive body parts (especially their breasts)."[27]

Participants reported extensive eve-teasing and flirting on campus areas. Nearby one campus, on a road where young men and women frequently travel, it was reported that young men ride their motorbikes towards young women and honk loudly to grab their attention. While discussing the Internet and its impact on sexual harassment, the participants voiced the view that more young women than young men watch pornography on their mobile phones. They also claimed that young women do not even hesitate to watch pornography with young men.

Actors involved

Young men belonging to all ethnic and social backgrounds in Dang and Surkhet were considered to be engaged in sexually harassing young women. Sexual harassment also was reported to depend upon the background of the young woman. If a young man knew that a young woman was influential and had strong political and social connections, then he would not dare to sexually harass her. Sometimes, he would not even look her in the eye, for fear that her relatives might come and beat him or call the police and put him behind bars.

Involving young men to reduce SGBV

The youth participants believed that change should start with the individual, through self-realization and commitment, and that it can be achieved simply through sensitization activities. For example, participants who acted as young women in role-playing exercises said how terrible it felt when young men used words like *bhalu* (whore), and that it made them not want to use such foul language against girls. After the reflection exercises during the research workshop, another participant stated that he will not use foul language against girls anymore, for fear of being scolded and slapped by them.

Other recommendations put forward by the participants included the need for education on sex and reproductive health in schools and colleges, strict enforcement of legal provisions and laws, and

[27] PRT with young men, Dang and Surkhet, 17–18 April 2014

youth-focused programming that would act to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment. It was also deemed important to spread the message among young men that violence against women is a violation of human rights and to make a clear distinction between sexual harassment and flirting/ joking.

Participants also shared thoughts on higher-level changes they would like to see, such as the transformation of the patriarchal social system, the end of inequality between men and women, and the establishment of a favorable environment in which women and girls have more confidence to object to and react against harassment and can get their problems heard.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

Nepali society is changing in many ways, but certain deep-rooted patriarchal norms and perceptions have remained unaltered. As a consequence, women and girls often suffer from discrimination and physical or non-physical violence, making it impossible for many of them to enjoy a life free of fear and insecurity, and taking advantage of social and developmental opportunities post-conflict Nepal could potentially hold for them. This assessment has shown that women are still largely considered as inferior to men, and those traditional gender roles that cast women as care-givers and men as providers are very important. There is a clear disconnect between the way that women and girls in one's own family or community are viewed and the way that women and girls outside the family or community are viewed: While participants accorded values such as honor and prestige to the women and girls in their family, they appeared to accord very little or no such value to other, or unknown, women and girls. Young men, in particular, perceive that the attire, attitude and appearance of women and girls define their character. Participants indicated that what a woman wears, and how she walks and talks, has a large influence on how they view or behave towards her. Participants stated that any woman or girl who dresses modestly and displays reserved and reticent characteristics will generally be left unprovoked. In contrast, those who are perceived to dress in tight or short attire, walk seductively and talk boisterously, are seen as promiscuous, and this in turn is thought to prompt sexual harassment or other forms of SGBV. However, actual cases of violence discussed by participants often involved women and girls who were dressed conservatively but were travelling alone or in deserted areas, or after dark, or they were women who were bathing in a local river or who belonged to economically poor families and therefore were required to work as maids or cleaners in other people's houses.

Also, in line with advances in technology, the spaces and modes of interaction between males and females are evolving. The opposite sexes are not only intersecting in real spaces, but also through cyberspace, using mobile phone technology and the Internet. However, technology constitutes both a positive and negative influence in the lives of women and girls. While on the one hand the availability of mobile phones and access to the Internet are aids to empowerment, their misuse by young men is becoming detrimental to women's and girls' well-being. Lewd messages, persistent phone calls and other forms of harassment, and the posting of slanderous content on social media platforms are increasingly commonplace in Nepali society.

There was a perception among participants that most of the SGBV perpetrated by young men appears to stem from a lack of awareness, stereotypical perceptions of women and girls, and absence of gainful employment or occupations which would provide positive alternatives. Many participants were unable to distinguish what counts as SGBV. They suggested that many unemployed young men engage in such transgressive acts simply because they have too much time on their hands and nothing constructive to do. Finally, stereotypes such as the notion that women or girls who dress in tight or short clothing are inherently promiscuous remain ingrained in young men, and it is seen as acceptable to approach or make lewd remarks to such women and girls.

Recommendations

This assessment has identified a number of recommendations that point towards the implications of the assessment findings for policy and practice, including for the SB project.

Target young men for initiatives to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV: Many donor- and NGO-led programs and initiatives to raise awareness regarding sexual harassment and

other forms of SGBV are focusing solely or mainly on women and girls. It would be useful to involve men in programs that sensitize them to sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV, challenge gender roles and stress that harassment is unacceptable. Young men would greatly benefit from the opportunity to openly discuss these issues with men and women their own age, or to experience or witness such activities through role-playing exercises. Role-playing and the subsequent discussions that took place during this assessment served as powerful tools to illustrate such harassment and to remind young men about its nature. Male participants who played female roles confessed at once how terrible and helpless all of them felt while and after being harassed. They even made commitments not to indulge in acts that violated the personal space of women and girls.

Streamline efforts to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV across the project: The SB Project provides excellent opportunities to reach out to a number of different stakeholders, including youth, adult men and women, the media and local and national government stakeholders. This should be taken advantage of, and activities to raise awareness on what constitutes sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV, to reflect on attitudes and behavior and to address SGBV should be included in ongoing and planned project components. For example, there could be more engagement and reflection with young people, including young men, through the youth component. Similarly, women could be reached through the WORTH project, in the framework of which efforts could be undertaken to talk about gender norms that reinforce inequality and sexual harassment and about the stigmatization victims of sexual harassment and other forms of SGBV are facing. Finally, the media component provides space for reaching out to the wider public.

Increase opportunities for young men to engage in constructive activities: As highlighted by most participants, greater employment opportunities for men of all ages would also play a positive role in reducing sexual harassment. The widely held perception was that those who engage in such acts have too much time on their hands because they are unemployed, and because they lack better alternatives. However, employment creation programs should also highlight that women and men employees enjoy equal rights and that sexual harassment at the workplace, or on the way to and from work, is unacceptable.

Strengthen SGBV-related legal provisions and their enforcement: Existing legal provisions to curb SGBV should be revised and strictly implemented to deter any perpetrator from committing SGBV. Strict enforcement will send out a strong deterrent message to would-be perpetrators. The police might also be encouraged to show a stronger presence, especially during *melas* or market days, and actively reach out to young men and boys to discourage SGBV, including sexual harassment.

Be aware of potential risks for women participating in development activities: Women participating in development and social activities are often viewed with suspicion, which can result in negative perceptions and potentially some form of SGBV. This needs to be taken into consideration when designing and implementing project activities and GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) strategies, especially if women are involved over longer periods of time and away from their homes. Clear communication about what they are doing in the framework of those activities and how they and their families will benefit are crucial, as is engagement with the community to create understanding and acceptance of women's participation in such activities. Likewise, conditions during trainings and workshops need to be context- and gender-sensitive so as to avoid situations that are uncomfortable for women or raise suspicions within the community.

Explore sexual harassment in cyberspace: The increased use of mobile phone technology appears

to work in tandem with harassment of women and girls over the Internet and social media. Abusive practices such as sending women lewd messages or posting slanderous material about them on the Internet are reportedly commonplace in all SB districts, along with a rise in the number of young men and women watching pornography on the Internet using mobile phones. This new phenomenon is becoming a critical variable in the SGBV domain and calls for further exploration.

Work with project staff and partners to become role models: Project and partner staff can set good examples and be role models when it comes to breaking down harmful gender stereotypes and norms. In the framework of its GESI strategy, Sajhedari Bikaas should make further efforts to encourage its staff and partner staff to reflect upon their own gender-related attitudes and behavior, both as individuals and from an organizational point of view, and identify areas where change towards more gender equality and non-violent behavior might be required.

Annex 1: Methodology

Saferworld employed the same methodological approach applied for previous conflict assessments to ensure consistency. To best meet the needs of the research topic, a stronger focus was placed on the use of participatory research tools (PRTs), taking young men as the main target group.

In order to collect the required data, several research methodologies were utilized:

Phase 1 – **desk research**: To inform and complement the field data, Saferworld reviewed other sources of information on the topic, such as previous conflict assessments and research on SGBV and/or masculinity carried out by Saferworld[28] and others, such as The Asia Foundation[29] and HimRights/Enabling States Program (ESP).[30]

Phase 2 – **participatory research:** This was the key phase in terms of data collection, and therefore entailed more complex data-collection techniques. This phase was rooted in a participatory rural appraisal approach utilizing tools (PRTs) that ensure group participation as much as possible.

Through extended **group discussions (GDs)** and **PRT exercises**, this assessment engaged with young men aged 17–25 from the SB target districts in two-day workshops. Saferworld invited between six and eight young men from each of the six SB districts, representing a cross-section of society, with individuals from different caste, ethnic and religious groups. The GDs focused on exploring relevant issues and discussing them jointly, allowing participants with different views and from different backgrounds to express their thoughts freely, and reflecting on those issues.

Based on experience and lessons learnt from research on a similar topic, Saferworld used PRTs that included:

- An exercise in which participants formed what they consider an 'ideal man' from clay or play dough – a '3-D man'. The discussion that followed the exercise explored what physical features were seen as relevant for men or as defining men, as well as how a man should behave and what characteristics he should have, and how those men who differ from this model are seen and treated.
- Mappings of social spaces, including spaces where sexual harassment takes place. Participants were asked to draw maps of the area they live in to highlight where young men are usually found and where they hang out, to indicate how these differ from places occupied by women ,and where men and women/boys and girls usually meet (e.g. dating spots, market places, specific locations during festivals). As part of this exercise, a discussion was conducted to explore what happens when people of different genders meet.
- A Gender Equity Measurement scale questionnaire was administered to elicit views on what

[28] Saferworld (2013), *Snapshot of Local Security and Justice Perceptions in Selected Districts of Nepal District assessment findings. Nepal: Kathmandu*; forthcoming Saferworld publication on notions of masculinity and SGBV (2014)

[29] The Asia Foundation (2012), *Nepal: A Study on Gender-Based Violence Conducted in Selected Rural Districts of Nepal* (The Asia Foundation, Kathmandu, Nepal) (available online: http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/1164, accessed 25 June 2013)

[30] HimRights/PPCC (2012), 'Sexual Violence Assessment in Seven Districts in Nepal' (HimRights/PCC and ESP, Kathmandu), available at: http://www.himrights.org/download/12_1633811810.pdf, accessed on 23 June 2013

was considered as acceptable or unacceptable behavior for men, women and SGM. Participants were able to 'agree', 'disagree' or 'partly agree' on statements such as: 'A woman needs to obey her husband'; 'Women and gender minorities should have the same rights as men'; 'It is normal that young men engage in eve-teasing'. These views were then further discussed and explored.

- Participants engaged in role-plays and reflection, through which they were encouraged to put themselves into the shoes of others, especially women and girls, and to experience how sexual harassment felt. Based on those experiences, the researchers developed recommendations with the participants on how young men might be discouraged from harassing women and girls, and how they could develop into role models for other young men, promoting respectful and non-violent behavior towards women and girls, and fostering gender equality.

This combination of research methodologies represents a 'mixed-methods' approach that takes a soft social constructionist approach to the research topic. Research methods were combined to provide a more complete set of findings than could be achieved through administering any one of these methods alone. The desk research findings were triangulated by the results of the various PRTs employed to test and validate findings.

GD participants:

	Group discussions – actual participants	**Quantity per district**
1	Banke	6
2	Bardiya	8
3	Dang	8
4	Kailali	8
5	Kanchanpur	7
6	Surkhet	8
	Total	**45**

U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue,
NW Washington, DC 20523
Tel: (202) 712-0000
Fax: (202) 216-3524
www.usaid.gov