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Quarterly Conflict Assessment(August 2014)

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Partnership for Local Development

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Public perceptions on current development initiatives and development stakeholders in selected districts in Mid- and Far West Nepal



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

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Public perceptions on current development initiatives and development stakeholders in selected districts in Mid- and Far West Nepal

Introduction

This report summarises key findings from the fourth conflict assessment, carried out by Saferworld in August 2014, in the framework of the Sajhedari Bikaas project.¹

The project, which is carried out by Pact and funded by USAID, aims to improve the ability of targeted communities in six districts in the Mid- and Far West regions of Nepal to direct local development. It does this by establishing and improving an enabling environment for community development; improving communities' ability to access resources for development; improving communities' ability to effectively implement inclusive development projects; and increasing the ability of existing and new government units to function effectively.

Existing and emerging conflicts are or have the potential to become obstacles to community development, inclusive and accountable decision-making and improved governance. To ensure that the Sajhedari Bikaas project is based on sound analysis of the context and an understanding of the conflict environment, and to enable it to spot and react to changes in the context, a series of conflict assessments will be carried out by Saferworld during the first half of the project.

Previous conflict assessments revealed that perceptions about development initiatives and development stakeholders varied greatly. While some research participants held positive views, others had more negative perceptions. Particularly, resentment was exhibited by respondents in Kailali and Dang districts. These respondents expressed negative views, particularly towards national and international development actors and criticised that they focus on urban areas, while being ineffective in rural areas. There were also a few respondents who accused some national and international organisations of encouraging ethnic tensions in Nepal.² In addition, in the last few years, news reports have been published claiming that development stakeholders, specifically non-government organisations (NGOs),

¹ This report is the result of a conflict assessment carried out in August 2014 in three districts of Nepal by Saferworld. The research was conceptualised by Saferworld's Nepal Programme team in consultation with Pact. Field research was carried out by Ojaswi Shah, Ramesh Shrestha, Chiran Jung Thapa, Chiranjibi Bhandari, Prawin S. Limbu and Tripti Rana; Ojaswi Shah coordinated the field research. The data was analysed and the report written by Ojaswi Shah and Chiran J. Thapa, with inputs from Julie Brethfeld and Evelyn Vancollie. Evelyn Vancollie edited the report. The research and report were carried out within the framework of the Sajhedari Bikaas project, which is led by Pact and funded by USAID. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the conceptualisation, data collection, analysis and write-up of the report. Special thanks go to all the participants in the group discussions (GDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), without whom this report would not have been possible and to the local coordinators from Centre for Legal Research and Resource Development (CeLRRd) in Kailali, Banke and Dang districts who organised the KIIs and GDs.

² For more information, please read the Rapid Conflict Assessment and the First Quarterly Conflict Assessment reports submitted by Saferworld within the framework of Sajhedari Bikaas project in 2013.



international non-government organisations (INGOs), bilateral and multilateral agencies, are ineffective and lack accountability towards the government. Many of those reports did not make a distinction between those different development actor categories.³

Considering this, the focus of the fourth quarterly conflict assessment was to explore perceptions at the community and district level, both positive and negative, about local development initiatives and the stakeholders active in carrying out such development activities. The assessment did not aim to map any past or existing development interventions within these districts. Out of six Sajhedari Bikaas districts, this assessment focused on three, Banke and Dang in the Mid-West region and Kailali⁴ in the Far West region. These were selected based upon previous conflict assessment findings, wherein respondents had discussed that these districts comparatively see more development initiatives within the region.

For this assessment, 39 key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out with representatives from the administration, security and justice service providers, civil society including NGO workers, journalists, political party representatives and others well placed to comment on development and peacebuilding dynamics. In addition, 6 group discussions (GDs)⁵ were held with representatives from local communities and youth, mainly at the Village Development Committee (VDC) level, and 2 GDs were held with local NGO workers at the regional level. The data collection was based on qualitative techniques using in-depth interviews with key informants and participatory tools within GDs. Additional two interviews were conducted at the national and regional level with members of the civil society and desk research was carried out to validate key findings. In total there were 36 women respondents and 61 men respondents. As the findings were based on qualitative research, they reflected the perceptions and opinions of those consulted; many of the findings would benefit from more in-depth analysis, as the assessment was only able to touch upon them rather than exploring these issues in detail. Field research for the fourth quarterly assessment took place between the 3rd and the 10th of August 2014; a period when there were floods and landslides caused by the monsoon season in most of the locations visited during the field data collection.

³ The Association of International Non-Government Organisations (AIN), an umbrella organisation for all INGOs legally working in Nepal, had to issue a press release in 2012 against the negative media reports that were targeting INGOs. Read more about this on: <http://www.spotlightnepal.com/News/Article/AIN-Media-Engagement> and on: <http://lookandgaze.blogspot.com/2013/01/why-do-nepali-media-look-down-upon.html>

⁴ See the Annex to the report detailing the assessment methodology and rationale for choice of districts.

⁵ Group Discussions incorporated some Participatory Rural Appraisal tools, were roughly three hours long, and distinct from Focus Group Discussion in their methodology.



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Acronyms

DDC	District Development Committee
GD	Group discussion
INGO	International non-government organisation
KII	Key informant interview
NGO	Non-government organisation, which for the purposes of this report includes civil society organizations (CSOs)
VDC	Village Development Committee

Executive summary of findings

When asked about development initiatives, research participants discussed tangible efforts such as road construction, health posts, the work of VDCs, electricity provisions, and some even discussed the rebuilding of police posts by the state agencies.⁶ There was also recognition by all respondents of other development stakeholders, primarily local NGOs, some national level NGOs, a few INGOs and a few donors, as implementing complementary development activities to that of the government. This was also confirmed by the respondents within local government and state structures and civil society. However, challenges around inter-departmental coordination between local state agencies were discussed as a key reason for the lack of effectiveness of development initiatives, along with lack of transparent and accountable practices among some government authorities. However, both communities and district level respondents also stressed the lack of coordination between NGOs due to the increase in their numbers and unhealthy competition between them to secure the same funds.⁷ People also discussed the lack of coordination between other development stakeholders and the state. However, some believed that there is a positive change in the coordination between government and other development stakeholder owing to the one-door policy and the new directives that has made it mandatory for local and international NGOs to report their project activities to the government.

A lack of accountability was also discussed on many occasions by the respondents at the community and district level. The main cause for this perception was the lack of transparency about the budget, project implementation and staff recruitment processes by some NGOs. The communities mentioned that no information was shared with them on the budget and the objectives of the project or how the activities conducted would lead to change. The lack of accountability within the government and other development stakeholders was also linked with the issue of perceptions of corrupt financial practices. There was an example given from

⁶ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Kailali and Kanchanpur, men and women, Kailali, 04/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Surkhet, Banke, 04/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with female and male journalist, Kailali; 06/08/2014; KII with local security provider, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with local government authority, Kailali, 06/08/2014; two separate KIIs with political party representatives from different political parties, male, Banke, 06/08/2014 and 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014

⁷ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Kailali and Kanchanpur, men and women, Kailali, 04/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Surkhet, Banke, 04/08/2014; two separate KIIs with political party representatives from different political parties, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Dang, 07/08/2014

Kailali, where four NGOs and two local government bodies reported that they built the same road in a VDC and all of them reported their full expenses for the same road.

Other development stakeholders, particularly NGOs and INGOs, were thought to be more effective in their development initiatives as they are perceived to plan their activities in a more holistic and inclusive approach. They usually are thought to come with projects that have specific objectives and are more process-oriented than the state stakeholders. However, the state-led development projects⁸ were thought to be effective in relation to their sustainability as the presence of state in the community was perceived as permanent compared to other development stakeholders, who usually have a short-term presence (generally referred to as 3-5 years).⁹

Religious proselytization, particularly Christian conversions of the ethnic communities, was raised in all three districts and seen by interviewees as something that local NGOs, INGOs, western donors and bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies engage in. While most of these NGOs and INGOs do not appear to engage in religious proselytization, some of their staff were reportedly members of the Christian community who would engage in debates in public places with their Nepali friends on religion. Such debates and discussions in public spaces were often interpreted by the local community as the particular NGO or INGO's attempt to religiously convert others. However, there were a small number of local NGOs and individuals that were said to be engaging in religious conversions, particularly to different forms of Christianity. While some community members did not see this as particularly negative, many others expressed negative views on this. Most of the negative views were based on perceptions that Christian proselytization was taking place on the basis of a promise of monetary and economic benefits rather than on religious grounds. Another key reason for negative perceptions on this issue was reported intolerance towards other religions among those individuals who had been converted. More in-depth research is required to generate concrete findings and analysis on this issue.

Research was also conducted to determine who shapes public perceptions of development actors and initiatives. It was found that the media is probably the most crucial entity shaping opinions, as in many cases the media is the only source of information on development actors, and thus negative media reports, even if false, could be very damaging. Other entities how influenced perceptions included political parties (both leaders and cadre), who could create a positive environment for development initiatives they liked. However, if political party members felt they were not included or informed of development activities, or if they thought such activities were against their interests, they could create negative perceptions about those efforts, e.g. by spreading misinformation about the initiative or organisation running it. Some individuals, such as traditional leaders, were also found to be able to significantly influence perceptions of development initiatives; as such people are highly regarded by the local communities.

The research also found that public perceptions were heavily influenced by the attitudes and behaviours of the development actors themselves. Participants were able to give several

⁸ These are largely projects that have been identified as led by the state, such as those carried out by VDCs, DDCs, Road Department, Water Department, etc. as part of the state development policy and agenda.

⁹ The perceptions were that the tenure of most development projects is between a 3-5 year span. Respondents felt that a permanent presence is the perpetual developmental engagement of the Nepali government. There were references to ownership by the community to have a sustainable impact as well.

examples of how development stakeholders who were respectful and working on activities which the community appreciated were viewed positively. However, others, for example those thought to be involved in religious conversions or those seen to be leading decadent lifestyles, were viewed negatively.

Context background

Development in Nepal has witnessed change from infrastructure-focussed strategies with the First Five-Year Plan in 1956, to addressing poverty with the Fifth Five-Year Plan in 1975, and economic and social transformation to address inequalities and poverty in the present Interim Plan for three years. The state as the primary entity for development has been consistently pursuing the development of infrastructures mainly in transportation, irrigation and agriculture, telecommunications and in the latter stages, reduction of poverty and inequalities and liberalisation of economic policies. To support this process, Nepal has continued to receive international financial aid, loans and grants from a number of different countries which includes the UK, Japan, Norway, Germany, India, China and the US, among many. Organisations such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank continue to provide financial and technical assistance that support the state-led development policies.

In order to support state efforts, international and national development stakeholders have and continue to carry out various development initiatives that support Nepal in achieving their development goals. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, the state decided to address the need for social and economic transformation, which was articulated in the Interim Plan of 2007/08 – 2009/10. Non-government national and international government and non-government stakeholders have been making efforts to ensure that these policies are achieved and are in line with internationally accepted standards human development.

The 2014 Nepal Human Development Report mentions that the importance of inclusive growth and human development to sustain peace has been deeply ingrained among all stakeholders. It goes on to state that gaps in regional human development and productive abilities persist, but inequalities seem to be narrowing.¹⁰ While this can be perceived as an improvement compared to past reports, it also highlights the need to ensure inclusivity and to increase efforts to achieve development goals for economic, social and political productivity.

While it is clear through state policies and plans and documented reports of the National Planning Commission that both state and non-state stakeholders (which includes national and local NGOs, private sector, INGOs and multi-lateral organisations), and foreign governments have contributed to the on-going development processes in Nepal, public perceptions towards these various actors have been positive and negative. While allegations of lack of accountability and transparency within government practices has been attributed to the government and state development stakeholders,¹¹ other actors, particularly some national

¹⁰ *Nepal Human Development Report 2014: Beyond Geography, Unlocking Human Potential*; National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal and United Nations Development Programme Nepal, Nepal (2014)

¹¹ 'National Integrity System Assessment: Nepal 2014'; Transparency International Nepal, Nepal (2014)

and international NGOs, are perceived to be ineffective in delivering development in rural communities.¹²

Research findings

Perceptions of development priorities

This section outlines the public perceptions of local development priorities as well as past and on-going development activities that were carried out by both state and non-state development actors, as well as those funded by bi-lateral and multi-lateral assistance.

Development, in general, was associated mostly with physical development and construction of infrastructure. Local communities, both men and women from all three districts, emphasised education and health as key development targets and discussed many development initiatives around these two development areas within their districts.¹³ Construction of schools, hospitals, local health posts, higher educational institutions, such as universities and colleges, and maintenance or upgrade of local existing schools were particularly emphasised by the communities as well as some individual respondents from political parties, state administration and NGO workers as both targets of development stakeholders as well as their own development priorities.¹⁴ Very few community members, aside from some in Banke, discussed social and human development as part of the overall development agenda.¹⁵ The argument around the need for social and human development was limited to the need to develop people's attitudes and behaviour towards the need to adopt more hygienic sanitation practices, integrate modern and technologically advanced agricultural practices, and educational reforms to generate more employment opportunities. The civil society which includes local NGO workers and the media, political actors and district level government authorities had a more holistic understanding of development. They did emphasise physical development but felt that without social, cultural, political and economic progress, development would not be effective and sustainable.¹⁶ Social awareness

¹² Source: <https://ccsnepal.wordpress.com/2008/11/27/ngo-needs-credibility-and-efficiency/>;

<http://www.aidmonitor.org.np/publication/other1.pdf>; <http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=16530>

¹³ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, Kailali, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014

¹⁴ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Kailali and Kanchanpur, men and women, Kailali, 04/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Surkhet, Banke, 04/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with female and male journalists, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014

¹⁵ Two separate GDs held with community members from different locations, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014

¹⁶ Two separate KIIs with local NGOs, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with local NGO, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with local NGO, male, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Dang, 07/08/2014

and positive change in public attitudes towards equality and inclusion was seen as a key attribute for these respondents. For example, in Banke a respondent pointed to a local example where they discussed a local NGO's initiative to construct toilets as contributing to development. However, they also shared their concern of the use of toilets, as there were examples of local people using the toilets as storage rooms rather than for sanitation purposes. Hence, they felt that awareness-raising and education was an integral part of development.¹⁷ Development was associated with social, political and economic progress for a majority of political actors at the district level.

In terms of identifying development initiatives and stakeholders, most of the respondents at the community level identified the state as the key development stakeholder providing services and facilities. They discussed about tangible efforts such as road construction, health posts, the work of VDCs, electricity provisions, and some even discussed the rebuilding of police posts by the government and the state.¹⁸ There was also recognition of other development stakeholders, primarily local NGOs, some national level NGOs, a few INGOs and a few bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors as implementing complementary development activities to that of the government by all respondents. This was also confirmed by the respondents within local government structures and civil society. The conceptual understanding of non-state development actors was, however, very limited, particularly as most community members¹⁹ and some journalists understood them to be local and national NGOs and few INGOs. A few members of civil society, such as NGO workers, journalists and activists, and some political actors and local government authorities were able to distinguish the different non-state actors namely NGOs, INGOs and private sector, and between bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors.²⁰

Challenges around coordination between state agencies were discussed as a key reason for the lack of effectiveness of development initiatives, along with lack of transparent and accountable practices among some government authorities. However, both communities and district level respondents also stressed the lack of coordination between NGOs and INGOs

¹⁷ KII with political party, male, Banke, 06/08/2014

¹⁸ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Kailali and Kanchanpur, men and women, Kailali, 04/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Surkhet, Banke, 04/08/2014; GR with community members, men and women, Banke, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with female and male journalists, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with local security provider, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with local government authority, Kailali, 06/08/2014; two separate KIIs with political party representatives from different political parties, male, Banke, 06/08/2014 and 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014

¹⁹ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Kailali and Kanchanpur, men and women, Kailali, 04/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Surkhet, Banke, 04/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Banke, 05/08/2014

²⁰ KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 04/08/2014; KII with government authority, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; two separate KIIs with members of local civil society, male, Banke, 04/08/2014 and 05/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Dang, 07/08/2014

due to the increase in their numbers and unhealthy competition between them to secure the same funds.²¹ Essentially, the prevailing thought among the respondents was that the donor is dangling bait in the form of funds and the NGOs and INGOs are competing to secure those funds through any means possible. Respondents also noted a perceived increase in development NGOs, so there is more competition in the field. Therefore, the respondents asserted that there are more competing organizations and their unwillingness to cooperate or coordinate and operate in secrecy (by not divulging much information) was resulting in unhealthy competition.

People also discussed the lack of coordination between other development stakeholders and the state. Although some believed that there is a positive change in the coordination between the state and other development stakeholders owing to the one-door policy²² and the new directives that has made it mandatory for local and international NGOs to report their project activities to the government.

Perceptions of development actors within their districts

Respondents expressed mixed perceptions of development actors engaged in their districts. The positive aspects ranged from their firm commitment to the development process to the tangible outcomes they produced, such as the construction of roads and bridges as well as community-level livelihood trainings targeting women and vulnerable communities.²³ Respondents highlighted awareness raising and women's empowerment as the most significant contributions. The growing number of development actors, particularly NGOs and their interventions and ability to influence positive social and political change, community acceptance and confidence at the local level, demonstrate their effective contributions to the development sector. The negative perceptions were mainly associated with the state's role as the primary development actor. Respondents expressed heightened concerns regarding a lack of transparency and accountability, political interference in state-led development initiatives and the state's inability to deliver. Negative perceptions on NGOs and INGOs included a lack

²¹ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Kailali and Kanchanpur, men and women, Kailali, 04/08/2014; regional-level GD with local NGOs from Banke, Bardiya, Dang and Surkhet, Banke, 04/08/2014; two separate KIIs with political party representatives from different political parties, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with local government authority, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Dang, 07/08/2014

²² One-door policy is a policy of the Government of Nepal, led by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare as part of the Social Welfare Council rules and regulations, with the primary objective of regulating NGOs and INGOs that are receiving foreign aid or grants to work in Nepal. The policy makes it compulsory for all I/NGOs working in Nepal to report their project details, including budgetary aspects, to the government and to receive prior approval from the Ministry and the Council before starting their work.

²³ GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; GD with local NGOs, men and women, Kailali, 04/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 04/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; three separate KIIs with political party representatives from different political groups, male, Banke, 06/08/2014 and 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Dang, 07/08/2014

of effectiveness at the rural level due to perceived short-term interventions leading to unsustainable outcomes, and a lack of transparency and accountability.

Contributing to awareness raising, empowerment and victim assistance

This section outlines public perceptions on the contribution of development stakeholders within their communities. They discuss both state development actors and non-state development actors mainly focussing on NGOs and INGOs.

According to respondents in all three districts, one of the primary reasons behind the positive outlook towards development actors is the contribution they have made in raising the awareness level of the populace - particularly that of women - and their direct role in supporting victims of conflict, internal displacement and those belonging to marginalised and vulnerable groups. Communities believe that due to the activities of NGOs and INGOs, people in the communities are more aware and empowered, particularly women and men from marginalised and disadvantaged groups. This aspect was best illustrated by a respondent who asserted that previously there were times when women could not stand up with confidence to say even their names.²⁴ However, they now know about their rights and of access-to-justice mechanisms available if they are victims/survivors of a crime or injustice. Also, they did not know how they should approach the police when faced with injustice resulting from criminal acts. Now, the rise in their confidence level and their ability to take actions for their rights is directly attributed to the activities of development actors.

Another salient contribution that was observed by respondents was the assistance NGOs and INGOs provide to victims suffering from various adversities. Whether they are homeless or whether they are victims of natural calamities such as floods and landslides, there are development actors who are there to assist affected members of the community. These development actors are reportedly providing relief and assistance to the victims in their respective domains. For example, a leading human rights organisation with reach to all 75 districts of Nepal, was mentioned by various respondents as one reliable actor in their districts which was assisting victims of human rights violations. According to a respondent, if there was a victim of a human rights violation, people already know that there are organisations that are there to assist.²⁵ Therefore, it is now common for people to approach those organisations when faced with such adversities. Likewise, NGOs that work on agriculture, livelihood, community empowerment and local-level women empowerment were some of the other actors mentioned by respondents that were directly involved in assisting rural communities, particularly marginalised groups, in their respective locations.

Public perceptions on coordination and complementarity

This section discusses coordination and complementarity of initiatives among various development stakeholders, including among NGOs and INGOs, as well as between state actors and NGOs and INGOs. As a result of responses collected during this research, other development actors such as bi-lateral and multi-lateral stakeholders have not been discussed.

²⁴ KII with civil society, female, Dang, 07/08/2014

²⁵ GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 05/08/2014

The state was viewed as the primary entity responsible for development activities. Respondents recognised that the state has made efforts to develop the country, leading to tangible results.²⁶ Respondents felt that the state was committed to Nepal's socio-economic development, and its willingness to engage with and seek assistance from other developmental actors to address actual needs and development priorities was seen as a demonstration of its genuine interest. Respondents believed that the state maintained collaborative relationships with other developmental actors.²⁷

More specifically, respondents working for local government bodies acknowledged good coordination between the state and NGOs and INGOs.²⁸ They also thought that work by other development actors helped to enhance the government's developmental efforts. While the government was viewed as investing more in physical infrastructure through its own funds and sometime with the assistance of international donors, other developmental actors, particularly NGOs and INGOs, were seen as engaging in human development through awareness raising and capacity building activities. As a consequence, respondents thought all actors were contributing to improving social conditions that benefit society and their efforts were complimenting each other.

Lack of coordination and cooperation, duplication of efforts and unhealthy competition

Even though responses at the district and village level highlighted positive aspects of development initiatives and stakeholders, there were many responses, particularly by the political actors, some journalists and some civil society members, that also discussed the lack of coordination and cooperation between development actors as negatively impacting on-going development activities. Reportedly, some development actors, both state and non-state, were carrying out various activities at the community level but were not informing each other of their activities, including the state. Although local government authorities²⁹ believed that there was good coordination at the macro level, they expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of coordination and cooperation between them and other development actors – namely NGOs at the local level. They asserted that many NGOs did not do proper reporting about their activities as warranted by government regulations and only sought approval prior to the initiative. Additionally, by not reporting about their activities, these actors were inhibiting cooperation between them and the government – which could have been beneficial to all the relevant stakeholders. A respondent cynically mentioned that the coordination between development actors where discussions on roundtables limited in hotel INGOs and NGOs took place, but these discussions often failed to translate into practice³⁰

Duplication of efforts by development actors was also highlighted by respondents in all three districts, particularly journalists, civil society members and political actors. Reportedly, in many instances several actors conducted similar activities in the same geographical area and even the beneficiaries overlapped.³¹ In some cases, it was simply duplicating efforts but other

²⁶ GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014

²⁷ GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014

²⁸ KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014

²⁹ KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 05/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Dang, 07/08/2014

³⁰ KII with political party, male, Banke, 06/08/2014

³¹ KII with political party, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with local civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII

cases resulted in unhealthy competition between the implementing actors that reportedly ranged of spreading misinformation about the other to using beneficiaries' information collected by other NGOs.³² The unhealthy competitions between these NGOs were not only due to that but reportedly for fund acquisition as well, since it was perceived that some local NGOs vie for the same donors (funds from INGOs or multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors) or government funds.

Display of transparency and accountability by development stakeholders

Under this finding, people discussed the levels of transparency and accountability displayed by the development stakeholders, and attributed the two as key characteristics required for a development organisation or actor.

Transparency and accountability were mentioned by all respondents as key attributes required for development stakeholders, both state actors as well as NGOs and INGOs. While a few respondents discussed that these attributes are improving within both state actors and NGOs and INGOs through the one-door policy and increased reporting to the government by NGOs and INGOs,³³ many held opposing views, particularly journalists, political actors and some government authorities as well as community members.³⁴ A lack of transparency and accountability were highlighted by respondents as a key criticism afflicting the development sector. Almost all development stakeholders were reportedly not transparent and accountable in their efforts. The state, NGOs and some INGOs were accused of being unable to publicly disclose their resource allocations, expenditures and their staff recruitment processes. Community members in particular were of the view that nepotism, favouritism and preferences were employed over organisational policy and procedures.³⁵ The government agencies in particular was perceived by some as politicised and lacking the will to work towards the real needs of the people, examples such as inequitable resource allocation and misappropriation of development funds was often provided by the respondents for such perceptions. The lack of elected representatives at the local level, according to respondents, was also viewed as having a negative impact on governance structures and development initiatives. Some respondents, particularly the political actors and a few members of civil society, also perceived NGOs and INGOs to be implementing activities based on their organisational preferences, which may or may not correspond to the actual needs or priorities of the people. In addition, government authorities expressed dissatisfaction with the way some NGOs and INGOs were conducting their activities and affairs without informing them

with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014

³² FGD 2 Dang

³³ KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014, KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014

³⁴ KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; two separate KIIs with representatives of political party groups, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; two separate KIIs with political party representatives from different political groups, male, 07/08/2014 and 08/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; GD discussion with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014

³⁵ GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014

or the intended beneficiaries. According to them, while there has been progress in government and NGO coordination, some NGOs registered at the District Development Committee (DDC)³⁶ do not report to or coordinate with the relevant government authorities. They simply coordinated to receive the approval for the project and thereafter did not maintain contact through reporting their activities – as is mandated by the regulations.³⁷

According to respondents in Dang, there were some local NGOs that neither had any established offices, rules and procedures, nor staff, but simply had a registration with the relevant government authority and conducted activities only when they were able to secure funding for development initiatives.³⁸ Reportedly, their activities were neither transparent nor accountable but they were simply motivated to obtain financial gains from development work. Such behaviour was reported to be contributing to negative perceptions about NGOs.

Perception of the duration and sustainability of development initiatives

Findings show that perceptions of sustainability were mainly based on the duration of the project and local community ownership of the implemented initiatives.

A general perception among many respondents across all three districts was that the interventions of NGOs and INGOs were short-term while state initiatives were long-term. According to various respondents, NGO and INGO development initiatives would last for a few years and ended with the completion of the project. Even though the initiative may have yielded positive outcomes, the end of the project generally marked the end of activities in many cases. The negative perception in this aspect was that these organisations were there to simply carry out activities for a short period of time and leave and were not necessarily concerned or motivated by the long-term good of the community. As one respondent mentioned, NGOs and INGOs are seen as those that ‘come, do and leave,’ but the communities are the ones that continue to live in this area.³⁹ However, there were also positive thoughts on this, where people discussed that even though many NGOs and INGOs have short-term projects, they were more effective and better managed than the state development initiatives.⁴⁰

There were several reasons why interventions were reportedly unsustainable, but the most cited reason was a lack of funding to continue carrying out the development activities. Another reason, as perceived by community members and some journalists and political actors, was a lack of genuine ownership and willingness of the beneficiaries themselves. In many instances, the activities of NGOs and INGOs were viewed as the priority of the implementers and not the beneficiaries, and as such the beneficiaries were perceived to attend and become engaged only during the project period and halt immediately following the end

³⁶ Although this was mentioned in interviews taken with local authorities, there are no provisions to register in the DDC, but they do need to be registered in the CDO.

³⁷ KII with local government authority, male, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with local government authority, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014

³⁸ Respondents mentioned “Jholay sanstha,” this was in reference to organisations that operated from the briefcase of the proprietor with no established structures but just a simple registration with the DDC as an NGO.

³⁹ KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014

⁴⁰ KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 04/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014

of the project. Another reason given was the lack of resources on the part of government authorities and communities to support the continuation of the initiatives. In most instances, neither the government nor the community with their limited resources were able to support such initiatives. Another critical factor mentioned was the time constraints of the beneficiaries to engage in development initiatives.⁴¹ For many of these activities, time commitment is a requirement that the beneficiaries were not always able to afford in the long run. They could attend several programmes and commit certain time to short interventions but mentioned that they were unable to make a longer-term commitment. Lack of incentives also affected the sustainability. During the course of the intervention, incentives such as financial reimbursements could be a stimulus to ensure beneficiaries and engagement for the short-term, but community ownership of the project was found to be lacking as community members often had little to no knowledge about the reasons for a particular development project to have been initiated in their village. They felt no ownership of the project as they were reportedly not part of the project design or consultations. As a result, following the end of the intervention, in absence of incentives, the beneficiaries were less inclined to continue and the process becomes unsustainable.

Who shapes perceptions

This section discusses what has shaped the public perceptions in the districts and elaborates on actors that have been influential in the development of such perceptions.

Across all three districts, there was unanimity over who actually shaped the perceptions of development actors. Media was reported as the primary actor that played a cardinal role in shaping public perception. Since the media was the only source of information about development actors in most instances, most community members seemed to have formed their perception about development initiatives and development stakeholders by media reports, which were often negative. Respondents in all three districts attributed a phrase called ‘*dollar kheti*’ [dollar farming] to some NGOs and INGOs; a term that was directly derived from media reports and public interviews in the media.⁴² One respondent succinctly illustrated how the media has the power to shape perceptions. The respondent referred to a case where media reports of a certain NGO providing care and support for children and the elderly alleged that the NGO was involved in wrongdoings and tarnished the image of the once respected NGO.⁴³ According to the respondent, although it was later discovered that the media reports were false and the chief executive of that organisation was later exonerated, the reports had already inflicted much damage to the credibility of the chief executive and the organisation.

⁴¹ GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014

⁴² GD with community members, men and women, Kailali, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014; KII with security provider, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with NGO worker, male, Dang, 05/08/2014; KII with journalist, female, Dang, 07/08/2014; KIIs with political party representatives, male, Dang, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KIIs with political party representatives, male, Banke, 06/08/2014; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014

⁴³ KII with civil society, female, Dang, 07/08/2014

Political party leaders and cadres were reported as another prominent actor shaping perceptions. According to development actors interviewed, many mentioned that it was imperative for them to take political party members into confidence in their line of work. If they did not inform or coordinate with the political party representatives in their respective programme areas, they ran the risk of a backlash from the party representatives. The backlash reportedly could come in the form of negative misinformation spread among community members and could even be obstruction and resistance against their activities. Community members in Dang mentioned a case where an NGO which was doing excellent work on *Kamalari* issues but had made no contacts with political party representatives in the district.⁴⁴ Reportedly, this NGO could not carry out its activities because they did not receive the support of the party representatives. Following a meeting with the party representatives, however, their activities proceeded smoothly. Another respondent claimed that political parties have vested interests in every activity that takes place within their respective spheres of presence and influence. They sought to maximise their influence and control in any given area. If the initiative of a development actor somehow provided a boost to their credibility and influence, they would provide support and assist in creating a positive environment for the initiative. However, if the initiative clashed with their interests, then they could potentially spread negative information or even go to the extent of directly obstructing the activities.⁴⁵

Instances where even one single individual could play a prominent role in shaping perceptions were also reported.⁴⁶ If a person was in a seat of power or had significant influence in the community, that individual could play a role in shaping perceptions of others. According to a respondent in Kailali, if that influential person spoke highly of development actors, then that would create a positive image among the community members. However, if the same person were to criticise a certain development actor or its activities, the community members could have negative perception towards that development actor. Traditional community leaders were reported as such influential people who could play a prominent role in shaping perceptions as community members still accorded significant value to the positions and opinions of these traditional leaders. A few respondents from Kailali also discussed that traditional leaders and political actors contributed to the perception that INGOs and donors were responsible for the ethnic tensions that caused the Undivided Far West movement in 2013.⁴⁷ Further elaboration on this was that the INGOs and donors funded the local organisations that were of particular ethnic group to carry out protests and rallies and demands for ethnic rights. This was, however, not validated with concrete examples of such funds being distributed.

Reportedly, perceptions also greatly relied on the attitude and activities of the development actors. In many cases, irrespective of what other actors were saying about the development actors, if their intentions and their activities were benefitting the community, people tended to disregard false accusations levelled against development actors. Community members were of the view that if those working for any development agency were committed to the betterment of their society and if their attitude and behaviour was positive and respectful, that generally resulted in a positive perception towards the actor. By contrast, if these actors were

⁴⁴ GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 05/08/2014

⁴⁵ GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 05/08/2014

⁴⁶ KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014

⁴⁷ KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 07/08/2014

driven by other personal interests and their attitude was condescending towards community members, people had a negative perception towards them. Respondents in Dang mentioned an example of why people had positive perceptions towards a certain development actor.⁴⁸ According to respondents, the unwavering commitment of the employees of this organisation to documenting human rights abuses during the conflict era coupled with their helpful attitude had created a positive image of the organisation. Reportedly, even when it put their lives at risk, they continued with their work when most of the development actors had halted their activities citing security concerns. This dedication and supportive role, according to respondents, had instilled a positive perception towards them.

Similarly, attitudes and behaviours of NGO and INGO workers could also contribute to negative perceptions about them and their organisation. A few respondents discussed that some of the NGO and INGO workers were engaging in religious conversion, particularly Christian proselytization as they belonged to the Christian community. These NGO and INGO workers were found to be engaged in public conversations articulating the positives of Christianity over Hinduism,⁴⁹ while other respondents felt that some local NGOs were engaging in religious conversion (particularly Christian proselytization) by providing people with money and resources, especially to those that belong to marginalised and vulnerable groups.⁵⁰ The other cause for negative perceptions was also derived from the display of lifestyles of individuals working in the NGO and INGO sector, which could include things like the vehicles they travel in, the attire they wear and the attitude they exhibit, such as dining in restaurants, owning smart gadgets, sending their children to private boarding schools. Such lifestyles were unlike those of the beneficiaries they served and this led to perceptions that the NGO and INGO workers were making money from the development budgets that was allocated to the beneficiaries.⁵¹

Conclusion

Considering both the findings from this assessment, and the fact that it was strongly raised in previous conflict assessments, perceptions of development stakeholders and development initiatives can be seen as a current and important topic of discussion in communities. Such perceptions deserve more attention, both in terms of development actors addressing the concerns of beneficiaries but also improving the effectiveness and sustainability of their development initiatives.

One finding which was brought out repeatedly in the research is the importance of information and the need for development actors to communicate more clearly with beneficiaries and communities about their initiatives. A lot of the concerns of the communities, such as lack of transparency, accountability and local ownership, would be partially eased with better communications.

⁴⁸ KIIs with political party representatives, male, Dang, 07/08/2014

⁴⁹ KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014

⁵⁰ KII with security provider, male, Kailali, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, female, Kailali, 07/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Banke, 05/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Banke, 07/08/2014; GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 06/08/2014; KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014

⁵¹ KII with civil society, male, Dang, 05/08/2014 ; KII with political party, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014 ; KII with civil society, male, Kailali, 08/08/2014 ; KII with political party, male, Banke, 06/08/2014 ; KII with journalist, male, Banke, 07/08/2014

Development stakeholders should pay more attention to how they are perceived, and also why they are perceived in such a way. Finding out such information is the important first step to answering key questions, such as whether public perceptions are aiding or hindering their initiatives or the long-term sustainability of the changes they are seeking to make, and what can be done to improve public perceptions.

Recommendations

For central and government development stakeholders

Increased coordination and collaboration between departments and different state agencies and government authorities

The perceived lack of coordination and collaboration between various government authorities was highlighted frequently by respondents. In order to achieve effective development-oriented results, coordination and communication needs to be maintained between actors working in the same geographic location. This could result in synergy and avoid duplication of efforts. Likewise, the inclusion of community representatives to ensure transparency of coordination at the local level is essential. Existing coordination mechanisms should be strengthened by ensuring that periodic reviews and meetings of each state-led development initiative is managed, whereby government stakeholders that are delivering various development projects are able to jointly plan and discuss their development plans and achievements.

Reduce political interference within local government mechanisms

Majority of respondents at the local level perceived political interference as having negatively affected the on-going development plans in Nepal. The state could adopt strong policies that discourage political actors from influencing their decision-making and implementation at the local level. A transparent and accountable mechanism that is supported by democratic and participatory civilian oversight can help reduce political influence, provided the participatory inclusion of both political actors and communities, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, in ensuring that the proposed development initiatives are based on the actual needs during the design phase.

Restructure the existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms within the central and local government authorities to ensure that the efforts go hand-in-hand

The government needs to review and strengthen their existing monitoring and evaluation practices and techniques, as part of being accountable to the citizens, taxpayers and foreign aid/grants that are provided for development plans and policies. Development initiatives should have in-built monitoring and evaluation strategies to undertake periodic progress reviews, with relevant central and local government agencies taking a lead on the process. These reviews need to be well-documented and publicly disseminated in local languages for increased local participation.

For NGO and INGO development stakeholders

Ensure programme design and implementation is sensitive to conflict dynamics

Many of the professional and ethical imperatives for NGOs and INGOs underscored by respondents directly correspond with the lack of being context-sensitive. In order to maximise effectiveness and minimise any adverse impact on the context, stakeholders need to

be aware of their contexts which include the interplay of actors and factors shaping the context and the outlined intervention. NGOs and INGOs need to ensure that their interventions avoid unfavourable impacts that could further degenerate into conflicts through careful planning complemented by consultations with local stakeholders and beneficiaries. Also, by ensuring transparency and accountability in attitude, behaviour and activities, and through feasible disclosures related to the projects, organisations can attain approval and esteem from the communities they serve.

Realistic and sustainable design and implementation of development initiatives

Initiatives designed and implemented should be contextually feasible, appreciable and sustainable. Reportedly, NGOs often come up with programmes that are unnecessary and incompatible with the local contexts. In such cases, communities find no value in such interventions neither do they take ownership which ultimately affects the sustainability of the development outcomes. Additionally, even if the objectives are compatible with the ‘need’ factor but there is no sustainability element factored in the continuum, the initiative halts upon the completion of the project. A metaphor outlined by respondents illustrates this, “one can provide training to augment the livelihood of the beneficiaries. If beneficiaries are imparted the skill to catch fish in absence of ponds or lakes with fish or without the proper essentials needed to catch the fish, they can’t sustain their livelihoods.”⁵² As illustrated by this metaphor, factors that would result in sustainability of the interventions need to be considered.

Increased consultations and collaboration with central and local government authorities

As highlighted by respondents including the government authorities, one critical factor that has marred the image of NGOs and INGOs is its perceived neglect of the local government authorities. Respondents mentioned that some NGOs conduct activities while keeping the authorities un-informed of their engagements. As the state is the primary actor in country’s developmental activities and is also the regulator, such NGOs and INGOs need to coordinate their activities in line with governmental priorities and collaborate accordingly. Similarly, guidelines and regulations set by the government, particularly the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development and their respective district and VDC line agencies should be discussed and adhered to. NGOs and INGOs should also increase consultations with the central and local government authorities, as well as among/between NGOs and INGOs themselves, to ensure that the coordination and communication between them is strengthened and does not lack in clarity.

Strengthen existing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate project design and implementation

NGOs and INGOs should have a robust monitoring and evaluation arrangements in place to ensure that the intended objectives are achieved and intended beneficiaries obtain benefit from the intervention. This also links to the need for ensuring that the development initiative is context-specific and that the planned activities are not causing any deliberate or inadvertent harm to the context or the intended beneficiaries.

Strengthen relations with the media

A key finding of the research was the media influence in shaping public perceptions towards development initiatives and development stakeholders, particularly the NGOs and INGOs. It

⁵² GD with community members, men and women, Dang, 05/08/2014



could be worthwhile for NGOs and INGOs to invest in a more transparent and accountable media relations whereby positive outcomes of their development initiatives are shared. Strengthening existing media relations would enable both media and development actors to engage in meaningful discussions on local and national development initiatives.

Annex 1: Methodology

Sajhedari Bikaas Project

Methodology for 4th conflict assessment

Topic: *“Public perceptions on current development initiatives and development stakeholders in selected districts in Mid- and Far-West Nepal”*

1. Research locations

Sajhedari Bikaas is proposed the following districts:

- Kailali
- Banke
- Dang

2. Rationale

The previous conflict assessments revealed that perceptions about development initiatives and development stakeholders ranged quite a bit. While there were those who held positive views, others had more negative perceptions. Particularly, incriminations and resentment were exhibited by respondents in Kailali and Dang districts. These respondents expressed negative views, particularly towards national and international development actors and criticised that they were focusing on urban areas, while being ineffective at the rural communities that are often hard to reach. There were also a few respondents who accused international organisations of Christian proselytization, and encouraging ethnic tensions in Nepal, particularly during the aftermath of the Undivided Far West Movement in the Mid and Far West districts. Recently, a series of news reports have been published claiming that development stakeholders, specifically NGOs, INGOs, bilateral and multilateral agencies, are ineffective and lack accountability towards the government. Many of those reports did not make a distinction between those different development actor categories. Other media reports blame some international development stakeholders for having influenced Nepal’s political discourse and the constitution writing process.

This assessment seeks to explore perceptions towards development initiatives and development stakeholders at the district level to inform the work of the Sajhedari Bikaas project. For the purpose of this assessment, the term ‘development initiative’ refers to a range of development activities, including activities focussing on economic development, broader social change (for example conflict prevention, women empowerment, etc.) but also infrastructure provision. While perceptions towards international stakeholders are of particular interest, the assessment will also seek to get views on Nepali NGOs and government stakeholders.

The assessment seeks to contribute to a better understanding of:

- district and VDC-level perceptions towards development initiatives and how they meet district-level priorities;
- district and VDC-level perceptions towards development stakeholders; please note that in the framework of this research objective, the research team will also seek to assess whether respondents are aware of the differences between the different development stakeholders;
- how and by whom those perceptions are shaped;
- what could be done to improve perceptions towards development initiatives and stakeholders.

Please note that the assessment does **not** assess the effectiveness of development initiatives in the selected research locations.

3. Methodology

Sajhedari proposes to use the same methodological approach applied so far for the other conflict assessments to ensure consistency.

Phase 1 – **Desk research** – to inform and complement the assessment Sajhedari will review other sources of information, particularly those that report on perceptions of development practices, practitioners and organisations.

Phase 2 – **Participatory consultations and research** – will be the key phase in terms of data collection. This phase is rooted in a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach utilising tools crucial to ensure that the research is as participatory as possible given the various social and cultural factors that can be an obstacle to this. This phase will mainly take place at the headquarters and the VDC level in the three districts, where the research team will collect most of the data informing the research. As much as possible, Sajhedari will seek to get VDC specific information as well. Participatory Research Techniques (PRTs) will be applied, including the following:

District-level key informant interviews (KIIs) are considered the core category of interviews to provide district specific information and qualitative data on perceptions on development initiatives and stakeholders. KIIs will aim to elicit information from target respondents who are strategically placed to speak on the topic.

A total of 12-14 KIIs will be conducted in the three target districts, mainly at the district capital level. Interviewees will be selected to represent a cross-section of administration, civil society, NGO and INGO practitioners, media and others who can provide a deeper understanding of the topic. To the extent possible, the respondent sample will seek to include both men and women. Categories for the respondents will include:

S.N.	KIIs at the district level	Quantity
1	INGO and NGO staff	4-6
2	Journalists	1-2
3	Government authorities	1-2
4	Political parties	3-4
	Total	12-14

Group discussions (GDs) with community representatives in all three target districts will be conducted at the VDC level. Two GDs per district will strive to provide qualitative data on public perceptions of development initiatives and stakeholders. The GDs will be conducted with community members for which participants will be selected to represent a cross section of Nepalis on the basis of both demographic statistics (e.g. caste, ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic position, location) and occupation. Some PRT tools will be used if appropriate.

A total of 6 group discussions were carried out, two per district. In each district, each group comprised of community members from both sexes.

S. N.	Group discussions (GDs)	Quantity
1	Banke community members (men and women)	6-8
2	Dang community members (men and women)	6-8
3	Kailali community members (men and women)	6-8
4	Regional (men and women)	16
Total	Community members (men and women)	24 men and 22 women

The research schedule was as follows:

Phase	Activities	Timeframe
Phase 1	Desk research and logistical preparations	14 th – 2 nd August
Phase 2	Data collection in selected districts and VDCs	3 rd August – 12 th August
Phase 3	Analysis of findings and production of first draft	15 th August – 10 th December
	Draft report shared for feedback	15 th December

4. Guiding Questions

Please note that the topic is quite sensitive, particularly with negative media reporting against development stakeholders continuing. Thus, the proposed questions were guiding questions only, and the decision whether, how and in what sequence to ask those questions rested with the research team leaders. Probing questions were asked wherever possible to get more in-depth information and specific examples to illustrate the respondents' perceptions. All KIIs and GDs began with specific questions to establish trust and break the ice.

Guiding questions for KIIs

Media, government stakeholders, political parties

- What do you consider the key development priorities in the district?
- What is being done to address those priorities, both by government and non-government stakeholders?
- Who are the key development stakeholders working in this district? Can you name a few organisations that work here?
- Some of the stakeholders you have mentioned are NGOs, some are INGOs, some are multilateral agencies or donor organisations. How would you characterise their different roles and approaches?
- What is your perception towards the ability of [NGOs, INGOs, government stakeholders] to effectively implement development initiatives? Why do you think so, can you provide some examples? [Probe on effectiveness, transparency and accountability; try to understand whether they think government stakeholders are better placed to carry out development activities]
- Are there any examples where development activities have done more harm than good?

[specifically for government respondents]

- Can you please explain how you coordinate the work of development stakeholders?

[for all]

- How would you describe coordination and collaboration between the different development stakeholders, and between development stakeholders and the government? Can you provide examples? Do these coordination mechanisms work well?
- How do you think NGOs, INGOs or donors are perceived by the communities here? Why do you think that is the case?
- There have been negative media reports about INGOs, NGOs and donors recently. Why do you think that is the case? Do you think the reports are justified?
- What would you like to see changed? Do you have any recommendations?

[specifically for media respondents]

- If you write articles about development initiatives or stakeholders, where do you get information from? Do you triangulate it, and how?
- There have been negative media reports about INGOs, NGOs and donors recently. Why do you think that is the case? Do you think the reports are adequate?
- In your opinion, what implications do you think this type of reporting has upon development stakeholders? Are there any specific examples?

NGOs and INGOs

- In which sector do you see most development stakeholder's engagement in this district?
- In your view, to what extent do development initiatives effectively contribute to positive change in the communities? Do they address development priorities? Can you give some examples?
- Are there any examples where development activities have done more harm than good?
- How would you describe the relationship and coordination between different [NGOs, INGOs]? What perceptions do you encounter towards [NGOs, INGOs] and their work? What do you think shapes their perceptions?
- How would you describe the relationship and coordination between [NGOs, INGOs] and government authorities? What perceptions do you encounter towards [NGOs, INGOs] and their work? What do you think shapes their perceptions?
- What could be done to improve that relationships and coordination?
- What perceptions do you think communities have of [NGOs, INGOs] and their work? Why do you think that is? Can you provide some examples? What shapes these perceptions?
- What do you think about the recent media reports about development stakeholders? Do such media reports have implications on your work? Can you please elaborate?

Guiding questions for GDs

Community members

- Can you tell us about development initiatives going on in your community/district? What activities have taken place or are going on? What do you think about them, did they contribute to change?
- What kind of development stakeholders are working here? [Probe to find out whether they understand the difference between NGOs, INGOs, donors, etc.]
- What is your view on those stakeholders and their work?
- If you think about effectiveness, which of these stakeholders do you think are most effective? Why? Can you give examples? [Probe to find out who and what is shaping those perceptions – personal experience, media, friends, ...?]
- If you think about trust, which of these stakeholders do you think can be trusted most? Why? Can you give examples? [Probe to find out who and what is shaping those perceptions – personal experience, media, friends, ...?]
- What do you think about the government's role in development?
- Are there any examples where development activities have done more harm than good?
- In your view, what characteristics would you like to see in a good development stakeholder? Which development stakeholder you know displays most of those characteristics [if any]?

- Are there any development priorities in this community/district that you think should be urgently addressed, but are not at the moment?

5. Research team

Three dedicated teams will be involved in the research, one in each district. This will involve:

- 3 Saferworld staff members (as Saferworld is the Sajhedari organisation responsible for the conflict assessments), leading on methodology development, training, data collection, analysis, write up, and quality control;
- 3 local researchers that support data collection and initial analysis;
- 3 CeLLRd staff for coordination and observation.

The three district research teams comprised of three members each and conducted the field research. A Saferworld staff member led each group. The assessments were supported by senior Saferworld staff in Kathmandu and London, particularly during methodology development, analysis of findings, reviewing the initial draft report, and quality control. CeLLRd staff who participated in the recent conflict analysis training were involved in this research as part of their capacity building. They were mainly given the role of coordinating the research and also accompanied the research teams to observe some of the KIIs and GDs.

6. Tentative Report Structure

The planned report structure was as follows (with adjustments made if required by the district findings):

1. Introduction (1 page)
 - Brief introduction to the Sajhedari Bikaas project, its objectives, and the purpose of the conflict assessment;
 - Brief summary of the methodology used, brief outline of report structure
2. Executive summary of findings (2 pages)
3. Context background (1 page)
4. Research findings per district (approximately 3 pages per district)
5. Conclusion and recommendations (approximately 2 pages)

Based on the findings, key cross-cutting themes will be drawn out and recommendations will be made on where key priorities and opportunities are seen in the Sajhedari Bikaas project to engage.

6. Annex

The annex will include:

- Final version of the methodology.

7. Key principles

Conflict and context sensitivity: Sajhedari is committed to implementing the principles of conflict sensitivity in its own work, and to support other actors to operate in a manner that is conflict-sensitive. Thus, Sajhedari applied the principle of conflict sensitivity throughout the methodology design, data collection, analysis and write-up. To do that, Sajhedari was, for example, transparent about the purpose of the research; involved respondents and researchers



in a way that did not put them at risk; selected and designed questions in a way that would not increase tensions, fuel stereotypes, etc.; and ensured confidentiality and anonymity of respondents at all times.

Inclusivity: Inclusivity is fundamental to Sajhedari’s approach, and the views and perceptions of the most vulnerable groups in society (which often includes women, youth, elderly and minorities) are a key consideration for Sajhedari. While there are limitations in terms of how many representatives from vulnerable and marginalized groups can be involved, Sajhedari will aim to ensure a good understanding of the perceptions and specific concerns of those groups.

Gender balance: The research team talked to both male and female respondents from different age groups, and worked to obtain nuanced viewpoints on the topic. However, the research team were not always have been able to get balanced involvement of male and female respondents, and also had to prioritise informants who are better informed about the relevant issues, even if fewer respondents from some groups were heard as a result.

Participatory methodology: The diverse views and perceptions of respondents are crucial to getting a good understanding of the current situation, potential developments and opportunities for programming responses. To get this information, participatory tools have proven effective as they are suitable for obtaining rich qualitative data. Sajhedari has identified and employed a limited number of tools that are designed to extract good information on specific issues where appropriate.

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