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**Caught in the Cross Fire: Children's Right to Education during Conflict
- the Case of Nepal**

Children & Society

Sara Parker, Kay Standing and Bala Raju Nikku

Abstract

Between February 1996 and November 2006, the Communist Party of Nepal, the *Maobadi* (Maoists), waged a 'people's war' in Nepal to address the inherent inequalities in Nepali society, (of which education is one amongst many), and to overthrow the constitutional monarchy. During the conflict in Nepal children were used as combatants, spies, porters, messengers by both Maoist and government forces, and schools became central to the conflict. This paper looks at children's experiences of conflict and the role schooling can play in both creating and resolving conflict in Nepal. The article focuses on the impact on children, schools and education during the conflict in Nepal but also looks at some of the initiatives in the five years since the end of the conflict, and raises questions for further research on schooling in the post conflict era. The article is based on research into education and development undertaken as part of a British Council funded Higher Education Link. Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted with school children, parents, teachers and community leaders between 2004 and 2006 and draws on informal discussions and observations with NGOs and teachers in the post conflict period, including the NGOs use of visual methods to enable children's voices to be heard in the peace process.

Keywords: children, Nepal, conflict, education

1. Introduction: Education and Conflict

In times of armed conflict children are disproportionately affected. Children can be directly affected by violence through displacement, death and injury, recruitment as child soldiers and sexual violence, but also indirectly affected thorough the wider impacts on the community, and specifically on education and schools.

There has been a growing concern in the international community with the targeting of education in situations of conflict (Tawil and Harley, 2004). The Child's right to education is enshrined in international law through the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but in situations of conflict education is one of the Human Rights that is violated on a regular basis (Tomlinson and Benefield 2005). In 2006 it was estimated that one third of the 115 million children out of school are in conflict affected areas (Save the Children 2006). Conflict can severely obstruct countries in achieving what is known as the 'Education for All' goal: the Millennium Development Goal that by 2015 all children have access to education.

The negative impact on schooling can continue long after the conflict has ended. Schooling can be disrupted through closure and direct attacks on school. Educational quality can fall as schools become overcrowded with scarce and unqualified teachers and lack of appropriate resources, books, buildings and equipment. There is evidence that high levels of violence in communities lead to increasing violence in schools, corporal punishment and sexual violence (Nicolai, 2007). There is growing recognition that a good school can have a stabilizing effect on the life of children during times of upheaval and can provide a secure and protective space for children' general welfare, enhancing their ability to cope with difficulties and providing a promise for their future in the context of conflict (Save the Children, 2007). It is argued that it is essential to educate children

during times of war. Education is both a fundamental right of a child, and can represent normalcy, making it easier for children to cope in times of conflict (Machel, 2001).

As Tomlinson and Benefield, (2005; 9) point out; “education in conflict and post-conflict situations as a recognized practitioner and research field is in its infancy”. The article thus attempts to begin to address this gap by providing a case study of the situation in Nepal between 2004 and 2006. One of the main questions that this paper addresses is how and why were schools, students and teachers targeted during the internal conflict of 1996-2006 in Nepal? What have been the impacts on the right to education of the Children, and to explore what is being done post conflict to enable children to access their right to education.

2. Context: Education in Nepal

In Nepal, education is weak at the best of times and the conflict added considerable pressure to an already poor education system, with education becoming both a cause of, and solution to, conflict (see Caddell 2009, Pherali 2011, Sheilds and Rappleye 2008, Standing et al 2006, Smith and Vaux 2003). The elite educationalist system in Nepal played a key role in exacerbating the conflict in Nepal by furthering existing social divisions. The educational system represented the dominant classes, did not meet the needs of local populations, ignored ethnic, caste and geographical differences and in the main contributed to uneven development and failed to provide meaningful opportunities for the majority of the population. Educational inequalities acted as a contributor to violence, reproducing existing social inequalities in terms of caste/class, ethnicity, gender and the rural/urban divide that were part of the conflicts main causes.

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 45 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. A stark contrast exists between urban and rural areas, with poverty rates ten times higher in rural areas than in the more developed Kathmandu Valley (UNDP, 2004). Nepal is culturally and ethnically diverse, yet, despite legislation, many discriminatory attitudes and practices persist to the detriment of indigenous ethnic groups, women and children. Women and children living in remote areas and those without land are the most marginalised and excluded, and were those most affected by conflict. Nepal is also a young population; overall 39% of Nepal's population is under 14, and over 50% is under 19. In a country where over 45 percent of the population is unemployed, half of these are youth under 19 years of age (Save the Children, 2006).

The heterogeneity and intersectionality of children's experiences makes it difficult to generalise in terms of education, and inequalities amongst children and in education vary. Whilst an estimated 18 per cent of primary-aged children (5-9 years) do not attend school, this figure is higher for females and Dalit children (Stash and Hannum, 2009). Inequalities in education are greatest in Far West Nepal, with reports of literacy rates as low as 30 per cent and mean years of schooling as low as two (Bhatta, 2009). Only 41% of children aged 3-5 have access to early childhood development programmes and approximately 84% of young people have dropped out of the formal education system. Access to secondary education is limited and provision poor, especially to the socio-economically disadvantaged (Bhatta, 2009).

The problem in education is not only lack of access but also the unequal quality and type of education provided. For those enrolled in school, the lack of resources, overcrowding, poor teaching quality, irregularity of teacher attendance and the extra costs associated with schooling mean that many children drop out or fail to do well (Bhatta, 2009). It was estimated in 2006 that

only a third of primary teachers had been trained (Save the Children, 2006: 22). The ten years of unrest had a negative impact on the ability of access to teacher training opportunities. The poor quality of education within Nepal has led Vaux et al (2006: 21) to the conclusion that children in government schools are 'practically all destined to become social and economic "failures"' due to low levels of progression and pass rates for the School Leaving Certificate¹. The SLC exams are often referred to as the iron gates of education. Low pass rates coupled with the prestige of being taught in the medium of English, led to a dramatic increase in private schooling. It is now estimated that a fifth of all school-going children attend private schools (Caddell, 2009). This two tier system divides the population further and contributed to popular support for the Maoist movement. General frustration with the educational system and the lack of opportunities that it brings were also key issues which underpinned the Maoists' propaganda and helped them to draw support from marginalised groups.

As in other conflict zones children were used as combatants, spies, porters, messengers by both Maoist and government forces, and schools became central to the conflict (Parker and Standing, 2007, Shields & Rappleye 2008, Pherali 2011). An estimated 13,000 people were killed as a result of the conflict, including at least 500 children (CWIN, 2006) and Nepal had the highest number of 'disappearances' in the world during the conflict (Amnesty International, 2004) with reports of around 4,000 children 'missing' (CWIN, 2006). It has been estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 people were displaced, of whom at least 40,000 were children (IRIN, 2005).

¹ In 2005 it was reported that only 20 per cent of students in government schools pass the School Leaving Certificate at the end of Year 10 (compared to 80% in private schools), and just 4% of students join higher education (CERID, 2005).. Whilst the pass rate has increased in recent years to 55% educational attainment varies greatly from location to location and between the different caste and ethnic groups.

3. Researching schools in a conflict situation

This article is based on research conducted as part of a British Council funded project on education and development. Initially research focussed on exploring the gendered experiences of children in 11 public secondary schools in and around the Kathmandu valley (Thapa 2004). Additional research focusing on the impact of conflict in schools was carried out in 2006-07. Interviews were held with teachers, parents and community members, and focus group discussions with groups of 4-6 children (48 boys and 46 girls). In addition school record forms were used to gain information on enrolment, promotion, drop out rates and repetition by gender and caste. Post 2007, follow on research has drawn upon observations, key informant interviews and analysing educational policies as well as exploring the work being undertaken by non government organisations such as Global Action Nepal and Children Nepal.

The initial research (2004-2006) took place in three areas of Nepal where the Maoist presence was high and many villages were rebel strongholds. The conflict led to many issues and dilemmas in the research process. The researchers were unable to visit some schools in rural and semi rural areas and the research was only possible because of the researchers close links with a wide range of schools in varying locations, thus enabling the research to be fully anonymous. In all locations a level of trust within both the school and the wider community was established and participants were assured that the research was no way linked to any political party of the government forces. Anonymity to individuals, schools and other key informants was guaranteed as was the locations of the research. The article presents qualitative data from the research to share the children's experiences and voices and to illustrate the long and short term effects of conflict on schooling and children's lives. It also draws on work undertaken by NGOs with young people using visual methods with children involved in workshops run by two NGOs working to promote children's rights and a

better education system in Nepal – Global Action Nepal in Kathmandu and Children Nepal in Pokhara. Children Nepal's work with number of Child Self Help groups in 2006-7 resulted in a picture book entitled 'Our Voice' which was presented to the Interim Government to give a voice to young people and help ensure their rights are recognised in the new constitution (Children Nepal 2008).

4. Findings from the field

4.1 Children and schools: - political and actual battlegrounds

It is widely recognised that schools were targeted during the Maoist Insurgency from 1996-2006 as they provided perfect sites for military operations, play a central role in community life, especially in rural areas and were viewed as government structures. Schools were targeted and closed for ideological reasons as they were viewed by the Maoists as representing an oppressive system of education which indoctrinates the population rather than emancipates it. Between 1996 and 2006 both parties, Government and Maoist, viewed schools as the entry point of their propaganda. This led to a variety of impacts, both direct and indirect, that vary according to factors such as geographical location (urban or rural), type of school (public or private), and factors such as gender, socio economic status and supporting or opposing the Maoist movement. Rural schools became one of the main recruitment arenas for both the Maoist and government forces. Students reported that both the Maoist and security forces would come into schools to spread propaganda:

They write their slogans on walls of school. They don't let erase the slogans. Once, a student questioned and showed interest to know about Maoists. The Maoists just ignored him and said 'Is your brother in army?' It was threatening to our friend. They don't want to listen to others and don't like to listen to questions about them (girl, year 10 focus group).

As schools are often the centre of a community, and the only large building, far from providing a place of safety and security for children, they were used by both sides as areas for recruitment, propaganda and sometimes actual battlegrounds.

When cross fire occurs, the Maoists make the school their safe place. They use the [...] school as their meeting place and their shelter. They order the community to come to attend their meeting compulsorily, which is very dangerous. When the Army comes, they just shoot down the people without recognizing them. Our school is near to the main road. It is very appropriate to organize meetings there for the Maoists and they organize the cultural programs. So they come time to time and organize their activities. When they go back, the Army comes in to school and asks several questions. (Boy, year 9)

They involve children in the militant group gradually from the cultural programme.....Many children died in the cross fire between Maoists and security forces in the past (parent)

The pressure felt by children at being trapped between all parties is depicted in the diagram below, where the text reads “join our party, no join our party”



GAN (2010) Image from workshop with Children's Club

In some areas which were rebel strongholds Maoists were fairly regular presences in schools, sometimes even 'teaching' classes. Whilst in some areas this was intimidating, in others it was made clear the rebels could only enter schools in civilian clothes and without guns, and children became accustomed to their presence, as one child stated:

The Maoists used to come to our school. We used to be afraid of them but gradually our fears have gone because we become familiar with seeing them everyday (focus group, grade 9 and 10).

One male participant, year 9, informed us that "Maoists come to school from time to time and go inside the classroom and start giving orientation talks to students about their politics" and recalls a time when they were taken on a rally far from the school where they suffered from hunger and thirst as well as a fear that the security forces would come and kill them. Other research discusses the influence such parades and propaganda had on young people with many children resorting to leaving school after being inspired by Maoist propaganda (see Shakya 2010). Seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the conflict on children, work by a number of NGOs with young people in the post conflict era highlights the stress felt by children who were caught in the middle of party politics whilst attending school. The image below is presented in the publication 'Our Voice' published by Children Nepal (2008).



CN (2008) Image depicting how children are misused in political conflict, by both the army and the police force as well as political parties.

However, the Maoists gained popular support by focussing on local concerns such as ensuring teachers regularly attend class and do not drink alcohol and that all pupils are treated equally regardless of caste or gender. In the main, these moves to make the education system in Nepal less elitist and more equitable were welcomed (IRIN, 2005; Save the Children, 2005). In some Maoist controlled areas, increased attendance of children in school was reported and also an increase in the number of taught days. One respondent reported that in their school:

some teachers taught roughly and used to take additional money from students for extra tuition. Then the Maoists went there and they beat the teachers and made them ready to teach well in class. Things are now better in our class. (Boy, Class 10 focus group).

Such perceived gains are seriously offset by the disrupting effect of the conflict, and the Maoist presence did not always have such a positive influence on teachers. As one informant said “the

Maoists had beaten the teachers from time to time and had threatened the teachers, due to the fear of the Maoists, the teachers couldn't concentrate on teaching the students which has decreased the quality of education" (Boy, year 9).

There is evidence that the Maoists kidnapped large numbers of teachers and students for 're-education' (Nepal News, 2004) and our research, like that of others (Amnesty International, 2005; Shakya, 2010, Watchlist, 2005) found that the use of children as spies, messengers and couriers was widespread and schools were used to recruit children and teachers by both the Maoists and security forces. Children reported schools being used as actual battlegrounds, and the fear of being caught in the crossfire:

Maoists kidnapped students and they gave training. Maoists forced us to dig bunkers around the school. One day, there was crossfire in our school, luckily after school time. If it had happened in school time certainly dozens of our friends (maybe us) would have lost their lives. Whenever armies come to the village, Maoists hide in the bunkers of our school. [...] They keep us in the front when the solders come and they go into the bunker to hide. The Maoists and the government soldiers are making teachers and students like sandwich.
(Boy, year 10)

Although both the government and Maoist forces have denied the recruitment and use of child soldiers, there are reports that the Maoists used the 2003 ceasefire to recruit secondary school children aged between 15 and 18 as child soldiers (Amnesty International, 2004 and Human Rights Watch, 2007). Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN, 2005), estimates that in 10 years of the insurgency 27,323 children have been abducted, while the state security forces have arrested 229 children. As part of the ceasefire, over 4,000 minors were discharged from Maoist army in January 2010, about

a third of whom were female. The children we spoke to confirmed that both boys and girls were used in combat situations, to provide ammunition or care for the wounded. One respondent told us

The army soldiers come to our village to try to persuade us to join army. They lure us by saying as: “You don’t have to do hard duty and don’t have to go in the battle field. You only have to take care of the injured soldiers”

Adolescents are most at risk in times of conflict, and also the greatest hope of conflict resolution and rebuilding communities (Machel, 2001). Older children were recruited at the time of the school leaving certificate exams, leading to both fear and contributing to students dropping out and not completing their education:

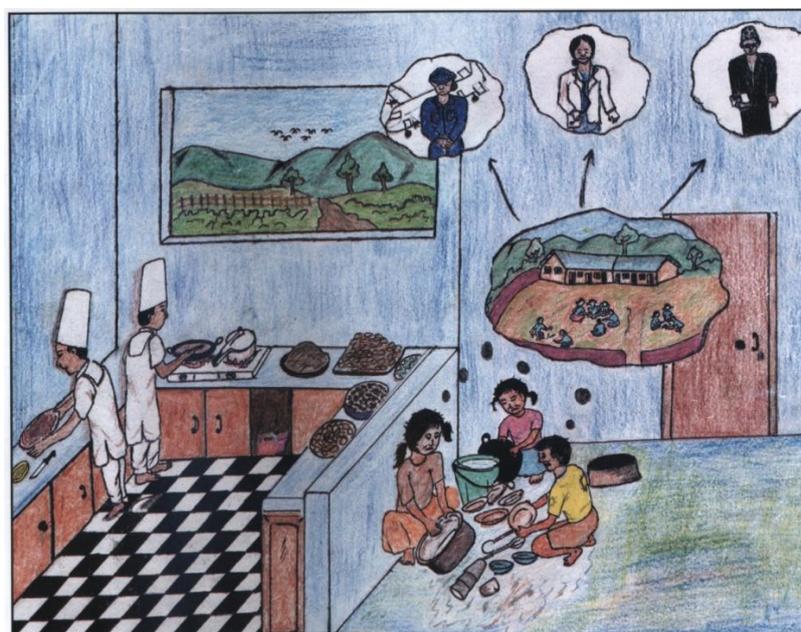
The trend is that the Maoists make their activities when children complete the final examination of grade 10. Last year, a friend did not appear at the final exam of grade 10 due to the fear of being kidnapped. He was talented but did not appear at the exam (Boy, Class 9)

It is important to recognise the gendered impact of conflict. Our research indicates girls were likely to be members of political wing, with jobs as ‘motivators’ going from house to house to try to gain support for the Maoists, however there is also evidence of girls being members of the military wing and receiving firearms training (Watchlist, 2005). Joining the Maoist army however was sometimes seen as an escape from a patriarchal household for adolescent girls, but brought with it the risk of gender based violence (see Standing et al. 2006 and Parker and Standing 2007 for more detail).

4.2 Indirect impact of conflict on children’s schooling

As stated above an indirect impact of the conflict was an increase in the school drop out rate. Our research found that whilst girls would be withdrawn from school to do household work boys would be moved to schools in safer areas, usually the nearest town or city. Children frequently migrated

to urban areas, one teacher noted that "many of the local people from [the village] have taken their children out of this school to [the nearest town] because of the conflict" .Many children were withdrawn from school completely to enter the labour market, boys tended to migrate to India or the Gulf countries as labourers, and many girls fleeing conflict ended up in commercial sex work (Watchlist 2005, Save Children Norway 2005). The diagram below from Children Nepal (2008) highlights that by denying children access to education they are denied access to better life.



As well as being affected by the direct impact of conflict, violence and fear of violence, numerous general strikes were called as part of the conflict with, schools specifically targeted for strike action often bringing the educational system to a halt, at times preventing students from taking important exams (Watchlist, 2005). Between January 2005 and April 2006, 3,670 schools were closed at one time or another (CWIN, 2006) and in the ten year period an estimated 300 teaching days at least have been lost. This equates to nearly two years of schooling. The impact on student performance cannot be underestimated, leaving students feeling exasperated and having little hope for their

educational future; adding to already high drop out rates. As one student told us that the frequent closure of the school disturbed their studies and “This has hampered our study and made us feel frustrated” (Boy Class 9).

Although recent data suggest that the number of children enrolling in school is increasing, the numbers completing their school education are still limited. Gaining access to school is only one part of the Education For All agenda; improving security around schools is also crucial to student retention and the psychological impact of the conflict needs to be addressed.

Our research found that there was social trauma among students about the conflict. They were afraid to go to toilet, classroom, and travel to school because of fear of bombs, kidnappings and violence. From an early age, children reported knowledge of murder cases and many of those affected had developed feelings of revenge. The research found that children had changed their traditional games like hide and seek, and adopted playing war games between Maoists and police. They dramatized the situation showing war, murder and killing others using guns and bombs. Teachers in one school noted that more and more children are playing with guns and other children are hero worshipping children who have plastic guns as toys.

It is imperative that the psychological impact of conflict on children is addressed. According to one study, 73% of children reported an increase in terror and fear, with 10% reporting fear of returning to school yet evidence suggests there is little support or counselling for children (Rana-Deub, 2005)

Education has been a political battleground in Nepal, and was both a cause of, and can be a solution to, the conflict. Whilst the Maoist perspective on education presented the possibility of

developing different and more emancipatory and inclusive discourses of education, including the wide scale participation of marginalized groups, in reality schooling was disrupted and children's human rights have suffered as a result of the conflict. The effects are complex and varied, as already noted. The greatest impact has been on children in schools in rural areas who have experienced violence and intimidation, but all schools and children have been affected by school closures and the fear of abduction and attack. In conclusion the article examines what can be done to rebuild children's lives and make schools places of security in post conflict Nepal.

4.3 Post Conflict Challenges

In November 2006 an agreement was signed bringing an end to the 10 year conflict, and the recent return to democracy indicates the potential to make progress in both formal and non-formal education and to improve the lives of children. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement ensures that children associated with armed groups and armed forces will be released and rehabilitated into their communities and Nepal is currently monitoring and reporting core violations against the rights of children through the UN Security Council Resolution 1612 Task Force. However, political parties continue to exploit and use children in street rallies and demonstrations (CWIN 2009). Nepal is thus going through a key time in establishing peace and democracy and the rights of children. However the peace process is fragile and evolving, and there is a concern that the voices of children will not be heard.

A number of International and National NGO's have taken the lead in helping to both reintegrate children back into school and in processes to give young people space to discuss their experiences and needs via establishing child clubs or self help groups (eg Child Nepal, Children Nepal, Global Action Nepal, World education and UNICEF). A number of programmes and initiatives have been

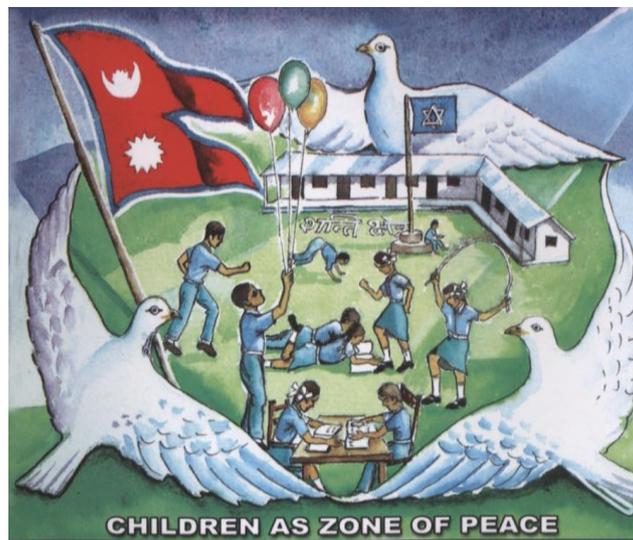
undertaken by a range of agencies to encourage children back to school such as the UNIEF initiated 'Welcome to School' campaign initiated in 2004 (Lawoti 2006). Whilst other programmes aim at reintegrating children either formerly associated with or affected by the armed conflict. Since 2007, World Education reports to have supported over 1650 children access school, literacy classes or vocational training (World Education 2011).

The World Bank-financed Community School Support Project was launched in 2003 to help reform the defunct public school system. The first approach was to encourage communities to take back the management of schools, by providing a one-time government incentive grant. The second was to transform the role of the Government from that of a provider of education to a facilitator. Both approaches aimed to increase both the demand and supply for education in parallel. Moreover, it aimed to improve not only the quality and relevance of the curriculum, but also the capacity of the Government agencies tasked with facilitating the system.

The results of these reforms have been encouraging. From 2003 to 2009, net primary enrolment rose from 84% to 92%. Gender parity improved from 83% to 98% during the same period. More than 9,000 schools transferred to community management (World Bank 2010). At the current rate, the goal of achieving community management for all public schools by 2015 appears attainable.

As early as 2001, Save the Children, was promoting the idea of 'Schools as Zones of Peace' in an attempt to reduce the impact of the conflict on young people. The SZOP campaign was targeted at ensuring children had the right to access education. By 2003 other leading campaign groups such as Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), the Institute of Human Rights and Communication Nepal and Plan Nepal were all working together to promote Children as a Zone of Peace in Nepal (CZOP)

(CWIN 2003). The main aim being to protect children and the spaces in which they are found such as day care centres, hospitals and schools. Working with schools, local communities and political leaders to develop a code of conduct to ensure schools are free from political conflict and to protect children and their right to live in peace (Save the Children 2009, Joshi 2010). In May 2011 the Government of Nepal endorsed the Schools as Zones of Peace initiative to help address the continuing disruption in schools due to the frequent strikes in Nepal. The Government objectives for SZOP include keeping schools from discrimination, any form, of violence and also keeping schools free from political party influence. Much of the work being done by activist groups in Nepal to give children a voice support this demand with children themselves demanding peaceful education and schools as zones of peace as depicted in the diagrams below from children engaged in the work of GAN and Children Nepal.



Children Nepal (2008) Picture depicting the school at the centre of the children of zone of peace demand and below a picture from a child club organised by GAN showing school children demanding peace.



However, whilst increasing educational access and creating schools as zone of peace are all positive steps, the issue in Nepal is wider than access; there needs to be wholesale reform of curriculum, pedagogy, teaching methods and materials if there is to be any lasting resolution to the conflict. Education needs to be accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the diverse Nepali population, and the voices of children need to be heard in the ongoing peace process. As one child informed us “we need qualified teachers and experienced teachers to teach us. We would also like a science lab for practical knowledge and a good English teacher (Boy Class 10).

The schooling system needs to encourage creativity and enable students to develop their own ideas. Currently the educational system is heavily based on rote learning and passing texts on an annual basis in order to progress to the next grade, as one child explained “teachers are all looking for the exact same answer that is in the text book.... there are many old teachers with this old way of thinking. They expect lots of respect from the students and don’t want to see the students’ views

in the answer. If we don't respect them they become angry and threaten us, even the Principal shows his anger to us because of his personnel tension. (Child Year 9). One of the knock on effects of the ten years of conflict has been a lack of training support being provided to teachers, especially in remote areas, and in many ways it represents a lost decade of opportunity where teaching methods and texts have all stayed the same.

The Country Director for GAN feels that Nepal needs one of the most important issues that needs addressing is to improve the qualifications and skills of teachers in the education system. He points out that whilst " '97% of teachers have some sort of qualification they are not fully trained ... this needs to be improved on and GAN provides training for teachers on how to educate them to better standards. The government needs to provide more adequate teacher training resources and techniques" and notes that in addition to this "the government really needs to monitor teachers as they are not being watched after they qualify". He goes on to add "It is essential that schools become more child friendly, not only in terms of the environment and resources which are available but also students should be given the opportunity to express their own ideas in school. We are currently running a number of teacher trainer programmes in child centred pedagogy in a number of districts in Nepal" (pers coms May 2011). The Director of Children Nepal adds to this arguing that "education needs to become more practical so that the children can use their education in Nepal "...improving the quality of education needs to become a priority in Nepal and there needs to be more sharing of good practice between non government and government sector" (pers coms April 2011). There have, however, been some government initiatives to improve schooling in Nepal. The government has begun to take the quality of education seriously and is introducing initiatives such as the licensing of teachers. However, whilst the government has implemented plans for education, health and children's rights (supported by INGOS) the post

conflict situation has meant these are often difficult to implement. To reflect this, the 'education for all' target has been shifted from 2010 to 2015.

5. Conclusion : The role of education in the peace process - where are the voices of children?

This paper supports Smith and Vaux findings that in Nepal 'education was a cause of the conflict and then became one of its main battlegrounds' (Smith and Vaux, 2003:19). Schools became both an actual and political battleground during the conflict (Parker and Standing, 2007; Shields and Rappleye, 2008) with teachers and students abducted by both sides, political indoctrination in the classroom, frequent bandhs (strikes) resulting in schools being closed for long periods of times and exams cancelled or disrupted. The paper has also highlighted a number of initiatives which are being implemented to encourage children back to school and also to improve the quality of education within Nepal. Improving access to and the quality of education is vital for further unrest and conflict to be avoided.

"The people of Nepal have lived through far too much violence already. Without urgent action from the international community and all parties in Nepal, a new generation will grow up knowing nothing but bloodshed and conflict," - Irene Khan, *Amnesty International's Secretary General* (Amnesty International press release dated 10 Feb 2006 titled '*Nepal: A decade of suffering and abuse*').

Now the question for policy makers and international donors is; how can the educational system be (re)built in Nepal that ensures rights of the Children? Is introducing alternative models of education an answer? Can the current government in place guarantee education as basic human right for all Children in Nepal?

If education is really to be a means of reducing social inequities and redressing the skewed course of development followed in the last few decades, it shall have to be reckoned as a site of struggle for power. The classroom shall have to relocate the power to critique and change – to decide what shall count as legitimate content for curricula, to choose enabling pedagogies, negotiated when, where and ultimately for what purposes. The educational discourse would need to consciously give voice to the silenced majority and redefine its objectives by valuing their lives on their terms (Rampal 2000:2523).

It is essential that further research is done to evaluate the impact of the various initiatives being undertaken by both Government and Non Governmental agencies and that forum are established whereby good practice can be shared and embedded into Government policies. In particular, research conducted with young people, to enhance their voice and ensure that their right to quality education is gained.

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