

Final Report

Submitted to

UNDP-ESP

on

Creating Peaceful Environment for the Election: Using Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues

Submitted by:

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*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background:

NTTP-Institute, in close collaboration with SCDP-UNDP and support from ESP, conducted series of consultative meetings, workshops and dialogues at selected provincial HQs and municipalities from August 7 to Nov 7, 2019 to identify major challenges to credible and peaceful elections and to assess their impact on peace and social cohesion. Altogether 12 Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and more than 100 Key Informants' Interviews (KIIs) were conducted before 10 workshops and 4 dialogues took place at provincial and municipality levels. The findings of FGDs and KIIs were validated during provincial and municipal workshops and based on workshops' recommendations, four facilitated dialogues were conducted in four places, two each in municipality and provincial headquarters' level, as piloting exercise.

On Dec 6, 2019, central level workshop was held in Kathmandu with participation of senior political party leaders, parliamentary committee chairpersons, members of both federal parliament and provincial assemblies and some NTTP thematic forum members to share the findings and recommendations of field-level activities. Central leaders took the recommendations seriously and discussed the ways to correct some wrong practices of elections so that peace dividends are directly despatched to the grassroots level people. Without true representation of the people at the margins who revolted against the existing state system, peace could not be sustained and elections could not become tool for promoting peace and social cohesion. Central leaders were briefed on local actors' perception of elections as a tool for preventing, mitigating and addressing conflicts, and elections as a process for connecting people with the state as part of a strategy to make them use conflict lens to elections.

1.2. Objectives

Main objective of the program was to analyze the trends of Nepal's elections, identify key issues, which are derailing peace and affecting credibility of the elections, and sensitize provincial and local level actors on importance of peaceful and credible elections in preventing reoccurrence of conflict in the country and to explore areas of their contributions to promotion of peace and social cohesion through peaceful and credible elections. Specific Objectives were to:

- Maintain the vitality of the local-level peace infrastructures that UNDP has supported over the

years;

- Identify current and future challenges to peaceful electoral processes;
- Find out what adjustments the peace infrastructures require to remain effective in relation to these new challenges, in the context of the new federal structure and in a manner that will not require long-term external support.

1.3.Rationale

Elections, democracy and development have inseparable relations. Nepal has tried her best to improve both technical and behavioural aspects of elections to prevent use of threats and coercion during electoral process. With support from international community and the UN, Election Commission of Nepal has modernized elections management system so as to reduce technical and procedural faults that trigger violence.

It is crucial for the governments in post-conflict setting to have informal or semi-formal dialogue spaces where conflict trends are analyzed, common understanding is developed and appropriate responses are explored. Both the situations mentioned above call for constructive engagement of opposition forces, civil society activists and minority groups by the elected governments so that all the dissident groups get legitimate space to ventilate all sorts of dissatisfactions and governments get feedback and suggestions on important policy decisions. If the government responds to such dissatisfactions through loose dialogue spaces, it finds itself better connected to the people and capable of addressing the root causes while they still at latent stage.

Nepal practiced politics of consensus for nearly 12 years since the alliance of seven political parties expressed their commitment to bring socio-political and economic transformation of Nepali society through restructuring of the state. In the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2006, they set three immediate goals; settlement of arms and armies of the Maoists, deliver transitional justice to the victims of the armed conflict and draft a new constitution for the country. Task of combatant management was successfully completed but some verified minors and late recruits of the Maoist army are still raising their voices for proper rehabilitation. Transitional Justice is still hinging on balance, waiting for appointment of a new set of officials in both the TJ mechanisms. As the third pillar of the CPA, constitution was promulgated in 2015 amid boycott of Constituent Assembly process by a number of political and social groups fighting for equal rights. And the issue might resurface once there change in political power balance. In this sense, Nepal is still observing some sort of transitional phase despite official announcement of the end of the political transition with

completion of 2017 elections.

Nepal's peace process has been taken as a unique model of conflict management globally. Nepal wanted to transform conflicts through elections; elections to Constituent Assembly to determine the process and platform for conflict management and follow-up elections to select the people to represent the conflict in this platform. So it is crucial to evaluate the process, practices and outcomes of these elections through peace lens.

Use of conflict lens is essential in every development initiative, governance and elections, and continuity of engagement of all the stakeholders has become more relevant than before. However, the constitution and laws don't provide sufficient space for constructive civic engagement to facilitate government functions, nor is any consistent practice of pre-legislation consultation and post-legislation scrutiny. In this context, some credible initiatives that can bring the people in government, parties outside the government, civil society activists and marginalized groups in informal or semi-formal setting, would make great contributions to local peace and social cohesion.

Loose forums of multiple actors are low-cost or no-cost options of civic engagement but can reduce a huge cost of the government in detecting conflicts, identifying triggers and developing shared responses. Such forums can be linked to central level initially as knowledge-sharing platforms. When elections fever grapples the political actors, behaviour-changing dialogues become difficult exercises as priorities of key political actors shift from fostering a culture of non-violence into employment of all possible measures to win the elections. So, several months up to the elections are not the right time to invest resources in such efforts.

2. Key Achievements

2.1 Outputs: Altogether 12 FGDs, more than 100 KIIs, 6 local level and 4 provincial level workshops, 4 multi-stakeholder dialogues and 1 national level interactive workshop were organised. Provincial level programmes were organized in Province 2- Janakpur, Gandaki Province- Pokhara, Province 5-Butwal and Sudurpashchim Province - Dhangadi. Likewise, local level workshops and dialogues were held in Birgunj, Rajbiraj, Bhairahawa, Kajura, Tikapur and Mahakali. The National level program was organized in Kathmandu.

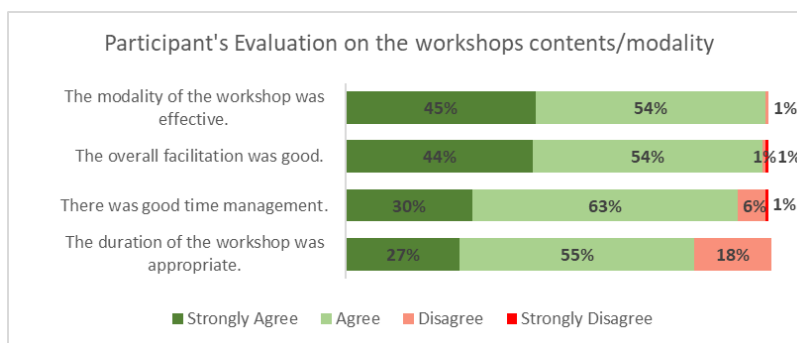
- A total of 256 people were reached through FGDs and KIIs during consultation meetings, among them 102 were female. Similarly, 325 people were reached through workshop where 84 were women; another 133 people participated in Dialogues. Altogether 39 of the dialogue participants were women. In National Workshop, 21 central leaders participated in, including 6 women

leaders, all either current or former parliamentarians. The participants were political party leaders, Provincial Assembly members, mayors, deputy mayors, ward chairpersons, election observation groups, media and civil society leaders, lawyers, professors, and officials at District Election Offices

- Former Chief Election Commissioner Mr Bhojraj Pokharel and NEOC General Secretary Dr Gopal Krishna Siwakoti prepared materials for nation and global trends of the electoral violence and debate around electoral reforms. Similarly, Dr Siwakoti prepared separately some resource materials on the trends and patterns of election and impact on peace and social cohesion. Two facilitators, Mr Chandrakishore and Umid Bagchand also presented some local trends of elections based on their observation and research works.

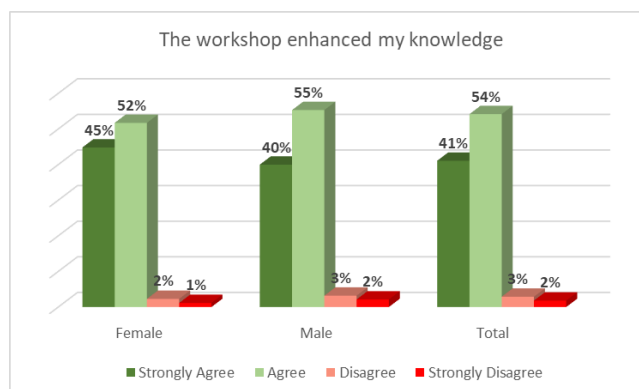
2.2 Overall Evaluation from all programmes

Out of 285 participants who took part in evaluation, 95 percent of the participants expressed satisfaction towards the workshops. Among them, 99 percent reported that the modality of the workshop was effective. 98 percentage reported



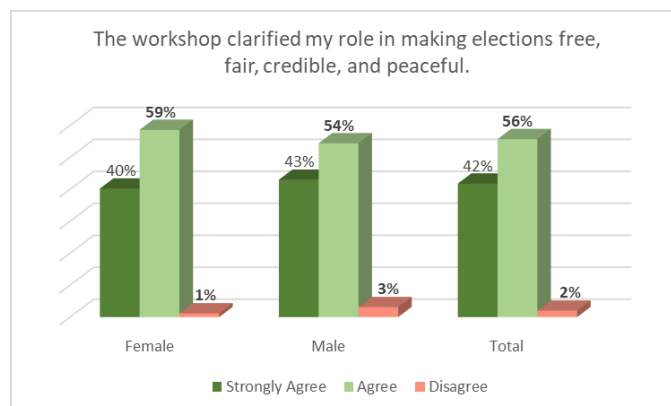
that the overall facilitation was good. 93 percent expressed satisfaction towards the time management whereas, 82 percent reported that the duration of the workshops was appropriate. 18 percent of the participants who didn't find the duration appropriate felt the duration was short.

Out of 285 participants, 41 percent strongly agreed that the workshop has enhanced their knowledge. Among them, 45 percent female and 40 percent male reported so. Again, 52 percent female and 55 percent male agreed that the workshop was useful to enhance their knowledge whereas, very few 2 percent of male

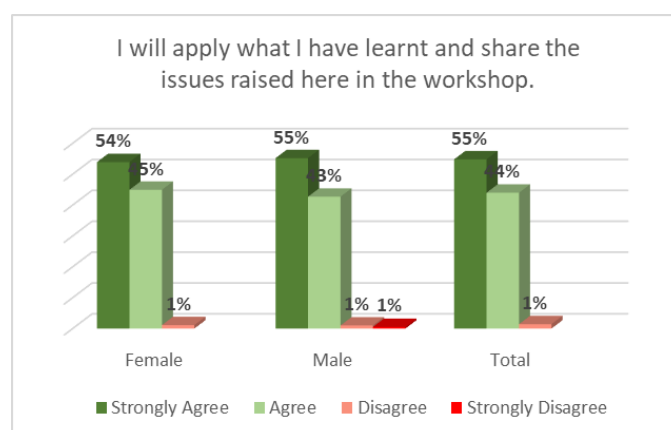


and a percent of female strongly disagreed that the workshop has enhanced their knowledge. Those who didn't see usefulness of the workshop were among the defeated candidates who were expecting presence of Election Commission's senior officials who could respond to their complains right away.

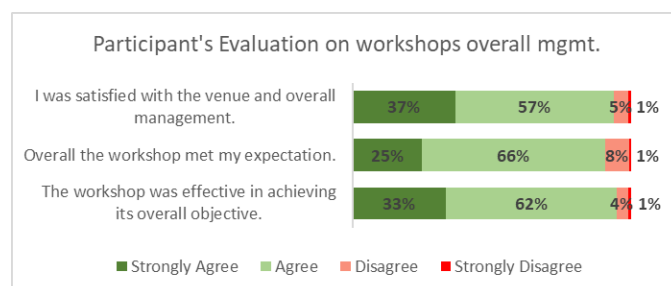
Almost all of the participants (98%) stated that the workshop has clarified their role in making elections free, fair, credible and peaceful. Only a percent of women and some 3 percent of men disagreed that the workshop was helpful to clarify their roles. Some of the respondents falling in this category must be those who were suggesting the organizers to organize such workshops at central level where causes of the problems were piled up instead of carrying out the debate at local level.



Almost all of the participants agreed that they would share and apply what they have learnt from the workshops except for a percent which is very minimal. However, a percent of male strongly disagreed that he would share the knowledge. Some participants who didn't like to share the knowledge with others said there would be no meaning of sharing the knowledge as entire problem rested at the center and were created by major actors deliberately.



Ninety-four percent of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with the venue and overall management of the workshops. Remaining five percent disagreed with it and one percent strongly disagreed. 92 percent of them, stated that the workshop has



met their expectation however, 8 percent disagreed and one percent sternly disagreed. Likewise, 95 percent found the workshop effective in achieving it's overall objective whereas four percent disagreed and a percent strongly disagreed. Most of the respondents in this category were not informed in advance about limitations of the program and their expectation was slightly different from the programme agenda.

2.3. Best Practices

- A. The resource persons were such some high-profile personalities in election-related issues that everyone informed at the program intended to take part and listen to resource person's remarks.
- B. Ground work was carried out intensively by NTTP-I and UNDP's SCDP that everyone was fully aware of what to share in the workshop and how to take part in dialogue.
- C. Activities were planned in very flexible way so that quick adaptation and adjustments were always possible in regards to date, time and modality.
- D. Local ownership was established in very smart ways; District Election Offices, major political parties and municipalities themselves took the programs like their own, helped invite the participants and also helped fix workshop venues.
- E. Local-level coordination also was made in very effective way. UNDP Field Office colleagues took part in most of the activities, took time to explain about SDGs and link peace, democracy, elections with the SDG goals, and made their resources available for the activities.

2.4. Partnership/Coordination

- Programs were conducted in close coordination with SCDP at national and sub-national level. Due to SCDP field staff's good understanding of local context and actors, approaching the rights stakeholders within limited time was possible. It saved time and resources of program implementation. Similarly, local NGOs, local partners of SCDP and media person were also coordinated for selecting and inviting participants and taking stock on the local conflict dynamics and electoral context.
- UNDP- ESP was also coordinated for Monitoring & Evaluation of the programs so that quick adjustment of program modality, participation, contents and way of facilitation was possible.
- UNDP Field Office colleagues and visiting of Country Office senior officers took active part in the activities, provided all possible supports and owned of entire program so that there was impression of one-UN among the participants .

2.5. Overall Programme Implementation

- Municipality and provincial workshops and dialogues were facilitated by a team comprising former Chief Election Commissioner Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel, former Election Commissioner

Prof.Dr. Birendra Prasad Mishra, former Speaker of House of Representative Mr. Daman Nath Dhungana, former Minister of Federal Affairs and Local Development Mr Vidyadhar Mallik, former ECN Secretary Mr. Madhu Regmi, NEOC General Secretary Dr. Gopal Krishna Siwakoti, senior journalists Chandrakishore and Umid Bagchand, and NTTP Executive Director Mr. Youba Raj Acharya. National Workshop was facilitated by Dr Siwakoti and Ms. Stella Tamang.

- Workshops methodology was quickly adapted by the facilitators as per needs. Different color meta cards were distributed to the participants and participants were requested to write answers to the set of questions displayed in the screen.
- Based on the learnings from some workshops, most of the workshops were organized in the afternoon followed by dinner so that most of the participants would devote their time to discussion and stay until last.
- ECN's local offices, political parties and local governments were deeply engaged since the consultation phase so that strong ownership could be established in the initiative.

2.6. Programme modality

The study relied fully on the interviews with political party leaders who either contested the elections or managed the campaigns or provided overall guidance to elections in their respective parties, election observers, voters' education volunteers, academia, journalists, EMB officials and lawmakers. Most of the senior political actors were interviewed individually while civil society groups, youth activists, deputy mayors, academicians and business communities were interviewed in groups. Journalists provided valuable insights separately and also attended Focused Group Discussions as well. Some key actors, senior leaders of major political parties, were met alone in order to extract their reflexive knowledge on the elections they either contested or managed in the past and foresee the way of future election. In this sense, Heuristic inquiry method also was applied to know the key actors' personal experience of the elections and their feelings regarding Nepal's electoral trends and explore areas of their contributions to peace and social cohesion.

Dialogues and workshops at the field levels were held in interactive manner, provoked by some power-point presentations as food for thought. There was combination of experience sharing, group acts and scenario building exercised used as required. Central workshop was purely interactive but findings from the field were fed into discussions occasionally. There were three presentations made by the elections, governance and GESI experts, namely Dr. Gopal Krishna Siwakoti, Mr. Vidyadhar Mallik and Ms. Stella Tamang, to provoke lively discussion.

2.7. Content

The study mainly focused on understanding stakeholders' perception about the interface between democracy, elections and conflicts and prepare ground for further intervention aimed at sensitizing them on relations between elections and peace in the country. During the study, main focus was given on identifying major problems regarding elections in Nepal, relating such problems with credibility and peaceful environment of elections and sensitizing key actors on importance of peaceful and credible elections, causes of the problem they have identified and solution to the problem they have envisioned with especial reference to the peace and credibility of the elections. The individual stakeholders' perception and analysis provided grounds for the ensuing workshops and dialogues among local and provincial stakeholders before focused dialogues are conducted as piloting exercise. Based on the findings of provincial and local workshops and dialogues, central workshop was held with objectives of sharing the findings from the field and sensitizing the national-level leaders about need for connecting elections to Nepal's fragile peace.

Field level activities were focused on providing space for local and provincial actors to reflect on Nepal's electoral trends, identify local triggers conflicts and explore local initiatives to prevent the elections from turning into flashpoint of violence. They shared their feelings, analysed the trends and identified areas where local actors' initiatives would be effective in promoting peace and social cohesion. They were sensitized on how elections in Nepal were used as tools for managing conflicts and why use of peace lens was necessary during elections and performing responsibilities by elected representatives in the aftermath of elections.

Central level workshop focused mostly on analyzing the field-level findings. Central leaders were seen serious about whether the elections were being able to ensure true representation of marginalized section of the society and whether the set up created by the elections were using peace lens in their activities. Majority of the participants during central workshop were in favor of reviewing electoral system to reduce electoral malpractices that were tarnishing the image representative institutions and affecting sanctity of elections. Some participants, however, suggested for exploring the ways to improve current system instead of replacing entire political and electoral system every one or two decade.

All the participants from municipality to central level were in favour of establishing some loose platforms where key actors sit together, share their observations and analysis of elections,

democracy, governance and conflicts, warn the government if they see some threats and recommend appropriate responses to such conflict in regular basis.

2.8. Participation

Participants included elected representatives at provincial and local levels including Provincial Assembly members, mayors, deputy mayors, ward chairpersons, ward members as well as defeated candidates in these positions. Election observers, lawyers, intellectuals, student leaders and journalists, leaders of major political parties in provincial, district and municipality committees were among the participants. At the national-level workshop, more than 90% of the participants were central level leaders of different political parties. The participants were former members of parliament, parliamentary committee chairpersons, Constituent Assembly members, former ministers, and current MPs of federal and provincial parliament.

2.9. GESI

- All the political parties were requested to send head of women wing and women leaders having long experience in the electoral affairs inside the parties. Civil society women, women academicians and election observers were individually invited.
- In national workshop there was a presentation made by the GESI experts on women representation in 2017 election.
- Out of 479 participants 138 women were reached out from different programs organized under this project. Likewise, 256 people were reached through FGDs and KIIs during consultation meetings, among them 102 were female.

2.10. Innovation

- High-profile people were used as resource person. Activities were framed in a way the high-profile people were going to share their observations and reflections and were listening to first-hand experience/feelings and perception and collecting organic suggestions to make Nepal's elections better.
- The workshop was held in the afternoon, mostly of the weekends, to ensure that professional participants didn't have to cut their participation to rush to their work.
- To make the discussions meaningful, some tone-setters were used from among the participants.
- There was combination of key-note speech, presentation, open discussion and focused

questionnaires used in the workshops to provoke lively discussion and explore options.

3. Lessons learned

3.1 Partnership/Coordination

- Programmes were conducted in close coordination with SCDP at national and sub-national level due to deeper engagement of SCDP field staff with local actors. However, where there was no presence of SCDP, NTTP had to put extra efforts and spend more time in exploring issues, identifying key actors and ensuring their participation..
- Similarly, local NGOs, election observers and media persons were also deeply engaged to ease selection of participants and taking stock on the local context. Involving multiple actors for selecting and inviting the participants led to logistical problem in Janakpur and Rajbiraj but last minute logistical adjustment didn't hamper overall objectives of the workshops and dialogues.
- Since, the program was organized in close coordination with UNDP- SCDP program and UNDP –ESP program, there was a problem in reporting in different formats and requirement of two different entities of UNDP in limited time span. Though there were some confusions in reporting channel, it didn't appear as problem throughout implementation of activities. An understanding was developed in a way ESP was directly reported on the issues related to realtime monitoring and evaluation and quality control whereas the activity reports and progress reports were channelled through SCDP. Constant coordination among three entities during preparation, implementation and after the completion of each activity was helpful in addressing this confusion.

3.2 Overall Programme Implementation

- Four hours allocated for discussions was not enough given the number of participants and seriousness of the issue.
- In absence of proper workshop venue in the locality, there was difficulty in using audio-visual presentation.
- Though the programme hired two facilitators with good command over local languages, lingual variances emerged as problems in some places. When some participants felt uncomfortable to express their views in Nepali language, facilitators promptly took the issue into account and facilitated the discussions in local language. Those unfamiliar with local languages, especially

the note takers coming from Kathmandu, had to take help of participants sitting next to them to grasp major ideas from the participants using local language.

- Organizing workshops in different location immediately one after another created some hassle in coordination.

3.3 Programme modality

- Opinion of each participants is important, but there was difficulty to allocate time for each speaker.
- To find a facilitator who possess the authority to talk about politics, governance, elections and peace with senior politicians is also difficult task.
- Most of the participants were individually met and briefed about the objectives of the workshop so that they could make meaningful contributions to discussion, which supported in easy implementations of the program but was time consuming and need lot of efforts.

3.4 Content

- A significant number of participants, especially those who won the last elections initially didn't show interest in discussing worsened practices on credibility and peaceful environment of elections as they believed the workshops and dialogues will just expose their campaign modus operandi. When open discussions on the trends and frank sharing of experience began, they realized the importance of discussing such issues when elections were not taking place.
- Convincing the actors who benefitted from the current trend of elections to discuss the trends and practices and their impact on peace and social cohesion was challenging in this non contextual period. Consultative meetings and personal dialogues helped in overcoming this challenge.
- There was need for other pretexts to continue the engagement because democracy and elections were not the matters the stakeholders would like to discuss repeatedly. It is still one of the major challenges.
- Stakeholders look for immediate action on the points they agree but NTTP-UNDP engagement is limited to localizing the discourse. So who owns up the matter and who sustains the discourse is still a big challenge given the fact that there will be no burning issues related to elections and democracy for continuous engagement. Almost all the participants called for formation of loose platforms which bring in elected officials, EMBs, civil society, intellectuals and professionals to

discuss the issues like peace, democracy, governance and elections in regular basis.

3.5 Participation

- Inviting different political parties' leaders among elected and those who lost in different levels of elections in one platform to discussion on common agenda was challenging.
- Inviting participants who were from the past MPs, CA members, former ministers, and current MPs of Federal Parliament and Provincial Assembly in given time and location was challenging.
- In absence of clarity on who is provincial level stakeholder, there was difficulty to give the workshop a provincial color. Provincial Assembly members, chief whips and whips of major political parties in Provincial Assembly were invited to serve the purpose. In absence of ECN's provincial structures, same District Election Officers were invited to provincial programs as well. District-level leaders and other stakeholders active in the locality participated in the provincial activities as well.

3.6 GESI

To make gender balance of participants and facilitators also was challenging, considering the nature and stature of the people in the target group. Only if 60% of participants is expected from women and other GESI groups, there will be 40% presence. So deeper level of homework and ground work is needed.

3.7 Innovation

- Exploring local co-facilitators or resource persons to present local examples would add values to the programs.
- Distribution of concept paper to participants one day in advance would help concentrate on the issues.
- Level of understanding of the participants need to be considered when workshops and dialogues are to be held on such serious issues.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Areas of Improvement in training

- Sharing of concept papers in advance to help participants focus on specific issues
- Distribution of resource materials for reference and future engagement

- Use of local language interpreter to smoothen expression of feelings and facilitate dialogues. Note takers had to take help of participants sitting next to them when discussion in Janakpur were held in local dialect. A local journalist was hired in Rajbiraj quickly considering similar situation.
- Adequate time for discussion: significant number of participants complained that a few hours of discussion was not enough to deal with such an important issue.
- Maintain smaller number of participants (In some Workshops, nearly 50 attended. Time management was hard job there)
- At least two days' time is needed to cover the areas in the agenda. So be specific if we have to discuss electoral financing and allot at least half day for that.

5.2 Recommended quality benchmark

- No. of participants: Should be within manageable number.
- Venue selection with audio visual facility proportionate to the number of participants.
- Facilitators: their skills, experience, local knowledge etc need to be considered.
- Language facilitation: Consideration of lingual variance in advance.
- Adequate time and time management: To allow every participant to take part in the discussion.
- Availability of resource materials in advance: Printing of materials and distribution of such materials at the end of the program.
- Similar level of understanding among the participants: Selecting the participants with similar level of knowledge of the issue may help make the discussions result-oriented.

5.3 Partnership/coordination

- UN as one entity: Staff from UNDP field office, SCDP field office and implementing partners of UN-supported projects were consulted in advance. In Dhangadhi and Janakpur, SCDP field staff took part in all the activities from consultative meetings to dialogues. In Dhangadhi and Janakpur, UNDP field office staff took active part in workshops and dialogues. It gave an impression that the events were not being implemented by a national NGO but whole UN was directly involved.
- Local ownership: In all the field-level activities, local stateholders including political party leaders, elected representatives at local and provincial governments, election observers' groups, civil society groups and District Election Office were deeply engaged. Except in Janakpur, the

workshops and dialogues allotted significant amount of time for interaction between other stakeholders and DEO officials on procedural and technical issues related to elections. Provincial Assembly members including parliamentary party leaders, chief whips or whips of ruling and opposition parties as well as secretary at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law attended the workshops and dialogues at provincial level. In some municipalities such as Mahakali in Kanchanpur, mayor, deputy mayor, all the ward chairpersons and defeated candidates in all these positions took part in the workshop. In other areas, either mayor or deputy mayor and elected representatives supported the whole process from consultative meetings to dialogues. The whole programs looked like provincial or local governments were organizing them.

- Credible and politically neutral local partner:

NTTP-I collaborated with SCDP's local partners in all the program areas during implementation of entire activities. Local partners especially in Mahakali, Dhangadhi, Tikapur, Khajura, Bhairahawa and Janakpur were perceived as credible and politically neutral. Two facilitators were selected from western and eastern regions in order to establish local ownership and incorporate local knowledge as well as to ensure that such initiatives are sustained through their local efforts.

5.4 For stakeholders in order to maintain conducive environment for peaceful elections:

- **Election Management Body**

1. ECN's projection of elections as its sole responsibility has affected local ownership and encouraged violation of COCs. So there is need for concrete steps towards sensitizing the people on how election was connected with their wellbeing and peace.
2. Highly centralized electoral affairs has not only increased the electoral expenses but also has weakened ECN's moral position to push for an austere electoral campaign. So ECN must immediate start decentralizing the electoral affairs and handover the tasks which are doable locally to local government.
3. Voters' education and electoral justice system have remained as the most-criticized affairs at local level. There is need for immediate action towards incorporating the voters education in school curriculum or handling the issues through local governments, schools and CBOs.
4. Provincial-level structure is a must to take lead on policy matters regarding the elections.

5. ECN must prepare a civil engagement guidelines for its subordinate offices so that DEOs or other local offices carry out regular engagement with stakeholders as a strategy to maintaining conducive environment for peaceful elections. The guidelines must address the issues obtaining NGOs', CBOs' and international donors' support to such activities if needed.

- **Government agency**

Elections have been perceived as a process of sending people to legitimately capture the state resources. So levelled playing field has not been created in any elections. Some state agencies are running like a ruling political party's machinery during the elections. So:

1. There is a need for guaranteeing that none of the person receiving state privilege contests elections with his/her non-privileged rival.
2. Transfer of police chief and CDOs' just ahead of enforcement date of CoC should be completely prohibited.

- **Constitutional Bodies**

Reforms in elections is not a standalone issue. If Auditor General is not aware of the money funneled to electoral campaigns, if CIAA is unaware of massive misuse of authority and state resources, if Public Service Commission is unaware of civil servants working as party's agent in the elections and if the court is unaware of the levelled playing field, only ECN's initiatives are not enough to ensure integrity of elections. So, charges of corruption, abuse of authority and other criminal charges against the political actors should be shared in public domain in regular basis so that candidates contesting the elections face public questions before they are elected to public office.

- **Political Parties**

Most of the questions were raised against political parties' electoral or campaign financing and electoral governance. They are held responsible for all the electoral malpractices. They use money, muscle, mafia and manipulation to with the elections at any cost. The notion of "at any cost" has destroyed basic sanctity of elections and tarnished image of democracy. So:

1. Campaign financing must mandatorily be made transparent
2. Candidates selection process must be made transparent through publicly known

standards so that the candidates selected by the parties doesn't involve financial gain or criminal nexus with parties' senior leaders.

3. Method of campaign must be completely restructured in a way a candidate doesn't necessarily need to go for door to door campaign to woo the voters.

- **Development Partners**

1. Development partners must put elections, democracy and peace in their priority instead of chasing only the quick-impact flashy projects.
2. They must incorporate conflict sensitivity in each and every support they provide to the government. Transparent and credible civic engagement strategy should be incorporated in each and every development support so that the donor's support doesn't fuel conflict.

- **Civil Societies**

In the context that opposition forces are too weak to exert pressure on the governments at all level of the governments go wrong, revival of strong, non-partisan civil society is a must to ensure that governments are responsive and accountable to the people. For this:

1. Civil Society must start a new phase of activism aimed at promoting peaceful and credible elections as a tool for consolidating peace and promoting social cohesion.
2. They should carry out internal correction to avert political manipulation of their activism, and Civil Society activists must put off their multiple hats.

- **Media**

Media persons have been blamed for working like political party cadres. Because of political bias, media reports are not taken seriously by the public. Even if some serious issues of bad governance are raised by media, people look at who runs the media and what is the journalist's affiliation rather than how the issue was affecting their life. So:

1. Media must enforce its own Code of Conducts during elections
2. All the active journalists must be oriented on conflict sensitivity approach
3. Self-evolving forums of credible senior journalists should be promoted at every level to analyze the media trends and explore measures to enhance credibility of media.

5. Conclusion

The NTTP-UNDP joint initiative was designed with a broader objective of maintaining the vitality of local level peace infrastructures UNDP has supported since Nepal's peace process began, and exploring the areas of adjustments in such infrastructures in the context of formation of elected representative bodies so that there would be no need for long-term external support to sustain peace. Since the stakeholders of elections are the one who have major stake in the country's peace and democratization process, the initiative focused on peaceful and credible elections within a broader context of Nepal's peace process. Elections in Nepal's context were taken as the major instrument for transformation of peace. So, stakeholders were engaged in series of activities such as FGDs, KIIs, workshops and dialogues to help them develop common understanding regarding sustainability of peace and make an assessment of whether the electoral system, practices and behaviours were better connecting the people with the state or not.

Before elected representative institutions came into existence at local level, UNDP and some other international development partners had been helping Nepal build local peace through hard-ware and software support. Such supports were focused on strengthening people's participation in responding to visible conflicts and addressing root causes. Local Peace Committees and citizens forums were active as the multistakeholder platforms where issues of conflict used to be intensively discussed and recommendations were made. Now, 753 municipal governments have been formed with authority to prevent and manage conflicts, and settle local disputes through a judiciary committee headed by Deputy Mayor.

In this context, stakeholders were involved in sharing their thoughts on whether these bodies are conflict sensitive in functions and inclusive in nature or not, and whether they are promoting multiple stakeholders' engagement as a tool for addressing conflict. In entirety, the elections, the entities that come out of the elections and behaviours of such entities were collectively discussed through the lenses of conflict prevention.

A large number of actors believed there were a lot to be done to establish public trust to elections as a tool for addressing conflict and to prevent elections from becoming trigger of next round of violence. They believe current electoral system, practice and political actors' behaviors were not consolidating peace dividend. The efforts to mitigate the risk of clearly observable acts of physical violence should go side by side with a public campaign to enhance public trust. The remnants of past conflict, slow progress in electoral reforms and increasing unethical electoral behaviors have

been fostering “perceived threat of violence” that is enough to coerce voters and manipulate the elections leading to misrepresentation of issues, agents and process of addressing conflict through public policy. Participants in the meetings were little aware of the reforms led by ECN and heard nothing from the political parties regarding changing electoral culture. So they believed not the state agencies or political parties but non-state neutral agencies or multi-stakeholder platforms would be appropriate actors to lead the discourses of reforms in elections. The discourses should focus on sensitizing the people on triangulating relations between election, democracy and conflict so that people would realize their responsibility to watch these issues closely.

Non-transparent campaign financing and electoral governance of major political parties, ECN’s weaknesses in operation and management of the electoral process, untrustworthy dispute settlement system, ineffective monitoring of Code of Conducts and lack of local ownership were collectively contributing to discredit Nepal’s elections. Though there was remarkable decline in the trends of violence during the elections held after 2006 People’s Movement, there was alarming trend of use of non-transparent money believed to be coming through mafia, goons and other owners of illegally-acquired money to manipulate the results.

Huge amount of resources transferred to the hands of local governments has also provided grounds for fierce competition in local elections. In the context of increasing perception among the people that elections are the process of selecting people to legitimately capture the state resources, an unhealthy competition among the political parties and use of goons and mafias has become imminent now.

Localization of electoral operation and management were inevitable for changing public perception about elections and reducing electoral cost.

They showed two risks if elections are not seen through conflict lens:

- 1.Failure of the electoral system to reflect the ethnic composition of the locality and dominant ethnic groups continuous control over representative position may create environment for extra systemic revolt.
- 2.Resources available at local governments’ control may incite fierce competition at local governments, and absence of multiparty peace mechanism would lead the situation to conflict.

Local ownership to the voters’ registration, electoral and voters’ education, logistical management, Code of Conducts enforcement and monitoring and results management would make elections more credible and peaceful. Most of the participants believed that reforms in political parties’

financial affairs and electoral governance would be the starting points towards making future elections more peaceful and credible and making them as a tool for promoting peace and social cohesion.

6. Way Forward

6.1 Sustainability plans with Opportunities and Needs

Participants appreciated the UNDP-NTTP joint initiative as the beginning of a discussion on where Nepal's elections are heading, whether the electoral process is bringing people close to the state affairs or widening the people-state gap, and explore appropriate ways to make future elections more peaceful and credible

UNDP has the wider acceptability compared to other bilaterals to discuss the issues of peace, democracy, governance and elections. If UN completely abandons these issues and confines its activities only in the areas desired by the government, there will be no agency after ten years to talk about the values UN has been promoting since its establishment. So UNDP must keep the discourse alive by integrating community engagement mechanisms or consultative mechanisms into its projects. Such mechanisms provide space for discussing responsiveness of development initiatives and scrutinizing accountability in regular basis. When promotion of such mechanisms as stand-alone project seems impossible immediately, UNDP must incorporate them as minor component inside other initiatives as the entry-point.

For future programming, UNDP/SCDP would better focus to:

- I. Build-on existing rapport of the SCDP with central, provincial and local policy-makers
- II. Promote formation of multi-stakeholder platforms comprising credible personalities that can bring in key actors to discuss socio-political and economic agenda in regular basis. Engage the platform to analyse context, develop early warnings and explore solutions.
- III. Integrate the concept gradually in other projects and programs and orient field staff on how to utilize the SCDP's strength on the ground to resolve problems in implementation of other projects
- IV. Take SCDP activities in the field as the avenues to build access to higher policy-making level rather than independent project with quick physical results to show
- V. Adopt problem-solving approach with preparation of pool of experts in different field as facilitators who have ability to influence policies

VI. Develop a consortium with major bilateral donors like USAID, DFID and GIZ to prepare common community engagement guidelines. Multi-stakeholder dialogues become part of community engagement. (nature will be multi-stakeholder and dialogue will be the approach)

A. ANNEX

Annex 1: List of Resource Person

1. Gopal Siwakoti
2. Stella Tamang
3. Bhojraj Pokharel