

A Critical Analysis of Conflict, Education and Fragility in Nepal: Towards a peacebuilding education¹

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Introduction

In February 1996, the then Communist Party of Nepal [Maoist] [CPN-M] announced a ‘People’s War’ in Nepal, with the aim of overthrowing the constitutional monarchy and establishing ‘a new socio-economic structure and state’ (Bhattarai 2003; Maoist Statements and Documents, 2003). The ensuing conflict spread rapidly across the country as a consequence of failing to respond to longstanding social inequality (Murshed and Gates 2005), abject poverty and deprivation (Deraniyagala, 2005; Bhattarai, 2003; Do and Iyer, 2007), and the lack of insights into, or political will to deal with the rising insurgency through peaceful means (Thapa and Sijapati, 2004; Bohara et al., 2006). Over 17,000 people were killed by the war, before the *Comprehensive Peace Accord* (CPA) was eventually signed between the Government of Nepal and the CPN-M in November 2006. However, while the ‘People’s War’ emerged in the context of widespread public dissatisfaction – (generated by several post-Panchayat [1990s] governments), it also surfaced in response to deep and historically embedded socio-economic divisions. In the last fifteen years, Nepal has suffered a significant loss in social and political stability, resulting in a breakdown or malfunctioning of state institutions and leading to a gradual decline of public trust in state functionality including the capacity to deliver quality education. Yet ironically, such marked political change has led also to improved public participation, where historically suppressed castes and ethnic groups have begun to challenge the dominance of the state that has been monopolised by socially and culturally privileged groups. In educational terms, the political hegemony of schools and educational processes that are conveyed through government policies, educational structures and the curricula, which control social, political and cultural meanings, have been seriously challenged, thereby creating an opportunity for educational reconstruction.

The post-CPA peace process and political developments have accomplished significant outcomes along with some serious setbacks in terms of institutionalising the political changes that emerged during the Maoist People’s War and People’s Movement 2006. Some of the key achievements of the peace process include: the restoration of peaceful democratic practices including, elections for the Constituent Assembly (CA); the release of over 3,000 under-age soldiers from the Maoist cantonments in 2010 (UN, 2010); and finally, the successful integration of the former rebels into the national army or their release with a financial package. Most importantly, the United CPN-M has formally relinquished the politics of violence and

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announced at their seventh national convention, held in February 2013. With a new political mandate after the second round of the CA elections in November 2013, the UCPN-M secured 80 out of the 601 CA seats, a significant loss from their 229 seats in the 2008 CA elections, barely securing the third position in the power hierarchy. Nepal is still in the process of establishing a stable political system that incorporates the demands and aspirations of recent political movements including – the People’s War (1996 – 2006), People’s Movement (2006) and Madhesh Movement (2007), in which educational reforms, in order to support post-conflict reconstruction of Nepali society, are crucial.

The chapter will highlight that the political interference, corruption and informal governance in education are the biggest barriers to post-conflict educational reforms in Nepal. Firstly, it will critique the process of educational development in Nepal from a conflict perspective. An overview of Nepal’s education system will be provided to discuss key challenges for conflict-sensitive educational reforms. Secondly, in the following section, it will present state fragility and political economy-based analyses of education, using a conflict assessment framework (DFID, 2002). Finally, the chapter will argue that the educational response to peacebuilding should be an integral part of the post-conflict state restructuring in order to support the process of social transformation by engaging critically with the social, political and economic conditions of the society.

Historical Context of Conflict

Nepal experienced the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy (1846–1950), the advent of democracy in 1951, King Mahendra’s no-party panchayat system (1961–1990), and the restoration of a multi-party polity with a supposedly constitutional monarchy (1990 onwards). These political changes, though emerged from the democratic aspirations of the ordinary people, failed to address the grievances of the majority of the underprivileged populations. Lawoti (2005) notes that the hill-based high-caste groups, particularly the Brahmins and Chhetris have always monopolised state power, resources and social dominance. In Nepal’s hierarchical caste system, Brahmins, Chhetris, and Newars are considered the upper castes, while indigenous groups, such as the Magar, Gurung, Sherpa, Rai and Limbu, are treated as lower castes. The Dalits, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, have been systematically marginalised and treated as an untouchable caste. The Maoist rebellion was founded and expanded on the problems of these socio-cultural inequalities that were deeply rooted in the Nepali society (Maoist Statements and Documents 2003). The armed revolt was justified against this backdrop and aimed at establishing a new democratic political system that would cater for the needs of marginalised groups, including ethnic minorities, women, subordinate castes, and indigenous groups (Bhattarai 2003).

The advent of the Maoist rebellion is generally attributed to three major factors. Firstly, despite the economic growth and development in 1990s, Nepal remained as one of the poorest countries in the world. There was a negative correlation between population growth and agricultural productivity, and most importantly, the poverty levels rose from 33 percent in 1976 – 77 to 42 percent by 1995 – 96 (Mishra 2004). The income share of the ‘top 10 percent of the people increased from 21 percent in mid-1980s to 35 percent by the mid-1990s, while the share of the bottom 40 percent shrank from 24 percent to 15 percent by the 1990s’ (Sharma 2006, p. 1245). The expansion of technology, education, banking and services largely

benefitted to the socially elite groups or urban populations, further contributing to spatial and horizontal inequality along caste and ethnic lines (Murshed and Gates, 2005; Tiwari, 2010a). Secondly, the multiparty polity achieved in 1990 introduced liberal market economy pursuing the policy of privatisation. Many of the state-owned industries such as the country's once most successful shoe industry and paper production industries, were sold to the private sector resulting in job losses. Finally, the post-1990 governments increasingly became corrupt and proved inefficient in addressing the insurgency in its early stage (Bohara, Mitchell, and Nepal, 2006; Thapa and Sijapati, 2004).

More recently, inequalities in the level of development and the negative face of development producing unwanted outcomes have been identified as two more explanatory factors in the emergence of violent conflict in Nepal (Rappleye, 2011; Tiwari, 2010b). The national education system either fell short in addressing these huge structural problems or played a complicit role in reproducing socioeconomic divisions by pursuing exclusionary policies such as language of instruction, teacher recruitment, curricular focus and most importantly, the usually biased attitudes towards the children representing ethnic minorities and indigenous nationalities. Even though the number of schools increased significantly and primary enrolment rose to 95 percent by 2010, the severe problem of equitable access to and attrition in education persisted among marginalised social groups such as girls, ethnic and indigenous nationalities and children representing lower castes (Yadava, 2007; Stash and Hannum, 2001).

Enhanced by the global Education for All movement, school enrolment was largely seen as an educational success while the debate about quality of education received much less attention. Social exclusion and marginalisation continued to become a norm within the public sector including education (World Bank and DFID, 2007). Bhatta et al (2008) show a serious issue of unequal representation across gender, castes and ethnicity in higher education, which reinforces the notion of 'unequal citizens' within the Nepali society (World Bank and DFID, 2007). This is without any surprise reflected in the prevailed monopoly of three major castes including Brahmin, Chhetri and Newars; and significant underrepresentation of Dalits, Madheshis, indigenous nationalities and religious minorities in state and polity (Neupane, 2000; Gurung, 2006; Onta, Maharjan, Humagain and Parajuli, 2008). These deep structural inequalities contribute to the state of fragility, the notion that relates to the lack of functional capacity of states in ensuring security and wellbeing of all citizens (Cammack et al, 2006). While the post-war political transition provides an opportunity to pursue necessary structural adjustments in relation to addressing the abovementioned inequalities, the delay in making these reforms equally posits state fragility and risk of relapse into conflict.

Overview of Educational Development in Nepal

The modern education system in Nepal was established only after the departure of the Rana oligarchy in 1951. The beginning of an egalitarian political system created an opportunity to introduce universal access to education. Education was then perceived to be the right of independent people but also as an instrument to promote unity, democratic values and national pride. The first *Five Year Plan for Education in Nepal* (1956 – 1961) emphasised 'national' characteristics in the education system which essentially began the national homogenisation project by preventing teaching and learning in indigenous languages and officially adopting a national curriculum in Nepali language for primary level schooling. The royal coup of 1960 and

the establishment of the Panchayat system added a new theme of *rajbhakti* (service to monarchy) (Onta, 1996) to education and placed a greater emphasis on national unity and solidarity. The New Education System Plan (NESP) was announced in 1971 with an aim to meet social, political and economic needs of the nation and again to solidify the project of nation building through the educational process. All schools were nationalised under the Ministry of Education and a national curriculum was made compulsory to embellish the grandeur of the regime rather than embarking upon a national strategy to produce citizens capable of contributing to the economic development of the nation (Ragsdale, 1989). In other words, the implicit object of the educational agenda was to manufacture consent and loyalty to the regime while neglecting the need for equitable modern education for all children. The education system became a hegemonic apparatus to coalesce the diverse Nepali society, favourably disposed to the monarchy and the ruling elite (mainly representing hill high castes) who were in control of the state functionaries (Lawoti, 2007). The People's Movement (1990) marked the overthrow of the Panchayat System and advent of a multi-party polity whereas the CPA (2006) ended the decade-long armed conflict and conceived the politics of republicanism. Even though Nepal has seen significant political changes including the reassertion of ethnic and linguistic identities, social movements such as gender empowerment, Dalits and bonded labour movements, the education system largely remains outdated, corrupt and complicit to the conditions that contribute to state fragility.

The educational response to conflict has been 'single-issue approaches' (Smith, 2011) rather than giving attention to education sector reform. For example, the School Sector Reform Plan (2009 – 2015) makes a provision for education in the mother tongue as an approach to promote indigenous language and to address the learning needs of children who represent marginalised communities. However, this has simply not been effective without reforms in teacher recruitment policy, curricular change and more importantly, without the political endorsement of the political forces at the national level. To re-envision the positive role of education in addressing the issues of inequalities and also to support political, security, economic and social transformations, it is important to address the sector-wide as well as inter-sectoral issues of exclusion. Smith (2011: 2) also notes that 'the prevalence of relapses into conflict suggests that macro reforms are not sufficient to sustain peace and that other forms of transformation are also necessary. Peacebuilding needs to consider the role of education sector reform and the contribution of education to social transformation'.

Education, Exclusion and Fragility

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (2011) proposes five key domains that provide a framework for engagement in fragile states. These five areas include: a) legitimate politics; b) security; c) justice; d) economic foundations and e) revenues and services. These concepts are not necessarily neutral and therefore can be unhelpful in understanding 'fragility' in terms of structural problems such as, horizontal inequalities across gender, castes and ethnicities that are fuelled by longstanding problematic policy frameworks. This framework is rather weak in terms of its focus on social justice as a means to reduce state fragility.

The liberal meritocratic model of Nepal's education system mainly benefits the children from the upper castes who have historically enjoyed the social, cultural, and political privileges. The prejudice in the

national education system not only exacerbates ‘horizontal inequalities across ethnic and caste groups’ (Tiwari, 2010a), but also poses an imponderable challenge to achieving equitable social adjustments to reduce structural marginalisation. From a critical peacebuilding perspective, liberal systems’ focus on stability rather than transformation ignores the agenda for grassroots empowerment. In the absence of radical interventions, marginalised groups continue to fall behind in all realms of civic life including education. Gramsci (1971) noted that the marginalised social groups often lack appropriate attitudes and ability to overcome the barriers that prevent them from identifying with the privileged social class. For Gramsci (1971), the ideology of meritocracy is problematic as the children who belong to a traditionally intellectual family are resourced with the prior knowledge, appropriate attitudes and continuous support necessary to succeed in education. In other words, members of socially underprivileged groups experience a serious cultural disconnection from the education system that is created by those in power. Despite the availability of education, children from the marginalised communities find it difficult to adapt to the learning culture due to systemic exclusion of their collective identity such as, the absence of their mother tongue in the medium of instruction, underrepresentation of their social and cultural attributes in the curricula, the nature of assessment that formalises the qualification and more generally, their cultural disconnection from what counts as legitimate knowledge. In technical terms, this leads to underachievement or attrition of these children from the education system (Yadava, 2007). As a consequence, this reproduces their subordinate status within the political and economic spheres. Apple (2004) also suggests that the perceived legitimacy of knowledge in society must be seen in the context of who controls power and its relationship to the economy. As he notes, ‘the ability of a group to make its knowledge into ‘knowledge for all’ is related to that group’s power in the larger political and economic arena’ (Apple, 2004, p. 64). The unequal distribution of educational outcomes is detrimental to social justice, which consequently, becomes a driver of conflict.

Education and Production of Unskilled Workforce

The private education and opportunities created by the development sector join forces to expand socioeconomic disparities. The socioeconomic status is strongly correlated with the type of education children receive – 44 percent of students from the richest quintiles are enrolled in private schools as compared to 7 percent from the three poorest quintiles (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Those who live in urban settings and have access to English medium education in private schools are more likely to succeed in the modern job markets, such as the business sector and the ever-growing number of non-governmental organisations (Bonino and Donini, 2009). The wealthiest quintile benefits from the influential social and political networks, and is likely to gain easier access to economic opportunities. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of Nepali youth from rural areas migrating to the Gulf States, Malaysia and Korea to undertake unskilled manual jobs.

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Number of Nepali Labour Migrants</i>
2006-07	204,433
2007-08	249,051
2008-09	219,965

2009-10	294,094
2010-11	354,716

Table 1: Labour Migration by Year (NIDS, 2011, p.10)

Even though the increasing pattern of work-related migration has contributed to poverty reduction by 20 percent between 1995 and 2004 (Lokshin, Bontch-Osmolovski and Glinskaya, 2007), this has adversely impacted upon educational aspirations of the vast number of young people who are increasingly attracted to the immediate opportunity of cheap labour in the growing economic market elsewhere.

While staying in education for children from poor families is already a big challenge, the (perceived) lack of economic relevance of education in the long term further distances them from the education system. Additionally, the growing culture of work-related migration is only promoting the demand for unskilled labour and has significantly increased Nepal's dependency on the foreign labour market. Consequently, it has contributed to the decline of local and national enterprises, and ruptured traditional social fabrics by prioritising urban life, Western culture and gradual detachment from traditional local economies.

A Political Economy of Education

Nepal's development and peacebuilding project faces the challenge of enhancing inclusive democracy, good governance and improving the lives of deprived people in remote areas. However, these development efforts coincide with complex dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding challenges. Education is a major domain of development agenda, it often exhibits political and economic tensions. By applying the framework for conflict-related development analysis (DFID, 2002), the following table provides an insight into multi-layered and multidimensional analysis of educational processes in Nepal.

	<i>National</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Local</i>
<i>Security</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of conflict; • Continued access to weapons; • Weak police force and rule of law; • Culture of impunity in relation to human rights; • Emergence of armed groups in the Terai and Eastern hills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic armed groups; ethnic tensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of conflict; • Ongoing political and criminal violence
<i>Political</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak government asserting centralised control; • Strong socio-political divisions; • History of rent-seeking by political leaders; • Unions linked to political parties make excessive demands; • Weak influence of civil society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralised control but promise of federalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of elected representation in Village Development Committee and District Development Committee; • Reliance on direct action (bandhas etc); • Politicisation of community-based organisations (SMCs, Community Forest Users' Groups, development committees)
<i>Economic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wealth focused in Kathmandu; • Policies restricting business; • Dominance of business by a few individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remittances from migrants create pockets of wealth outside Kathmandu; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extortion by armed groups; • Unresolved land issues; • Corruption in community-based organisations

<i>Social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divisions of ethnicity, caste, religion mobilised around federalism and political agendas; • Issues of social status now associated with private schools and English medium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language issues mobilised around political agendas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social exclusion against dalits, women and other marginalised groups; • Shifts in power dynamics and tensions due to women's empowerment
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Table 2: A Conflict Analysis of Education in Nepal

The current political tensions act against the likelihood of a strong government in the near future. The decentralisation policy, which is aggressively advocated by Nepal's development partners particularly the World Bank is either far from reality and is heavily abused by local elites who have political connections with ruling parties (Pherali, 2012). Excessive centralisation and implicit resistance to the decentralisation process have resulted in weak governance, inhibiting local engagement and control. These issues, along with contesting national and international interests pose enormous challenges for social transformation and sustainable peace.

Teachers in Conflict and Politicisation of Education

Teachers and students have always been a major stakeholder of Nepal's political movements and the struggle for democracy. During the armed conflict, schools were strategic locations for recruitment for the rebels and also the physical space for shelters and political gatherings (Watchlist, 2005). Even after the end of explicit violence and beginning of the peace process, teachers continue to suffer from post-traumatic anxiety (Pherali, 2013), which is manifested in their professional disengagement and increased loyalty to political parties rather than to the state. Teachers are hence increasingly becoming political entities rather than dedicated educational professionals (Vaux et al, 2006).

Teachers as Political Activists

More recently, teachers' involvement in party-based politics but more generally, in politicisation of the education system has been cited as the main cause of declining educational quality in schools. However, the reasons for politicisation of education and especially, of the teaching workforce can be elucidated from three perspectives. First, Nepal's political parties have historically been interested in teachers as political activists rather than holding teachers accountable for their professional responsibilities. During the conflict, the state either caused violence on, or largely failed to protect schools and teachers from hostilities. The CPN-M on the other hand, denounced the existing education system but exploited it ruthlessly (e.g. misusing school premises, recruiting children, enforcing mandatory donations and involving teachers and children in political demonstrations) while utterly failing to offer an alternative to the existing provision. This led to the decline of trust among teachers towards the state in times of difficulties. The problem of teacher absenteeism and their involvement in politics is not just an issue of professional misconduct but also a part of the institutional culture that has been historically constructed and nurtured by the political and bureaucratic structures. Second, the peace agreement in 2006 marked the end of decade-long suppression and perpetual state of fear, providing teachers with a sense of professional freedom and personal security. However, teachers found themselves in a situation where the legitimacy and control of the state had significantly declined, giving rise to 'informal governance' across all sectors including education (Pherali,

Smith and Vaux, 2011). The post-accord fragility has largely incapacitated state institutions including education and undermined the rule of law, while intensifying the existing culture of competitive patronage and rent seeking among non-state forces. In this context, teachers have made a rational choice by extending their loyalty to teachers' unions affiliated to political parties rather than maintaining professional integrity to the weak and ruptured post-war state.

Finally, there is a strong tendency to blame teachers for the loss of educational quality in schools. This undermines exigent working conditions (e.g. lack of resources, children coming from extremely poor backgrounds, parental indifference to education, overcrowded classes, etc.) in which teachers are expected to produce competitive results. In addition, they become passive recipients of national and international policy initiatives that constantly pressurise teachers and parents to produce better results without providing necessary resources (Poppema, 2009; Pherali, 2012). Most importantly, teachers have been working in a fragile political situation and at the verge of contriving a new political structure that would also devise the education system reflecting changes in society. This means that teachers are likely to align with political forces that would protect their interests in the times of structural reforms in the education system.

Post-conflict Peacebuilding and Educational Response

The UN has taken a consolidated approach to development and peacebuilding in Nepal. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) has identified some key priorities for Nepal's Interim Plan as the country undergoes political transition: i) peacebuilding; ii) social sector: education, health and drinking water; iii) youth employment and mobilization; iv) economic sector: agriculture, tourism, industry and commerce; and v) infrastructure sector: roads, irrigation, electricity and information technology (United Nations Country Team, 2007). The inclusion of women, children, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis and people with disabilities has also received increased attention in the development discourse since its emphasis in the UN peacebuilding strategy. The peace and development strategy proposed by the donor community for the period of 2010 – 2015 aims to 'provide a framework for how Nepal's development partners can work together to support implementation of the CPA' (Nepal Peace and Development Strategy 2010 – 2015, 2011, p. xi). As a part of the UNDAF, the strategy coincides with the peacebuilding framework set out by the CPA that includes transformational agenda on equity, inclusion, accountability, good governance and restructuring of the state. Unfortunately, the educational sector is still viewed as a marginal player in the peace process and development of Nepal. Given the role of education 'in processes of socialization and identity formation, which are vital for economic growth and individual and national advancement and can act as an important vehicle for social cohesion' (Novelli and Smith, 2011), post-conflict reconstruction of education needs to be a key agenda for Nepal's social transformation.

Protecting Schools from Violence

As a humanitarian response to increasing violation of children's rights by armed groups and armed forces, the Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP) programme was initiated collectively in 2002 by several non-governmental organisations working for the welfare of children in Nepal. A joint campaign *Schools as Zone of Peace (SZOP)* was launched by UNICEF, Save the Children Alliance and Child Workers in Nepal

Concerned Centre to create pressures on conflicting parties to treat schools and children as Zone of Peace (UNICEF, 2012). SZOP is often cited as a successful educational response to reduce conflict but there is a lack of independent inquiry into this campaign in terms of its contribution to securing peace (Vaux, 2011). It is also noted that the SZOP campaign was ‘supported by a broad coalition of agencies’ including human rights organisations and most importantly, its success is attributed to the clear interest of warring parties to gain ‘international respect and recognition’ (Vaux, 2011, p.10).

The SZOP also involved awareness programmes in order to enhance people’s knowledge, attitude and practice in relation to children’s right to education and the need for schools to become safe sites for teaching and learning. Even after the CPA, the legacy of violence and more apparently, the emergence of armed outfits in the Terai and Eastern hills, continue to violate peace in schools. It is reported that 524 schools have been supported across the country in implementing the Code of Conduct that helps prevent external violence or political interference on schools (World Education, 2010). The project also trained 626 teachers for Conflict-free Classrooms, 300 Parents-Teachers Associations and 300 SMCs for improved governance and conducted advocacy and community assessments for ensuring peace within schools (World Education, 2010). However, UNICEF (2010, p.4) notes that political campaigns such as ‘strikes and Bandas do not exclude schools and little effort is made to ensure students get sufficient tuition days or make up days.’ Schools in the Terai are reported to be more vulnerable due to teachers receiving threats from armed groups demanding money and mandatory donations. Unless political parties adopt SZOP as their party policy at central level and abstain from interfering schools, localised interventions of the SZOP campaign may not be effective. Most importantly, such school-based interventions tend to underestimate structural violence, injustice and deeply rooted forms of social marginalisation that continuously fuel conflict in societies.

Structural Problems and Curricular Reforms for Peacebuilding

The peace and development strategy also recognises that development support to school education is crucial in order to enhance access of marginalised communities to education. The MoE has promoted linguistically inclusive and locally relevant learning materials in the schools with the view of promoting peace in ethnically diverse communities through education (MoE, 2009). However, the CPA does not explicitly identify education as a key element and the UN’s peace and development strategy that supports the CPA has no major priority for educational intervention. The School Sector Reform Plan (2009 – 2015) that has been jointly developed and funded by the government and Nepal’s development partners fundamentally lacks a clear vision for the role of education in peacebuilding. In addition, there seems to be a general perception that increasing access to education and handing over the management of schools to the community is a positive way forward for school effectiveness even though the outcomes of school-based management policy are consistently being questioned (World Bank, 2010; Pherali, 2012). In the context where schools harbour deeply rooted social and cultural disparities (Pherali, 2011), educational decentralisation has merely benefitted the local elites who monopolise school-based management committees in order to gain broader social and political privileges (Pherali, 2012).

The most recent educational response to peacebuilding involves the integration of Peace, Human Rights and Civic education (PHRC) in formal and non-formal education. This initiative was a joint effort of the Department of Education and international organisations supporting educational reforms in Nepal, which involved revisions of the school curricula to incorporate the key PHRC concepts at grade 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10. The contents of peace education focus mainly on the culture of peace, child rights, disability issues, human trafficking, democracy, rule of law, celebrating diversity, social inclusion etc. (Save the Children, 2010). The National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) has produced teacher guidelines and provided training to some teachers as trainers of the new PHRC teaching strategies. Teachers from the communities where ethnic conflict has taken place in the past have now begun to assume broader roles as peacebuilders and dispute mediators even outside their schools (Save the Children, 2010). Yet, teacher education programmes are still far from necessary reforms in terms of the needs of post-conflict Nepali society. Even though the PHRC guidelines have been developed by the NCED, the dissemination and implementation of these guidelines is very limited. More importantly, dealing with sensitive issues in a politicised society can be much more complex than what an official document might prescribe. The implementation of the PHRC initiative in itself is a colossal task that involves providing training for over 250 thousand teachers nationwide and does demand significant amount of funding and human resources, which for effectiveness, needs to be mainstreamed through the national budget rather than temporary project-based interventions.

Conclusions: Towards a peacebuilding education

Schools in Nepal manifest tensions that may be characterised as by-products of the decade-long political violence and decentralisation policy of the government. In the absence of local governments, public services including schools have now become *de facto* political centres where party cadres compete for their political influence. This situation has even escalated due to the protracted transition and fragile peace process that offer limited hope to the people of Nepal. In this context, the political and economic interests of local elites overshadow the urgency for enhancing educational quality (Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011) and the opportunities for education to support Nepal's peacebuilding efforts at local and national levels. Hence, the increasing culture of 'education as a source of political support and influence' (UNICEF, 2011, p.11) leaves Nepal's educational sector in a fragile situation.

Against the backdrop of longstanding structural inequalities that fuel state fragility and post-war instability, a sparse integration of peace education materials into the existing curriculum can be of little influence (Vaux, 2011). While promoting democratic values, human rights and conflict resolution skills can be instrumental to young people, peacebuilding education should be more about supporting the processes of social transformation in post-conflict environments (Novelli and Smith, 2011). Unfortunately, Nepal's peacebuilding project takes the usual liberal approach which has been criticised for its neo-liberal bias that embraces capitalism and market economy as a solution to underdevelopment and civil conflict (Richmond and Franks, 2007). The failure of the liberal peace framework relates to the false assumption that elections followed by peace agreements always lead to democratisation for peace and social transformation (Paris, 2004). In a society that is characterised by socioeconomic disparities, elitism and deeply rooted ethnic and

caste-based exclusion, liberal reforms are likely to nurture the interests of the socially privileged and significantly delay in effecting changes that benefit the disadvantaged and marginalised social groups.

Hence, in the context of post-conflict Nepal, the aim of peacebuilding education should escape the uncritical rhetoric of peace that simply complements ‘the liberal peace’s main components– democratisation, the rule of law, human rights, free and globalized markets, and neoliberal development’ (Richmond and Franks, 2007, p.29), the success of which may not necessarily remove structural violence, social divisions and deeply-rooted culture of social exclusion. Hence, education for peace is to raise critical awareness of social and political conditions that fuel or mitigate conflict in order to identify transformative approaches to achieve peace with social justice. The curricular framework for peacebuilding education should therefore, allow for critical debates around the issues of social injustice and ‘structural violence’ in the local context (Galtung, 1972) that often engender violent rebellion. Education also holds the responsibility to promote proactive and peaceful ways through which young people are able to deal with differences. In terms of curricular reforms, it does not only involve integration of contents relating to human rights, importance of non-violence and the rule of law but also allows for a critical engagement with the issues relating to unfair social and educational policies, inequitable access to resources and unjust state structures that are monopolised by elite social groups. It is therefore important that peacebuilding education combine with learners’ practical involvement in social, cultural, economic and political projects in their local communities that not only build socio-political capacity of young people but also provide practical knowledge and skills for peacebuilding. Hence, it is important to note that educational programmes that prioritise pacification by teaching moral values such as tolerance, self-discipline, forgiveness thereby accepting symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984), are likely to miss the opportunities to encourage more substantial reforms needed in the education system.

A critical peacebuilding education has implications for pedagogical practices as well. It should challenge the common didactic approach as widely adopted by teachers in Nepal who view teaching as a process of passing knowledge and information to students. Peacebuilding education should promote the pedagogy of critique in which teachers do not only inculcate knowledge and conflict-analysis skills in the specific contexts but also facilitate critical debates around the issues that are significant for conflict transformation. These pedagogical practices can only succeed if ‘education programming’ is ‘based on high quality political economy and conflict analysis that is sensitive to the conflict dynamics of local contexts’ (Novelli and Smith, 2011, p.7).

In the last thirteen years, Nepal has suffered a significant loss in social and political stability, resulting in a breakdown of state institutions. Yet ironically, such marked political upheaval has also led to improved public participation, where historically suppressed castes and indigenous nationalities have begun to challenge the assumed dominance of the political state putting pressures on state restructuring that guarantees a more inclusive democracy in all sectors. Hence, educational reform in post-conflict Nepal is strictly a political endeavour and the education for peace is therefore concerned with social transformation rather than simply promoting conditions for the absence of direct violence.

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