

Title: New Ambassadors for Peace

School: Connecticut College

Student(s) Information: Nayan Pokhrel '10, Nepal (Connecticut College, non-UWC graduate) & Pragya Lohani, Nepal (Southern Methodist University '09, non-UWC graduate)

Project Summary:

The participants implemented the project in Rukum, a remote and socio-economically deprived district in the mid-western region of Nepal. This location change from the original proposal was upon the recommendation of our partner organization, Nationwide Scholarship Programme (NSP). This district was a stronghold of the Maoist rebels during the past 12 years of insurgency and witnessed some of the bloodiest clashes between the rebels and the security forces.

The participants worked with a non-governmental organization (NSP) in the capital of Kathmandu to select 20 students between the ages of 13 to 16 as "New Ambassadors for Peace." The selected students were evenly split male and female but all had been affected directly by the insurgency and represented extremely poor economic backgrounds. The main objective of the project was to create a crop of peace makers in a volatile region by supporting basic educational needs and leadership development. The KWD 100 Projects for Peace funding provided this group with three years of educational necessities to complete their school level education (10th grade) along with periodic workshops on peace.

Five different schools in Rukum submitted applications for consideration and the selection of the students was held from the 15th of April to the 30th of June. The participants went to Rukum on the 4th of June and returned to Kathmandu on the 14th. While in Rukum, the participants led different workshops on peace (both formal and informal) with the 20 students, their families, teachers, security heads, leaders and the local people. The workshops were joined by the district coordinator (representative of NSP) and volunteers from UNICEF and Society for Open Nepal (SFON). After the 14th of June, the participants worked on the preparation of a video report and publicity of the project. The video can be found online at - <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7918682590261661138&q=new+ambassador+of+peace+video&total=144&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=0>. The article about the project was published in WAVE, the most widely circulated youth magazine of Nepal. It is available online at - <http://www.wavemag.com.np/issue/article2220.html>

The students received their first year of scholarship from the grant funding. The monetary resources for the next two year's scholarship were directed to the NSP per an earlier agreement. Connecticut College Department of Multicultural Affairs funded a part of the participant's roundtrip travel expenses to Nepal.

Project Results

The project made a huge impact on not only on the 20 students but also their schools and local communities. The implementation was very smooth and effective. The cooperation from all the five schools, local authorities, media and the people was immense. Surprisingly, the representatives of the Maoists were equally positive about our endeavors. The “New Ambassadors of Peace” were clearly excited and very keen to make a difference in their respective communities. The participants felt that our project provided the 20 students financial and emotional support lacking previously and gave other ordinary people in Rukum reasons to hope for a peaceful future. Positive feedback came from both Rukum and Kathmandu. A few social organizations in Kathmandu expressed interest for future involvement with our project.

Due to minor changes in the proposed expenditure and time constraints, the participants were unable to coordinate campaigns for regional single mothers. The participants did meet them informally during a mass gathering on the final day. With that lone exception, the project exceeded our expectations and we were amazed by what difference a few US dollars and committed college students could make in the lives of so many people.

Implications:

The project carries a huge potential to ripple in the lives of so many who are desperate to find peace after the insurgency. The project left a message that there were reasons to be hopeful about a peaceful future and that people from outside of Nepal did care about their lives.

Through our interactions, it was clear that the project would encourage other organizations to begin involvement with youth conflict resolution in mid-western Nepal. The local people in Rukum are more positive about their future. And more importantly, those 20 students have experiences and potential to positively impact their futures.

The project provided the participants with being able to make a positive difference in the lives of their fellow Nepalis. They met people who were the real victims of a bloody civil war. They listened to stories of unbelievable character. They learned valuable lessons for their own lives.

