

# Does Gender Affect Peacebuilding?

A Quantitative Study on Paths to Peace in Nepal

## Summary

On the 21st of November 2006, representatives of the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. After a decade-long armed conflict affecting most of the country, the peace agreement was a welcome milestone. But durable peace requires popular support.

This report summarizes the findings from a survey of 1000 women and men across six districts in order to examine the peacebuilding process in Nepal, including views on reconciliation and truth-telling. The survey found that the legacy of conflict has implications for people's mental health and that people have low levels of interpersonal and institutional trust. Results also indicated important gender differences that should be taken into account when designing and implementing peacebuilding mechanisms.

## Key Findings

- Levels of post-traumatic stress are high and need to be addressed through psychosocial support.
- Few people (4% of the total respondents) fear renewed violence, but many (34%) struggle with livelihood issues.
- Few people feel threatened by other groups in society, but levels of interpersonal trust are low. Women are significantly less trusting than men.
- Few people are aware of, or are invited to participate in, peacebuilding institutions. There is a need for improved communication to allow and encourage people in the conflict-affected communities to actively take part in these institutions.
- Truth-telling is important, but women are more hesitant to support such processes.

Dr. Prakash Bhattarai  
Dr. Karen Brounéus  
Dr. Erika Forsberg  
Mr. Pawan Roy

Centre for Social Change, Kathmandu  
Uppsala University, Sweden  
Uppsala University, Sweden  
Centre for Social Change, Kathmandu



UPPSALA  
UNIVERSITET



Centre for Social Change

सामाजिक परिवर्तन केन्द्र

## Introduction

In a collaboration between Uppsala University in Sweden and Centre for Social Change in Nepal, a survey was conducted in 2018 to learn more about women's and men's experiences during the decade long armed conflict, their current psychological health and their views on the peacebuilding processes. This report summarizes some of the key findings of the survey.

## Study Design

Approximately 1000 Nepali (50% women and 50% men) from six districts throughout the country participated in the survey. The six districts were selected and categorized based on conflict intensity into high conflict areas (HCA) and low conflict areas (LCA). The LCA districts are (1) Sunsari, (2) Morang, and (3) Jhapa in the Eastern part of Nepal and the HCA districts are (4) Bardiya, (5) Surkhet and (6) Dang in the Mid-Western part of Nepal. The location of these six districts are highlighted on the map below (Figure 1) where the HCA are marked blue and the LCA are marked orange. In each district, municipalities/villages, wards, and *small settlements* within each ward were selected randomly, proportional to population size and gender balance. As the sample is drawn from six districts, and is not nationally representative, it should be noted that the results cannot be generalized to the whole population. However, findings of this study may have their relevance even in the national context or at least in areas similar to the study districts.

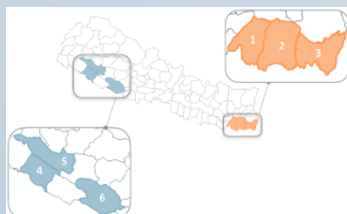


Figure 1: Map of surveyed districts

The survey data was collected using electronic handheld devices (tablets) where participants could type their responses in private. They also had the option of being assisted by the enumerator. The enumerators were recruited in the sampled districts and participated in a three day training on research and research ethics conducted by the joint research team prior to the survey being implemented. On average, each survey took one hour to complete.

The questionnaire consisted of 95 questions divided into seven sections: demographics, trauma stressors, PTSD symptoms, experiences of family violence, resilience factors, peacebuilding attitudes, and gender equality attitudes.

This report focuses primarily on peacebuilding attitudes and psychological

health, across all survey respondents and also disaggregated by gender. In cases where significant differences between high and low conflict areas were found, these are also discussed.

## Key Findings

### 1. Mental Health

The survey questionnaire included several questions aiming to gauge the mental health of the participants.

When asked to self-assess their own **mental health** (symptoms such as anxiety, depression, fear, fatigue, tiredness, hopelessness etc.) over three quarters of respondents reported feeling high levels of mental health, expressing 'very' or 'somewhat' good mental health. Male respondents reported higher levels of mental health than female respondents. In addition, respondents from LCA reported higher levels of mental health than those from HCA.

In addition to the self-assessed mental health, the study team also included a set of six **PTSD symptom** indicators based on the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist (PCL-6) used as a clinical tool to assess the prevalence of PTSD. These six symptoms fell under three symptom groups:

- Re-experiencing symptoms
- Avoidance of certain situations for the purpose of not being reminded of trauma
- Hyper-arousal

This measure revealed a bleaker picture of the mental health among the respondents; as indicated in Table 1, close to a third (32%) of survey respondents reported experiencing PTSD symptoms above the established threshold.

Table 1: PTSD and Gender

	All	Women	Men
Above PTSD threshold	32%	31%	33%
Below PTSD threshold	68%	69%	67%
Sample size	1010	503	507

While there were no significant gender differences, in results not reported in the table we found that HCA had a higher prevalence (37% reached the threshold) than LCA (25%). This difference is statistically significant. The estimates are quite high and can be compared to, for example, countries in Western Europe where 0.5-2.5% of the population is estimated to reach the PTSD threshold.

These results also suggest that psychological ill-health is partly a legacy of the armed conflict. To further illustrate how conflict experiences impact respondents' health, Table 2 cross-tabulates having been directly

affected by the conflict (e.g. through violence or displacement) and PTSD prevalence.

Table 2: PTSD and conflict experiences

	All	Affected	Not affected
Above PTSD threshold	32%	41%	20%
Below PTSD threshold	68%	59%	80%
Sample size	1010	598	412

As shown in Table 2, those directly affected by the conflict reported higher levels of PTSD. There was no gender difference in relation to this pattern.

### 2. Coexistence: trust & threat

Another common legacy of armed conflict and violence is the lasting effects on people's trust and threat levels. To assess the respondents' perceptions of trust and threat in general and in relation to specific groups, several questions were asked to the survey participants. First, we asked what they considered to be the greatest **threat** they currently face. Table 3 shows the responses to this question, for all respondents as well as by gender.

Table 3: Perceptions of greatest current threat

	All	Women	Men
I currently do not face any threats	34%	35%	33%
Struggle for economic wellbeing	14%	12%	17%
Natural disasters	11%	12%	10%
Scarcity of safe drinking water	10%	10%	10%
Threats from wild animals	8%	9%	6%
Domestic abuse or violence	6%	8%	5%
Religious or ethnic tensions	4%	2%	6%
Renewed violence in my community	4%	2%	4%
Sexual abuse or violence	3%	4%	2%
Other	3%	2%	4%
Physical violence against myself	1%	3%	1%
Abduction	2%	1%	2%
Sample size	1011	504	507

The most common response, selected by 34% of the respondents, was that they currently did not perceive any threat. Also, few respondents (4%) selected concerns for renewed political violence in the community. This is good news for the peace process, however, many people continue to struggle with livelihood issues. The gender differences were small and there were also small differences between high and low conflict areas. Significantly more respondents appear to struggle with livelihood issues in the high conflict areas.

The survey also showed that few of the respondents feel threatened by specific groups such as people from political parties, and from other countries, as seen in Table 4. However, in findings not reported in the table, women much more frequently reported feeling threatened compared to men.

Table 4: Threat by groups

	Very much	A little	Not at all
Your family	8%	20%	72%
People in neighborhood	4%	33%	63%
People of another ethnicity or caste	7%	37%	56%
People from other area of Nepal	11%	37%	52%
Maolist members/leaders	12%	30%	58%
Members/leaders of other political parties	8%	32%	60%
Army/police force	10%	32%	58%
People from another country	14%	29%	57%

The antithesis of threat is, arguably, levels of **trust**. Hence, when threat levels are low we could expect high social trust. However, the findings reveal a more complex picture. Several questions about general interpersonal trust were asked and two striking patterns characterized these results. First, trust levels are very low in the surveyed districts. Second, women have significantly lower trust than men. The survey also asked about **trust in specific groups**, as seen in Table 5:

Table 5: Trust in different groups

	Very much	A little	Not at all
Your family	81%	17%	2%
People in neighborhood	25%	67%	9%
People of another ethnicity or caste	17%	66%	17%
People from other area of Nepal	13%	58%	30%
Maolist members/leaders	11%	43%	46%
Members/leaders of other political parties	9%	54%	37%
Army/police force	20%	53%	27%
People from another country	8%	44%	48%

The results indicate that respondents generally have high trust only in their own family; in all other groups few respondents indicated high trust levels. Again (not reported in the table) we see a significant gender difference; women consistently reported lower trust in all of these categories.

### 3. Peacebuilding mechanisms

The survey asked questions related to different types of mechanisms and processes of relevance to peacebuilding and below we focus on the results pertaining to reconciliation, and truth telling.

First, an important part in improving coexistence is to implement different types of reconciliation programs. However, only a minority (322 people, or 33%) of the respondents to the survey had heard of any such initiatives. As demonstrated in Table 6, among those that had heard of

such initiatives, they generally considered the programs to be important, men slightly more so than women.

Table 6: Importance of Reconciliation Programs

	All	Women	Men
Very important	83%	74%	88%
Moderately important	14%	23%	9%
Of little importance	3%	2%	3%
Not at all important	0%	1%	0%
Sample size	322	122	200

Of the 322 respondents who had heard about reconciliation programs, about one-third (117 respondents, or 36%) had participated in at least one program. Such as community-based interaction programs, vocational development programs, and sports. About 83% of those that participated in at least one reconciliation program viewed the program/s as very important.

In sum, this shows that the reconciliation programs are appreciated by most participants. However, given the rather low number of survey participants aware of the programs, much remains to be done in regards to communicating the existence of the programs to the public.

The survey also importantly showed that people agree that these programs play a very important role for reconciliation in Nepal.

The survey asked several questions related to **truth-telling**, i.e. talking about past experiences during the armed conflict. The overall trend in the data is that people are supportive of truth-telling mechanisms and that those can lead to positive outcomes.

For instance, the respondents agreed that sharing the truth about conflict experiences will improve relations both *across* different communities and *within* their own community.

In response to the question “It’s important to know what happened during the conflict and collect testimonies” a large majority agreed, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Testimonies should be collected

	All	Women	Men
Strongly agree	69%	65%	73%
Somewhat agree	19%	20%	18%
Somewhat disagree	4%	5%	3%
Strongly disagree	8%	10%	6%
Sample size	909	442	467

Although generally supportive of truth-telling, the results show a statistically significant gender difference indicating that women are less supportive than men regarding collecting testimonies. This

highlights the need to carefully design these initiatives to minimize negative impact for women.

The survey also asked about the respondents’ own participation in different commissions and peacebuilding mechanisms. A small number of people (in total 209) had participated. Some respondents participated in more than one commission or peacebuilding mechanism. Given this small sample, Table 8 reports frequencies rather than percentages.

Table 8: Participation in commissions and peacebuilding mechanisms

	All	Women	Men
TRC	69	23	46
LPC	68	21	47
Conflict victims committee	66	20	46
Human Rights Commission	60	21	39
Human Rights NGOs	48	13	35
CIEDP	45	12	33
OHCHR	23	6	17
Community-based indigenous organizations	13	3	10

As can be seen from Table 8, participation was highest in the TRC, LPC, Conflict Victims’ Committees, and Human Rights Commissions and more men than women in our sample participated.

Among the 209 respondents who had participated in one or more commission, a majority was satisfied with their experience. There was no significant gender difference in the satisfaction level.

## Recommendations

(1) Self-reported high PTSD symptoms among men and women, particularly from high conflict-affected areas, indicate the urgency of immediate psychosocial support and services to communities, families and individuals affected by conflict and for other reasons. All three tiers of government, policymakers, the donor community, as well as civil society groups should play their respective roles to address this mental health issue.

(2) It is interesting to note that a low number of people (only 4%) have reported renewed violence in the community as a threat to their well-being. However, 35% of the respondents have reported socio-economic factors such as struggle for economic well-being, natural disaster, and scarcity of drinking water as a threat to their livelihood. This finding indicates the need for more robust programming from the government and relevant stakeholders to address the economic well-being, natural disaster, and safe drinking water issues. Additionally, almost 9% have indicated domestic and sexual violence as a

threat to their well-being. This suggests the need of important interventions to address domestic as well as sexual violence.

(3) The finding related to the feeling of threat with regards to specific groups indicates generally low level of perceived threats. However, gender wise, women perceived greater level of threats than men. The findings additionally showed that levels of trust are very low, and women less trusting. This points to a need of proactive initiatives from the government, civil society, and community to promote social harmony and increase the level of trust, especially amongst and across caste and ethnic groups. Intergroup contact is vital for building trust between the various groups. To accomplish it, organizations from all sectors (including business, religion, sport and education) need to become more open to include people from all groups and promote open dialogue. Intergroup contact should be designed in a way that it lowers negative emotions and to this end it is important that groups are open to acknowledge other groups' sufferings as well as their own.

Formal and informal community based dialogues among leaders, peace education among children and young people, and the establishment of community driven intercultural forums and centers for bringing different ethno-cultural groups together can be some important initiatives in this regard.

In addition to improving interpersonal trust, there is also a great need to improve institutional trust. The government can increase its trustworthiness by actively showing its citizens that it cares by, amongst other things, responding to the needs articulated by citizens and involving them in the policy making process. To do so effectively the government might need to rethink its political structure in a way that brings governmental officials geographically closer to the people. Furthermore, institutions should be reformed in a manner that allows them to bring more inclusion and equity into the structure. This can be done, for example, by putting a stronger emphasis on social skills, human rights and diversity interaction work. Accountability mechanisms should be put in place to guarantee the institutions work towards inclusion.

(4) This research found that a large majority of surveyed people indicated the importance of reconciliation programs for peacebuilding, while also suggesting a very low level of awareness among people about such programs, or programs bringing people from different conflicting groups together. The research also revealed a relatively low level of participation of people in various reconciliation programs conducted in the past years. Thus, when the

future TRC comes up with reconciliation programs, we find it important to highlight that the programs need to be clearly communicated to the people in the conflict affected communities. This could be done through community radio, public interface programs, and sharing of information in local languages in regions where people have difficulties to understand Nepali. Additionally, this research opens an avenue to further explore the participation in past reconciliation programs and find better ways to increase people's participation in future programming.

(5) The results showed that the majority of the respondents support truth-telling processes and that these could potentially benefit the society, however, it was noted that women are less inclined to support such processes. We therefore recommend involving gender experts and female interviewers, and setting up special women's only hearings, to strengthen support among women. Men and women should be treated in an equal manner when sharing their stories and stigmatization needs to be actively prevented. Furthermore, having sufficient security measures in place (e.g. witness protection programs) is important. Avoiding deterministic narratives and signaling support for everyone's story is vital to ensuring that people feel comfortable to share their stories. Informal story-telling mechanisms and the ability to submit written stories can additionally strengthen truth-telling.

Finally, as protecting people's self-agency is crucial, silence and the active choice to not share needs to be respected.

(6) Considering the low level of people's participation in peacebuilding commissions and mechanisms, this research makes two major recommendations. First, commissions such as TRC, CIEDP, and National Human Rights Commission should be easily accessible to the general population and people directly affected by armed conflict. For this, clear communication and awareness raising among larger segments of society regarding the existence of such commissions, the nature of services provided by them, and their roles and responsibilities for promoting peace, justice and reconciliation are essential.

Second, given the higher frequency of visits of people at National Human Rights Commission, its outreach capacity should also be strengthened at the local level.

(7) The research indicates that LPC and Conflict Victims Committees are the most frequently visited peacebuilding mechanisms by the local communities. Due to the recent collapse of LPCs and internal tussles within the conflict victims' community, no such strong mechanisms are in place at the local level. Meaning that

there is nowhere local communities and conflict victims can go, discuss, and express their concerns regarding their current peacebuilding needs, or to distribute relevant information to the higher authority. Thus, we recommend the establishment of more local peacebuilding mechanisms, which should be initiated through the local and provincial governments or civil society groups. In the long run, these could work as a gateway to address conflict related issues in a systemic way.

## The Project

The Gender, War Trauma and Peacebuilding project aims to investigate the challenges of post-conflict peacebuilding processes by studying the complex (and possibly gendered) relationships between war related trauma and attitudes towards peacebuilding, trust and co-existence after war. The project is funded by the Swedish Research Council (Grant Number 2014-3780).

## DPCR, Uppsala University

The Department of Peace and Conflict Research (DPCR) was established at Uppsala University in 1971 to conduct research and offers courses in peace and conflict studies. Both research and teaching focus on addressing issues related to the onset, dynamics, and resolution of armed conflict on a scientific basis.

## Centre for Social Change

Centre for Social Change (CSC) was founded in the year 2015 as a non-profit, non-governmental organization and serves as a social think tank based in Kathmandu. CSC works towards changing socio-political dynamics of Nepalese society via research, education, and advocacy. Currently, CSC's focus is on issues around conflict transformation and peacebuilding, democracy and governance, migration and human mobility, and civic space and civil society development.

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