Nepal

Peace and stability in Nepal remain fragile despite fresh constituent assembly elections and the promise of a progressive constitutional framework. Programs that lay the foundations for an equitable restructuring of the Nepali state, improved governance capacity at local levels, and more civic engagement are critically important. The Asia Foundation is supporting and encouraging a smooth political transition; conflict transformation at national and subnational levels; enhanced women’s rights and security; accountable local governance; and broadened economic opportunity.

SUPPORTING THE PEACE PROCESS AND POLITICAL TRANSITION

After the decade-long Maoist conflict, Nepalis have been engaged in restructuring the state and writing a constitution that provides for a responsive government and assures services and opportunities to all citizens. Following the November 2013 elections, political parties must tackle contentious issues on the design and implementation of a new constitution as well as a federal system of government. The Asia Foundation in Nepal assists the achievement of that broad objective through programs that support national political dialogue processes and subnational peace-building activities.

Prior to the 2013 election, the Foundation’s Nepal Transition to Peace (NTTP) Forum worked with major political parties, youth politicians, and civil society groups to create an open environment for elections, and provided support for dialogues with dissident groups. Since then, the Foundation has also been supporting the transition of the NTTP Forum into an independent national peace institute (NTTP Institute).

Under the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) program, the Foundation implemented activities to enhance the legislative capacity of the Parliament Secretariat; significantly upgraded the parliament’s media center; and improved strategic communications and public outreach. We promoted public engagement in the legislative process through periodic bulletins, a website, town hall meetings, and weekly radio shows and built the capacity of civil society organizations to conduct social audit of relevant legislations.

CONFlict transformation and Peacebuilding

The Asia Foundation is engaged in a long-term effort to help establish a culture of peace in Nepal, built on respect for diversity, human rights, and nonviolent responses to conflict. The NTTP Forum brings major political parties and key civil society leaders to an informal and confidential dialogue process that supports political negotiations on implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), constitutional development, peace building, and transitional justice. We also support the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in preparations to launch and activate transitional justice structures such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and local peace committees. Concurrently, we have been working on security sector reform to strengthen the credibility of public security institutions during the transition.

To support peacebuilding at the local level, we promote interest-based, facilitated mediation in...
134 communities in 12 districts. As of March 2014, our community mediation program has registered 25,000 disputes of which over 85 percent have been successfully resolved. The program contributes to increased access to justice, builds positive state-community relations, and promotes a culture of peaceful dispute resolution at the community level. We also facilitated the formation of Community Mediators’ Society (CMS), a national-level mediator network, which aids in harmonizing and sustaining high-quality mediation practices. We support the implementation of the new Mediation Act and the promotion of mediation practice in close coordination with the Supreme Court’s Mediation Council and various ministries of the Nepali government.

At the subnational level, the Foundation supports a dialogue forum, Sambad Samuha, in multi-ethnic enclaves with divergent claims on identity and federal boundaries.

WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND SECURITY
The Asia Foundation aims to increase women’s opportunities for fuller participation in social, political, and economic life by incorporating gender perspectives in policymaking, combating gender-based violence (GBV), and trafficking of women and girls. The Foundation works with young political leaders and government officials to enhance their capacity to respond to and support women’s leadership in national-level political and public policy processes.

The Foundation’s Combating Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) program addresses the core issues related to women’s security, while promoting opportunities for enhanced economic and social participation of women and girls from vulnerable and marginalized communities at the local and national levels. Operating in six trafficking-prone districts in Nepal, the program emphasizes local-level interventions coupled with national-level reform to combat human trafficking.

The program works with government stakeholders to create an enabling policy and structural environment to combat trafficking. With the program’s support, an annual TIP Report is published by the Nepali government; a national-level Anti-Human Trafficking Unit has been established within the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare; 170 local-level village committees on Controlling Human Trafficking are now active; and capacity of law enforcement officials and judiciary has been strengthened to better address issues related to victim/witness protection. Recognizing the linkages between human trafficking and labor migration, the Foundation supports interventions that protects the rights of migrant workers throughout the migration cycle. We published research on labor migration patterns across South Asia and supported regional policy advocacy workshops advocating a common South Asia framework for migrant worker rights. We also provided support for the Government of Nepal’s first-ever labor migration status report.

BROADENING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
The Asia Foundation has conducted analyses of local government budget allocations—critical to promoting broad economic development. The analyses found that costly accountability tools did not lead to improved governance given the widespread collusive practices, weak institutions, and uncertain political climate. We published studies on the Nepali policymaking process, political economy of local governance and public security, political constraints on rapid hydropower development, politics and accountability, and politics of resource allocation in local government bodies.

The Foundation provided support to the Investment Board of Nepal for cross-country comparative analyses of fiscal incentives for FDI and the practice of royalty distribution to local communities. We also supported “Investment Climate of Nepal,” a month-long outreach program, to discuss the investment climate and relevant legislations of Nepal with local communities.

BOOKS FOR ASIA
The Asia Foundation’s Books for Asia program supports the expansion of English-language readership in Nepal, helps to advance professional knowledge, and builds vocational and research skills among children and young adults. In 2014, a total of 31,071 books were distributed to 188 recipients including educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, public libraries, and training institutes in 39 districts across Nepal. We partnered with NGO networks, public libraries, and the District Education Offices of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Nepal to expand our books distribution to hard-to-reach areas throughout the country. We have also purchased and distributed 285 special collections of books to research institutions, judicial bodies, and government institutions.

In Nepal, The Asia Foundation’s programs are also funded by the Australian, British, Danish, and Swiss governments.