

# CONFLICT IN NEPAL & ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN



**A discussion document prepared for  
UNICEF Regional Office South Asia**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the project

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a global charter for the protection of children's survival, development and well being. Armed conflict creates conditions under which many of the rights laid out in the CRC are undermined. As the 1996 Graca Machel/UNICEF report on Children Affected by Armed Conflict pointed out, war increases the threats to children and clearly contravenes the mandate for their protection laid out in the CRC.

The international community has therefore a special duty of care and protection with regard to children exposed to armed conflict, civil strife and displacement. This duty requires agencies involved in preventative and emergency efforts to understand how children are affected by such adversities and to develop measures that mitigate the impact on children. Acknowledging the urgent need to improve child-focused emergency responses in the context of conflict, the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID) has provided financial support to UNICEF globally, through the Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC) Project to raise the capacity of child-focused interventions in armed conflict.

As part of this initiative the Regional UNICEF Office in South Asia (ROSA) has undertaken the Children Affected by Armed Conflict Part One Project. The premises of the project are:

- i. Child protection during emergencies involves more than simple service delivery. The project seeks to develop a conceptual and practical framework to move forward policy, practice and advocacy on CAAC. This entails the development of new methods of information gathering and analysis, new approaches to programming and policy development and new ways of thinking about and working with children and their families during conflict.
- ii. Working with and supporting children, their families, communities and other local stakeholders implies the need for in-depth understanding of the particular context, dynamics and impacts of armed conflict in South Asia.

iii. Building the capacity of UNICEF and partner organisations to respond more effectively to war-affected children requires the development of new training approaches that enhance not only individual learning, but also institutional memory. Current training practices that rely on ‘training events’ and the production of manuals are not the most effective way of meeting these objectives. The Project will therefore develop interactive and distance learning methods and produce learning modules and materials that will be made available on the UNICEF website.

iv. Children’s rights can be protected by promoting leadership and accountability for violations, and by ensuring that internationally agreed standards of child protection become accepted throughout the region and are sustained during conflict. This entails lobbying, advocacy and information dissemination on general human/children’s rights instruments, with a focus on principles and issues that are of particular relevance to war-affected children.

### **Establishing the Knowledge Base**

To initiate the project UNICEF ROSA commissioned consultants at the Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, to map out: 1) the existing knowledge on children affected by armed conflict in the South Asia region 2) the existing institutional capacity for intervention on CAAC. Between January and April 2001 two consultants travelled to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan collecting existing secondary information on CAAC and meeting informed experts, particularly those involved in child-focused intervention in areas of conflict. The UNICEF country offices provided logistical support in Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Pakistan and Afghanistan the project was facilitated by the UNICEF Pakistan Country Office and Afghanistan Country Office in partnership with Save the Children Fund (US) Pakistan and Afghanistan Field Office. A complementary study on children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Cox’s Bazaar of Bangladesh was funded by the British Council Bangladesh.

The findings of the research will constitute two regional discussion papers to be presented at a workshop in Kathmandu 9-13<sup>th</sup> July 2001. Country specific discussion documents have also been compiled. These use existing material and insights from interviews with informed experts to promote conceptual and practical

frameworks to move forward policy, practice and advocacy on children affected by armed conflict.

### **The Nepal Country Discussion Document**

Given the rapidly changing circumstances in Nepal in mid-2001 this document is, necessarily, provisional in nature. It attempts to articulate some of the major concerns expressed by international and national agency personnel, human rights monitors and various local community figures, all of whom have a particular interest in or experience of the Maoist “People’s War” and its potential impact upon children in Nepal.

Given the practical difficulties of directly accessing the areas currently affected by the conflict, this author has had to rely on heavily on the accounts of such individuals and on statistical and other published data available. This latter has generally been sparse and inconsistent. Basic information which might give the scale of particular phenomena, such as displacement, was not available during the period of data collection. Furthermore, given the highly charged political atmosphere which presently prevails in Nepal, it was necessary to treat much of the information provided with some measure of caution. As far as possible I have sought to cross-check accounts and reports, and have generally included only those views which were corroborated by several different sources.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that the “People’s War” and its effects upon communities, families and, in particular, upon children, is poorly researched and documented. Much needs to be done to develop a systematic approach to monitoring of the situation: a challenging task in which many agencies have an important role to play. One of the principal purposes of this paper is to encourage discussion about the ways in which this challenge may be met.

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## SECTION 1

### CONTEXTS & DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT

On February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1996 the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), under the leadership of Dr Baburan Bhattarai and Comrade Prachanda, launched its “People’s War”. In the movement’s own words, this event “ushered in a new era of democratic revolution in all spheres of the society.”<sup>1</sup> The violent methods which the Maoists have employed in pursuit of their goals have caused widespread shock. However, in the view of many analysts, the emergence of such a movement and the degree of support it has enjoyed were entirely predictable. In order to appreciate this point, it is necessary to consider briefly Nepal’s recent history, in particular the return to multi-party democracy instituted in 1990.

*Issues addressed in Section 1:*

- **The Panchayat and the revolution of 1990**
- **The Outbreak of the ‘People’s War’**
- **Dimensions of the Maoist “People’s War”**
- **Current Dynamics of the Conflict and Concerns for the Future**

#### **THE PANCHAYAT AND THE REVOLUTION OF 1990**

The *janandolan* (‘People’s Movement’) of 1990 brought to an end 28 years of monarchical rule under the *panchayat* system.<sup>2</sup> This regime had been introduced by King Mahendra in 1962 to replace a nine-month old, democratically-elected government with “guided democracy” in which the unity of the nation and the promotion of national sentiment were paramount goals.<sup>3</sup> Political parties were banned and the media tightly controlled. Mass schooling was introduced with the explicit aim of building national identity through a standardized curriculum conveyed in the Nepali language.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, King Mahendra, and his successor King Birendra, also pursued economic development, encouraging foreign investment and support, especially from India and the United States.

In retrospect, it is apparent that, by focussing on education and economic modernization, Nepal’s monarchy planted seeds for the revolution of 1990 which

effectively ended their monopoly on power. During the period of *panchayat* rule the education system expanded exponentially. The effects of this are evidenced in the increase in literacy rates from 5.3 percent in 1952 to nearly 40 percent in 1989,<sup>5</sup> and in the rate of secondary and tertiary level enrolment shown in Table 1 below. At the same time, migration from rural areas to towns in Nepal and India increased greatly. Those who moved in this way, principally adult males in pursuit of employment in industry, came into contact with new ideas and sources of information.<sup>6</sup> In short, then, the general populace, particularly those in Kathmandu and other large towns, became increasingly aware of the wider world and of the constraints upon them as citizens of Nepal in comparison to those of other countries.<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 1. Enrolment in Secondary and Tertiary Level Institutions 1950-1991/2**

	1950	1961	1970	1984/5	1989/90	1991/2
Secondary School	1,680	21,115	102,704	216,473	364,525	421,709
Higher Institute	250	5,143	17,200	55,560	95,240	110,329

Source: 5/1/1996 [quoted in Hoftun et. al. 1999:95]

Other factors, such as expansion of the country's network of roads and the increasing access to mass media and entertainment – radios, newspapers and cinemas – further contributed to the dissemination of new ideas and images and the raising of expectations. On the other hand, during this same period resentment grew amongst rural dwellers displaced as a consequence of large-scale development schemes and degradation of the environment.<sup>8</sup> This period also witnessed a growth in what may be called 'identity politics' as numerous ethnic-caste groups began to assert their cultural distinctiveness. Their efforts, however, met stiff resistance from the Nepali-speaking, Brahmin elite which held sway in all areas of the country's life.

It is also important to consider events in the wider world beyond Nepal and their potential affects upon domestic perceptions. According to some commentators, the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989 and the apparent triumph of liberal democracy provided a source of inspiration to many Nepali citizens. As Hoftun et. al. commented "In Nepal, as in many other parts of the world, the enthusiasm of 1989-90 was partly the result of a belief that democracy would bring prosperity."<sup>9</sup>



The *janandolan* ('people's movement') of 1990 which led to the restoration of multi-party democracy can thus be seen as the product of numerous factors which may be summarised as follows:

**TABLE 2: Factors contributing to emergence of the 'People's Movement' in 1990**

- Introduction of mass education
- Modernisation of the economy
- Developments in communication and media
- Rural-urban migration
- Rural resentment at government inability to address causes of impoverishment
- Emergence of 'identity politics' around issues of ethnicity-caste
- The apparent triumph of liberal democracy globally

The popular protests which helped to bring about the end of the *panchayat* system were generally confined to the Kathmandu Valley. Nevertheless, they embraced all sections of society in this location and, due to processes of urbanisation, inevitably included many people who hailed from outlying rural areas. Furthermore, the victory of the *janandolan* not only illustrated the growing political consciousness of Nepali citizens but also stimulated the further raising of awareness. The general populace were now hungry for signs of real change in social and economic, as well as purely political, terms.

### **THE OUTBREAK OF THE 'PEOPLE'S WAR'**

The measures introduced by King Birendra in November 1990, in response to popular protest, represented a significant change in the system of government, at least at the organisational level. Nevertheless, as growing numbers of the citizenry were to discover in subsequent years, much of the country's underlying social and political structure remained firmly in tact. Thus, for example, power remained in the hands of the Brahmin and other elites who had predominated prior to 1990.<sup>10</sup> The evidence of positive improvement in the many areas which ordinary Nepalis had hoped for was scant. Instead, the perception of corruption and nepotism at the highest echelons of society – the government, judiciary, amongst those responsible for the delivery of

health and education services – grew rapidly. Decentralisation, which might have given citizens throughout the country a stronger sense of participation in government and made their elected politicians more accessible and accountable, failed to materialise in a meaningful way. Even the media, now theoretically liberated from the controls imposed under the *panchayat* regime, proved itself, in many cases, to be in thrall to powerful vested interests in the form of government and private proprietors<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, the efforts of ethnic-caste and minority religious groups to challenge their marginalization by the Hindu, Nepali-speaking elites were met by explicit assertions of the dominance of the values and position of these elites. Thus, for example, a concerted campaign for a secular state mounted in 1990 led to the formulation by government of a clause in the new constitution affirming that Nepal is “a Hindu, monarchical kingdom”.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, demands for school education to be conducted in the mother tongues of different ethnic groups was met by reassertion of Nepali as the only medium of instruction. Other languages were permitted only as optional subjects at the university level.

Perhaps the restiveness of the early 1990s which was produced by these factors – corruption, discrimination, lack of accountability and representativeness – might have been contained had the economic conditions of ordinary Nepalis improved. Instead, unemployment, impoverishment, lack of investment, and the exploitation of labour by local landowners continued as ever. At the same time, the agents of government with whom villagers most commonly came into contact, namely the police and local administrators, were responsible for acts of brutality and extortion.

Even the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) which constituted a minority government for nine months in 1994 failed to address effectively the grievances and aspirations of ordinary Nepalis. During this period they were perceived, instead, to abandon the principles which, theoretically, lay at the heart of their movement as they protected the vested interests of the elites.<sup>13</sup>

Five years after the return to multi-party democracy, widespread disillusionment and frustration had, therefore, made some form of popular response almost inevitable. As one commentator noted:

The circumstance of the political, social and economic status of the country has reached such a point that even if there were no Maoists there would be someone else taking up this cause.<sup>14</sup>

## **DIMENSIONS OF THE MAOIST “PEOPLE’S WAR”**

There are certain key characteristics which distinguish the Maoist “People’s War” as a militarised insurgency. These may be summarised as follows:

**TABLE 3: Characteristics of the Maoist “People’s War”**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding primarily from local sources</li><li>• Use of low-tech military equipment (small arms, improvised explosive devices, etc)</li><li>• Rural focus and base for military activities</li><li>• Support from marginalized ethnic-caste groups</li><li>• Support from women</li><li>• Strong appeal to proletarian revolutionary ideology</li></ul> |
|---|

Each of these characteristic features carries with it implications for the ways in which children are likely to be affected by the ongoing conflict. These effects will be discussed in subsequent sections. Here the aim is to indicate the geographic, demographic and military dimensions of the conflict to date.

### **Funding**

Although rumours abound that the Maoists are supported by outside governments, there is little evidence that they receive significant financial assistance from abroad. In this sense, then, the “People’s War” is so far largely a home-grown affair: the majority of financial support is gathered internally. Networks of Maoist supporters throughout the country are currently engaged in informal “tax-collecting” activities, by which individuals and businesses in towns throughout the country, including Kathmandu, are called upon to contribute funds to the “People’s War”, often with thinly-veiled threats of violence. Similarly, at the local, rural level where Maoist cadres are active, villagers are required to support the movement with offerings of foodstuffs and other materials, supposedly in proportion to the wealth of their household. They have also raised funds by the looting of banks and businesses.

According to recent estimates, in the period 1996-2000 the Maoists raised 161 million Nepali Rupees in this way.<sup>15</sup>

### **Weaponry**

The Nepali authorities have claimed that the People's War Group (PWG) – a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary organisation operating in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh – supply the Maoists with electronic detonators and explosives, and that the Maoist Communist Center (MCC) – active in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh – have provided the “People's War” with pistols, ammunition and detonators.<sup>16</sup> Aside from the possible provision from these Indian revolutionary groups, the majority of weapons are believed to come from two main sources. Firstly, the Maoists produce their own materials, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs)<sup>17</sup> and the traditional crescent-shaped machete (*khukuri*). They are such production in this by the fact that they have been able to gain support from the marginalised *bishaw karma* – an occupational caste of blacksmiths. Secondly, they rely on rifles and ammunition captured from the Nepali security forces. According to estimates, in the period 1996-2000 they obtained 714 weapons by this means.<sup>18</sup>

### **Rural / Urban Dynamic of the “People's War”**

Despite an escalating process of urbanisation, the Nepali population remain predominantly country dwellers: an estimated 80% of all citizens still reside in rural areas.<sup>19</sup> It is away from the cities that the Maoists have built their military base. So far their approach to the conduct of the “People's War” appears to be a gradualist one focussed on the steady conquest of rural areas with the aim, in their own words, of “encircling the city from the countryside”.<sup>20</sup> Several districts, notably in the mid-Western region, have been targetted for intense military activity in which local people have been recruited and the Nepali police forced to retreat to the district headquarters. The poverty and disenchantment of villagers, coupled with the existence of forests, provide a useful base for guerrilla activities. In several districts the government forces currently maintain their authority in towns while the Maoists effectively control the surrounding rural hinterlands. This is notably the case in districts such as Rukum, Rolpa and Jajarkot in the mid-western region.

At the same time, it is important to note that the Maoist sphere of influence extends far beyond the rural areas now under their effective control. Through their network of supporters, which includes an active and well-organised student wing, they are able to reach all parts of the country, exerting influence over individuals and businesses by the use of threats. They have also demonstrated their power in a most public way through the institution of general strikes which have brought all parts of the country, including Kathmandu, to a standstill. In addition, they have forced the closure of schools nationally for days on end.

### **Ethnic-caste based support**

A striking feature of the casualty figures from the first five years of the “People’s War” are the numbers of marginalized and low caste ethnic group members killed by the Nepali police. For example, according to figures compiled by human rights group INSEC, in the period 13.2.96 – 31.1.01 the police killed 224 members of the Magar ethnic-caste group in contrast to 86 killed by the Maoists.<sup>21</sup> This gives some indication of the extent to which the “People’s War” may have an ethnic-caste dimension, drawing its support from those groups which perceive themselves as persecuted by the government authorities on the basis of their ethnic-caste identity.

In a recent study, Anne de Sales analyses the evident enthusiasm of one ethnic group, the Kham Magars, for the Maoists. As she explains, this enthusiasm stems from the belief that the “People’s War” is a means to overcome oppression by the state and establish territorial autonomy. de Sales observes:

The needs of the Maoists (to have a secure base territory for their guerrilla action) and those of the villagers (to protect themselves from a government that has become hostile and dangerous) coincide, even though their projects are not the same.<sup>22</sup>



### **The support of women**

In their own literature, the Maoists have made much of the support that they enjoy from rural women. According to one recent newspaper article as many as a third of the combatants may be women.<sup>23</sup> However, the involvement of women across the country is not uniform. In the district of Gorkha, informants claim that there are more women than men involved in the movement. Here the local commander is a woman. There is also reason to believe that the Maoist movement has enjoyed a particularly keen response from high caste (Brahmin & Chhetri) women in rural areas: women who are relatively well-educated, yet very constrained within daily life.<sup>24</sup>

The “People’s War” has achieved such support as a consequence of consciousness-raising at the local level coupled with actions intended to address some of the sources of oppression experienced by women. For example, the Maoists have taken an active role in encouraging the schooling of girls and literacy training for those past school age. They have also included the institution of women’s property rights in their list of demands presented to the government. In the following account one woman combatant explains her support for the Maoists:

#### *Account 1: Sunsara*

“Before the initiation of the People’s War I was very oppressed – on the one hand by the government, and on the other hand by the men in the family. All the housework was done by women. After the initiation there have been many changes. All housework is now done by men and women. Beside this, men inspire us to go forward, fight to liberate women and participate in the People’s War”.<sup>25</sup>

## **Revolutionary Ideology**

In spite of the appeal of the “People’s War” for groups such as the Kham Magars which profess an agenda of ethnic separatism, the Maoists remain defiantly proletarian revolutionary in their ideological orientation. The main aims are to overthrow feudalism and imperialism and to introduce a communist system through “cultural revolutions”.<sup>26</sup> The movement is connected to the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) and draws much of its inspiration from Sendero Luminoso (‘Shining Path’) the Maoist revolutionary movement in Peru. Together with “reactionary forces” in Nepal, Indian expansionism and US imperialism are particular targets for the rhetoric of the Maoist leaders, Dr Baburan Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal (popularly known as “Prachanda”). However, criticism is also heaped upon the so-called revisionists of other leftist organisations in Nepal and of the Chinese government who have betrayed the true Marxist-Leninist-Maoist spirit of revolutionary violence.

## **DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICT AND FUTURE CONCERNS**

*The main points to be addressed here:*

- **Recent upsurge in Maoist attacks on police**
- **Introduction of new military police force**
- **General lawlessness**
- **Danger of civil war**
- **Initiation of further conflicts**

### **Current Dynamics**

Commentators estimate that the Maoists are now active militarily in 68 of Nepal’s 75 districts. Of this number, 32 are considered to be strongholds for the “People’s War”. In several districts, notably Rolpa, Rukum, Jajarkot and Salyan, the Maoists now run a parallel system of government.<sup>27</sup>

As discussed above, the Maoists have professed to avoid open warfare with the Nepalese police in favour of a steady process of wearing down the enemy through irregularly-spaced attacks. In apparent contradiction to this, the first months of 2001 have witnessed a dramatic upsurge in violent attacks on the police. In the month of April alone there were 76 policemen and civilians killed in a series of massacres

carried out by the Maoists. This figure is equivalent to more than 15% of the total number of people killed by the Maoists (496) in the period 13.2.96 – 31.1.01: clearly a sharp increase.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence of these attacks police forces have been withdrawn from posts in outlying rural areas and concentrated instead in district headquarters.

Possibly the recent spate of attacks by the Maoists has been in anticipation of the deployment of the government's Armed Police Force. This paramilitary force is intended to reach an ultimate strength of 25,000 men.

Although army units have been stationed in 25 district headquarters, the government has so far refrained from using soldiers in direct combat with Maoist forces in the rural areas. The suggested reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, there is concern that the Army's engagement in counter-guerrilla work might be drawn-out and ultimately unsuccessful. This could, in turn, damage the reputation of the army internationally, thereby creating a potential threat to Nepal's security from outside. The main concern, however, appears to be that, by employing the army directly, the conflict could quickly turn from a situation in which the authorities attempt to control an errant political party to one of full-scale civil war.<sup>29</sup> In any event, those government personnel eager to deploy the army have been hampered by the lack of consensus amongst parliamentarians.

The lack of a concerted military response to the Maoist forces and the series of massacres and retreats suffered by the police, has inevitably contributed to an increasing problem of lawlessness. Not only are the country's police forces stretched by the additional needs of security in conflict-affected areas but a mood of despondency has taken hold amongst policemen themselves. According to one informant, the common perception of police work as a good career option has been badly damaged over the past five years of fighting the "People's War". Furthermore, the evident inability of the police to contain the Maoists has undermined their credibility nationally, thereby encouraging would-be criminals. One new approach of such people has been to assume the guise of Maoists. These so-called "fake Maoists" are now believed to be responsible for many acts of robbery and extortion, suggesting that they are combatants in the "People's War" in order to play upon people's fears.



## **Future Concerns**

Clearly the recent increases in the levels of Maoist violence, coupled with the government's decision to deploy a new paramilitary force must raise concern about the general escalation of the conflict in the short to medium-term. At the same time, there is an alarming absence of concerted effort for the conduct of dialogue between the two sides.

In the longer-term, analysts express anxiety that the "People's War" could trigger a series of further violent conflicts. As already discussed, recent years have witnessed the emergence of 'identity politics' around the issues of ethnicity, caste and religion. The Maoists have so far appeared to harness the frustrations and aspirations of potentially separatist groups to their own programme. However, the contradictions between a revolutionary proletarian agenda and that of ethnic separatism are likely to emerge eventually. In addition, new tensions are developing in Nepal, such as between Hindi-speaking people of the plains (*madeshis*) and Nepali-speakers of the hill areas which led to violent riots at the end of 2000. This is one potential conflict scenario that is likely to be exacerbated by the displacement of people from the hill areas by the "People's War".

There is thus a very real danger of further conflicts developing: conflicts that might easily become militarised given the clear example already set by the "People's War".

At a more general level, numerous commentators have noted the tendency for villagers to use the "People's War" as a pretext to settle disputes with neighbours. That is to say, the denunciation of a fellow villager as a Maoist sympathiser to the police authorities has become, in some places, a strategy for revenge. Alternatively, a villager may be denounced to the Maoists as a 'class enemy' guilty of making false accusations. There may be no truth at all in the allegations but the accusation alone may be sufficient to call forth harassment and even death by either side. According to one author, prior to the "People's War" intra-communal disputes were normally managed within the village itself through established procedures. This new means of settling scores brings in powerful outside parties with the obvious risk of escalating the dispute and destabilising the community involved.<sup>30</sup>

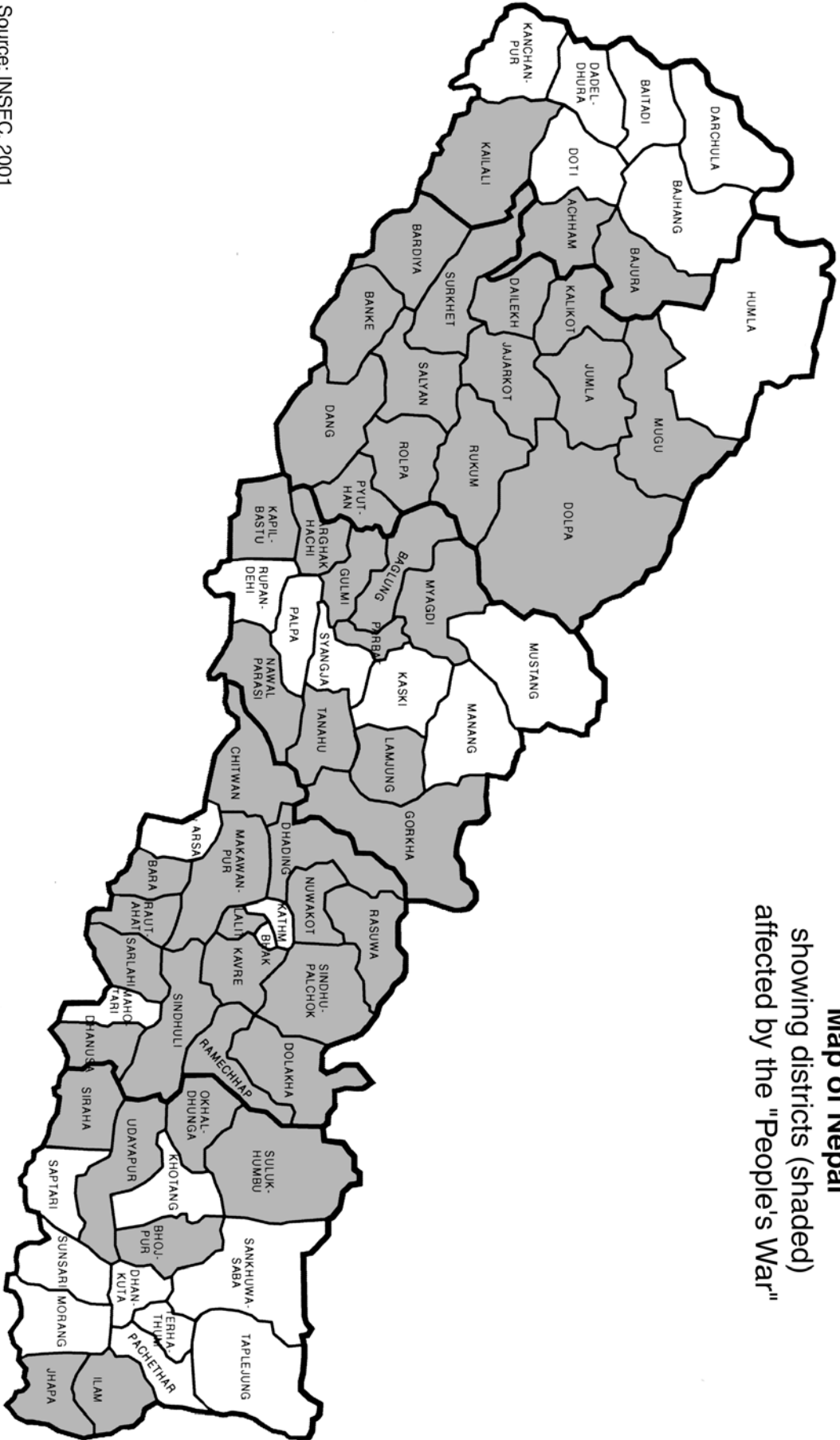
In considering issues of concern with respect to future conflict, the events of June 1st, 2001 cannot be ignored. How the deaths of ten members of the Nepalese

Royal Family will affect the general security situation in the country remains to be seen. It seems inevitable that the fragile balance of power in the country will be severely shaken and that, in some way, it must have serious implications for the direction of the “People’s War”.

### **The Bhutanese Refugees in South East Nepal: conflict concerns**

In the early 1990s approximately 97,000 refugees from Bhutan took up residence in camps in the South East of Nepal. These camps, supported principally by UNHCR in conjunction with WFP, several INGOs and local NGOs, are still in existence. After a decade of fruitless negotiations between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan, agreement was finally reached to institute a process of verification in order to determine the veracity of claims to Bhutanese nationality and thus right of return. This process, which commenced in March 2001, was generally met with guarded optimism by refugees themselves. However, the slow pace of verification (between 8-10 families per day) and the refusal of both sides to allow any third party to be involved in the process has quickly soured this mood. Human rights activists estimate that, at the current rate of verification, it could take at least six years to process all the residents of the camps. Furthermore, the Bhutanese government’s framework for determining nationality and genuine refugee status has generated strong feelings of resentment.

In the meantime, the refugees themselves can only sit and wait. However, the conditions of their residence in Nepal, with severe limitations on freedom of movement and the ability to engage in any form of enterprise or paid employment, are further contributing to feelings of frustration, particularly amongst the ever-growing number of educated young people. Community leaders and some analysts have expressed concern that the youth could become attracted to the Maoist “People’s War” as a vehicle to express their frustration and take some control over their destiny.<sup>31</sup> Certainly the Maoists themselves are becoming increasingly active in the South East of the country and rumours are circulating that cadres may be involved in the military training of camp residents.



**Map of Nepal**  
 showing districts (shaded)  
 affected by the "People's War"

Source: INSEC, 2001

## SECTION 2

### MEZO LEVEL IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICT

*Issues addressed in Section 2:*

- **Service Provision – Education & Health**
- **Economy – National & Local Levels**
- **Family Structure**

#### **SERVICE PROVISION**

As a general point, it should be noted that the provision of basic services in Maoist-controlled areas has, to varying extents, been hampered by their opposition to the presence of many NGOs and, particularly, INGOs.<sup>32</sup> According to informants, such opposition is due to two main reasons. Firstly, there is concern that such organisations are agents of imperialism and the means by which foreign governments may gain a foothold in the country. Secondly, the Maoists are eager to ensure that any credit for improvements in the lives of ordinary citizens goes, unequivocally, to their movement.

Having said this, the attitude of the Maoists towards development agencies lacks consistency. While some organisations have been compelled to withdraw entirely from areas under Maoist control in the face of threats and attacks on property, others continue to function, at least for now. A number of INGOs have changed the nature of their operation: switching from implementation to the funding of local organisations. However, since the Maoists have also expressed opposition to some NGOs, this option is not always viable.

#### **Education**

The “People’s War” has apparently had both positive and negative affects upon education provision in terms of children’s access and the quality of schooling provided. On the positive side, it is widely reported that they have put great pressure upon recalcitrant teachers and those who did not show full commitment to their students. They have also forbidden school principals to collect any form of payment from parents – a practice that was formerly commonplace in spite of its illegality.

On the other hand, this latter action, in the view of some commentators, is having a negative effect in that the underfunded education system has now lost a source of income vital for its maintenance. There are also concerns that teachers allied to political parties opposed to the Maoists are now too frightened to enter the villages where they are employed and instead spend their days in the district headquarters. Furthermore, the closure of some private schools by the Maoists is inevitably exacerbating overcrowded conditions which already exist in government schools.

It would appear, however, that the children who are least likely to get a school education are those in areas where neither side have gained clear control and thus parents fear for the safety of their children away from home. At school they are liable to recruitment by the Maoists, harassment or arrest by the Nepalese police. It is also likely that teachers are reluctant to continue working in areas where violent conflict is ongoing.

The following tables, which employ statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education, compare the enrolment rates in three areas under Maoist control with the national average. As of 1999, the last year for which statistics are available, all three of these districts showed significant increases in the enrolment rate. The national average fell in the case of lower secondary enrolment and rose far less than these three districts at the secondary level.

**Table 4: Lower Secondary Enrolment**

	<b>1992</b>	<b>1999</b>
National	1,061,374	915,649
Rolpa	3,253	3,900
Rukum	4,790	7,553
Jajarkot	1,920	3,212

Source: Ministry of Education & Sports, Statistics Section

**Table 5: Secondary Enrolment**

	<b>1992</b>	<b>1999</b>
National	262,828	385,079
Rolpa	706	1033
Rukum	1169	2327
Jajarkot	564	1136

Source: Ministry of Education & Sports, Statistics Section

## **Health**

Health provision, even more than government schooling, was generally in a poor state prior to the “People’s War”, particularly in more remote rural areas. Therefore, it may be somewhat irrelevant to talk about negative affects upon services due to the conflict. It would appear, however, that the problems of staffing have increased in areas under direct control of the Maoists. Health workers, to an extent greater than teachers, have often chosen to avoid the conflict-affected areas altogether, using real or supposed Maoist threats as an excuse. Those health workers who do continue to attend to their responsibilities have come under great pressure to serve villagers equitably and to sell medicines at cost price.

From the perspective of villagers themselves, their willingness to visit health centres is, in some cases, affected by the positioning of such facilities in close proximity to police posts.

## **ECONOMY**

At the national level, as the conflict increases in scale, so the damage to the economy of one of the world’s poorest nations, will inevitably increase in three main ways:

1. **Tourism**, an important source of income and foreign currency, will surely be damaged as the “People’s War” is carried into areas popular with tour groups. There have already been isolated attacks on such groups but it is not clear if these were the work of genuine supporters or the so-called “fake Maoists”. Nevertheless, the perception abroad that Nepal may no longer be a safe holiday destination is growing.<sup>33</sup>
2. **Foreign investment** is inevitably threatened by perceptions of instability and the government’s inability to maintain order. The British Ambassador, for example, recently noted that “Nepal’s deteriorating law and order situation is discouraging foreign investors.”<sup>34</sup>
3. **Security expenditure** by the government is growing. Thus resources, which are sorely needed for the provision of basic services, are being channelled into the purchase of weapons and the payment of wages to the forces recruited for counter insurgency work.<sup>35</sup>

There are also important economic effects of the “People’s War” at the local level, some of which may be beneficial for the poorest citizens. According to reports, in many areas the Maoists have taken a strong stance against large landowners, particularly those who have exploited villagers through the long-established system of bonded labour. Some of these landowners have been forced out of the rural areas and their land redistributed. In some cases of bonded labour, the Maoists have reportedly intervened, imposing more equitable terms on the landowner.

Although it is widely believed that the Maoists have offered assistance to the poorest villagers in the areas under their control, the majority are obliged to support the People’s War through the provision of produce. Even people living in the cities whose relatives remain in the rural districts now under Maoist control are liable to receive demands for material support, usually backed up by threats. The amounts demanded in money or produce may equal as much as 25% of a family’s income, as reported for districts such as Gorkha and Lamjung.

The villagers likely to be worst affected, however, are those in areas not under clear control by either side. According to reports they are visited by police during the daytime calling for food and alcohol and at night by the Maoists. In general the police are considered more troublesome, helping themselves to valuable items and appearing at unpredictable times. In contrast, the Maoists inform villagers of their demands for basic items in advance and appear at particular times of the year, notably around harvest time.<sup>36</sup> Overall, the impoverishment that such demands can create has contributed to the migration of villagers from some rural areas.

## **FAMILY STRUCTURE**

There appear to be three main ways in which family structures are directly affected by the “People’s War”:

### **Children’s involvement with the Maoist movement**

The reasons why children participate in the activities of the Maoists are numerous (as discussed in the following section). According to local informants, in many cases they do so with the encouragement of family members, possibly following their own example. However, it is also clearly the case that children are often participating in spite of their parents’ wishes. In such situations, it is claimed, the authority of parents

is being undermined and the Maoist activities, particularly the student wing of the movement (*Kantikhari*), apparently offer a kin-type network in potential competition with the traditional family.

### **Death & Arrest of Parents**

This is the most obvious way in which families have been affected. It is necessary to bear in mind that the families of many police officers have also suffered due to the death or disablement of a male relative in the line of duty. However, government compensation currently extends only to the families of those killed or injured by the Maoists, excluding many rural families whose main breadwinners may have been killed, 'disappeared' or imprisoned by the police. Although it is possible to lodge complaints about police brutality and claim government compensation under the 1996 Torture Compensation Act, so far no one has been awarded any monies.<sup>37</sup>

### **Displacement**

It is hard to know the full extent of displacement as a consequence of the current conflict. Recent estimates suggest that around 5,000 families may have left the ten worst affected districts, but this figure excludes many who have moved out of fear of victimisation by the police.<sup>38</sup> Those who leave are generally thought to head first for the nearest district headquarters and from there to larger towns in Nepal or across the border into India. These are routes which are already well-trodden by rural workers in search of wage labour: a fact which further complicates the quest to identify the numbers of those displaced by conflict.

Not all such displacement involves whole families. In some cases, it may be children alone who move away. This is particularly the case for those families living in 'grey areas' where neither side has gained clear control. Here there are strong fears that children will either be recruited by the Maoists or else victimised by the police, due to the suspicion that they are assisting the Maoists. Seemingly this has led parents to send their children, particularly boys, away from the area, normally to the largest towns.



## *Account 2: Goma*

Madan Prasad Giri of Bhote Namgal village in Sindhupalchok was killed ... by Maoists to teach the villagers a lesson. Once a Maoist supporter, Giri had got disillusioned by the violence and shifted his allegiance to the Nepali Congress. And he had dared to publicly criticise the Maoists for killing villagers who did not agree with them.

Feeling threatened, Giri's widow, 22-year-old Goma, left Bhote Namgal for Kathmandu to find a job to support her two children, one born four months after his father's murder. In Kathmandu, she lives with her sister's family in a cramped rented room. Her brother-in-law has now also fled his ancestral home in Sindhupalchok after he was identified as an "enemy of the revolution" by the Maoists. For the moment, Goma is supported by her sister's family, but she knows she cannot depend on her forever. She has already sent her three-year-old daughter back to Sindhupalchok to be cared for by her maternal grand-mother. "My seventh-grader will also migrate to Kathmandu as soon as her exams are over. There is too much pressure on the young to join the Maoist militia," says Goma.

Source: Nepali Times, 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2001

All of the three factors discussed here – children's involvement with the Maoists; the death & arrest of parents; displacement – pose challenges for the traditional family structure. It would appear that in different ways all of these contribute to the encouragement of greater autonomy amongst the young.

## SECTION 3

### IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

Children affected by the “People’s War” and those currently resident in the Bhutanese refugee camps.

*Issues addressed in Section 3:*

- **Recruitment**
- **Exposure to violence**
- **Landmines**
- **Exploitation**
- **Child work/labour**
- **Education**
- **Early Marriage and Child Bearing**
- **Care of orphans**
- **Psycho-emotional effects**
- **Nutrition**

### RECRUITMENT

Although the role of children in direct military activity is unclear, with strong claims and equally strong denials made,<sup>39</sup> informants generally concur that the Maoists are responsible for recruiting children under 18 for different purposes. According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the majority of children recruited are in the 14 – 18 age group. Although some may well participate in military activities, many others are involved in information gathering and messenger roles.<sup>40</sup>

Claims exist that children are being abducted by the Maoists<sup>41</sup> and that some of these are ill-treated, as the following account suggests:

### *Account 3: Damber – 14 year old Maoist conscript*

“I resisted them, weeping a lot...When I physically turned to be unfit for handling the gun, they told me to work as a mess boy and guard the shelters...We stayed there for a long time (in the jungle)...There were six girls among the group of fifteen guerrillas and a boy of my age... I remembered my mother when I could not get food and sleep.”<sup>42</sup>

However, the reasons that the young are getting involved with the “People’s War” undoubtedly extend beyond simple coercion. The likelihood of children from different parts of the country joining up may be mediated by the following factors:

#### **Historical precedent**

For the past two centuries the British Army has recruited young Nepali males for the Gorkha Regiment. At least until the 1970s, boys under the age of 18 were recruited and sent abroad for training and service.<sup>43</sup> Traditionally, most of the recruits came from the mid-Western region, that is to say, the districts which are now the heartland of the “People’s War”. Therefore, we can discern an element of continuity in the villages of this part of the country: until the 1970s children were recruited by the British Army, since the mid 1990s the Maoists have been responsible for similar recruitment.

Similarly, ethnic groups in certain parts of the country have a history of involvement in military conflict. The Gurungs and the Magars, for example, both of which live in the mid-Western region, have a tradition of providing personnel for the military campaigns of Nepal’s rulers.<sup>44</sup>

For children living in these areas and amongst these groups, there may thus be a greater familiarity or acceptance of the notion that they should be involved in the pursuit of armed conflict.

#### **Access to education**

Over the past half century, the government has expanded its educational provision across the country. Nevertheless, some children are still unable to gain access to schooling. Exclusion may occur at the level of family, community or state, due to factors of economy, caste-ethnicity, gender, and security. It is part of the Maoist agenda to eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender and caste-ethnicity that

prevent girls and those from marginalized caste-ethnic groups from gaining equal access to schools. Furthermore, they are committed to the provision of free education which, although assured by law, is not always the case in practice. It is, therefore, understandable that young people, whose ambitions to study have been frustrated, should be attracted to the Maoist cause, as the following account illustrates:

*Account 4: Rachana: teenage Maoist*

Before the initiation of the People's War I did not know anything about politics or parties. But after the initiation [of the armed struggle] one of my relatives suggested I take part in the local cultural group and asked me to go to their rehearsal. I didn't tell my mother or father about this – I only told my older brother who said "Go ahead if you want to die... Can you carry a gun on your shoulder?" I replied "You didn't give me a chance to study and now I am eager to solve the problems of the people and the nation. I want to fight for liberation. If you won't allow me to go I will rebel."<sup>45</sup>

**Family**

Numerous informants from areas affected by the "People's War" have reported that children who join the Maoists often do so with the encouragement or example of parents and, especially, of older siblings. The death or arrest of a close relative by the police serves as a particular spur to the young to offer their own support. In this regard, it would be particularly valuable to explore the activities of children who are orphaned by the conflict.

Nevertheless, children's involvement is liable to depend not only on the attitude of family members to the "People's War" but also on intra-family dynamics. That is to say, we need to consider the strength of authority built upon hierarchies of age and generation in order to comprehend the likelihood of the young making an autonomous decision to join the Maoist cause. In this regard such issues as the absence of male heads of household (due to labour migration) and the Maoists' own rhetoric about family and the nature of authority, in particular their explicit stance against "patriarchal exploitation and discrimination", may be important factors affecting authority and discipline within families.<sup>46</sup>

## EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

According to the most recent figures compiled by human rights observers, the number of people killed in relation to the “People’s War” from its inception until 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2001 is 1,412. Of these, 80 were under eighteen years old and 34 of these were younger than fifteen. These fatalities, together with perpetrator are shown here.

**TABLE 6: Victims of Police & Maoists during the conflict (13.2.96-31.1.01)**

	Police		Maoists	
<b>Total deaths</b>	916		496	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>15-18</b>	12	12	1	1
<b>Under 15s</b>	20	4	14	4

Source: INSEC, 2001 (personal communication)

It would appear that most of the children killed by the Maoists have died in bomb blasts. Victims of the police, in contrast, seem predominantly to have been killed by gunshot fire. In addition to killings, there are numerous anecdotal reports of arbitrary arrest and torture of the young suspected of involvement with the Maoists. For their part, the Maoists have also been responsible for the abduction and detention of children.

With respect to the police treatment of children, it is important to consider abuses and killings in the wider context of the country as a whole. Violence perpetrated upon minors – rape, attempted rape, physical assault, even death – are not confined exclusively to those areas affected by the “People’s War”. Two children – one aged ten and the other twelve – were killed by the police during riots in December 2000 and several others have died in similar events in recent years.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, in the estimation of local commentators, it is partly due to the protection which the Maoist forces offer from familiar practices of police brutality to women and the young that the support of villagers has been secured.

## LANDMINES

It is difficult to estimate with any certainty the extent to which landmines are being used by either party to the conflict. The government of Nepal, which denies that it

uses, produces or stockpiles landmines, has yet to sign the relevant international treaties for their prohibition. In the meantime, there are unconfirmed reports that the police may be planting mines around their own posts for defensive purposes. Many of these posts have been abandoned in the face of the Maoist advance and, seemingly, no demining has taken place, giving potential cause for concern.

More worrying, from the point of view of the danger to children, is the increasing production and use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by the Maoists.<sup>48</sup> Such devices utilise everyday objects such as screw top bottles which explode upon opening. Curious children are thus particularly at risk. There are also claims that the Maoists are now producing their own factory-made anti-personnel mines. Recently, the Nepal Campaign to Ban Landmines suggested that villages in ten districts in the country may be mine-affected.<sup>49</sup> All of these districts are ones in which the “People’s War” has been most strongly fought.

## **EXPLOITATION**

The main form of exploitation involves the trafficking of girls to work in the sex industry and in circuses in India. This has been discussed particularly in relation to Bhutanese refugees by human rights organisations working in the camps in South East Nepal. However, the trafficking of girls is also a well-established practice in other parts of the country. It is not clear the extent to which the incidence of this may have increased as a consequence of the “People’s War”. One may imagine that the poverty, displacement and instability created by the conflict will have exacerbated this problem but this is an issue that sorely needs systematic research to assess the full impact. Given the highly sensitive nature of the subject, information might only be accessible through the conduct of sustained, local level research.

## **CHILD LABOUR/WORK**

The connection between the conflict and the incidence of child labour/work is a complex one. The employment of children, especially boys, is a practice which clearly predates the start of the “People’s War”. The large towns in Nepal are full of under eighteen year olds engaged in a variety of jobs, many of them migrants from the rural areas. The most common reason reported for their movement is economic hardship in the villages. However, poverty itself may be occasioned or exacerbated by

numerous causes, including conflict: an issue that could be better comprehended through the pursuit of primary research at the local level.

Other reasons for children moving to the cities and engaging in paid employment have also been mentioned by informants. These include fear of recruitment by the Maoists or abuse by the police; displacement as direct consequence of conflict; lack of support in the event of being orphaned by the fighting; inability of displaced families to access educational provision in the towns.

Within the rural areas under Maoist control, it is reported that children are used directly by the local leaders to assist in community projects such as road building or the thatching of roofs. In addition, some informants claim that the young have been taken out of school by the Maoists and sent to participate in the looting of property belonging to local landowners.

There is evidence to suggest that the conflict may be contributing significantly to the phenomenon of child labour/work in urban areas. In one particular case, for example, a large brick factory in Kathmandu was discovered to be employing a number of 13-18 year old boys from Rukum and Rolpa – two of the districts at the heart of the “People’s War” – many of whom had been sent away by their parents out of fears for their safety.

Here again, there is a great need for careful research to explore the scale of this phenomenon and better understand the connection between conflict and the incidence of child labour/work. In particular it would be valuable to learn about the specific challenges and needs of child labourers/workers who may have witnessed or been involved in acts of violence in their own villages and for whom there may no longer be a home of any sort to which they might return. In this sense, their situation may differ significantly from that of many other children working in the big cities who maintain some connection with their families remaining in the village.<sup>50</sup>

## **EDUCATION**

The effects of the “People’s War” upon children’s experiences of schooling have been several. The main issues to emerge are the following:

### **Access for girls**

The lack of encouragement for girls to enter and remain at school during the past half century is evidenced in the large discrepancy in literacy rates between males and females. According to figures for 1991, literacy rates amongst females above the age of ten was a little over half that of males.<sup>51</sup> According to many reports of locals and visiting journalists, the Maoists have taken a strong stand on this issue – insisting that girls of school age attend the local facilities, even to the point of holding parents accountable and liable to punishment for the non-attendance of their daughters. It is now claimed that in Maoist-controlled districts such as Gorkha, fifty percent of all school going children are girls, but this statistic may be skewed somewhat by the fact that more boys than girls have been sent away.<sup>52</sup> The Maoists are also credited with supporting efforts to establish literacy classes for women past school age.<sup>53</sup>

### **Caste discrimination**

Human rights organisations in Nepal have, over the past years, sought to tackle discrimination on the basis of caste which affects some school-going children. As one Nepali NGO recently claimed “Hundreds of thousands of dalit children are socially discriminated in their everyday life”.<sup>54</sup> Within the school such discrimination can be expressed in the form of teacher abuse of low-caste children, in the effective ban on their occupation of seats at the front of the class, and in the denial of access to drinking water lest they cause contamination. According to many observers, the Maoists have striven to outlaw such degrading practices.

### **Teacher conduct**

There are some non-Maoist teachers who apparently choose to stay in the district headquarters rather than venture into Maoist-held villages where they are employed. However, the majority are reported to be tending to their responsibilities having been given assurances of their safety by the local cadres. These teachers are subject to strong pressure and possible punishment for non-attendance, in some cases having to pay back money from their wages for days not worked. Furthermore, consumption of alcohol, which had been previously a problem in some cases, is strictly prohibited.



With regard to the discussion of political issues, this is only allowed for those teachers who are, themselves, supporters of the movement. All others are forbidden to raise such matters with their students.

### **Cultural content**

To the apparent delight of many school students, the Maoists have banned or made voluntary the study of Sanskrit in Grades 6,7 & 8. This subject is a compulsory part of the national curriculum but its relevance to the lives of many ordinary children is not always appreciated. Instead, children often consider the study of Sanskrit as an aspect of elite, Brahmin culture which serves only to reinforce their own inferior position in Nepal's social hierarchy.

Guiding the Maoists' actions within the education system is the underlying view that schooling is essential to the creation of a new generation of enlightened revolutionaries. This view was reinforced by statements made by Maoist leader Prachanda in February 2001 that students would be a "reserve force" in a future "mass uprising".<sup>55</sup> The introduction by the Maoists of cultural/ideological activities into schools in areas under their control should be considered in this light. Different art forms are used and, apparently, in this way the movement is proving itself very successful in attracting the imagination and subsequent support of children.

It is also reported that traditional religious celebrations have, in many cases, been replaced or been given a different slant by the introduction of celebrations relating directly to the Maoist movement. This is the case, for example, with the transformation of the Hindu festival of *Dessain* into a celebration of the start of the "People's War" in February, 1996.

### **Schools as targets**

It has already been mentioned that parents may choose not to send their children to school out of fear that they will be subject to the recruitment practices of the Maoists and the potential abuse of the police. Certainly, school premises themselves are often militarised spaces in the sense that both sides have been known to use them for mobilisation or training activities.

### **School closures**

A principle way in which children throughout Nepal have been affected by the “People’s War” is through the efforts of the Maoists to close schools through imposed strikes. Last year, for example, a seven day strike was imposed which caused severe disruption to the timetable of many students, particularly those preparing for exams who were compelled to make up classes at the weekend and during holiday time.

There is also a long-term threat to private schools, given the Maoists’ opposition to such education on ideological grounds. At present the private school sector is expanding rapidly in response to demand for better quality education than is generally available in the public sector. According to current estimates there are more than 10,000 private schools around the country. Thus a large number of children are particularly subject to disruption of their education. Most recently this took the form of a week-long closure of all private establishments in response to demands by the Maoists’ student wing ANNFSU[R] (All Nepal National Free Students Union [Revolutionary]) in May 2001. The demands of the student wing included a 50% reduction in tuition fees and improvements in the standard of educational provision at public schools.

## **EARLY MARRIAGE AND CHILD BEARING**

According to recent estimates, 66% of Nepali women marry before the age of 18.<sup>56</sup> This figure is necessarily only an approximation but it does impart a sense of the very high incidence of early marriage that exists in Nepal, giving rise to concern amongst many children’s and women’s organisations. Informants from rural areas under control by the Maoists suggest that this is a concern shared by the movement. It is understood that they are tackling it the following ways:

### *1. Prohibition on dowry payments*

One main reason for the early marriage of girls is the increased cost of dowry payments for older women who are considered less desirable as brides. Thus, impoverished parents seek to marry off their daughters at an early age in order to keep the costs low. By banning the payment of dowry altogether, the Maoists have, in theory, disposed of the whole problem.

## 2. *Encouragement of education and social participation for women*

As already mentioned, girls and women are strongly encouraged to gain an education and to participate in society generally and in activities connected to the “People’s War” in particular. This directly challenges their traditional role and apparently stimulates girls to consider leading lives beyond marriage and the home.

It is too early to detect the extent to which Maoists activities may be contributing to reduction in the incidence of early marriage, but this is a subject that would merit close monitoring in the longer term. One counterbalancing factor might be the effective facilitation of contacts amongst young men and women in Maoist activities. Although this may not lead to early marriage, there are cases reported of children born out of such liaisons. Within the setting of rural Nepal this raises issues of social acceptance for both the parents and the newborn children.

In the Bhutanese refugee camps there is great concern that both early marriage and child bearing are on the increase. Human rights organisations working in the camps all report that girls from the age of 14 or 15 (and even, in some rare cases, 11 or 12) are being married off. The payment of dowry is not a Bhutanese practice and therefore not of issue here. It is claimed, instead, that such marriages occur because of the cramped living conditions in the camp which make social and potentially, sexual contact between young people more likely. In addition, the lack of parental control, particularly due to the common absence of fathers, contributes to this phenomenon. Furthermore, given the costs of education after grade ten, girls are more likely to drop out since, generally, they are perceived to have less potential to earn an income as high school graduates than boys. Thus their options seem even more limited than those of boys growing up in the same setting.

It may also be that the system of ration distribution encourages early marriage and pregnancy since all refugees, whatever their age, receive the same ration. The presence of an infant in one’s household is, therefore, a benefit in terms of the nutritional resources of that family since he or she will receive the ration equivalent to that of an adult. In contrast, a girl who is entering adulthood within the natal family can only become an increasing draw on those resources. However, this is a hypothetical point which would need to be verified through research.

## **CARE OF ORPHANS**

In general, it would appear that the children of persons killed by the Maoists, particularly police officers, are provided with compensation and care. However, no such automatic provision exists for the children of those people killed by the police. Furthermore, informal sources suggest that this latter group of children find it particularly difficult to access institutional care. There is a noted tendency for the police authorities to label such children as 'children of the Maoists'. Many organisations which might offer support are nervous to assist anyone thus associated with the Maoist movement for fear of becoming an object of suspicion themselves.

Wherever possible, children orphaned under these circumstances will be taken in by relatives and they or their carers may receive some support from the Maoists. Nevertheless, there are reported cases of children who do not receive adequate care and who may choose or be compelled to leave their villages in the quest for survival. Such children end up in Kathmandu and other large towns, often working in factories or the service industry. Research into the scale of this phenomenon, the experiences and needs of orphaned children is sorely needed.

## **NUTRITION**

The reports about the nutritional status of children in conflict-affected areas of the country are inconsistent. Cases of malnutrition are believed to exist but, generally, local informants suggest that the scale of this problem is not, as yet, great. Certainly, the demands of police and Maoists on local people to provide food is putting a strain on many families. In addition, the conflict itself impacts upon agricultural activity both by discouraging farmers from entering their fields due to security concerns and by causing the absence of family members who would normally engage in such work. Reportedly the Maoists ensure that food supplies are given to the most needy families but this should be checked to ensure that other factors, such as political allegiance of the families concerned, do not disqualify some people from receiving this assistance.

The basic nutritional needs of the Bhutanese refugees are currently met by the provision of basic rations supplied by the World Food Programme. It is commonly-held view that the nutritional status of the refugees is generally very good. However, several young people, particularly young women, informed me that they and their

peers suffer from stomach pains due to hunger and there were anecdotal reports of children fainting in school and problems of night blindness associated with malnutrition. In any event, there is widespread concern that these rations may be reduced (as happened twice in recent years) or terminated altogether due to budgetary constraints. Several informants from the camps also reported that local government officials sometimes withhold rations as a means of punishing individual refugees who have earned their displeasure.

### **PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL EFFECTS**

This is a subject about which very little is known. Informants have spoken frequently about the traumatic effects of the conflict upon children. However, there appears to be little consistency in the way in which this concept is employed across the different cases discussed. For example, children whose school has been used by the Maoists for a meeting were described as traumatized by the experience, while the same term

was used to talk about children who had undergone arrest and torture, or who had lost a close family member through the fighting. So far there does not appear to be any systematic research into this subject. Primary research, based upon sound methods, and employing indicators which are appropriate to the cultural context would be required to glean any reliable picture of the scale and nature of the psycho-emotional issues arising as a consequence of the conflict.<sup>57</sup>

## SECTION 4

### **FURTHER RESEARCH – NEEDS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

In a recent report commissioned by DFID Nepal, Jonathon Goodhand highlights the need for aid agencies to “develop greater conflict sensitivity so they can minimise the potentially negative impacts of programmes and amplify the positive”.<sup>58</sup> In order to achieve this, the author argues, they need to “develop new approaches, organisational structures and relationships.” However, the ability to make such changes would, in turn, depend on several factors including improvements in research and analysis of the conflict itself. This should cover such areas as the link between poverty and conflict as well as the coping strategies of those directly affected by conflict. There is also a need to consider in more depth the Maoists themselves.<sup>59</sup>

Discussions with INGOs and NGOs working in or near areas affected by the “People’s War” revealed the common view that there is a regrettable lack of reliable data about the dynamics and consequences of the current conflict. In such a situation the design of programming and advocacy work must rely principally on anecdotal and highly impressionistic evidence. This report has, in passing, indicated some of the specific areas in which systematic, primary research would be invaluable in providing a clearer picture about issues that are either obscured by contradictory reports and political bias or which simply have not been given due consideration.

In planning such research it might be helpful to identify the effects of the conflict in relation to two distinct populations: those displaced and those who remain in the villages. Although there are obvious links between these two, the issues which would appear to be of concern and the possible manner of conducting research in both cases are likely to be quite different. Each is discussed in summary form below.

## **RESEARCH AMONGST THE DISPLACED**

### **Issues**

- Child labour
- Exploitation – notably through trafficking and local sex work
- Access to education and other services
- Care of orphans, including access to institutional support
- Social integration
- Nutrition
- Family separation
- Psycho-emotional effects
- Relationship with government authorities, particularly security forces

### **Possible Approach**

- Site research in one or more district headquarters
- Engage a small team with different competencies/areas of expertise
- Work in conjunction with local organisations engaged with relevant issues (e.g. street children, trafficking, child labour, counselling services, educational, health and recreational provision)
- Conduct participatory research with displaced children to explore issues regarding displacement and life in the new setting.
- Conduct interviews with significant actors – police, local administrators, care workers, etc

## **RESEARCH WITHIN THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY**

### **Issues**

- Service provision: standards and availability of education and health services
- Changes to the school curriculum
- Care of orphaned & abandoned children
- Children's engagement with the Maoist movement: physical, economic, social & cultural
- Gender and caste practices in light of the "People's War"
- Physical threats to children: violence from armed personnel, landmines & explosives
- Inter-generational relations
- Nutrition

### **Possible Approach**

- One or two researchers to reside within a village
- Work through human rights or other NGO with good network of local contacts
- Build relationship of trust with Maoists based upon transparency
- Conduct participatory research with children and adults



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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *The Documents of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)* p.1 <http://www.partizan.org/nepal.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> At its most local level the *Panchayat* system consisted of over 3,000 village assemblies which met once or twice a year in order to approve an annual budget and elect an executive council. From this council one member was elected to represent the village at a district assembly which, in turn, voted in an eleven-member district council. The district councils then participated in zonal assemblies which, between them, elected 90 members for a national council. This national council (or *Rastriya Panchayat*) was supplemented in its composition by small numbers of members representing special interest groups (such as peasants, youth, women, ex-servicemen etc) with the addition of 16 members directly nominated by the king. As Hoftun M. et. al. comment, this system of political organisation left “the palace very much in charge” (1999) *People, Politics & Ideology: Democracy and Social Change In Nepal* Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point page 77
- <sup>3</sup> See de Sales A. (2000) ‘The Kham Magar Country, Nepal: Between Ethnic Claims and Maoism’ *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* Vol.19 42-43
- <sup>4</sup> For a theoretical discussion of the role of public schooling in the development of national identity see Gellner E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism* Oxford: Blackwell
- <sup>5</sup> Gurung H. (1998) *Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions* Kathmandu: New Era page 85
- <sup>6</sup> de Sales writes of Nepalese rural migrants “Whether their personal journeys have been in search of a better education or, more commonly, in search of work, whether they have gone to the flatlands of the Tarai, to the capital, or abroad, they have come into contact with a modernity which, even if not viewed as 100 percent positive, marks a Rubicon....(they) are more inclined than in previous times to join a militant project for a society in which they would have a more respected place and a better life.” (2000:48)
- <sup>7</sup> Hoftun et. al. note “The products of the schools and colleges were equipped with the means to question what they saw around them and also entertained expectations of employment commensurate with their education...” (1999:95)
- <sup>8</sup> For discussion of the effects of deforestation and environmental degradation see Sattaur O. (1996) *Nepal: New Horizons?* Oxfam UK; Johnson V. et.al. (1996) *Listening to Smaller Voices: children in an environment of change* ActionAid
- <sup>9</sup> Hoftun et. al. , 1999:344
- <sup>10</sup> Panday states that in the 1994 elections to the House of Representatives more than 60% of those returned as members came from the elite caste-ethnic groups of brahmin, chhetri and thakuri which together account for only 31 % of the population of Nepal. Meanwhile, the percentage of elected politicians from the historically marginal hill-ethnic groups was 12%. This represents a significant reduction from the 20% who had been elected in 1959, prior to the introduction of the panchayat system. Panday D. (1999) *Nepal's Failed Development* Kathmandu: Nepal South Asia Centre page 109
- <sup>11</sup> “When a news item gets published in a newspaper about an alleged act of corruption, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate if it is a professional media work, a ploy to defame a political adversary, a proxy shot at an honest person on behalf of the mafia groups or even a notice for extortion.” Panday 1998 (quoted in Panday, 1999:133)
- <sup>12</sup> See Hoftun et. al. 1999:334-5
- <sup>13</sup> See de Sales, 2000:54
- <sup>14</sup> SAP-Nepal, (2001) *Peace and Governance: Concerns, Issues and Strategies* page 21
- <sup>15</sup> Figure quoted in Goodhand J. (2000) *Nepal Conflict Assessment* unpublished report page 59
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.nepal-school-projects.org/maoist%20problem.htm> page 1. See also Chandran S. & Joseph M. (2001) *Lethal Fields. Landmines and IEDs in South Asia*. New Delhi: Land Mine Monitor page 10
- <sup>17</sup> Chandran & Joseph, 2001:55
- <sup>18</sup> Goodhand, 2000:59
- <sup>19</sup> Figure given in recent BBC report – 9.6.01
- <sup>20</sup> A recent publication by the Maoist movement explains their military strategy as follows: “The enemy wants to incite us and draw us into confrontation according to his own convenience, but we want to harass the enemy, tire him out and attack him at his weak points at the time and place of our convenience according to our own plan.” Taken from *This is the Nepal Organisation* p.5 <http://www.maoist.org>

- <sup>21</sup> personal communication with INSEC (Informal Sector Service Centre), Kathmandu, January 2001
- <sup>22</sup> de Sales, 2000: 65
- <sup>23</sup> Manchanda R. (1999) 'Empowerment with a twist' The Hindu November 21, 1999
- <sup>24</sup> Johnson et. al., 1996:39
- <sup>25</sup> Taken from Onesto L. (2001) *Nepal: Women Hold up Half the Sky!* RW Online [www.rwor.org](http://www.rwor.org) page 1
- <sup>26</sup> *The Documents of the Communist Party of Nepal* page .3
- <sup>27</sup> See, for example, SATP, 'Assessment 2001: Nepal' [www.satp.org/nepal/Assessment\\_Nepal.htm](http://www.satp.org/nepal/Assessment_Nepal.htm)
- <sup>28</sup> Figures provided by INSEC, personal communication
- <sup>29</sup> See 'Setting Priorities for Preventive Action in Nepal' Feb. 2001 [www.preventconflict.org/nepal\\_finalreport.html](http://www.preventconflict.org/nepal_finalreport.html)
- <sup>30</sup> de Sales 2000:62-3
- <sup>31</sup> For discussion of the Bhutanese refugee youths' potential for armed militancy see John A. (2000)
- <sup>32</sup> According to Goodhand (2000:4), between 1996-2000 there were 18 recorded attacks on the offices of international donors which were believed to be the work of Maoists.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Maoist Insurgency and Tourism', Kathmandu Post, 1.11.00 *Political Militancy among Bhutanese Refugee Youth* Colombo: RCSS
- <sup>34</sup> 'Security Conscious' Spotlight Nov.3.-Nov.9, 2000
- <sup>35</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1999 former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba reportedly stated "What we must realize is that as terrorism increases, all our budget, including development budget, will be directed to combat the problem, to buy arms and for counter insurgency." Amnesty International, (2000) *Nepal – Human Rights and Security* page 16
- <sup>36</sup> See de Sales, 2000:65 for discussion of demands made upon the Kham Magars.
- <sup>37</sup> Amnesty International, 2000:7; Jahangir A. (2000) *Civil and political rights, including questions of: disappearances and summary executions: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/31*
- <sup>38</sup> Figure given by Kapil Shrestha of the National Human Rights Commission to the Nepali Times, 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2001
- <sup>39</sup> "We want to make it clear that no child soldier has been recruited in any unit of the People's Army" CPN leader, Prachanda, Reuters, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2000
- <sup>40</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, unpublished briefing paper.
- <sup>41</sup> Amnesty International, 31/025/2000 August 2000
- <sup>42</sup> Kathmandu Post 21.8.00
- <sup>43</sup> Dhakal P. (n.d) *Nepali Child Soldiers: do we know the truth?* unpublished paper for SCF (UK)
- <sup>44</sup> de Sales, 2000:50
- <sup>45</sup> Taken from Onesto, 2001:4
- <sup>46</sup> From demand number 19 of the Maoists' 40 demands submitted to the government in early February, 1996
- <sup>47</sup> CWIN (2000) *The State of the Rights of the Child in Nepal 2001* page 3
- <sup>48</sup> See Chandran & Joseph, 2001
- <sup>49</sup> Information contained in *Landmine Monitor*, 2000
- <sup>50</sup> Baker R. & Panter-Brick C. (2000) 'A comparative perspective on children's 'careers' and abandonment in Nepal' in Panter-Brick C. & Smith M. (eds) *Abandoned Children* Cambridge University Press page 173
- <sup>51</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that 23.5% of females over the age of ten were literate, in contrast to 56.2% of males. Figures cited in Hoftun 1999:96
- <sup>52</sup> The most recent government statistics do suggest that Gorkha District is ahead of the national average for girl enrolment, in comparison to that of boys, but that they do not yet constitute 50%, particularly after primary level.

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports, 1999

	Primary			Lower Secondary			Secondary		
	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys
<b>National</b>	72.1	64.4	79.4	31.3	25.5	36.9	20.8	16.3	25.3
<b>Gorkha</b>	96.8	95.1	98.4	35.8	33.0	38.4	19.3	15.9	22.8

<sup>53</sup> Manchanda, 1999

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<sup>54</sup> CWIN, 2001:9

<sup>55</sup> Comments quoted in Nepali Times, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2001

<sup>56</sup> CWIN, 2001:7

<sup>57</sup> For discussion of the inappropriateness of western conceptualisations of trauma and stress in relation to the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, see Hinton R. (2000) 'Seen but not heard: refugee children and models for intervention' in Panter- Brick C. & Smith M. op. cit. page 201

<sup>58</sup> Goodhand, 2000:4.

<sup>59</sup> Page 7