NEW PROJECT ALERT:
Three Democracy and Governance Projects Launched. A Quick Overview:

Sajhedari, Partnership for Local Development

Life of Project: 2012 to 2017
Goal: To improve the ability of targeted communities to better direct local development
Implementing Partner: Pact Inc.
Geographic Focus: Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Surkhet, Banke, and Dang districts of Nepal's Far-West and Mid-West Development Regions, including 50 percent of the VDCs in each district
Estimated Budget: USD 25 million

Building on the successes and lessons learned from two previous USAID-supported projects and complementing the work of Nepal government and other donor programs, Sajehdari is designed to improve communities' ability to better direct their own development. Over the next five years, the project intends to strengthen the relationship between Nepalis and their officials, and to improve transparency, accountability, and responsiveness at the local level. The project will work with local communities, civil society and government counterparts to create a more positive environment for local development, help communities identify and access local and national resources, increase participation in community planning and oversight, and strengthen the effectiveness of local government. Sajhedari will facilitate the development of inclusive plans that meet the demands of the broader community, including historically marginalized populations.

Community Initiatives for Common Understanding

Life of Project: 2013 to 2016
Goal: To foster understanding and cooperation between conflicting groups
Implementing Partner: Saferworld, through two local organizations, Child Workers in Nepal and Informal Sector Service Centre
Geographic Focus: 15 VDCs in the conflict-affected Kailali, Bardiya, Surkhet, Banke, and Sunsari districts
Estimated Budget: USD 1.14 million

The Community Initiatives for Common Understanding project will seek to address the root causes of conflict in local communities by bringing together representatives of conflicting groups to interact purposefully and seek possible solutions. The project will foster understanding and cooperation between conflicting groups. It aims to engage 9,000 at-risk and conflict-affected youth, including ex-combatants and affected communities, by attempting to break down existing barriers and encouraging peaceful dialogue, and building on healthy relationships in order to identify and collaborate on community development activities. It will simultaneously raise district- and national-level awareness of conflict-sensitive development and rehabilitation programming.

Inclusive Resource Management Initiative

Life of Project: 2013 to 2015
Goal: To enhance stability through conflict resolution and inclusive management of natural resources
Implementing Partner: Mercy Corps through two local partners, Backward Society Education and Shakarmi Samaj
Geographic Focus: 20 VDCs of Kailali, Bardiya, Banke, and Dang districts
Estimated Budget: USD 1.16 million

Inclusive Resource Management Initiative will seek to enhance stability through natural resource conflict resolution and inclusive natural resource management. It will promote inclusive natural resource management, use, and decision making; and reduce competition through joint environmental and economic initiatives. The project will benefit 237,000 community members, particularly youth and women in the four target districts.

WHAT ROLE DOES USAID PLAY TO SUPPORT NEPAL'S ELECTIONS?

USAID is poised to support Nepal's elections with five programs implemented through six partners. An overview –

Monitoring Nepal's Peace Process and Constitution Drafting Project
Partner: The Carter Center | Budget: USD 2.6 M | Life of Project: 9/2009-12/2013
In addition to other aspects of the peace process, The Carter Center monitors elections preparations across each region. To date, they have observed the citizenship registration and voter registration drive, documented local governance processes absent local elections, and surveyed perceptions of the elections process. Recommendations drawn from the observations are shared bi-monthly with local and international stakeholders. The project's long-term observers are accredited by the Elections Commission as international observers and The Carter Center is set to monitor the elections.

Strengthening Political Parties, Electoral and Legislative Processes Project
Partners: The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) | Budget: USD 23.9 M | Life of Project: 8/2010-8/2015
While NDI works with political parties to ready them for the elections, IFES supports the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) through technical assistance and training of their District Elections Offices. NDI provides training to political parties to inform them of ECN requirements for political party registration, the elections code of conduct, constituent outreach, voter registration, campaigning and agenda development. Additionally, NDI established the "Democracy and Elections Watch," which represents a coalition of traditionally marginalized populations and will train and deploy 6,000 observers covering all 240 constituencies. IFES provides technical assistance and training to the ECN in order to improve public outreach for voter registration, electoral education, electoral law reform, and capacity building. IFES also works in 26 districts through six local NGOs that target Dalit, women, freed Kamaiya, youth, and people with disabilities for electoral education and voter registration. IFES recently produced two radio PSAs targeting Nepali youth to encourage them to register to vote before the July 15 deadline.

Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) Project
Partner: Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction | Budget: USD 1.05 M | Life of Project: 12/2012-1/2016
USAID is one of eight donors that support the Government of Nepal-managed NPTF through a pooled fund mechanism. The Fund is responsible for implementing the commitments under the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement - including elections for the promulgation of the constitution. The Election Commission's largest financial support comes through the NPTF for the upcoming election ($94.1 M for elections security and $31.3 M for elections). Recently the NPTF funded the Ministry of Home Affairs to conduct a citizenship registration drive in tandem with ECN's voter registration.

Promoting Inclusive Political Process in the Terai
Increased participation of marginalized communities in national voter registration

"As is the cases for many rural Muslim women of Nepal, I had little knowledge about my political rights. This changed when a social mobilizer visited our village. My family and I are now all registered to vote and I am encouraging everyone to register as well," said Maithool Khatun, who learned about voter registration and other civil rights from Janaki Women's Awareness Society (JWAS) – a sub-grantee to the USAID-supported voter education initiative in the Terai region. This initiative is part of USAID's Strengthening Political Parties, Electoral and Legislative Processes program.

Implemented through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), USAID's program works to enhance electoral participation amongst disadvantaged populations—particularly ethnic minorities, Dalits (low caste), Kamaiya (freed bonded laborers) women, and youth—who have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes in the country. Since the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections, these groups have gained legally defined quotas for representation. Working with the Election Commission and six local organizations such as JWAS, the program helps ensure greater political participation by marginalized populations. Through this program, over 5,000 members of these communities are now trained as voter educators, becoming long-term resources to support public awareness campaigns for future elections.

In addition to promoting greater political participation by marginalized populations, it aims to restore citizen confidence in democratic processes and institutions.

Ms. Phula Devu Harijan, another beneficiary of the program, states, "I am finally a registered voter at the age of 65. I am keenly looking forward to casting my vote for the first time in my life." Including voter education in community-level development activities has not only been enthusiastically embraced but will greatly increase the development impact on marginalized communities. Over 1.7 million marginalized community members have been reached personally, and three quarters of potential voters in the Terai have now registered to vote.

Encouraging Youth to Vote !

Through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and its local NGO partner, Youth Initiative, USAID supported the development of two fun and informative radio PSAs aimed at encouraging young Nepalis to get themselves registered to vote before the July 15 deadline for the November Constituent Assembly elections. Click here to listen to the PSAs. "Your Right! Your Choice! Voting is your Voice!" Spread the message!

NEW VIDEO: Combating Trafficking in Nepal

In May 2013, USAID launched a short documentary that highlights the changing dynamics of trafficking in Nepal and demonstrates the efforts, challenges, and accomplishments of the government and civil society, through the eyes of trafficking survivors and the USAID-funded Combating Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) project. Trafficking is a serious problem in Nepal, characterized by cross-border, international, and internal trafficking of women, men, and children. Many migrants, mostly youth, migrate via India to other destinations where they are vulnerable to sexual and labor exploitation.

"Sita" went to Malaysia dreaming of a job in either a hotel or a school. But, as soon as she landed at the airport, she learned that she had been deceived by the recruitment agent and was forced to work as a maid in a private house where she was subjected to physical and mental abuse.

The CTIP project takes a holistic approach to address protection, prosecution, and prevention of trafficking in persons by building capacity of law enforcement and the judiciary to effectively implement the Trafficking in Persons Act, provide information on safe migration to prevent trafficking, and provide relevant services to protect victims of trafficking.

Click the image or this link to view the video.