Title of Project: Creating Safe Spaces for Victims of GBV  
Country where project took place: Nepal  
Nominating College, University, or Institution: International House New York  
Designated project leader: Amay Yadav, India, Columbia University

Narrative Reflection

Summary

The aim of our project was to raise awareness of issues of gender-based violence, build local women’s capacity to take collective action and create safe spaces in their own communities. We worked towards this aim through informative and interactive workshops with local women from Lumbini, Nepal and its surrounding villages. The workshops were conducted by a professional trainer experienced in gender-based violence and psycho-social support, who introduced participants to relevant topics, such as violence against women, patriarchy and its structures and community safeguards against gender-based violence. They were further trained in how to take collective action against violence and use government services for the same. The post-survey shows drastic increase in their knowledge compared to baseline regarding these issues.

Project Description

How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project?

I grew up in a family of women and that exposed me, at a very young age, to how gender-based violence was rampant in aspects of society regardless of the class one belongs to. Further, working in rural India with organizations using innovative ideas to tackle this issue, I decided to pursue a similar approach in neighboring Nepal with Atoot that has been working in the region using sports-based youth development and education with local girls for over four years. This has helped them gain trust of the local community – an imperative for such an intervention.

Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?

A very important factor in selecting the location was the prior existence of local relationships of the partner organization. This played a key role in getting potential beneficiaries to attend the workshops. It is not an easy conversation in these parts, moreover the time commitment required for these workshops was only possible due to the trust in the local partner. Further, the logistical issues related to conducting these workshops from venue, food, transport, and other related necessities was streamlined by the local partner.

What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?

Reducing the time of the workshop since women could not be out of their houses for that long especially over two days. Further, it was their sowing season, so their availability was limited. Despite that they participated for over 8 hours on both days.

Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

There was, of course, an indirect effect of other fundraising efforts of the partner organization – Atoot from Mia Hamm Foundation, British Embassy amongst others. These led to proper functioning of the organization.

Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe.
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This was the first such effort by the local partner – Atoot – involving parents of their beneficiaries. This helped them better their community relations and increase the ease in having discussions about difficult topics. Further, due to my rapport with the community through these workshops, I will return with next steps of this conversation that was initiated over this period.

Reflection

How do you define peace? Peace, for me, is both the negative meaning of absence of wars, conflicts, and violence, and the positive one – existence of opportunities for equitable access for all members of the society.

In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term? The project normalized the discussion about violence and their outlook toward it, as well as aiding in shifting their participants’ mindset that women have the agency to tackle violence in ways specific to the culture, region, and setting they find are in. This is a positive first step but in order for the change to be sustainable, there needs to be continued psycho-social support and efforts to maintain participants’ confidence in their agency as changemakers in their communities. In the long term, the seeds sowed would help the next generation to be able to take decisions important to them, feel safe doing so and have the freedom to choose and access opportunities that align with them.

Identify a significant conflict you observed or encountered in your work. How did you navigate the conflict and what would you like to learn more about as a result. A major conflict during the project was the drastically different outlook of some participants both before and after the workshop. This is very normal in any setting but due to the time constraint, this was difficult to navigate. We would constantly break them into groups and have them on the same team during role plays which would bring them together and make them think about different scenarios. This would get them to discuss their differences on their own and provide time and space for others to have their own discussions. One of the staff members was with each group and brought forth points that were worth discussing with the whole group.

I think I want to learn how to better navigate such scenarios while giving ample time and space for people to share and express without deviating or sidetracking from the discussion on hand.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you? It has been challenging, inspiring, and rewarding at the same time. Working in a different context and applying my learning from other contexts pushed me since there was not enough time to grasp the culture, so the process was iterative and adaptive. Regardless of these impediments, it was an inspiring space to be in – seeing the fruits of my efforts setting in motion something that would bring about positive change in the lives of people. This has reinforced my belief in the effectiveness of grassroots, last-mile and consultative interventions to bring about positive impact.

Personal Statement

A brief statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing the value of this project and what you have learned. Indicate the student’s name (yours or your teammates’) for quote attribution.

This experience of working on a project of my own has been a turning-point in my trajectory. Receiving a Project for Peace grant enabled me to challenge myself and reinforced my belief in collaborative community-based, grassroots work and the lasting change it can have on peoples lives. – Amay Yadav