

Population movement and the Nepal Red Cross Society

An example of a conflict-sensitive approach to better programming through BPI

Since the early 1990s, more than 100,000 refugees – mainly Bhutanese of Nepali origin – having been living in seven refugee camps in the south-eastern corner of Nepal. They fled Bhutan following the introduction of the government’s “One Nation, One Culture” policy. The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) was one of the first organizations to provide assistance to the refugees. Since 1992, it has run the refugee assistance programme (RAP), which is responsible for distributing all food and non-food items. It also runs a home gardening and nutrition programme and a fire-fighting and fire prevention service. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme are donors.

The refugee and host communities live together relatively peacefully, but the refugees’ presence has led to increased demand for local resources and jobs, which has been the cause of some instances of conflict between the two groups. In 2003, faced with growing signs of frustration, particularly among young people in both communities, the NRCS decided to review the RAP using the International Federation’s conflict-sensitive approach to programming, the “Better Programming Initiative” (BPI).

Dividers and connectors

The dividers include competition for jobs. The refugees receive free basic essentials from aid agencies and so can ask for lower wages than the locals, who are thus deprived of much-needed local employment. There is also competition over natural resources, especially firewood and water. Local and refugee populations have come into conflict mainly over refugees’ collecting firewood around the camps.

Another divider is the lack of future prospects for the rapidly increasing youth population in both communities, which leads to great frustration and boredom.

The BPI methodology applies five analytical steps:

- **Context analysis:** Identify and prioritize the division (“dividers”) and cohesion (“connectors”) that characterize the context.
- **Aid programme description:** Describe planned actions in detail: why, where, what, when, with whom, by whom and, most importantly, how aid is being offered.
- **Impact identification:** Will aid reinforce or weaken dividers and connectors? Aid has an impact through its material consequences (e.g., how its distribution affects existing inequalities and divisions in society) and its symbolic consequences (e.g., who it legitimizes or delegitimizes).
- **Options:** For each impact identified, brainstorm programming options that will reinforce positive and decrease negative impacts.
- **Repeat the analysis:** Contexts change rapidly, as do constraints and opportunities for aid programming. Analysis should be updated as frequently as the project cycle permits.

One result is young people seeking excitement and a sense of purpose in conflict with “the other side”. They are also exposed to the ongoing conflict between the Nepali government and the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist.

Connectors include the fact that most refugees are of Nepali ethnic origin and have the same culture, religion and language as the local community. They sometimes



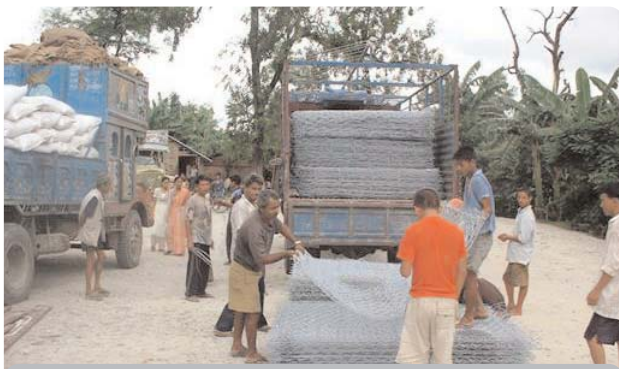
Disaster Preparedness in local house design

share family links and celebrate festivals together. They are also exposed to the same natural disasters, mainly floods; both communities therefore need better flood defences and relief assistance in case of flooding. They also share a common interest in maintaining access to the natural resources of the area.

National Society programming

As tension between the local and refugee populations worsened, the NRCS used BPI analysis to address the genuine needs and vulnerabilities in the local community.

The Society set up a programme whose two main objectives are to develop a cordial relationship between both populations and to enhance their living standards focusing on their original work trades. In 2003, it provided three types of training (carpentry, sewing and modern agriculture) to a total of 680 people (330 refugees and 250 local people).



Belangi 1 Refugee camp: Unloading steel cages to be filled with stones for river bank strengthening. (project funded by Netherlands Red Cross).

Impact on dividers and connectors

The training programme provides a neutral space where refugees and local people can meet to strengthen the connections between them. In 2004, 164 trainees from both communities agreed that the courses had helped to improve understanding and communication between their communities. Some refugees have been confined to their camps for 12 years; that the training took place

outside the camps was a positive aspect for them. Both communities have requested more such training courses.

Options

The NRCS has also secured funding to strengthen local riverbanks. It aims to offer training courses to more participants in a wider range of subjects, with a more in-depth curriculum, and to supply tools and materials so that the skills learned can be better implemented.

Other options include sports and recreation activities for refugee and local youth to increase opportunities for positive interaction, an afforestation project and the establishment of a kerosene stove workshop to increase the number of stoves available and thus reduce the competition for firewood.

Lessons learned

How any programme uses and distributes resources will have a positive or negative, direct or indirect impact on the context in which it operates. In addition to direct technical support, such as skills training and provision of resources, the best way to strengthen development is through the provision of an open, secure and peaceful environment, free from violent conflict or intimidation. An impact analysis such as BPI is, therefore, a crucial element in any assistance programme intended to strengthen livelihood outcomes.

The BPI methodology can be useful in planning and analysing programmes in fields other than conflict and post-conflict situations, for example those associated with population movement. The influx of population into an area inevitably places stress and demands upon local resources, thus increasing the possibility for aid agencies to create more tension and conflict by implementing programmes that are perceived as favouring one group over another. In a situation such as that in Nepal, the host community may be just as vulnerable and in need of assistance as the refugees. The benefits of using a life-skills development programme, for example, can be felt in terms of decreased tension between both populations, and in the way they perceive NRCS action.

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