



THE PEACEBUILDERS

“Keeping the ICF Circle informed; Connecting with Community of Interreligious Peacebuilders”

Bi-monthly E-Newsletter of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs



SoP Alumnus facilitates NVC Workshop in Mymensingh, Bangladesh

A workshop on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was held on August 12, 2023, at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University as a part of the International Youth Day Celebration 2023. The workshop was facilitated by Probin Tripura, an alumnus of the School of Peace 2023 that was held in Bali, Indonesia. The workshops' objectives were to give the participants basic knowledge about NVC and help them identify the conflicts in their individual lives by using NVC language and resolving them. The workshop was organized by Rangdhanu, a volunteer organization at the university. The organization aims to promote peace and understanding among young people and helps people by donating blood.



Probin facilitating the workshop

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A total of 15 students from the university participated in the workshop. The workshop lasted for two hours and covered the following topics:

- What is Nonviolent Communication?
- The four elements of NVC: observation, feeling, need, and request
- 4 Ears: Handling Triggers
- Anger Transformation

The facilitator explained the workshop's agenda and led group activities to teach the four elements of NVC and 4 Ears of Handling Triggers. The workshop was conducted in a very interactive and engaging way. The participants expressed that they had a basic understanding of NVC and that they would use it in their daily lives. They also said that they would recommend the workshop to others.



"It was my first ever workshop on Nonviolent Communication," said Probin Tripura. "I learned about it for the first time during School of Peace 2023 was held in Bali. I did not just want to keep the learnings for myself. I wanted to spread the learnings among the other youth. That is why I grabbed the opportunity to facilitate this workshop. My experience was very good and the workshop went well. The participants loved the session. I would love to facilitate more workshops on NVC ahead and will try to bring positive impact in other people's lives."

***Probin Tripura,
ICF Alumnus, Bangladesh***

Three-Day Workshop on Understanding Dowry System and its Impacts on Human Rights: Reflections from the Participants in their Own Words

Learning revealed

By : Aakankshya Sharma

A public awareness program was held in the center of Pokhara city about the dowry system and its impact on human rights. 25 leaders from diverse communities and ethnic groups, religious groups attended the workshop. It was a wonderful experience with all of them. Everyone gave a chance to learn different things from their knowledge, experience and perspective.

Day 1

In the beginning, the organizers of the program honored all the guests with Tika and khada. The first day began with a brief introduction, thoughts on dowry, gender inequality, and the impact of mental illness on human well-being, and reflections on its existence. We had a group discussion that Dowry has a long history and is prevalent for various reasons, it has become a controversial issue in today's world due to its association with gender inequality, social pressure, and financial burden on the family. On this day, we explored the origin of dowry, its evolution, the problems it creates, and efforts to address them.

Day 2

The Second day started with Role-playing exercises on dowry-related situations connection between the dowry system, gender inequality, mental illness, and domestic violence. On the second day, all the participants narrated some of the incidents they had seen in their society. We all charted out the causes of violence and the solutions to them and presented them in front of everyone. With the personal involvement and dedication of everyone present, we moved the program forward.

Day 3

The last day was the culmination of knowledge and action. Our contribution to end dowry can make a significant difference and we can start by raising awareness within our communities about the negative consequences of dowry and advocating for strong legal measures against it. One can lead as an example in society by not giving or accepting dowry at the time of marriage and encourage others to do the same. Support initiatives can promote gender equality and women's economic and social empowerment, reducing the risk of dowry-related pressure. By taking steps to encourage family and friends to question and rethink the practice of dowry, we learned that we can contribute to ongoing efforts to end dowry and promote marriage equality. And this program has played a major role in helping us develop social awareness. Also, we left there having built a good relationship with everyone.

This three-day program helped me to understand the dark side of society closely and gathered a lot of courage and readiness to eradicate it. I am very grateful.



Aakankshya Sharma posting her expectation for the workshop

Reflection of Kusum Bhandari

In the heart of the picturesque city of Pokhara, a transformative journey for changemakers was conducted for three intense days, exploring the intricacies of the dowry system and its profound impacts on human rights. The workshop, aptly titled "Understanding the Dowry System and its Impacts on Human Rights," was a collaborative effort between the School of Nonviolence, the Interfaith Cooperation Forum, and Nepal Unites. This symphony of change brought together 25 individuals from diverse backgrounds, regions, and faiths, united by a common purpose: to unravel the hidden layers of the dowry system and foster a society built on equality and justice.

Day 1: Unveiling the Historical Roots

The workshop commenced with warmth and vigor, thanks to Ms. Santoshi Wagle's heartfelt welcome with the overall objective of the program followed by khada and tika for all the participants and guests. Guest speakers, including Ms. Indira Pokharel and Saraswoti Subedi, added their wisdom to the proceedings. Laxmi Ghotame and Pabitra K.C from Pokhara Metropolitan shared invaluable insights, setting the stage for an enlightening journey. Day one started with a short round of introduction, thoughts around the dowry system, and the reflection on its existence despite the severe impacts on human well-being resulting in gender inequality and mental illness. The day was an exploration of the historical roots of the dowry system, where participants engaged in dynamic discussions, shared personal stories, and dissected the sociocultural factors that sustain this practice.

Day 2: Unmasking the Dark Corners

The second day ushered in revelations about the vicious chain, and connection between the dowry system, gender inequality, mental illness, and domestic violence. Ms. Aakankshya Sharma, with her exemplary leadership, delved into the cycle of abuse, provoking thought-provoking conversations and case studies. Ms. Binita Timilsina courageously sheds light on the commodification of women within the dowry system. The afternoon was focused more on the case stories, empathic listening of the personal experiences where human rights were being compromised, and even ideas to empower women and awareness of the community members were explored and discussed.



Kusum Bhandari (in glasses) during the sharing of personal stories activity

Day 3: Emerging as Changemakers

The final day marked the culmination of knowledge and action. Under the guidance of Mr. Nirajan Poudel and Ms. Binita Timilsina, participants found a safe space for sharing and emotional literacy sessions. Ms. Bishnu and Mr. Sri Ram guide the participants in a journey of self-discovery, support in crafting awareness, and co-create strategies to challenge the practice of the dowry system, reformulating the narrative of dowry as a practice of sharing love and care rather than the business. They delved into case studies, crafted advocacy letters, developed action plans for community-led initiatives, and created impactful posters, reflecting their growing determination to drive change.

Closing Ceremony: Empowerment in Action

In the closing round, a gallery walk showcased the collective wisdom and shared achievements of the participants followed by reading out the advocacy letter to the guests and government representatives by participants and handing over the letter with action plans and its urgency in the Nepalese community. Esteemed educators, local leaders, representatives from women's groups, and government officials marveled at the tangible outcomes generated in just three days. With a rallying call to action, the participants pledged their commitment to breaking the chains of inequality, injustice, and the dowry system.

During the closing round, Ms. Pratiksha Khanal skillfully unraveled the threads of gender inequality and mental health challenges, revealing the emotional turmoil that silently plagues families and communities. She meticulously connected the dots from domestic violence to broader social upheaval, illustrating the dark path perpetuated by the dowry system. While speaking, Ms. Khanal radiated a tangible sense of hope. She envisioned a future where empowered individuals would unite, resolutely dismantling the grip of the dowry system. Just as the vestigial tail vanished from modern humans, the dowry system would become a historical footnote, a tale for future generations.

Our workshop was not just a platform for learning but a space for profound exploration, thanks to Ms. Khanal's stirring voice. Her words transcended the room's confines, echoing in the hearts of all participants, and resonating deeply within societal consciousness.

One poignant moment came when a participant remarked, *"We used to think it was only in the southern belt of the country, it has already been impacting us, when we listen to each other's stories"*.

The resonating theme throughout this incredible journey was unity in purpose. Diverse backgrounds converged to forge a powerful force for change, illuminating the path toward dismantling the dowry system's detrimental grip on society. As the workshop concluded, its ripple effect will continue to spread, instilling empowerment, unity, and hope for a brighter, more just future. The hashtags #ChangeBeginsFromWithin and #EmpowermentForChange encapsulate the essence of this transformative experience, reminding us that together, we are champions of social change.

In these three days, we have not only created awareness and learned theory but dive deep into the darker sides and also forged a powerful force for change and I am immensely honored to have been a part of it.



Poster creation : Raising Awareness | Planning for community led initiatives

Reflecting on the three-day workshop

By Binita Timilsina

The 3-day workshop on "Understanding Dowry System and its Impacts on Human Rights" was an eye-opening and enlightening experience that left a profound impact on me and I am pretty sure for all after listening to the reflections from my fellow participants. We were a diverse group of 25 individuals, each bringing our unique perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. Our common purpose was clear: to understand the dowry system and its detrimental effects on human rights, particularly women's rights, and to take steps toward change.

Throughout the workshop, we focused on these key objectives:

Objective 1: We began by defining the dowry system and delving into its historical roots in Nepali culture. The dowry, once a token of love, has transformed into a source of financial gain and power, perpetuating gender inequality and violence against women. We realized that it's not just a cultural practice but a human rights issue, with severe consequences for women's well-being.

Objective 2: Exploring the historical and sociocultural factors contributing to the persistence of the dowry system was an eye-opener. It became evident that deeply rooted norms and beliefs play a significant role in sustaining this practice. We also unraveled the complex web linking the dowry system to issues like domestic violence, mental health challenges, and gender inequality. This understanding deepened our commitment to addressing these interconnected problems.



Binita Timilsina in black t-shirt during the listening activity

Objective 3: Analyzing real-life case studies exposed us to the harsh realities faced by many women. The emotional turmoil, economic exploitation, discrimination, and physical abuse they endure due to dowry-related human rights violations were heart-wrenching. We recognized the urgency of raising awareness and sensitizing our communities about these issues. Crafting creative awareness-raising strategies and advocacy became our collective goal.

Objective 4: Our vision for change extended to the grassroots level. We envisioned setting up support systems, safe listening circles, and advocacy for community-led initiatives. The ultimate goal was to challenge the dowry system, promote alternative practices respecting human rights and gender equality, and advocate for zero tolerance against this harmful practice.

The workshop was facilitated by Ms. Santoshi Wagle and supported by Ms. Bishnu Karki and Mr. Sri Ram Timilsina, who played pivotal roles in guiding our discussions and providing valuable insights.

For me, this workshop was a real and enriching experience. I take it as a real investment. I found confidence in myself and also felt very energized after the deep exchanges with the leaders and group presentations. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this transformative journey. It has reinforced my belief in the power of collective action and the importance of addressing deep-rooted societal issues. As we move forward, I am hopeful that our collective efforts will contribute to breaking the chains of inequality, injustice, and the dowry system in Nepal.

**#EmpowermentInAction #Changemakers
#HumanRightsMatter #TogetherWeRise
#EmpathyInAction #BreaktheChain
#Empower #RiseandLead #Speakup
#Enddowrysystem #empowergirls
#girlseducation #unite**



Participants honoring the facilitator Santoshi Wagle

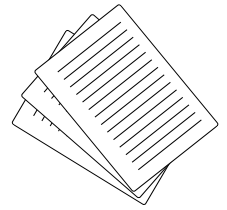


Group photo of the facilitators and participants

Letters from Santoshi Wagle's Workshop Participants

** These letters were originally read in Nepali to the ward chair and the government representatives from the ward, civil societies, women groups, and media people. It was later handed over to the respective government leaders. The government leaders promised to organize similar programs in the coming days. It remains to be seen how far the participants can go. Thank you very much for your support and care. Feeling blessed for this connection. Santoshi Wagle translated these letters and submitted them to ICF.*



Letter 1**2080-05-09****Pokhara, Kaski, Nepal****Dear Rudra Nath Baral****Ward Chair****Representatives of local bodies, mothers' groups, civil society and village development organizations**

Topic: Advocating for a Safe, Just, and Equitable Society: Addressing the Dark Side of Dowry and Calling for Human Rights

After participating in a 3-day workshop organized by The School of Non-Violence Nepal and supported by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum on the Dowry System and its Impact on Human Rights, we as responsible members of society, must address the important issues that hinder the progress of our community's well-being and prosperity. We are writing this letter with the hope that you could address the issue at hand.

As concerned citizens for social change, we would like to draw your attention to some challenges that have a far-reaching effect on the entire family and society, even though the problems in our society seem to affect only women on the surface.

The Dark Side of Dowry: We recognize that dowry not only perpetuates inequality but also acts as a catalyst for domestic violence, which threatens the fabric of our society. We have learned that this vicious cycle of abuse, inequality, and violation of human rights leads to serious physical, mental, and social consequences.

Urgent Need for Change: As responsible and informed citizens, we believe it is our collective responsibility to break the chain of violence and create an environment that respects the inherent dignity and rights of every individual. Our community deserves to thrive in an environment of peace, non-violence, and justice, and our contribution to that is equally important.

In light of these pressing issues, we would like to propose the following measures for the government, civil society, and citizens to implement:

Awareness Campaigns: Initiate mass awareness campaigns in schools and communities to educate people about the adverse consequences of the dowry system. We believe that knowledge is the first step to change.

Safe Listening and sharing group: Establish safe spaces where victims and survivors of domestic violence can share their experiences without judgment and find emotional support. These circles create a context for empowering survivors and providing collective healing to those suffering

Empowerment and Equality: Promote women's empowerment and gender equality to end dowry and create an environment where women can flourish without fear.

We are committed to developing a culture that respects the basic human rights of all individuals, regardless of their background. We believe that by taking these steps, we can build a society that thrives on the principles of equality, justice and compassion.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." Let's join hands for that change. Let us embrace a future where the rights of all are upheld, and violence is replaced by understanding, harmony and love.

We urge you to consider our collective call to action and collaborate with us to bring about meaningful change. Let's turn our shared aspirations into reality and pave the way for a brighter and more equitable future.

Thanking you,

Dowry system and its impact on human rights, workshop participants - (Women's Group)

Letter 2

2080-05-09

Dear Mayor, and

Representatives of local bodies, mothers' groups, civil society, and community development organizations

Subject: Request for cooperation in campaigns against dowry, domestic violence, and gender inequality.

After participating in a 3-day workshop organized by The School of Non-Violence Nepal and supported by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum on the Dowry System and its Impact on Human Rights, we as responsible members of society, find the need to address the important issues that hinder the progress of our community's well-being and prosperity. We are writing this letter with the hope that it can be addressed. As concerned citizens for social change, we would like to draw your attention to some challenges that have a far-reaching effect on the entire family and society, even though the problems in our society seem to affect only women externally.

Due to deeply rooted practices of the dowry system, domestic violence, and gender inequality, our efforts to build a just and equitable society have been overshadowed.



Dowry: We are proud of our cultural practices, but it is disheartening to admit that dowry has become a black mark on our traditions. This system not only perpetuates economic burdens and inequality but also contributes to violence, abuse, and loss of life. It is time to consider whether such practices are compatible with the values of compassion, respect, and progress we aim to uphold.

Domestic Violence: We all know that within the confines of our homes, some people continue to experience violence and fear. Domestic violence, often linked to dowry, tears apart families and leaves lasting scars on victims, affecting their physical and mental health. It is our collective duty to ensure that every home is a sanctuary of safety and love rather than a breeding ground for violence.

Recognizing the impact of these challenges and the urgency of societal transformation and public awareness, we urge you to take meaningful steps to address these issues as soon as possible:

Public Awareness: Conduct community-wide campaigns to educate citizens about the negative effects of dowry, domestic violence, and gender inequality.

Enforce effective laws: Strengthen enforcement of existing laws that protect individuals from domestic violence and abuse. Be aware and support those who do such actions to become accountable.

Develop support systems: Establish strong support systems, and safe listening and sharing circles, for survivors of domestic violence, including counseling services, shelters, and legal aid. These services can be a lifeline to those in need.

Promoting Gender Equality: Starting programs to promote gender equality from an early age. Promote equal access to education, employment, and decision-making.

Human Rights Advocacy: Ensuring basic human rights for all people regardless of gender or background. To protect the dignity and well-being of every member of our community.

As concerned citizens, we stand ready to collaborate with local governments to build a safe, equitable society. We believe that by addressing these challenges urgently, we can create a brighter future for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and support. We are committed to taking meaningful steps towards a society free from the burden of dowry, domestic violence, and gender inequality.

Thank you.

With full of hope,
Workshop participants from Dowry system and its impact on human rights,
(youth group)



REFLECTIONS: SoP Community Immersion



The community immersion in Blimbingsari village took place from June 4-7, 2023, as part of the School of Peace (SoP) organized by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum. All the participants of the SoP and ICF staff participated in the immersion. The village's tourism committee hosted the event and assigned the participants to nine different families from various professions and backgrounds. The participants had the opportunity to spend five days living and working closely with their host families, allowing them to learn about their culture, traditions, professions, and religions. Overall, the participants formed strong bonds with the host families, creating unforgettable memories. Blimbingsari, also known as the "promised land," was established in 1939 during the rule of the Dutch. The village's residents are predominantly Christian, and they chose this location to establish their community. Once a forest teeming with wild animals, area captivated the first visitors, by its beauty and approached the Dutch Government in Denpasar to secure the land. As a result, the village people consider Blimbingsari as a place blessed by God. The village is now home to 175 families, with a population of nearly 1,000. I noticed that most village residents belong to the upper and middle class, with well-maintained houses and some even owning cars. Situated between the hills and the beach, the village has become a popular community tourism destination where visitors come to enjoy their vacations.



Visit to local market of Blimbingsari

One remarkable aspect of the village is the strong unity among its residents. They take pride in maintaining cleanliness and the overall improvement of the village. Blimbingsari exudes a sense of peace due to the absence of heavy traffic, large crowds, and excessive urbanization. The village residents make a living by hosting tourists, engaging in gardening, farming, and food production. However, many of them live outside the village, such as in Jakarta, Surabaya, Denpasar, and Sumatra, for work and employment purposes. Only the elderly and retired individuals remain in the village, resulting in small household sizes with one or two people per family. Unfortunately, I noticed a sense of underlying sorrow within this beautiful village, as people endure the absence of their loved ones who have moved to the cities. Some individuals are living alone after the loss of their spouses, children, and other loved ones. Despite these challenges, I learned valuable lessons from the village.



Firstly, I gained insights into effective community organizing. Blimbingsari village has a well-structured system with a village leader whom the residents respect and follow. The people demonstrate mutual understanding, share food, and spend time together. They collaborate during festivals and other occasions, showcasing their unity. Secondly, I learned about their culture and roots. Despite being Christians, they actively preserve their traditional and cultural practices, seamlessly integrating them with their religious beliefs. During Christmas, they proudly don their traditional outfits and celebrate village festivals, engaging in various activities following Balinese customs and traditions. Lastly, I discovered the inherent trust among the village residents. They have deep trust in one another, resulting in an absence of theft or dishonesty within the community.



Participants learning gamelan, traditional ensemble music of Indonesian Islands of Bali and Java

Overall, the five-day community immersion was a transformative experience for me. I had the opportunity to interact with village residents, engaging in conversations about their lives and the village itself. They were kind-hearted individuals, and I was fortunate to spend those five days closely with my host grandparents. Observing how they navigated life in their old age provided valuable insights. Hopefully, I could set this village as a model village for my community organizing purpose in my village when I will be back in Bangladesh.

Probin Tripura
SoP participant, Bangladesh

“Experience gives us the tests first and the lesson later.”

I joined this activity called immersion for the first time. I understand why it is called an immersion. Community immersion allows individuals who are not familiar with the people and communities where they will work, immerse themselves in these settings.

On June 4, 2023, we immersed in the community in Blimbingsari village, in Bali, Indonesia. At first, I was very excited about immersing in the community. It is because community immersion opens my eyes to many things and reality, and I will cherish this experience for it teaches me to become a better person. I can mention many things, but one thing that should be highlighted is the efforts of the elderly women or women in the village, the way they contribute to the village, and how they look after their husbands. They could set as an example not only for the women of the village but also for all the women in the whole world. It may not sound like a big deal to the readers when I say this, but they go through hardships. I think of the sacrifices they make, the challenges they face, and all the women's efforts to carry out their daily activities and take care of themselves. Those things are beyond words. Generally, all the women in that village set up a small business of their own and do it happily. They have that mentality of not only fulfilling their own needs but also of helping others. This makes them as an example for other communities.

One of the things that challenges me to be resilient is the life of an elderly couple. There is an aged couple in that village. The woman is 76 years old, and her husband is 78 years old. Due to her husband's condition, he cannot talk much, only a few words, and he needs an aid like a crutch to walk. The woman takes care of her husband and starts a small business to supplement their income by making some food items and selling them to the shops to earn income. The special thing about this is that the old woman wakes up at 2:00 in the morning and prepares the food items. She does this work till 6:00 in the morning. After preparing the food, she packs them and takes them on his motorcycle, and sells them to the shops. This is amazing because in most of our countries, people over the age of 60 are usually found living with the disease and are not able to walk or drive a vehicle.

This 76-year-old woman takes care of her husband and help others without looking for help from others makes her believe that she can be an example to other women. She reminds me of a statement by C. JoyBell C.

"I believe in strong women. I believe in the woman who is able to stand up for herself. I believe in the woman who doesn't need to hide behind her husband's back. I believe that if you have problems, as a woman you deal with them, you don't play victim, you don't make yourself look pitiful, you don't point fingers. You stand and you deal. You face the world with a head held high and you carry the universe in your heart."

In particular, the bond between the people of the village, how they reflect their culture, and how they teach is truly outstanding. A community, by definition, cannot be exclusive. In a community, everyone is tied by common bonds and chooses to look out for each other, not because it is convenient, but because it is right. A community is made of individuals, who are all equal in their humanity.



Photo opportunity after learning the traditional dance of Bali

Service has changed me by bringing me into contact with people whom I would have not met otherwise. It amplified my capacity to understand and empathize with others. I realized that Community Service is important for many reasons. I realized that it is a unique opportunity to use what was taught in class in a real-world setting: to experience an increased cultural awareness and an appreciation for diversity. It is a great chance for us to build networks and relationships. And it provides us with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in the communities. My experience during the community immersion taught me a lot. I learned to become independent and face the responsibility being assigned to me. I learned to socialize with different people whatever their status in society. And most important I learned how to respect life and be thankful for what I have right now.

Follow effective action with quiet reflection, from the quiet reflection, will come even more effective action

– Peter Drucker

MS. Sajith Umar
SoP participant, Sri Lanka

Is it the generation gap preventing us from loving each other? That was the question I kept asking myself throughout my five days of living and working with our host at Blimbingsari village. As a young person surrounded by job and personal upheaval, I was not sure I can appreciate every moment with strangers who do not share the same language or culture. I could not help but consider about the generation gap between me and my grandma when I noticed that my host was an older adult. It would be difficult to impress older people because they are demanding. That frigid idea, however, was swept aside by her warmth. I understood that despite their age, culture, and distinct languages, two people may still have genuine feelings, thanks to the efforts of each other.



Anne joining the choir practice of the local church members

The intergenerational conflict between young and old family members is a complex phenomenon that can arise from various factors. Generational differences in values, beliefs, and communication styles contribute to these conflicts. The generation gap, characterized by contrasting worldviews and cultural norms, often leads to misunderstandings and clashes between different age groups. Additionally, societal changes, such as advancements in technology and shifting social dynamics, further exacerbate the conflict.

The younger person may feel misunderstood and disregarded, while older adults may perceive the younger generation as disrespectful or lacking in traditional values. From an early age, I observed how adults in my family, such as grandparents and parents, placed their high expectations and immense pressure on their children. Although their intentions are rooted in love, this emotional and educational attachment often resulted in trauma, leaving me yearning to break free from the confines of my family. Despite my genuine affection, expressed through acts of assistance and problem-solving, I found myself unfairly labeled as heartless and selfish by the adults. This unintentional judgment further strained my relationship with them, highlighting the detrimental impact of ageism within the family dynamic.

While I was with my host, I still faced difficulties and barriers. She only knows a little English, I cannot speak Bahasa. Her schedule and mine are different, and our dining etiquette is different. However, she and I naturally broke down that barrier to reach each other's hearts. My grandma and I actively used Google Translate to understand complex information, I never missed a single word from her but I tried to understand fully. I tried to learn more Bahasa to understand her. She also actively found some English words to express herself, and we use intimate gestures such as kissing and hugging to express our feelings of respect for each other. I tried to understand her, and she tried to understand me. Patience and respect for each other in our actions have made us understand each other, thereby building a deeper relationship. Since then, I have realized that patient understanding can help nurture better relationships and foster harmony within the family unit.

However, maintaining a relationship is difficult because the priorities and interests of the two generations are very different. Young people have a lot of pressure to express themselves and survive in society. So, when it comes to the balance between staying home and maintaining relationships with loved ones, they weigh the two and organize it in the form of a schedule. I had some activities with her, and a separate task assigned by the community immersion, and I wanted to perfect both. Therefore, I scheduled tightly to fulfill the grandchild and helper roles. However, I prioritized the urgent and important one, which inadvertently affected the people around me. This is also a problem I always encounter: trying to please everyone while forgetting about myself, which in turn affects everyone involved.



Accompanying the host family in teaching the choir members

After the trip, I realized I needed to mature emotionally, consider my priorities, and learn to move on. Up to now, I still keep in touch with my host and try to accompany her as a grandchild. Moreover, I want to bring the model of living with the elderly to apply to Vietnam as a bridge to get the young and the old closer together. Five days is not much, but it is enough for me to realize the love language of young and older people, and learn to express their love language in a way they can understand. According to Allah, "The reward of goodness is nothing but goodness." (Quran 55:60).

Le Thuy Khanh An
SoP participant, Vietnam

The journey of having a new experience

My learning journey started when I got an opportunity to visit Blimbingsari village. It was 147 kilometers, 4 hours, and 15 minutes of travel by bus. The village is peaceful and people are living in harmony. The name of Blimbingsari is from Blimbing, which means starfruits, and sari, which means flower.



Group photo after the community walk with the leaders

All people living there are Christians and they are committed to the community rules, working together to keep the community clean and manage safety. The architecture of the church building, which is the oldest church in Bali, has not lost its Balinese identity. At first glance, ordinary people see it as a common temple in Bali. Community immersion is something that I enjoyed a lot. It gives me an opportunity to learn very new experiences from my daily life. I found people doing hard work.

I especially liked the idea of working together and I found a lot of joy and happiness in them. The villagers believe in good health and a clean environment. They respect each other and trust each other. This can be seen from their habit of never locking the door, even when they go out. If the house is closed, it is just to prevent dogs from entering it. They also welcome people as part of the big family. I experience the natural giving and receiving from the heart without any expectations during my stay. I also got lessons about family love between husband and wife, children and grandchildren, as well as concern for neighbors. They visit each other, even if only by sending invitations, bringing snacks, visiting sick neighbors, and so on. From my host's family, I also see how they communicate openly while maintaining the feelings of the other person. Humility, simple life is another important thing that I learned from the family where I live. They believe that God is blessing their lives. However, I still see the challenge of the community as there is a trend of young people leaving the village. Meanwhile they mostly have a huge area of land, where someone should be working on it. Unfortunately, the people there are mostly elderly who cannot work on their land anymore, considering their age and health.

I see a lot of similarities between the community there and my country. The same challenges, the same way of solving problems, of living together, and working in harmony. No human being is free from these challenges. At first, I thought my country, Nepal, was a poor developing country and we were the only ones with problems. This gave me hope when I return, that I could make positive changes through activities both individually and collectively.



Santoshi helping her host family in cleaning their farm



Santoshi and Retha helping in harvesting the cocoa



Santoshi with her host family enjoying dinner

Santoshi Wagle
SoP participant, Nepal



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The Interfaith Cooperation Forum is a program of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. It values the significance of interreligious understanding and unity. Thus, it offers opportunities for study and appreciation of the different perspectives of religions on peace, and discern the role of religion in peacebuilding. Yet, considering that unpeace is brought about by many factors, including the onslaught of neoliberal economic globalization, more people experience poverty, internally displaced people are increasing as communities are destroyed, native wisdom and values are overrun by Western and consumerist outlooks, patriarchy and racism persists, and climate change is now felt as the destruction of the Planet Earth seems unabated.

Peace is celebrated as a gift from the Divine, yet, we, the earthlings have the responsibility to make peace a reality. Although its contribution may just be like a drop of water into the lake, ICF seeks to equip young people of different religious traditions, especially from the marginalized communities of Asia and Pacific, to make waves of peacebuilding actions.

Editorial: Peacebuilders speak the truth; check the facts.

“Without facts, you can’t have truth. Without truth, you can’t have trust.” These are the words of Maria Ressa, 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who founded Rappler, along with some Filipino journalists and technopreneurs. Under her watch as CEO, Rappler practices uncompromising journalism and its quest for facts and truth vis-à-vis fake news. Consequently, it earned the ire of the nation’s corrupt political leader for speaking the facts. Journalism that speaks the facts and stands for the truth is crucial in peacebuilding.

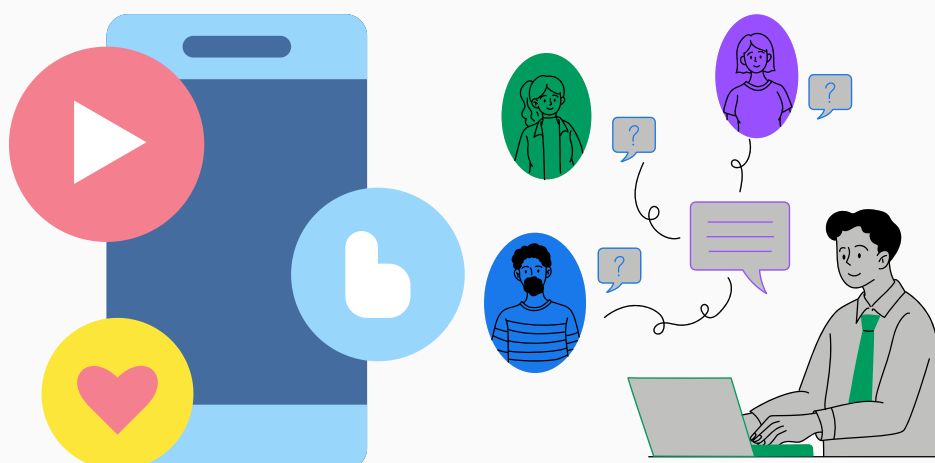
The world has changed so much with the advent of digital and social media. A glut of information comes floating around. Digital technology and platforms have shaped people’s habits and perspectives. One wakes up, and instead of saying a little prayer of thanks for waking up alive, s/he reaches out to one’s cell phone and checks out what is new on Facebook or TikTok.

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There are many experiences of conflicts that emanate from fake news. This fake news may be created by some just for fun. But in many cases, people create fake news to veer the public's gaze away from the facts and realities, couched in ulterior motives of hiding corrupt deals and businesses involving people who have public accountability. Becoming a vanguard of facts and truth is a challenge that young people in Asia and all over the world face. Technopreneurs, founders, and owners of social media platforms have their agenda. Their creation, systems, and algorithms, drive them to make money and engage in hideous deals. Some of these platforms may look harmless, but it becomes ethically questionable when they allow the politics to use them, or when they make business deals with unscrupulous politicians to influence or even rig the election results. For example, it is public knowledge that the former president of the U.S.A., the former president, and now, the current president of the Philippines used troll farms to mislead the electorates.

As peacebuilders, young people especially, need to hone their wisdom to discern how to use such technology for the common good. The technology could be employed as a vehicle of resistance against the narrative of the dominant powers that push the voices of the ordinary people to the margins. It can surely be used for advocacy for justice, human rights, and peacebuilding.

One must not be oblivious that the powers that be also use the same platforms to create stories that hide their business and political interests – be it on the local, national, and worldwide level. They are the mythmakers, and when we do not reflect on the implications of the news items they feed us, we believe their truth without checking the facts. Take the historical rift between Palestine and Israel. Religious groups tend to believe that Palestine is the bully, but fact-checking informs us that historically, Israel occupied and drove the Palestinians out of their native land. Telling the truth based on facts has risks as one may collide head-on with the powers that benefit from fake news, that hide their interests that affect the world. Thankfully, there are journalists and computer tech-savvy people who stand for the truth based on facts, in their local or national setting, and even in the international context such as the likes of Julian Assange of Australia, and whistleblower Edward Snowden.



The point here is for anyone to do peace journalism, and take the product of any journalistic effort with the stance of being “wise as a serpent, and gentle as a dove.” The peacebuilder needs to learn the ropes of journalism for advocacy. In her book, *How to Stand Up to a Dictator: Fight for Our Future*, Maria Ressa points out that the mission of journalism is to “Be Honest,” and to “create ripples of change.” The interfaith circle of peacebuilders needs to take the task of journalism in peacebuilding seriously. A peacebuilder is called to the task of becoming a mouthpiece to speak the facts and the truth. We learn from the Buddhist tradition the value of silence in meditation. It helps us empty and unclutter our minds and see things. It gives us time to reflect, analyze situations, and be aware of who we are. Yet, it also prepares us and gives us a reason to speak up. Can we be trusted with our truths? A peacebuilder cannot remain silent in the face of injustices and deceit. This task reminds me of a song that Michael Mahler wrote titled, “How Can We Be Silent.” Below are a couple of stanzas of the song.

How can we be silent when we know our God is near,
Bringing light to those in darkness, to the worthless, endless worth?
How can we be silent when we are the voice of Christ,
Speaking justice to the nations, breaking love to all the earth?

How can we be silent as we turn our eyes away,
And ignore the poor and broken who lie bleeding in the street?
How can we be silent when we're called to heal and serve
In the image of Lord Jesus, who has stooped to wash our feet?

Refrain:

None can stop the Spirit burning inside us.
We will shape the future.
We will not be silent.

