Evaluation Report UNESCO’s Increasing The Safety Of Journalists Project

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**Introduction**

**Context**

The aim of UNESCO’s Safety of Journalist Project is to create an environment in which media establishments and media personnel can operate freely without any threat to their physical, psychological and professional well-being. This involves the creation and consolidation of a system that ensures safety by introducing permanent means, methods and modalities that are both pre-emptive and post hoc.

There has been a proliferation of the media since 1990. This has created a complex media environment in Nepal. Media establishments range from professional media institutions to ad hoc and fly-by-night ventures. Media personnel also span the spectrum form full time professionals dedicated to informing the public to part time amateurs who use the media to further less desirable interests. There is, moreover, a marked difference in environment and operational conditions between the larger urban centers and the districts. With the commencement of the Maoist insurgency in February 1996 a new dimension was added to the complexity of the media environment in Nepal as many journalists and media houses became the target of violence and threats from both state and non-state forces. With the commencement of the peace process some of those dangers have subsided but have not entirely ceased.

The transitional phase from war to peace, during which the challenging process of peace building is being undertaken, involves new difficulties and problems. The politicization of media personnel, which had increased during the years of conflict, accelerated further as contentious issues surfaced over the writing of the new constitution. The expansion of business opportunities that accompanied the end of the war also gave rise to new dynamics in the relationship between the media and newly emergent forces in the grey and black economy. The growth of the remittance economy has expanded the monetary system and increased the level of monetization in the Nepali economy. The accompanying consumerism along with the absence of remuneration commensurate with inflation and aspiration has led to different kinds of temptations for journalists. These and other developments of a similar nature have created new situations and new sources of danger to media personnel especially since the endemic corruption in the political, bureaucratic and business spheres has cast its shadow on journalism as a profession. These new developments have served as force multiplier to increase the kind and scale of danger facing journalists.

The dangers facing media personnel in their different pursuits and in these diverse locales differ in kind, scale, intensity, severity, and duration. Some dangers are grave and periodic or occasional. Some dangers are persistent and hence serious even if they are of low intensity. The sense of insecurity that prevails among the media community has heightened due to the low rate of prosecution of perpetrators of violence against journalists. Apart from physical danger journalists also face professional insecurity on account of inadequate working conditions and unfair employment practices. Working conditions and work place discrimination are particularly acute in the case of women journalists. These dangers and insecurities impede the creation of a climate for free speech and freedom of expression fostered through a thriving and independent media. There is a compelling need to reform the media environment in Nepal and the most urgent of these reforms is a fundamental improvement of the security situation for journalists through systematic and institutionalized means.

**Purpose**

To this end the project “Increasing the safety of journalists and reducing impunity of acts of violence against them” was initiated on 1 April 2013 with Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Sancharika Samuha (SAS) - Forum of Women Communicators, Community Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB), Freedom Forum and International Media Support (I.M.S.) as implementing partners. This project was implemented within the framework of the United Nations Peace Fund Nepal mandate. The project was oriented primarily towards contributing to the achievement of Strategic Outcome 6 along with the ancillary objective of contributing to the achievement of Strategic Outcomes 1 and 2.

Contribution to the achievement of Strategic Outcome 6 entails the promotion of freedom of expression and security of journalists with the objective of encouraging, furthering and assisting dialogue, conflict transformation and social cohesion in order to peacefully resolve conflicts. This effort is also expected to make an adjunct contribution to Strategic Outcome 1 and 2 by increasing citizen’s confidence in the security sector institutions and the judiciary and criminal justice system respectively through institutionally addressing, at the level of the police and legal system, the problem of impunity regarding violence against journalists.

**Modality**

To ensure the above outcomes the project was expected to facilitate and establish partnerships between the media and other institutions, notably the relevant state agencies and civil society organizations in order to create the linkages that would result in effective policy dialogue that culminates in specific deliverables. In doing this, special attention was also to be devoted to addressing the gender dimension of threats to journalists. Specifically the project was intended to 1) enable the National Human Rights Commission and media associations to establish the institutional framework and mechanism for protecting media personnel, 2) build the capacity of law and order and judicial institutions to investigate and prosecute cases of violence against media personnel and 3) raise awareness about the causes, forms and consequences of violence and impunity against media.

To achieve the first of the above objectives the project was expected to build, through consultations, the knowledge and skills related to institutional design for monitoring mechanisms and media rights violations desks. The second involved dialogue and awareness enhancement programs specifically oriented to the law and order agencies and the judicial mechanisms at the different levels in different regions of the country. The third required the project to generate the awareness material, resources and events to enhance the capacity of journalists to protect themselves.

Per the above mandate the three specific deliverables of the project were 1) A national level independent mechanism with the necessary framework and powers to address the issue of security of journalists and deal with impunity of perpetrators in a speedy manner; 2) Improve the security and judicial institutions capacity to more efficiently protect journalists; 3) impart awareness in a way that all stakeholder and the public acknowledge the importance of the free media and safe journalists in protecting and preserving free speech, democracy and peace.

With Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Sancharika Samuha (SAS) - Forum of Women Communicators, Community Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB), Freedom Forum and International Media Support (I.M.S.) as implementing partners, the project created a network for dialogue across several spheres of professional activity in the state and non-state sector in several districts. The main participants in the dialogue process included the National Human Rights Commission, the Press Council of Nepal, various domestic and international media freedom and safety monitoring organizations, as well as judicial, police and civil administration officials.

**Partners and Coverage**

The project entailed partnership between the following 14 organizations:

1. National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
2. Press Council Nepal
3. Sancharika Samuha
4. Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)
5. International Media Support (IMS)/NIMP
6. Freedom Forum
7. Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)
8. Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB)
9. Media Action Groups (MAG)
10. Jagaran Media Center
11. Human Rights Journalists Association
12. Federation of Nepali Indigenous Nationalities Journalists (FONIJ)
13. Madhesi Journalist Association
14. Media Accountability Foundation

The 19 districts covered under the project are as follows:

1. Taplejung
2. Ilam
3. Panchthar
4. Dhankuta
5. Terhathum
6. Bhojpur
7. Khotang
8. Sankhuwasabha
9. Udayapur
10. Solukhumbu
11. Okhaldhunga
12. Dhanusha
13. Mahottari
14. Sarlahi
15. Rautahat
16. Bara
17. Parsa
18. Makwanpur
19. Chitwan

**Rationale and Methodology**

The project duration was from 2013 to 2015. The project has been completed and this evaluation is being undertaken to assess the relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability and overall performance of the project.

The evaluation relied primarily on a detailed desk review of the project documents and structured and un-structured interviews with partners and stakeholders. This was preceded by detailed discussion with staff at the UNESCO office in Kathmandu as well as with the project coordinator regarding the context, rationale, purpose, process and outcome of the project. Where necessary, follow-up questions and discussions were conducted through email. The initial discussion with project partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries were free form and revolved around their assessment of problems facing the journalist community in Nepal and their perspectives on solutions. This was followed by a set of structured questions on the project process to elicit detailed responses on the stages and methods adopted, as well as the extent and nature of their involvement and participation. Particular attention was devoted to eliciting responses to the challenges they and the project faced and their perspectives on the limitations and weaknesses of the project if any. Respondents were also asked to enumerate the list of activities they had undertaken in the project as well the concrete output and the impacts of these activities. While they were not asked to specifically assign a scale value to their level of satisfaction with the project, the evaluation process calibrated the strength of these responses on a rough scale to come to reasonably accurate conclusion about the respondents’ attitude to and perceptions of the project, its processes and outcomes.

**Limitations of the Evaluation**

This evaluation has been undertaken at a very difficult time due to the economic blockade and consequent disruption of the routines of daily life. As a result it was not possible to meet all the stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries according to the planned schedule. Nevertheless, it was possible to obtain the detailed responses of all the institutions critical to the project. Where it was not possible to obtain direct information responses were collected over email and telephone.

Some part of the projects outcomes and impacts are qualitative in nature and hence do not lend themselves objective measures of empirical calibration. Quantifiable outcomes present few difficulties in empirical assessment where accurate data is available. However, where outcome and impact are based on perception, the measurement of results must perforce rely entirely on subjective responses and on the judgements thereof. Since evaluation of the qualitative dimensions of the project are based on the subjective responses of the respondents, the usual caveats will apply.

**Findings on Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts**

**Project Outputs**

Among the major quantifiable outputs and activities implemented by the different partners of the

project are as follows.

**Reports and Documents**

*Report on Workshop on Institutional Design and Monitoring of Media Rights Violation*

*Report on Role of Journalists in Peace Building*

*Compilation of a Bibliography of Resources (Online & Offline) related to the Safety of Journalists*

*Report Analyzing the Status and Capacity of Functional Media Rights Monitoring and Response Desks of Professional Organizations in Nepal (A Research Report)*

*Report On Dialogue among State Agencies for Protection of Free Expression*

*Report on Consultations for Coordination and Improving Monitoring Documentation among Various Media Rights Violation Monitoring Mechanism towards developing a draft Joint Strategy Document on Improving Monitoring Documentation among Media Rights and Monitoring Institutions*

*Report of National Consultation among Stakeholders to Reach Agreement on the Best Framework to Protect Journalists and Free Expression*

*Review of Existing Laws and Policies Related to Free Expression and Safety of Journalists*

*Review of the Complaints Handling Process and Guidelines for the Independent Mechanism for the Safety of Journalist*

*Report on Legal Aid to Journalists and Free Expression Advocates*

*Draft Regulation for Enabling the NHRC to Establish the Proposed Independent Mechanism*

*Mapping of Organizations Working on Free expression and Safety of Journalists*

*Review of the Financing System at NHRC and the Possibility of a Mechanism for Financing the NHRC Mechanism*

*Policy Document on Creating and Operationalizing the RTIF at NHRC under the Proposed Mechanism*

*Policy Document on the Formation of an Independent Task Force for the Protection of Human Rights of the Persons Working in Freedom of Expression specially Journalist and Persons affiliated in Media House and Human Rights Defenders*

*Policy Document on the Working Procedure of the Rapid Response Mechanism for the Protection of Freedom of Expression and Media Persons*

*Manual on Institutional Design and Monitoring*

*Compilation of Cases of Impunity Related to Safety of Journalists*

*Presentation on Status and Capacity of Media Rights Monitoring and Response Desks Monitoring Violations against Media – Lessons from Pakistan*

*Assessment of the constitutional and legal architecture of freedom of expression, freedom of media, access to information and safety of journalists and review of the specific laws related to media*

*Presentation on Free Press and Safe Environment for Journalists*

*Report on Building Knowledge about the Institutional Design, Creation and Functioning of Monitoring Mechanisms; Enhancing the Capacities of Media Rights Violation Monitoring Desks in Professional Organizations; Organizing Dialogue with Justice Institutions; Carrying out a National Sensitization Campaign for Raising Awareness on Freedom of Expression*

*Report on Assessing Self-Protection Capacities of Journalists Including the Status of ‘Hotlines’ Maintained by Different Press Freedom Protection Organizations*

**Activities and Consultations**

Workshop on Institutional Design and Monitoring of Media Rights Violation

Seminar on the “Role of Journalists in Peace Building” in Janakpur and Dhankuta

Regional seminar on Role of Justice Institutions in Protecting Journalists: Legal Challenges Facing Journalists, in Makwanpur and Biratnagar

Dialogue among State Agencies for Protection of Free Expression. This involved the hosting of 6 dialogues involving District Administrator Office, District Court, District Attorney Office/Public Prosecutors, Security Agencies (District Police Office, Armed Police Office and Nepal Army), District Bar Association, National Human Rights Commission Regional/District Office, Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) District Chapter, INSEC Office, WOREC Representatives, and Freedom Forum local representatives. The dialogues were held in two phases. In the phase dialogues were held in three districts of the Terai—Chitwan, Birgunj and Dhanusha. In the second phase dialogues were held in three eastern hill districts—Okhaldhunga, Dhankuta and Ilam.

Dialogue among State Agencies for Protection of Free Expression Survey Questionnaire—Pre-Survey and Post Survey to ascertain perception and level of awareness among district level prosecutors, police, government and judicial officials regarding national and international instruments on freedom of expression and journalists' rights.

Regional consultations among media institutions, government agencies and other non-government organization on Improving Media Rights Violation Monitoring Mechanism, in Birgunj and Ilam

National Consultation on Improving Media Rights Violation Monitoring Mechanism

National Consultation among Stakeholders to Reach Agreement on the Best Framework to Protect Journalists and Free Expression

Consultation and Workshop in Dhangadi, Nepalgunj, Pokhara, Biratnagar, Lalitpur on freedom of speech and journalist security

Regional Consultations on Self-Censorship in Biratnagar with participants from 16 district in the Eastern Region.

Regional Consultations on Self-Censorship in Pokhara and Nepalgunj

National Consultation on Self-Censorship in Kathmandu involving three international experts— William Horsley, (Centre for the Freedom of the Media, United Kingdom), Edward Pittman, (Open Society Foundation) and Iqbal Khattak (Pakistan Coalition on Media Safety, Pakistan).

These outputs and activities were implemented to improve the overall working environment for journalists by helping to ensure their safety in the line of duty through building knowledge about the institutional design, creation and functioning of monitoring mechanisms, enhancing the capacities of media rights violation desks in professional organizations, organizing dialogue with justice institutions; and carrying out a national sensitization campaign for raising awareness on freedom of expression.

**Assessment of Results Achieved by the Project**

1. **Progress of the Partnership with Stakeholders in Implementation and Achieving Strategic Outcomes**

There has been a very high degree of collaboration and understanding among the partners of the project in the course of implementation. A project of such magnitude and consequence in an adverse environment requires time, resources and organizational partnerships of a commensurate scale. The larger the number of partnerships the greater are the problems associated with ensuring smooth co-ordination, co-operation, unanimity, consensus, and synergy of processes, means and objectives. The project implementation entailed partnership with 14 very diverse organizations with different mandates that had to be made to intersect with all its different dimensions. Moreover, given the high degree of politicization of the media environment, and the high level of conflict in the political environment, achieving the level of synergy among partners and stakeholder that the project has accomplished is no small task.

As a results, the project has been able to deliver a large number of outputs of very impressive quality. The documentation produced by the project falls into two broad categories. The first are reports of activities undertaken and records of the discussions and consultations among stakeholders. These documents contain detailed descriptions of the problem in Nepal, the threats, dilemmas and predicaments facing media personnel and media houses, the extent of professional inadequacies in the overall environment, the limitations of the law and enforcement systems with regard to safety and security, the terminological, definitional and data discrepancies in the reporting and monitoring mechanisms, case studies of threats, existing monitoring systems and documentary resources and the measures to be taken and methods to be adopted to resolve the problem. The second category of documents provides both general and technical policy prescriptions on the design of the independent mechanism, including issues of financing and sustainability.

Assessment of the documentary evidence and discussions with stakeholders indicate a high level of progress in the achievement of the strategic outcomes. The independent mechanism has acquired a very definite conceptual shape and strong institutional foundation. NHRC is unambiguously supportive of the mechanism and fully committed to taking it forward. Other partner organizations and stakeholders, without exception expressed approval of and satisfaction with the aims, the process and the current status of the mechanism.

Stakeholders were also equally satisfied with the progress made on other fronts, notably on the dialogue process. Women stakeholders particularly appreciated the platform for discussing their special concerns about physical and professional security. Respondents emphasized that as women they have hitherto not had any professional, solution-oriented media forum or platform to share experiences, discuss problems or propose institutional solutions on matters concerning their safety at the workplace or outside. While it is the case that a project cannot by itself, in the course of two years, transform the situation completely in terms of reforming the external environment, through its many activities it has increased the level of confidence among journalists and the level of awareness among the concerned state and non-state institutions and agents. To the extent that the project has laid the foundations for an independent mechanism and furthered and assisted dialogue on the issue of safety it has significantly contributed to facilitating the conditions in which freedom of expression and safety of journalists is taken much more seriously by the concerned authorities. This is a substantial contribution to Strategic Outcome 6. By conducting several regional dialogues for 19 districts in the eastern region involving district level functionaries in the judicial, legal, civil and police administration and raising their level of awareness about impunity regarding violence against journalists the project has also made significant contributions to Strategic Outcomes 1 and 2.

1. **Achievement on addressing the issues of impunity of violence against journalists.**

The different aspects of the issue of impunity is addressed by different components of the project. As indicated in the national workshops and consultations among various stakeholders, detailed and accurate compiling of the cases of violence against journalists and impunity is a pre-requisite for addressing the issue of impunity so that the appropriate agencies of the state can pursue investigation and prosecution. Accordingly the project has produced a detailed document that compiles the cases of impunity related to violence and threats against media personnel.

Including the issue of impunity in the design of the framework for the independent mechanism is another major initiative of the project. The proposed independent mechanism is intended to be an institution that can comprehensively address the issue of safety of journalists in all aspects that have legal implication and consequences. For such a mechanism to be effective it is essential not only for it to be equipped with the requisite authority and provisions to address impunity, other institutions, but to have the co-operation and assistance of other cognate and supporting institutions, both state and non-state, to possess the necessary capacity and be fully aware of all the laws, instruments, conventions and protocols, both national and international, that help to protect journalists and the freedom of expression. Impunity occurs due dereliction at the various levels of the investigating and prosecuting authorities. Diminishing and eventually eliminating impunity requires the police, legal and judicial fraternity to be both aware and co-operative.

The project component 'Dialogue among State Agencies for Protection of Free Expression' was oriented specifically for this purpose. Six such dialogues were conducted in different district towns and the participants included senior civil, police, armed-police and judicial authorities as well as members of the legal fraternity and human rights defenders. The dialogues were preceded by a pre-dialogue assessment survey on the existing state of knowledge and attitude prevalent among the relevant authorities at the district level on these issues. Following the dialogues another assessment survey was conducted among participants to gauge the enhancement of knowledge and support. The questions in the survey pertained to the national and international instruments concerning freedom of expression and journalist’s rights.

The survey questions were designed to assess the knowledge and perception level among police officials, prosecutors, judicial functionaries and personnel in the civil administration at the local level on a range of issues that included relevant constitutional provisions, national laws/code of ethics, the UN Action Plan on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Convention on Civil and Political Rights provisions, and obligation and performance of law and justice enforcing institutions regarding freedom of expression and journalists' safety. The pre-dialogue survey indicated a very low level of knowledge of these instruments and a generally poor level of awareness regarding issues of journalists’ safety.

The dialogues were accordingly structured to address these deficits. Apart from presentation that provided information to the law enforcement agencies and judicial mechanism, discussions at the dialogue focused on how these institutions could contribute to promoting safety and reducing impunity. These dialogues were able to secure a commitment from state functionaries to protect journalists better. The post-dialogue surveys also reveal a higher level of understanding and a more supportive attitude among these functionaries than they did before the dialogue.

The respondents who were interviewed as part of this evaluation were satisfied with the progress made on the issue of impunity. All respondents felt that since the culture of impunity was deep rooted as a legacy of the years of conflict, because the laws were weak and because the law enforcement agencies did not have adequate capacity, eliminating it completely will take time. However, given the increased level of knowledge among the concerned authorities due to the project activities, the general tenor of the response was that the climate and mechanism have been initiated to address it with more diligence than has been the case in the past.

1. **Long-term efficacy of the independent mechanism for journalist safety and free expression**

The nationally owned independent mechanism for the safety of journalists and free expression is one the primary objectives that the project is expected execute. In the current environment, the creation of such a mechanism on sustainable foundations requires co-ordination between many agencies and stakeholders as well as ownership and acceptance by implementing and safeguarding agencies and by the beneficiaries. Given the number of agencies involved in media monitoring and protection, the number of state institutions with overlapping jurisdictions and functions in this regard, the diversity of media in Nepal as well as the kinds of geographical, topographical and cultural terrains it is extends over, not only the idea of such a mechanism, but also its shape and mandate, authority and efficiency, capacity and competence, ownership and management, financing and auditing are crucial to its long term sustainability. Equally crucial is the very process by which it is intimated, accepted and initiated. Both from the very careful documentation of the process and from the responses of interviewed stakeholders and partners it is clear that approach to the execution of this mechanism has been systematic, objective and meticulous.

There are many indicators for the sustainability of the mechanism. 1) The choice of partners has been appropriate since it involves a mix of organizations that are critical to the initiation, creation and continuation of the mechanism. 2) The associated activities, with tangible outputs, that ran concurrently with the process of initiating the mechanism were designed to create the climate and the capacity to enable the necessary functionaries and professionals to support the mechanism. In the absence of such an effort the mechanism will be created in a legal, administrative and psychological vacuum and its functioning will be adversely affected. In short the necessary linkages between institutional jurisdictions and the relevant domains of professional expertise that are essential for a robust mechanism have been created. 3) The depth of dialogue and consultation that has preceded and accompanied the initiation of the mechanism is another strong indicator. Sustainability of the mechanism is contingent as much on the clarity of the concepts on which it rests as on the strength of the laws on which it operates. The extensive dialogues within Nepali stakeholders and partners from the media and legal professions as well as inputs from outside Nepal have helped in producing this conceptual clarity. In an environment in which monitoring is pursued by several different bodies and organizations, with very different terminologies, definitions and data sets, there is no commensurability of categories and discourses. Standardizing definitions and terms and producing uniform reporting formats is, therefore, obligatory if the mechanism is to function durably and in a manner that enables comparison over time and with similar mechanisms in other countries. 4) The enhancement of the capacity of professional institutions as a concurrent activity adds value to the sustainability of the mechanism since these institutions are a vital cog in the initial reporting. Both the monitoring and reporting of incidents by such institutions must adhere to the form and be accompanied by the kind of evidence that the mechanism can take cognizance of. The mechanism and its supporting institutions must speak the same language and follow similar protocols. It is not only important to develop this language and protocols it is equally important to train the supporting institutions in use of this language and protocols. In interviews with stakeholders during the evaluation process respondents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the pace and quality of capacity enhancement of professional institutions, particularly at the local level. 5) The level of co-operation, co-ordination and consensus between the various organizational partners has been very high as the responses from partners indicate. Such initial co-ordination points to a high level of coherence in the blueprint for the mechanism. Absence of initial consensus will lead to later complications. Hence, this initial consensus indicates that disputes over modalities and mandates will not plague the mechanism at a later stage. 6) The documents relevant to the mechanism cover many different aspects of its founding and functioning. This strong documentary basis has given the mechanism concrete shape and direction even prior to its establishment. Carefully crafted founding documents indicate the potential durability of the mechanism since such documents distil the carefully considered discussions on present and anticipated aspects of its functioning.

The evaluation process found only one dissonant note with regard to the hosting of the mechanism. The Press Council of Nepal suggested that responsibility for housing and running the mechanism should be with the Press Council since it is a specialized body dedicated to the conduct of the media. However, all other stakeholders were unanimous and emphatic that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is the proper authority for such a mechanism since its mandate corresponds most closely with the functions of the mechanism. It was also felt that NHRC has a larger institutional presence and greater credibility and experience in so far as defending rights is concerned. Given this level of unanimity on the matter, the Press Council’s current views are unlikely to interfere with the future functioning of the mechanism. The NHRC has expressed its strong commitment to the mechanism and has taken several steps towards operationalizing it by giving shape to the necessary systems and procedures.

1. **Capacity enhancement of professional institutions, state agencies including security sector institutions, the judiciary and civil society on the issues of safety of journalists and deal with the cases of impunity**

The project has undertaken several activities to enhance capacity of the above institutions. The outputs pertaining to these, including the documents have been listed above and its impacts have been discussed in the assessment above of progress of outcomes, achievements on the impunity issue and the durability of the mechanism. The feedback from respondents covered a range of issues covering these objectives and outputs. There are also a number of documents that deal in detail with specific aspects of these issues.

1. **Positive changes enabled by the project for journalists safety and the issues of impunity**

Evaluation of the activities undertaken and the outputs delivered in pursuit of the specific objectives of the board indicate the following positive changes. 1) Barring one exception (an extremely poor document by INSEC) all the documents produced by the project on the different dimensions of journalist safety and impunity are of very high quality. These documents are useful for their detailed discussion of the many aspects of the problem and hence constitute a baseline against which future progress can be measured. Among the documents is a very useful bibliography and list of repositories of documentation on violence and threats against journalists. Consolidated data and list of sources is the first step in creating awareness of the extent, nature and causes of the problem. 2) The NHRC has taken up the creation of an independent mechanism earnestly and taken several steps to operationalize it. This is major contribution to ensuring the safety of journalist since it instils in media personnel a sense of confidence that will enable them to pursue their profession with a sense of security and freedom from fear. Moreover, the initiation of the mechanism in itself facilitates the creation of pre-emptive deterrents since relevant agencies of the state that have participated in the dialogue are more aware that cases will be pursued on the basis of stronger laws. This deterrent effect could potentially have positive impacts on the issue of impunity. 3) The dialogues and consultations around the creation of the independent mechanism as well as the regional and national dialogues on safety and impunity with both state and non-state actors has led to an increased awareness and capacity of media personnel to articulate their rights. Many media personnel have not had adequate training and many media houses have not had adequate understanding of the nature of the problem. According to respondents the discussion and the media coverage of these issues have raised the level of awareness not only among the concerned agencies but also increased the capacity of journalists to protect themselves. In their view the process itself has had positive impacts. 4) One woman respondent spoke at length about how women participants in the discussions were able to share experiences of danger and insecurity and this has instilled awareness in women media personnel about the special circumstances affecting them. This has led to a greater sense of confidence. 5) The dialogues with security sector institutions, civil administration, judicial mechanism and the legal fraternity have improved their awareness of the issues facing journalist and elicited commitment from them about addressing these.

1. **Specific impacts to address the needs of women and vulnerable groups as and where applicable**

Addressing the gender dimension and the needs of vulnerable groups is a subset of the main objectives of the project. While the bulk of the outputs and activities deal with more general aspects of journalist safety, at least three of the project partners are organizations that are dedicated exclusively to or predominantly to women’s issues. While some of the problems faced by women journalists are of a general nature common to journalists as a group, some of the problems faced are very specific and need to be covered through tailor-made programs and provisions. To do this much more work focused exclusively on the problems of women journalists needs to be undertaken. The greatest impact that the project has had on women journalists has been the platform it has provided from a right’s and security perspective for them to discuss all aspects of the safety and security dimensions of their professional lives. One woman respondent enumerated at length all the different aspects of the problems and dilemmas faced by women in print, radio and television which tend to be very different and not very well known. This consolidation of information about the nature and scale of the special problems faced by women has been attributed to platform, purpose and environment provided by the project. Women face insecurities at range of professional insecurities at the workplace, physical and personal danger outside apart from the dangers they face as journalists. Both male and female respondents who discussed this issue felt that public discussion of such issues was neither possible nor useful. On open public platforms women are reluctant to discuss many issues because of cultural sensibilities. Besides open discussion would lead to negative publicity that would deter women from pursuing journalism as a career and therefore adversely affecting the already poor gender balance of the profession. In this context there was a high degree of appreciation for the project for providing the scope for purposive discussions oriented towards a right’s based solution. While all of these problems cannot be addressed within the ambit of the completed project there have, nevertheless been two positive results. 1) It has provided information on the ways in which the mechanism will need accommodate those problems which are amenable to a legal solution. 2) It has instilled more confidence among the women participants at these discussions and enhanced their capacity to discuss and propose solutions. No activities or outputs specially addressing the needs of the social groups that are considered vulnerable were encountered in the evaluation process. However, some of the participants in the dialogue and consultation process were members of such social groups.

1. **Document main lessons learned, best practices and propose recommendations to improving the safety of journalists end the impunity through building awareness and enhancing capacity of the state agencies, civil society and journalists**

**Lessons**

The project has drawn extensive lessons in the course of implementation and some of these have been collated here from the documents as well as from respondents’ feedback.

1. Media personnel face threats and dangers in the line of duty as well as professional insecurities at the workplace. The later are often as important as the former in preventing journalists from pursuing their profession in an atmosphere free from danger and threats. Both these kinds of insecurities these need to be addressed.
2. Monitoring and reporting of attacks on and threats to journalists as well as the impunity that results from the lack of effective mechanisms and awareness are beset by problems of terminological and definitional discrepancies and non-commensurability of reporting formats.
3. The extensive politicization of the media environment creates various kinds of threats not all of which can be cognized as attacks on journalists. These need to be clearly differentiated from attacks on journalists qua journalists in the line of duty.
4. For the mechanism to function effectively, it must have inter-institutional co-ordination and multi-stakeholder buy-in. This requires early and extensive consultations conducted through credible and transparent processes whose purposes have clarity and coherence which are communicated effectively.
5. Since a mechanism exclusively devoted to journalist safety is a novel concept in Nepal it also needs consultation with international experts. This will enable the special and local circumstances of Nepal to be adapted to fit into international formats, instruments and protocols. It will also bring into consideration the lessons learnt from other countries.
6. Enhancing the capacity of state agencies and other associated non-state actors, such as the legal fraternity, is a continuous need. At present the level of awareness across the country is low. On the evidence of the progress achieved by the project it would appear that periodic training can quickly address this deficit. However, since these personnel are periodically transferred, promoted out of their present positions, or retire, the need for such training and awareness raising is constant and the process needs to be continuous.
7. At present media personnel have a very low capacity for self-protection. This is especially true of places where the dangers are the greatest. Hence it is necessary to work with media establishments and with media training institutions to enable such training so that they can both avoid or deal with danger in the line of duty and be aware of their rights and means of redress as journalists.
8. The state needs to undertake more efforts to create the conditions for safety by strengthening the law and ensuring that its law and order mechanism functions effectively to prevent and prosecute violence against journalists. Hence any program to address the problem of journalists’ safety must work closely with state institutions.
9. Attacks on journalists are politically motivated and hence it is necessary also to work with political groups to raise their level of awareness to reduce the level of threat from such sources.
10. Women journalists and those from socially vulnerable groups have special problems of safety and these need to be addressed.
11. Not all safety and security problems can be addressed by a solution that is largely legally oriented. Other modes and mechanisms to address such issues need to be concurrently pursued.
12. While a timeline and schedule for implementing activities is necessary, there also needs to be flexibility in implementation to incorporate new needs that may arise, new lessons that may be learnt or sudden and unexpected events that occur. In Nepal there have been various developments and crises since the inception of the project. These developments and crises, like national elections, constitution drafting require, earthquake, the blockade besides disrupting routine life also require media attention and hence timelines for media projects need to be flexible.

**Recommendations**

1. The work undertaken by this project needs to be expanded with the same objectives to cover the rest of the country.
2. An institutional mechanism needs to be created for the continuous task of maintaining the enhanced capacity of state agencies to protect journalists and end impunity. This could take the form of a permanent, possibly residential, training institute for periodic short-term training of district level officials. Properly designed courses with appropriate facilities, besides increasing awareness and knowledge, will also increase state functionaries’ goodwill towards the media fraternity and help improve relations.
3. In order to foster the proper environment for furthering freedom of expression more programs need to be implemented in partnership with media houses and media-related civil society organizations to address those issues of safety and security that cannot be addressed within the ambit of the present project.
4. The special needs of women and socially vulnerable groups should be addressed through appropriate special programs.
5. The documents created by and lessons learnt from the project should be collated and published so that they are available in the public sphere. Such documents could become useful resources as teaching material in journalism departments in the country and as reference material for media monitoring organizations. Those pertaining to the mechanism could be published as the founding documents. Where appropriate, some of the documents could be simplified and published as handbooks.
6. To increase the capacity of journalists to protect themselves and to make themselves of their rights under law and the redress available through the new mechanism, a small handbook can be published. This handbook could also include a basic code of ethics to be practices by journalists. It will be useful to have publishing houses give these handbooks to new recruits.

**Conclusions**

Overall the project fulfils an urgent need in the Nepali media environment. Its relevance, particularly in its choice of objectives and geographical area of coverage is highly relevant. Its effectiveness and efficiency have been confirmed by all respondents in the evaluation process. Its impacts, both empirically verifiable and subjectively ascertainably are extremely beneficial and positive. All partners in the implementation have completed a highly commendable exercise in very difficult circumstances.