

Strategic Plan 2010-2013



Aawaaj

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INTRODUCTION

Since it began in 1999, Aawaaj has pioneered community-based responses to gender-based violence in rural mid-western Nepal. This approach has resulted in a broad and comprehensive programme addressing systematic discrimination and abuse of Nepali women and girls. As the end of the 2007-2010 programme cycles drew to a close, a participatory strategic planning process was conducted in order to ensure that Aawaaj's organizational capacity and programme design would be able to effectively respond to the issues occurring in the target communities over the next 3 years.

This paper presents the results of this effort, providing an overview of the organisations' history and development, a summary of how its key values and approaches , and the strategic objectives for 2010-2013 that will enable it to appropriately respond to Nepals' changing social, cultural and economic landscape.

REVIEWING THE PAST

AAWAAJ's GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT, 2000-2009

2000-2004: Conception & Establishment

Aawaaj – which means “voice” in Nepali – was started in response to a 1998 study on the situation of adolescent and pre-adolescent girls in Midwestern Nepal. The research, conducted by Irada Gautam of Save the Children UK, revealed that girls' opportunities are hindered compared to boys in virtually every area of life, and are routinely exposed to discrimination, exploitation, verbal abuse and sexual harassment, irrespective of caste/ethnicity. Realizing that the prevailing socio-cultural environment needed to change in order to create a safer and supportive environment for girls, Irada formed Aawaaj in 1999 with 7 volunteers. With the support of BICE (Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance), the team began raising awareness in the villages of Surkhet district in midwestern Nepal.

“Breaking the Silence”

After gaining experience with the communities, the need for providing non-formal education to adolescent girls - almost all of whom had never studied at school - was keenly felt. Aawaaj discussed this need with World Education, which subsequently provided funding in 2001 to provide non-formal education of the most vulnerable girls in 30 villages. Using literacy as a platform for sensitizing the girls and their families to the problems and their causes, Aawaaj began to develop its core strategy of forming “Community Support Mechanisms” (CSM), enabling citizens and authorities to take collective action on all forms of violence against women and children, including sexual abuse. With the continued support of BICE, the addition of a temporary safe house and skilled staff specializing in mediation, medical and legal services also extended the scope and impact of the programme.

2005-2009: Expansion and Specilization

The second phase of the Aawaaj’s development involved building and expanding on its community-based approach. A 2-year grant from Action Aid in 2005 enabled training of additional communities on domestic violence affecting both women and children, and the strengthening of safety and support mechanisms at the village and district levels. Support from Canadian Corporation Office (CCO) in 2006 allowed expansion to an 10 additional villages in Surkhet and Dailekh, while vocational training and small business assistance were added for survivors and those most vulnerable to abuse.

Due to the increasing impact of violent conflict between Nepal’s political foes during this time, Aawaaj initiated peace-building and conflict transformation activities focused on the needs of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), widows and children affected by fighting and those used as child soldiers. With the generous support of CCO and the International Rescue committee (IRC), Aawaaj developed a comprehensive responses including reintegrating displaced children into their biological or foster families; providing scholarships for boys and girls whose education had been interrupted; and vocational training / employment assistance for young women living in conflict-affected villages through the support of The Asia Foundation (TAF) and Winrock.

Together “We Can”

During this period, Aawaaj maintained its focus on gender discrimination, conducting training workshops to help break work-related stereotypes of women that limit their opportunities and fair treatment in the workplace. The Oxfam-funded “We Can” campaign was launched in 2006 to raise awareness of violence against women via “edutainment”-style radio programming, linked with local Listener’s Clubs, artistic competitions, and broad distribution of printed campaign materials etc. The campaign continues to this day to encompass over 300 Listener’s Clubs spread across 25 districts in mid-western Nepal. In 2008 Equal Assess partnered with Aawaaj to provide additional radio programming highlighting the link between HIV and violence against women. Meanwhile, Community Support Mechanisms had been replicated in the remote neighbouring districts of Dailekh and Bardiya, and the CSM model was expanded to cover psychosocial counselling, Safe Houses and legal counselling to respond to the needs of survivors in all locations. “Child-Friendly Spaces” (CFS) were also established in the most vulnerable communities in each district. The CFS centres now allow approximately 200 marginalized children to benefit from 2 hours of recreational and educational activities per day.

2010-2013: Consolidation and Professionalization

As Aawaaj celebrates its first 10 years of existence, it recognizes the need to consolidate the experience of a decade of work on behalf of children and women. As described in the Strategic Objectives below, this includes building on its unique organizational and programme strengths; adopting a “results-based” approach through improved planning, monitoring and evaluation; and strengthening support services which will compliment and improve the effectiveness of its community-based activities. Overall, the next three years will see Aawaaj develop its professionalism in these and other areas covered in the 2010-2013 Strategic Plan, in order to provide the best possible service to the communities it serves.

ASSESSING THE PRESENT

AAWAAJ’S VALUES, VISION & MISSION

As Aawaaj has developed, so has its capacity to articulate and apply its values as well as overall vision and mission. These were reviewed during the strategic planning

process, and while the content was found to remain relevant, they were revised as needed for clarity. This section describes how the organisations' values, vision and mission will continue to influence the ethos and work of Aawaaj as it enters its next 3-year programming phase.

Core Values

Aawaaj believes that continual innovations should be sought and that failure should not be feared. Our prime focus throughout the project cycle is on:

Empathy

We strive to identify and empathize with marginalized children and women to foster social justice and equity.

Participation

We base ourselves on the active participation of children, women, men, parents, and concerned adults throughout the project cycle.

Respect

We show respect for the dignity, worth and potential contribution of each and every person regardless of caste, ethnicity, ability and gender.

Value

We value the diverse culture, complexity and multiple perspectives of each person and their environment.

Integrity & Accountability

We strive to act consistently with our mission, to be honest and transparent in what we do and say, and accept responsibility for our collective and individual actions.

Ownership & Sustainability

As we address underlying causes of violence, poverty and the denial of rights, we develop approaches that ensure our programs result in lasting and fundamental improvements in the lives of those with whom we work.

Commitment and Excellence

We strive to work together effectively to serve the larger community, to constantly challenge violence against children and women, and to reach the highest levels of learning and performance possible.

Vision & Mission

Aawaaj vision and mission statements are built upon its values and also serve to guide programme development, implementation and evaluation:

Our Vision is a world of hope, resilience and social justice where all people live in dignity and security. We seek an end to all forms of violence against women and children caused by unjust social, political and economic conditions. The work of Aawaaj and its partners will lead to gender equity and sustainable development, fulfilling the rights and improving the lives of poor, vulnerable and socially excluded groups.

Our Mission is to eradicate all forms sexual, domestic and conflict-based violence through the process of empowerment. Our work will contribute towards creating an enabling environment through establishing community support mechanisms addressing violence against children and women. We bring about lasting change through a participatory process involving the active contributions of men and women, children, families, teachers, local leaders, existing community groups, the government and local NGOs, and especially survivors of sexual exploitation in all phases of our work.

Key Approaches

Aawaaj integrates a number of cross-cutting themes into its programmes. Based on solid development theory and practice, these act as guiding principles which underpin and strengthen our work with communities and other stakeholders:

Promote Empowerment

We stand in solidarity with poor and marginalized children and women and support their efforts to take control of their lives and fulfil their rights, responsibilities and aspirations. We ensure that key participants and organizations representing affected children and women are partners in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of our programs.

Work with Partners

We work with others to maximize the impact of our programs, building alliances and partnerships with those who offer complementary approaches, are able to adopt effective programming approaches on a larger scale, and or who have responsibility to fulfill rights and reduce violence and poverty through policy change and enforcement.

Promote Responsibility

We identify individuals and institutions who are duty-bearers with an obligation toward poor and marginalized children and women, and support and encourage their efforts to fulfill their responsibilities.

Address Discrimination

In our programs and offices, we address discrimination and the denial of rights based on sex, caste, race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, education, physical disability, and victims of violence.

Promote Non-Violent Conflict Resolution

We promote just and non-violent means for preventing and resolving conflicts at all levels, noting that such conflicts contribute to poverty and the denial of rights.

CHARTING THE FUTURE

2010-2013 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

This section outlines the Strategic Objectives for 2010-2013 that will serve to focus decision-making on specific priorities over the next 3-years. As a review of organisational capacity revealed that Aawaaj is doing admirably in this area, the objectives are focused on strengthening key programme areas identified during the strategic planning process. Each objective is followed by a description of how it will be implemented; other methods will also be identified as the strategic plan progresses over the next 3 years. The objectives should also provide useful context and guidance for annual operational planning, to support monitoring and evaluation by staff, donors and external evaluators.

Objective 1: Consolidate Strengths

As **Aawaaj** has experienced considerable growth at both the programme and organisational levels, it is necessary to consolidate its experience in order to both maximize and maintain the quality of its work. Examples of this process include the following:

■ Promote Application of Core Values & Key Approaches

Aawaaj is committed to living its 6 core values and 6 cross-cutting themes described above. However, as the organisation has grown in the number of staff and activities, there is a need to ensure that they are consistently understood and implemented. Regular opportunities to reflect on and apply our values and themes will therefore be provided to staff, partners and clients by selecting 4 to be highlighted during each year of the 3-year phase, eventually covering all 12 while allowing sufficient time for each to be internalized and acted upon. In 2010, for example, Partnership, Respect, Empowerment and Sustainability will be emphasised.

As values and themes are a powerful method of motivation and decision-making, this has the potential to significantly strengthen the programme in creative and innovative ways.

■ Increase Emphasis on Prevention

In recent years the demand for crisis intervention services has increased in direct proportion to women and children's increased awareness of their right to protection. As a result, there is a need to ensure these services continue to be available for those that need them, while not losing sight of the long-term importance of activities that will prevent abuses from occurring. Programme activities that are preventative in nature will therefore be increasingly utilized to target specific risk factors as well as protective factors among marginalized groups, with the aim of achieving a measurable reduction in vulnerability. Aawaaj will also seek to positively influence the knowledge, attitudes and practices of men and boys towards women in their families and communities, by forming peer education groups that respond to their specific interests and roles in society.

■ Prioritize Child Protection Issues

Although Aawaaj began as an organisation responding to the needs of girls and young women, the demand for services that respond to the wider range of abuses

occurring in families and communities has meant that the range of issues taken on by the organisation has grown. In order to not fall into the trap of working “a mile wide and inch deep”, Aawaaj will review and prioritize the specific child protection issues that it is best equipped to address, with a special focus on those that involve sexual abuse. It will also advocate for coordinated and child-friendly interventions by duty-bearers and professional service providers such as police, doctors, lawyers, etc. Strategies will also be developed to reduce the culture of shame and blaming the victim that contribute to out-of-court settlement of child sexual abuse cases, while increasing the implementation of laws that punish those who commit such crimes.

II. Adopt a “Results-Based” Approach

Over the years Aawaaj has developed a comprehensive programme of activities empowering communities, families and individuals. While both internal “social audits” and external evaluations have shown these have indeed made a positive impact, Aawaaj now wishes to become more intentional in achieving specific and measurable outcomes; in other words, to move from “activity-based” to “results-based” approach. This will also enable team members to continually reflect on and learn from the results of their action. Two ways this will be accomplished over the next 3-years are as follows:

■ Strengthen Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation

As the foundation of a result-based approach is a strong Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) system, Aawaaj will strengthen the capacity of its management and field staff in this area. This will include developing annual log frames providing clear and measurable indicators of success, and the use of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools to more accurately monitor the work of staff and measure changes in the lives of target groups. Baseline data will be collected (especially for measuring KAP indicators) and the quality of reporting improved via simplified formats linked to log frame indicators. Data related to cases of abuse and violence will be systematically collected and entered into a computer database, which will allow detailed analysis of the numbers, types and locations of cases, detailed demographics of victims and perpetrators, etc. which will inform the development of strategic responses.

■ **Improve Ownership & Sustainability**

Another foundational approach to achieving meaningful and lasting results is ensuring ownership and sustainability of activities and/or impacts. Although already identified as core values, Aawaaj will increasingly focus on these in our work over the next 3 years. Among other ways, this will include reviewing all of our activities and methods to ensure they enable eventual handover to communities; clarifying the roles and responsibilities of those involved; and identifying the knowledge and skills that will be needed to sustain their activities in the future. Following this, a Sustainability Plan will be developed with the participation of stakeholders, detailing the specific handover dates and capacity-building necessary to enable each target community to conduct its own prevention and protection activities after support is withdrawn.

III. Strengthen Support Services

Along with its core approach of community mobilisation, Aawaaj provides a range of support services that compliment and reinforce this work. A SWOT analysis conducted during the strategic planning process revealed that strengthening these could significantly increase the effectiveness and sustainability of mobilisation activities. While 2 such services are described here, others will be considered as operational planning is conducted each year.

■ **Strengthen Training and Awareness-Raising**

The success and sustainability of community mobilization is greatly affected by the quality of training and awareness-raising activities directed at government authorities, community leaders, existing women's and children's groups and the general public. A SWOT analysis indicated that the current programme lacks measurable indicators, methods and materials that support specific achievements in this area. As a result Aawaaj will strengthen its objectives and approaches to include training CSMs and other duty-bearers on the appropriate legal and social responses to various forms abuse and violence; increasing the frequency of training sessions for VDCs, religious leaders and other stakeholders who can support rights-holders; and adding village-based street drama teams, survivor-led public rallies and child-friendly BCC (Behavior Change Communication) materials to its Mass Awareness Programme.

■ Promote Economic Empowerment

As poverty both increases the vulnerability of both young and adult women who are already marginalized by society, and decreases the ability of women to seek safety for themselves and their children by leaving abusive husbands, it is crucial for Aawaaj to promote the economic empowerment of those that most need it. To achieve this the programme will focus on providing more effective income generation assistance (IGA) as both a preventive and protective strategy. Current IGA activities will be used to more intentionally reduce the vulnerability of clients with clearly identified risk factors for abuse, while survivors will benefit from a more accurate assessment of the appropriate type(s) of support needed. These will be expanded to include a range of services, including seed money for new businesses, loans or materials to expand existing businesses, and training for income and nutrition enhancement via vegetable gardening and small animal husbandry. Finally, the loan approval and repayment process will be strengthened with more formalized procedures aimed at increasing accountability and sustainability.

Each objective is followed by specific recommendations for practical implementation, which will be integrated into operational planning in appropriate ways and times during the 3-year phase.

Objective 1: Consolidate Strengths

■ Promote Application of Core Values

- Select 4 key values to prioritize each year
- Provide monthly opportunities for staff & community groups, families and survivors to reflect on and apply key values.

■ Increase Focus and Impact on Prevention

- Clarify prevention activities (Child At Risk Savings Groups, Scholarships, Economic Support, etc.) and link with clear indicators of reduced vulnerability
- Assess risk / protective factors of all clients, then use case planning and social services to reduce risk / increasing protective factors to a minimum standard by a specific date
- Influence knowledge, attitudes and practices of men and boys by responding to their interests and roles in society, ex. being an effective head

of household, strengthening marriages, human sexuality (men) & sports, sexual development (boys), role of alcohol in abuse, etc.

■ **Increase Focus & Impacts on Children**

- Prioritize focus on child protection issues from among the following:
 - Family-based sexual abuse, inc. step parents
 - Violence against children in families
 - Sex and labour trafficking of children, inc. recruitment by females
 - Child/adult/gang/violent rape
 - Sexual abuse of boys
 - Early marriage
- Promote integrated responses and child-friendly systems among duty-bearers, e. g. doctors, teachers, lawyers, police etc.
- Address blaming the victim mentality, and other deeper levels of KAP change beyond awareness of violations, laws, etc.
- Strengthen mediation goals and skills (training if needed), inc. reducing impacts on children, using Harm Reduction into when abusive behaviour or legal redress is not feasible, and conducting regular follow-up visits
- Develop strategy to improve implementation of law, e.g. reduce
- Negotiation of out-of-court settlements, marriage to perpetrator and root causes such as non-mandatory investigations, corruption, loss of prestige, duration of legal process, etc.
- Provide increased opportunities for abused women and children to
- Regain dignity and social respect, ex. social events, creative/performing arts, participating in advocacy events, etc.

II. Develop a “Results-Based” Approach

■ **Strengthen Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation**

- Develop and implement a new log frame providing clear indicators and data collection tools to more accurately measure both quantitative and qualitative achievements.
- Ensure that baseline data is collected and used when appropriate

- Improve reporting quality improved via clear formats linked with log frame indicators, and improved narrative reporting
- Monitor trends in abuse via systematic collection and entry of case statistics into a computer database, which can further inform the development of strategic responses. (e.g. numbers, types and locations of cases, detailed demographics of victims and perpetrators, use of alcohol-drugs, weapons, etc.)
- Provide training for Management, field staff, and eventually community network members (both children and adults) in M&E methods and tools

■ **Improve Ownership & Sustainability**

- Identify the primary community mobilization methods (CSM, Change Makers, CPC/Para-Counsellors, etc.) and their roles, responsibilities and support services are needed for success
- Develop a Sustainability Plan with specific phases, handover dates and activities necessary to enable each target community to take over and sustain achievements after Aawaaj fully withdraws its support
- Transfer Aawaaj and center-based activities to community groups as appropriate, i.e. local fundraising for victim by para-counsellors, economic support to survivors
- Assess duplication of services with other NGOs and revise activities as needed, including developing formal partnerships with those that can provide social services, esp. IGA, health, nutrition, educational and job placement support
- Increase motivation & commitment of group members by ensuring benefits to members' personal & professional lives, ex. training related to their work or studies, parental support for family problems, letters of recommendation for volunteers, student internship programme, etc.
- Increase responsibility and long-term ownership of government institutions by establishing MOUs for specific activities, e.g. VCPC/DCPC ownership of safe houses, case management, etc.

III. Strengthen Support Services

■ Strengthen Training and Dissemination:

- Identify and further build on dissemination best practices to emphasize child, youth and parent-friendly methods and materials, e.g.. drama team, audio/video vs leaflets, debate groups vs. workshops, creative arts vs. teaching, video discussion
- Improve duration and frequency of training, mediation, and other support activities requiring sustained contact, e.g. legal literacy, include training in group meetings, prioritize follow-up of mediation, etc.

■ Improve IGA Assistance

- Develop an approval criteria process to be more careful to assess who can repay and be responsible
- Conduct needs assessment for loans and make plan with client about what money will be used for
- Formalise the process: use written loan terms, include group or co-signers etc
- Give moral and business support to those who are not doing well. Conduct small business training for specific occupations, vegetable farming, goat farming, etc.
- Regular follow-up / monitor of people who borrow loans to ensure proper use of funds and to measure impact of loans

CONCLUSION

The strategic objectives described above promise to increase the positive impacts that Aawaaj and its community-based networks have been able to achieve in the last phase of its mission. It is with gratitude and renewed hope that we look forward to continuing to work together to realize communities of hope, resilience and social justice where all people live in dignity and security.