

**SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH  
ARMED CONFLICT IN RUKUM WEST**



**A Thesis**

**Submitted to APF Command and Staff College,  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University,**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for Master Degree in Security, Development and Peace Studies**

**Submitted By**

**MANOJ KUMAR DHITAL**

**Roll No.: 28MSDPS40055**

**Year: 2079-2081**

**TU Registration No.: 14104-94**

**APF Command and Staff College  
Sanogaucharan, Kathmandu, Nepal**

**May, 2024**

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## DECLARATION

I, **MANOJ KUMAR DHITAL**, affirm that this thesis titled "**SOCIAL CHANGES THROUGH ARMED CONFLICT IN ROKUM WEST**," submitted to the APF Command and Staff College, is my own original work, unless otherwise stated or acknowledged in the thesis. The thesis does not include any material that has been previously accepted or submitted for another degree at the University or any other institution. I have provided proper references to all sources of information, duly acknowledging the authors or institutions involved.

.....

Manoj Kumar Dhital

Roll No: 28MSDPS40055

Regd. No: 14104-94

APF Command and Staff College

Sanogaucharan, Kathmandu, Nepal

Date: May , 2024



Government of Nepal  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
APF Command and Staff College

Phone No. :-014513159

Email:- paacademic2015@gmail.com

Website:- <http://csc.,apf.gov.np>

Ref. No. :-

Ref. No.:-

Academic Section

Sanogaucharan,

Kathmandu

Date:- 2081/02/

### LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

I, as the advisor and supervisor, confirm that the thesis titled "**SOCIAL CHANGES THROUGH ARMED CONFLICT IN ROKUM WEST**" has been prepared by **MANOJ KUMAR DHITAL** under my guidance and supervision. I recommend it for the final examination as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Security Development and Peace Studies.

.....

Thesis Supervisor

Professor Dr. Ramesh Raj Kunwar

Date: May . 2024



**Government of Nepal  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
APF Command and Staff College**

**Ph. No. :- 01-4513159/9851072030**

**Email :- [paacademic2015@gmail.com](mailto:paacademic2015@gmail.com)**

**Website:- <https://csc.apf.gov.np>**

**Ref. No.: - (080/081)/**

**Academic Section**

**Sanogaucharan, Kathmandu**

**Date:- 2081/02/**

### LETTER OF APPROVAL

This Thesis entitle "**SOCIAL CHANGES THROUGH ARMED CONFLICT IN ROKUM WEST**" submitted by **MANOJ KUMAR DHITAL** to APF Command and Staff College, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University in partial fulfilment of Master Degree in Security, Development and Peace Studies has been approved by the undersigned members of the Evaluation Committee.

#### Evaluation Committee:

.....

Prof. Dr. Ramesh Raj Kunwar  
Thesis Supervisor

.....

Associate Prof. Dr. Chiranjivi Acharya  
External Examiner

.....

Assistant Prof. Gaurav Bhattarai  
External Examiner

.....

SP Yadav Bishwakarma  
Internal Examiner

.....

SP Suresh Sapkota  
Internal Examiner

**May 2024**

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis paper explores into the dynamics of social status in Rukum West and its evolution amid armed conflict. Employing a qualitative approach, the study merges primary and secondary data sources to analyse the Rukum West's social changes. It precisely examines various aspects such as education, economics, health, caste dynamics, political landscape, and gender equity. Primary data are predominantly collected through interviews and on-site observations, while secondary data are sourced from online platforms and documented archives. Purposive sampling techniques are applied to ensure the representativeness of qualitative data, drawing insights from local communities, leaders, and ex-combatants.

The data analysis process encompasses transcription, coding, thematic exploration, and validation through supervisor consultation, maintaining reliability and accuracy in interpretation. Ethical considerations are dominant, emphasizing participant confidentiality, privacy, and the avoidance of misrepresentation. The research observes to principles of integrity and transparency, ensuring participants' well-being and avoiding any form of harm. By analysing post-conflict social structures, this research aims to offer insights into the transformative impact of armed conflict on the social structure of Rukum West, contributing to broader understandings of conflict dynamics and societal resilience.

This qualitative study provides an in-depth analysis of the enduring effects of armed conflict on Rukum West, Nepal, covering across various dimensions such as political, social, economic, and gender dynamics. It examines into how communities have become polarized and radicalized over time, influenced by underlying political tensions and worsened by social disparities. The universal influence of social media further complicates these dynamics, amplifying conflict narratives and hindering efforts to foster dialogue and reconciliation. Despite these challenges, the study highlights ongoing efforts to rebuild social cohesion and preserve cultural heritage as inspirations of hope amidst difficulty. It particularly emphasizes the significant shifts in gender dynamics, with women assuming leadership roles and actively participating in public life despite facing discrimination and trauma. Overall, the study sheds light on the multifaceted challenges faced by communities in Rukum West and stresses the importance of intensive efforts to promote peace, reconciliation, and inclusive development in the region.

*Key Words:* Rukum West, Social Changes, Armed Conflict, data etc.

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION**

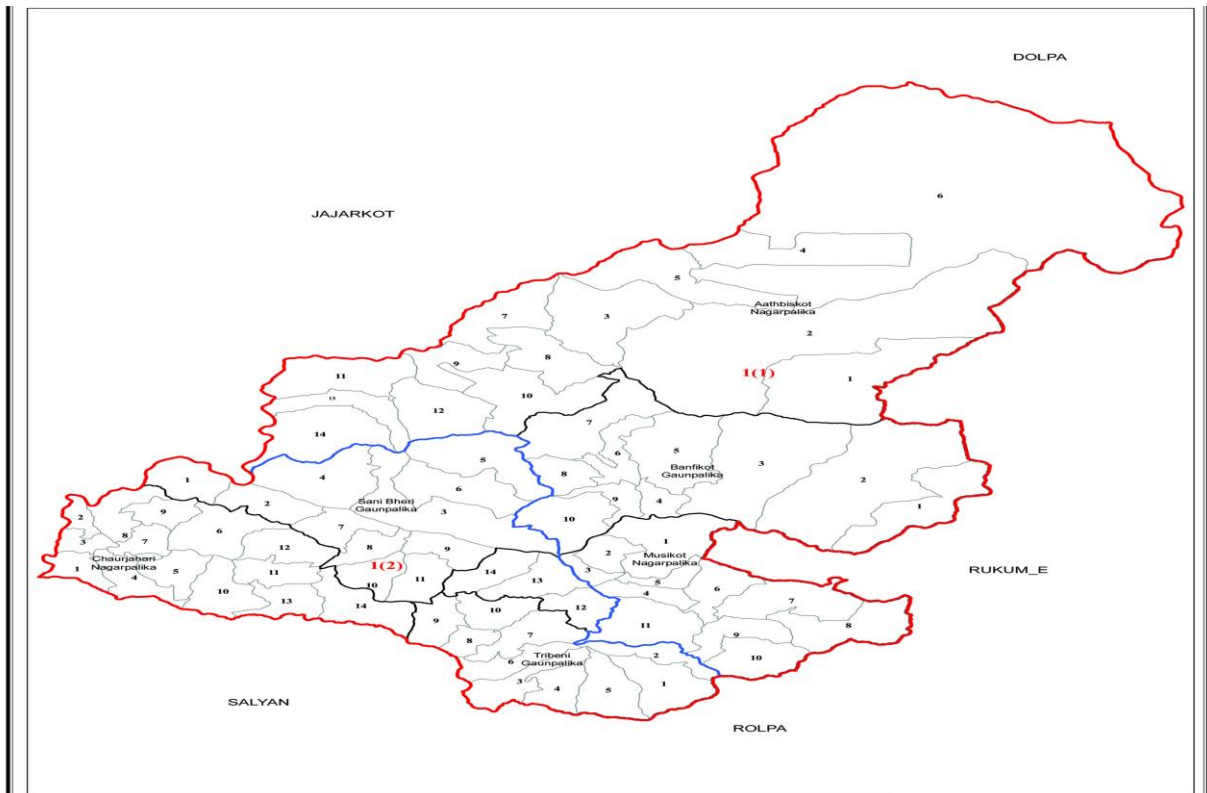
APF	Armed Police Force
BS	Bikram Sambat
CCVT	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Accord
DCC	District Coordination Committee
DSP	Deputy Superintend of Police
ILO	International Labor Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LGIS	Local Governance Information System
MP	Member of Parliament
NGOs	Non - Governmental Organizations
PTSD	Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder
P1	Participant One
SEE	Secondary Education Examination
TU	Tribhuvan University
UN	United Nations
UPF	United Peoples Front
USA	United States of America

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Rukum West, a district situated in Nepal, is among the seventy-seven districts in the nation. It covers an area of 1213 square kilometres and has a population of 166,354 people based on the 2021 Nepal census. The district's administrative centre is Musikot. Formerly, Rukum West was a part of Rukum District; however, on September 20th, 2015, it was bifurcated into two distinct districts, namely Western Rukum and Eastern Rukum, as part of the government's administrative division reconstruction (Dixit, 2022).



*Note:* DAO Rukum, 2024

Rukum West, located in the hilly western region, is a district characterized by plenty of valleys. It shares boundaries with five neighbouring districts: Eastern Rukum and Rolpa in the Lumbini province to the east, Salyan to the south, Jajarkot to the west, and Dolpa to the north. Hinduism is the predominant religion in the district, with 98.1% of the population identifying as Hindus. Other religious affiliations include Christians (0.9%), Buddhists (0.7%), Prakriti followers (0.2%), Muslims (0.1%), and others (0.1%). The literacy rate in

Rukum West is recorded at 64.6%. Rukumkot, a notable village within the district, is often recognized as "the place of 52 lakes and 53 hills" (Dahal, 2023).

Despite being classified as a remote district, Western Rukum has witnessed notable advancements in its transportation infrastructure. The establishment of road networks has facilitated the availability of bus and jeep services, connecting the district with neighboring districts and major cities, including Kathmandu. Moreover, there are two airports in the region, located in Musikot and Chaurjahari, which offer essential facilities for passenger flights. The Rapti highway and the east-west Madhya Pahadi Lok-Marg serves as vital transportation lifelines within the area. Rukum West comprises a total of six local administrative units, with Musikot, Chaurjahari, and Aathbiskot designated as municipalities, and Baficot, Tribeni, and Sani Bheri as rural municipalities (Paudel, 2006).

On February 4, 1996, Maoist Party presented a list of 40 demands to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who was heading the Nepali Congress government during that period. The UPF issued a warning that if the government failed to address these demands within a 15-day timeframe, they would commence a "people's war." Unfortunately, the Deuba government did not adequately respond to these demands, leading to significant consequences. As a result, on February 13, 1996, just three days prior to the deadline, the United Peoples Front initiated the people's war by launching attacks on the police in Holeri and Aathbsikot. Since then, Nepal has been grappling with an unprecedented crisis (Upreti, 2006).

The civil war in Nepal, which took place from 1996 to 2006, remains a dark chapter in the country's history, deeply imprinted in the memories of most Nepalese. It was initiated by Maoist rebels on February 13, 1996, with the objective of removing the long-established monarchy and establishing a system governed by the people. This protracted conflict remained for a decade until the rebels reached a peace agreement with the government formed after the 2006 People's Movement. Regrettably, the ten-year-long conflict resulted in significant loss of life and property, with over 17,000 killed and more than 3,000 cases of enforced disappearances (Gautam, 2016).

Rukum West served as a focal point for the armed conflict, particularly during the period when Rolpa and Rukum were the epicenters of the decade-long conflict. Rukum district, in particular, experienced significant impact from the Maoist groups, with security forces primarily concentrated in the district headquarters. The Khara attack stands out as a notable event, resulting in a high number of casualties among the Maoist fighters. Numerous

skirmishes took place throughout the armed conflict in Rukum West. Mahat Village, located in the then Rukum District, witnessed the abduction of Dsp Thule Rai by Maoist fighters. The Mahat Gau area was heavily affected by the armed conflict, leading to the loss of many lives. In April 13, 2005, the Police Chauki in Athbiskot, Rukum, was raided. The security forces also conducted operations against the Maoist groups in the region.(Giri, 2005 ).

Social changes encompass a wide range of transformations and shifts in societal patterns, structures, and behaviours that occur over time. These changes can occur at various levels, including the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels (Form, 2024).

In the field of sociology, social change refers to the modifications that take place within the social structure, which includes changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations, and value systems. Sociologists have historically drawn inspiration from various academic disciplines to develop conceptual models of social change. In the late 19th century, with the prevailing paradigm of evolution in understanding biological transformations, social change ideas also took on an evolutionary nature. While alternative models have been refined and developed over time, evolution remains a fundamental principle in understanding social change.

The prolonged armed conflict has had a profound impact on the cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices in Rukum West. The current cultural situation can be observed through the devotion to traditions and rituals, which reflect the recent changes in society. To comprehend these societal changes, various indicators are examined, including population size, birth rates, death rates, and migration patterns. The economic situation and social structures also play a crucial role in shaping social change. Economic indicators such as employment patterns, income distribution, wealth accumulation, and overall economic conditions provide insights into the state of society. Basic infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and telecommunication services, is crucial in rural areas, and the prioritization of health and education is essential. The development of these aspects can impact people's lifestyles and subsequently influence families as well (Dangol, 2015).

Social change in Rukum West encompasses significant transformations in various aspects, including the education system, political structures, governance systems, and power dynamics. These changes are reflected in the adaptation of political ideologies, government policies, and the nature of political participation within the society. Social institutions such as the family, marriage, education, religion, the caste system, gender dynamics, and healthcare

also contribute to driving social changes in the region. The case of Nabaraj BK serves as an example illustrating the influence of the caste hierarchy on the social situation in Rukum West (Dahal, 2020).

Furthermore, the recent impact and losses caused by earthquakes demonstrates the vulnerability of the region to disasters and the community's capacity to cope with such events. After enduring a decade-long armed conflict, it is crucial to study the current state of social change in Rukum West, assessing whether these changes have had positive or negative impacts on the society.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Decade long armed conflict in Nepal was started from Rukum and Rolpa district. These two districts were poor in terms of development and other human index in comparison of other districts. Rukum West was geographically remote, literacy rate was below the average level, people used to go India for employment, gender inequality was also high, caste system was rigid, child marriage and poor health facilities were common challenges in Rukum West. Those poorly situation and backwardness helped Maoist party to initiate armed conflict against Nepal government.

In the central level, there were corruption, nepotism and monopoly among big political parties, as a result, they had been losing public trust. In 1996, the United Peoples Front submitted a 40 point demand to the government but the government ignored that demand. As a result UPF started armed struggle against government from Rukum and Rolpa district. That armed struggle increased day by day to the other districts also. It became the hot issues and covered the headline of national and international news. It was continued until 2006 and known as decade long insurgency of Nepal, resulted in the loss of lives and property, deaths of over 17,000 people and over 3,000 enforced disappearances.

The new political and social institutions would be in risk due to the painful past and unresolved ideas and emotions. It is not sufficient to merely pledge to remedy crimes committed during wartime. In order to improve the present and ensure a better future, it is necessary to address the past. However, post-conflict nations may decide to ignore the past entirely. This may occur with the intention of avoiding reopening wounds out of concern for a precarious peace (Aryal, 2018).

Since 2006, the Maoist party has held power in the government, either directly or indirectly, for a significant portion of the time. The Maoist party also played a role in the creation of a new constitution through the constitutional assembly. The political, social, and economic agendas advocated by the Maoist party have been incorporated into the constitution, laws, policies, and programs. However, many people, scholars, and media outlets remain skeptical about the extent of the actual changes in socio-economic and political aspects, despite the speeches made by the party leaders. It is worth noting that there has been a lack of research conducted specifically on the social changes resulting from the decade-long armed struggle in Rukum West, even though it is one of the districts where the armed struggle originated.

On the basis of research, the researcher will try to find out the level of social changes, either there is remarkable changes or not. There is a critical need for an in-depth examination of the specific dimensions of social change in Rukum West in the aftermath of the conflict. Existing research provides a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted ways in which this conflict has shaped social structures, community dynamics, and individual lives in Rukum West. This research aims to address on displacement and migration pattern, social structure and relations among people, educational status, economic situation and livelihood of the people, gender dynamics and post conflict reconciliation and community building.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The research will be focused to answer the following research questions:

- 1.3.1 What was the social status of Rukum West before armed conflict?
- 1.3.2 What are the post conflict social characteristics in West Rukum?
- 1.3.2 What are the social changes in West Rukum brought by armed conflict?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this research paper is to explore social status of Rukum West and changes brought by armed conflict. For this, the specific objectives of the research are:

- 1.4.1 To access the social status of Rukum West before armed conflict.
- 1.4.2 To observe the post conflict social characteristics of Rukum West.
- 1.4.3** To examine the social changes in Rukum West.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This research paper “social change through armed conflict in West Rukum” holds substantial significance due to its potential contributions and implications in various areas. The research paper would deepen our understanding on decade long armed conflict and its impact on different issues like political, economic, demographic, cultural, health and educational in the context of Rukum West. The understanding on social issues would help to judge either the decade long armed conflict fulfilled its mission, if not, where are the lapses? This paper would provide deep insights on social norms and values, political environment, social structures of Rukum West society. This research paper would be beneficial to know the gap between formulation of policies and its implementations, provides some successful countries examples in comparison to Nepal. The research highlights deeply rooted traditional norms and values of society that are being challenged for development and some positive prospective also. It would be the guideline for future researcher and provides the plenty information about social issues related to Rukum West. It would be helpful to review armed conflict and its impact on society for political parties, scholars and other stake holders. This knowledge can inspire other countries facing similar challenges to consider the validity of armed conflict. This research paper on social changes through armed conflict in Rukum West would contribute to academic literature for APF, Nepal by expanding the knowledge based in the study of Rukum West. It could be a reference point for scholars, researchers, and students who are interested in this field. The insights gained from Rukum West’s experiences with social changes can have relevance beyond its borders.

## **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

While conducting the research the researcher has faced several limitations. It is essential to acknowledge these limitations to ensure transparency and to provide a balanced interpretation of the study. The study is limited to armed conflict and social changes in Rukum West. The reliability and accuracy of the available data may also pose challenges to the research. The timeframe of the research was limited, preventing an in-depth analysis of long-term impacts and trends related to social changes of Rukum West. For data collection, interview was conducted with open ended questions and one hour time was allocated for per person. Gathering qualitative data, such as interviews with local people was challenging due to limited willingness to participate. To access the data from related offices was difficult due to

reluctance. Conflict zones often experienced population displacement that might create difficulty to obtain representative samples. Those who remain might have different characteristics than those who have fled, leading to potential sampling bias. Social conditions would be changed rapidly that may impact on research findings being outdated. Individuals affected by armed conflict experienced trauma, impacting their ability to recall and report events accurately. Biasness and psychological distress could affect the reliability of retrospective accounts. Research in conflict zones was a subject to political and personal sensitivity. Individuals within a conflict zone might have diverse experiences and perspectives. Failing to capture this heterogeneity could result in oversimplified generalizations about the impact of the armed conflict on social change.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 General Review

The literature review section aims to provide an overview of existing studies and research related to the social changes brought about by the armed conflict, specifically focusing on the impact of the conflict on various aspects such as displacement and migration patterns, social structures and relations among people, educational status, economic dynamics, and gender roles. Several studies have examined the social changes resulting from the decade-long armed conflict.

Bibhas (2021) writes that during the height of the insurgency, the Maoists came down heavily on anything that they believed were 'social evils'. They smashed alcohol pots and forced gamblers to eat their cards. Party banned drinking, producing and selling *raksi*," Under Dahal's orders, alcohol was considered a 'social evil' and Maoist went around the countryside destroying vats of homemade liquor and even beating up those found drinking. But these rules only applied to the party rank-and-file and those who weren't involved in the war efforts. Supreme commander Prachanda was known to take two pegs of *raksi* every day, but this knowledge was limited to high-ranking leaders and cadres. They began to believe that Dahal had sold them out and abandoned his revolutionary promises of inclusion, social justice, and land reform.

Devkota (2010) discusses the multidimensional and contested nature of development. In Nepal, the author identifies three tendencies that have shaped the discourse around power distribution, diversity, and identity. From the 1950s to the 1980s, there were those who sought to maintain and promote the existing authoritarian and conservative political economy. In the 1990s, there were those who aimed to reform it through a liberal capitalist and social democratic approach. Finally, in the 2000s, there were those advocating for radical communist restructuring. The concept of "New Nepal" emerged as a vision for bringing about significant socioeconomic transformation in a progressive manner. This involved

implementing agrarian reform and developing productive forces and industrial relations to provide employment opportunities for the youth. However, the existing structures and institutions have not functioned as intended and lack the capacity and willpower to bring about the desired changes. As a consequence, the crucial tasks of bridging gaps between different communities and addressing the underlying causes of conflict, particularly poverty and unemployment, have been largely neglected in the post-conflict peace-building process.

Dhakal and Burgess (2020) draw attention to the inadequate exploration of appropriate social policies in developing countries, despite the significant attention given to the decent work agenda in the context of sustainable development. In response to this gap, the authors focus on Nepal, a country that has faced two major crises: a decade-long armed conflict that concluded in 2006 and the 2015 earthquake. The authors examine country-specific policies and programs related to decent work in Nepal, considering the country's recovery from these significant challenges. They aim to shed light on the formulation and implementation of social policies in the context of decent work, which have not been extensively studied in developing countries.

Hart (2001) discusses the grassroots effects of the conflict, highlighting several key consequences. Firstly, there has been a rural exodus of individuals who are most fearful of the Maoists, including local elites, government officials, activists from other political parties, and others, who have relocated from remote areas. Secondly, the lack of security has resulted in a significant reduction in travel and the transportation of goods. Thirdly, numerous economic activities have been disrupted, potentially impacting food security in certain regions. Fourthly, local infrastructure, particularly structures associated with government intervention and control, has been destroyed. Lastly, a climate of fear and insecurity has emerged, wherein the Maoists are perhaps perceived as less threatening in terms of human rights abuses compared to the security forces. Although significant support for the Maoists persists, particularly among the poor and socially disadvantaged, their demands for contributions from the local population and their own human rights abuses have had negative repercussions in this regard.

Kharel (2007) concludes in his study that Dalits, historically, have been defined as individuals who face troubles, oppression, and subjugation by others. They are deprived of social prestige and honour within a society where notions of superiority, inferiority, purity, and pollution are deeply ingrained in the caste-based social stratification. However, today, the

term Dalit also represents the struggle for equity and equality. It is widely acknowledged that the term Dalit should continue to be used as long as caste-based discrimination, including the practice of untouchability, persists in Nepal. Despite constitutional and legislative safeguards, significant human rights violations against Dalits persist in the country. They continue to experience institutional discrimination and structural violence rooted in the caste system. This situation represents a challenge to fundamental values such as human dignity, democracy, the rule of law, equality, and social justice.

Köhler et al. (2009) discuss the remarkable political transition to peace and democracy in Nepal, which has generated high expectations for social change. The authors highlight the complex situation characterized by widespread poverty and social exclusion, worsened by the country's physical environment and post-conflict economic stagnation. They argue that this calls for new policy interventions. Based on political, economic, and social considerations, the authors propose strengthening social protection in Nepal. They specifically suggest the introduction of a child grant, which entails a cash transfer from the government to families with children. This grant is presented as a potential "building block" in the country's social protection system. Furthermore, the authors argue that a universal and unconditional child grant could be more effective in addressing not only child well-being but also the broader challenges of poverty and inequality. They advocate for a grant that is accessible to all families with children, without any conditions or restrictions.

Medeiros et al. (2020) discuss the objective of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in Nepal, which aimed to improve the relationship between the state and its people in order to facilitate the process of state-building. A critical aspect of strengthening this relationship is enhancing the state's capacity to provide essential services to its citizens. However, the decade-long armed conflict from 1996 to 2006 severely weakened the state's ability to deliver these services and resulted in a significant divide among the population. The legitimacy of the state was also questioned during the war. The primary focus of the analysis conducted by the authors is to investigate public perceptions regarding the state's delivery of services in key areas such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and social protection. The objective is to identify the gap between public expectations and the state's capacity to deliver these services and to evaluate the state's response. Empirical evidence for the study was collected from the districts of Ilam, Rolpa, and Bardiya.

Sangroula (2021) argues that the emphasis on strengthening military capabilities has overshadowed the demand for essential needs. As a result, social sectors are deprived of development opportunities, with the notion that defence takes precedence over other aspects. While violence is directly linked to the political structure of a state, its detrimental impact on society and development is evident as a consequence of the state's response to the challenge. One prominent effect of violent conflict is the socio-economic decline experienced by the affected society. Resources are redirected towards fulfilling the state's security requirements, which becomes a policy priority. However, this shift in focus towards security not only comes at a high cost and leads to destruction but also proves ineffective as resistance and reaction to state reprisals continue to grow.

Shrestha (2023) highlights that the caste system in Nepal has created a complex social structure that assigns individuals specific roles and lifestyles. However, this system has also given rise to significant challenges for individuals in lower castes, leading to discrimination and limited opportunities. Life for lower-caste individuals is described as extremely difficult, characterized by various forms of discrimination and restrictions, particularly in remote and rural areas. One prominent issue is social boycott, where inter-caste marriages are met with rejection and violence. An example of this is the tragic incident in Soti village, where a young Dalit man seeking permission to marry a higher-caste girl was beaten to death. Another manifestation of discrimination is the denial of entry for lower-caste individuals into hotels, restaurants, and the homes of higher-caste individuals, perpetuating beliefs of impurity and reinforcing social divisions.

Discrimination also extends to the realm of education, with lower-caste students facing isolation and bias from both their peers and teachers. They are often forced to study outside the classroom, and lower-caste teachers also experience discrimination from their colleagues. Additionally, lower-caste individuals face restrictions on using public services such as taps and wells, further highlighting the pervasive discrimination they encounter. The traditional association of caste with occupation has led to a regrettable situation where lower-caste individuals are confined to jobs that carry the least societal respect, such as cleaners and labourers. This perpetuates an unjust hierarchy that hinders social development and equality.

Thapa (2010) discusses the impact of the end of the Cold War on conflict dynamics, noting a significant increase in conflict-related deaths in recent decades. The study focuses on understanding the causes and intensity of conflict, utilizing data from 75 districts in Nepal.

The Maoist conflict in Nepal rapidly spread throughout the country over a period of ten years, with varying direct costs in different regions. The conflict escalated when the army was mobilized in 2001, resulting in higher casualties and more killings by the state compared to the Maoist rebels. The study reveals that political workers and agricultural labourers were particularly vulnerable and constituted a significant portion of the casualties, indicating that the poor face a higher risk of being affected by conflict. The research identifies various economic, social, and natural factors that influence the level of insecurity in a district. These factors include poverty incidence, income levels, food security, the proportion of women engaged in non-agricultural operations, a composite development index, elevation, and caste polarization. The study also highlights the significant impact of caste and ethnicity, with districts having a higher proportion of indigenous populations experiencing a decrease in insecurity levels.

Thapa and Hauff (2012) highlight the high prevalence of psychopathology in conflict or post-conflict situations, particularly in low-income settings like Nepal. It is important to identify individuals who require active treatment, particularly those exhibiting distress symptoms, high disability scores, and low self-reported health status. The study reveals that nearly one-third of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the sample are in need of active treatment, while the remaining individuals could benefit from regular psychosocial support. Clinical applications of these findings involve addressing depression and anxiety to prevent disability. Conducting an epidemiological survey that includes assessments of perceived needs, self-reported health status, and disability can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. The authors suggest that researchers should incorporate disability and perceived need assessments into surveys of IDPs. Additionally, further prospective studies are necessary to identify predictors of disability and distress, including common psychotic disorders among conflict-affected displaced populations.

Upadhyaya (2011) discusses the transitions that have occurred in Nepal, including those in 1951, 1979-80, 1990, and 2006, all of which were aimed at establishing democracy. However, the author notes that the transitions prior to 2006 did not result in significant inclusive reforms. Political actors, such as parties, pressure groups, and social movements, operate within a larger social context and address societal issues. The author emphasizes that the formation of the modern Nepali state is characterized by a rustic and power-centric nature, making the question of who rules a vital concern in Nepal. Political actors both shape and are shaped by the pressing issues faced by society. The issue of state restructuring

becomes highly controversial, particularly when it involves the transition to a federal system. Given the extreme diversity and complexity of Nepali society, progress in Nepal can only be achieved from a macro perspective, which can serve as a benchmark for the development of Nepali society. As Nepal is a country with multiple nationalities, the author argues that post-republican state restructuring should be guided by positive protests, civil society, political parties, opposition, and genuine dedication rather than prejudice. These factors will contribute to establishing a common bond of harmony amidst the diversity. Throughout this process, the influence of public opinion, civic society, ideologies, and social trends outside the formal institutions of political power remains crucial.

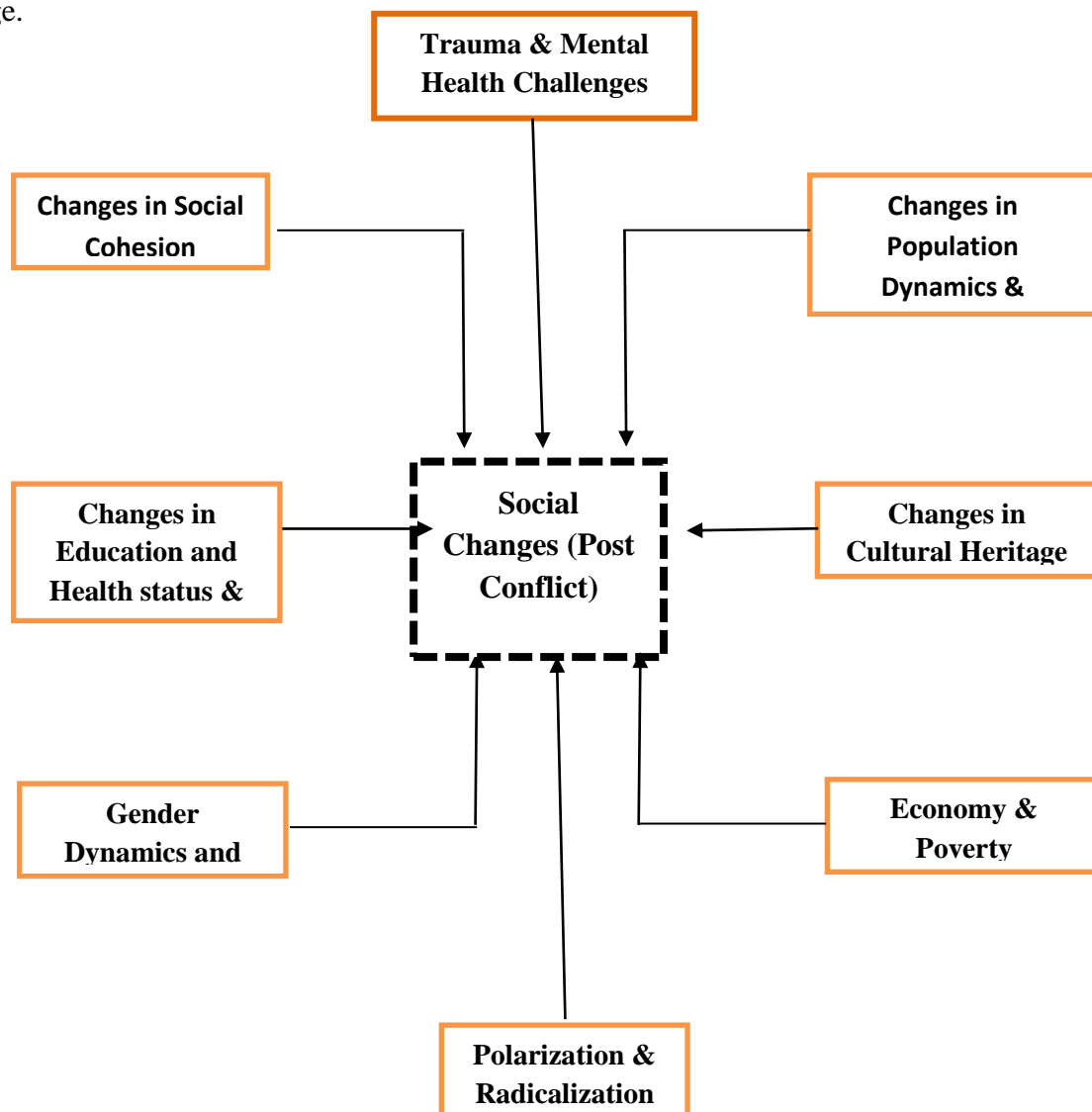
Upreti et al. (2016) discuss the completion of Nepal's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the Communist Party of Nepal. The CPA aimed to strengthen the relationship between the state and its people and improve service delivery. However, the decade-long armed conflict had a detrimental impact on the state's ability to deliver services and created divisions among the population. The research conducted by the authors examines public perceptions of the state's service delivery, with a focus on identifying the gap between public expectations and the state's capacity and response. A key question in the public debate is the effectiveness of international actors' support in building the state's capacity. Strong state institutions are crucial for Nepal's post-conflict transition, as they are responsible for delivering efficient basic services, implementing state-led social protections, and securing livelihoods. The book aims to assess the contribution of international actors in building the capacity of state institutions to deliver basic services. It focuses on the role of international actors in promoting livelihoods and providing essential services. Reciprocal engagements between international actors and the state are seen as integral to post-conflict state capacity building in Nepal.

Yadhav (2016) argues that social transformation cannot be adequately understood solely through top-down approaches that focus on structural and institutional changes. Instead, it requires a deep understanding of individuals' subjective lived experiences. In the context of Nepal, women have demonstrated their self-sufficiency by taking on diverse roles, such as armed personnel, taxi drivers, and MP. The challenges presented by the People's War compelled women to engage in tasks they would not have considered before the conflict. Consequently, these newfound responsibilities led women to question their previous lives and the discriminatory practices they had endured.

Recognizing that their circumstances were not fixed or beyond challenge, women realized that they could bring about change through collective action. The conflict acted as a catalyst for social transformation in Nepalese communities, particularly for women, creating a supportive political environment for their involvement. Prior to the war, women were dependent on men, but their engagement in new activities and exposure to independent female role models during the conflict sparked a desire for self-determination.

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is an essential component of an empirical study. It represents the researcher's understanding and synthesis of existing literature that explains a particular phenomenon. It outlines the necessary steps and illustrates the relationships, sequence, concepts, and ideas relevant to different aspects of the research, creating a clear mental image.



*Note:* Modified and derived from Oberschall et al. (2010)

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative study was used in this research. Purposive sampling was used to collect primary information. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research design, methods employed and sources of data, data processing techniques, analysis procedures, and methods of presentation. Additionally, the conceptual framework also provided. The following points were taken in to consideration when developing the research methodology.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design was qualitative, based on primary as well as secondary data, focus on the issues related to social transform of Rukum West. For the primary data collection, the interview method was applied in spite of field observation. Internet and websites were used to collect secondary data. Descriptive and analytical methods was used to analyse and gather information during the course of research to address the objectives.

#### **3.2 Study Area**

The general area of this study was Rukum West and different issues like educational status, economic conditions of locals, health status, cast hierarchy, political situation and gender equality was observed minutely. Present social structure of society was compared with past through different tools and techniques. Those who were directly involved in armed conflicts were consulted for their experience.

#### **3.3 Sources of Data**

The study was based on both primary and secondary data. Much of the data was collected as primary data through interview method by the field visit. Different documents, books, online portal, internet sites, views of local leaders and interview with ex-combatants was focused

equally. The collected data has analysed by narrative and descriptive method as well as presented concurrently. The field visit was conducted on 16 to 26 March 2024. Primary data was collected with consultation of teachers, political leaders, beurocrats, farmers and local people through open ended questions and observation method.

### **3.4 Sampling Technique**

Purposive sampling method was used to get qualitative data. To know about social status of Rukum West, sampling was conducted from the larger groups among the local people, local leaders and ex-combatants was selected to collect data.

### **3.5 Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation**

The analysis of the interviews went through several steps to ensure accuracy, confidentiality, and coherence. Initially, all interviews were precisely recorded and transcribed verbatim, ensuring an accurate representation of every spoken word. To protect the participants' secrecy, any identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Next, the researcher collaboratively developed a set of codes to categorize the data based on emerging patterns, allowing for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the content. Thematic analysis was conducted to ensure consistency and reliability in interpreting the data. In cases where differences arose during the coding process, the researcher engaged in discussions with a supervisor to resolve any differences, promoting transparency and incorporating diverse perspectives into the analysis. The initial stages of analysis involved manually assigning codes to segments of the data to facilitate organization and interpretation. Additionally, data summarization was performed to condense and synthesize the key findings. An abductive approach was employed, which involved generating codes from predetermined topics while remaining open to new insights and perspectives. This iterative process allowed for the exploration of various perspectives, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data while also being responsive to emerging information.

### **3.6 Ethical Consideration**

The confidentiality of the data was protected and the privacy of research participants was highly given priority as per their request. Respect and dignity of participant was always valuable during the study and no misleading information was included in research. Research participants were not subjected to harm in any ways whatsoever and honesty with

transparency was the main direction of the study. Researcher was always sensitive to the issues that reminds their bitter past. Throughout the research write-up, the respondents were referred to as p1, p2, p3, and so on, to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### **4.1 Background of the Rukum District**

Rukum West is smaller in size but the population strength is bigger than East Rukum. Unlike Rukum East, the majority of people belongs to Brahmin, Chhetri and Thakuri. Rukum District was divided in to two parts in 2015, the main cause was political and another cause was ethnic. Before 2030 BS Rukumkot (East Rukum) was district headquarter. Before armed conflict, there was unemployment and people used to do agriculture, husbandry and used to go India for seasonal employment also. Some people are still engaged in unethical business like opium and hasis production and trading also. In another side, there was Tibetan refugee camp in Dhorpatan area, as a result, the external activities were also seen in that area. There was low presence of government in remote area of Rukum also. The narcotic drug production has been increasing since past ten years in Rukum district. People's illegal activities promotes the gap between government and local people.

Rukum West has undergone significant social changes due to the armed conflict and ongoing reconstruction and reconciliation efforts (Gautam, 2016). The district has witnessed migration for employment to foreign countries like the USA, Europe and gulf countries. Progress has been made in education. However, many students still seek education outside the district. Women's empowerment has improved, and healthcare services have advanced, aided by infrastructure. Nevertheless, recent observations indicate male outmigration for work and persisting challenges in health and education.

The post-conflict development in Rukum West has transformed traditional means of subsistence, with emerging economic sectors replacing seasonal labor, animal husbandry, and agriculture. The stability of communities is still threatened by illegal activities such as opium production. The enduring suffering of the victims underscores the lasting impacts of violence and turmoil. The psychological effects of the conflict continue to affect societal cohesion and mental health, despite restoration and reconciliation efforts. While infrastructure and education have made progress, long-term issues such as trauma, outmigration, and unemployment necessitate ongoing assistance and treatment (Dixit, 2004).

The conflict has reshaped community dynamics, leading to changes in migration patterns and an increased presence of women in households and public spheres. Trauma and mental health challenges persist, with limited access to mental health services. Education and human capital development have been prioritized, but challenges remain in ensuring quality education and retaining skilled professionals (Malla, 2023). Economic transformation has been influenced by internal and external factors, but persistent challenges like unemployment and underemployment persist, particularly among marginalized communities. Rebuilding social cohesion and fostering reconciliation are central objectives, although tensions from the conflict still linger. Infrastructure development and improved connectivity have enhanced access to markets, services, and opportunities, but disparities remain, especially in remote and marginalized areas. Addressing the multifaceted needs of communities requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors.

The provided information gives an overview of the current socio-economic landscape in Rukum West, Nepal. These themes and sub-themes serve as a framework for analyzing the impact of polarization and radicalization within communities in West Rukum as a result of the armed conflict, as well as the contributing factors and efforts to mitigate them. It also explores the role of social media in conflict dynamics and the perceptions of politics and political leaders among local people. The qualitative findings from in-depth interviews were carefully analyzed, translated, and transcribed to generate codes, sub-themes, and themes aligned with the predefined topics, such as the breakdown of social cohesion, trauma and mental health challenges, and others.

#### **4.1.1 Respondents Age Group**

During the interview, different age group of people were participated. Among them, 13 respondents were from 40 to 50 age group who faced the armed conflict directly and gave clear data regarding armed conflict and its impact. Likewise 10 participants were from 30 to 40 age group, they were second largest in number. The participants who belonged to 20 to 30 age group, did not directly involve in armed conflict but they are facing the challenges created by armed conflict. Some participants were very furious and some of the participants were serious during interview period. Due to physical as well as human losses who were integral part of their life.

**Table 1:***Composition of respondents on the basis of Age*

SN.	Age	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	20 – 30 Year	6	17.1
2.	30 – 40 Year	10	28.5
3.	40 – 50 Year	13	37.1
4.	50 – 60 Year	6	17.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note: By Researcher, 2024***4.1.2 Respondents' occupation**

Occupationally, the surveyed individuals were engaged in various professions like agriculture, private job, teaching and government job. With private jobs being the most common at 31.4%. Teaching roles and agriculture account for 25.7% each, and government jobs represent 17.1% of the sample. This data highlights the diversity within the surveyed population in terms of various professions.

**Table 2***Composition of participants according to Occupation*

SN	Occupation	Number	Percentage
1.	Agriculture	9	25.7
2.	Private Job	11	31.4
3.	Teachers	9	25.7
4	Gov. Job	6	17.1

*Note: By Researcher, 2024***4.1.3 Cast group of respondents'**

During the interview, respondents were selected on the basis of different castes. Among them majority were from chhetri and Thakuri that was 16 in numbers. After that 9 respondents were from Bramhan community. Dalits 5 and Janajati 5 were selected as the respondents, so that data from all communities could be collected. Different issues like cast discrimination, women participation and situation of polarization could be depict preciously. To analyse the

armed conflict and its effect in economy, political and social issues, this gives vivid picture of Rukum West society.

**Table 3:**

*Composition of respondents on the basis of Caste*

SN.	Caste	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	Bramhin	9	25.71
2.	Chhetri/Thakuri	16	45.7
3.	Dalit	5	14.2
4.	Janajati	5	14.2
5.	Other	0	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

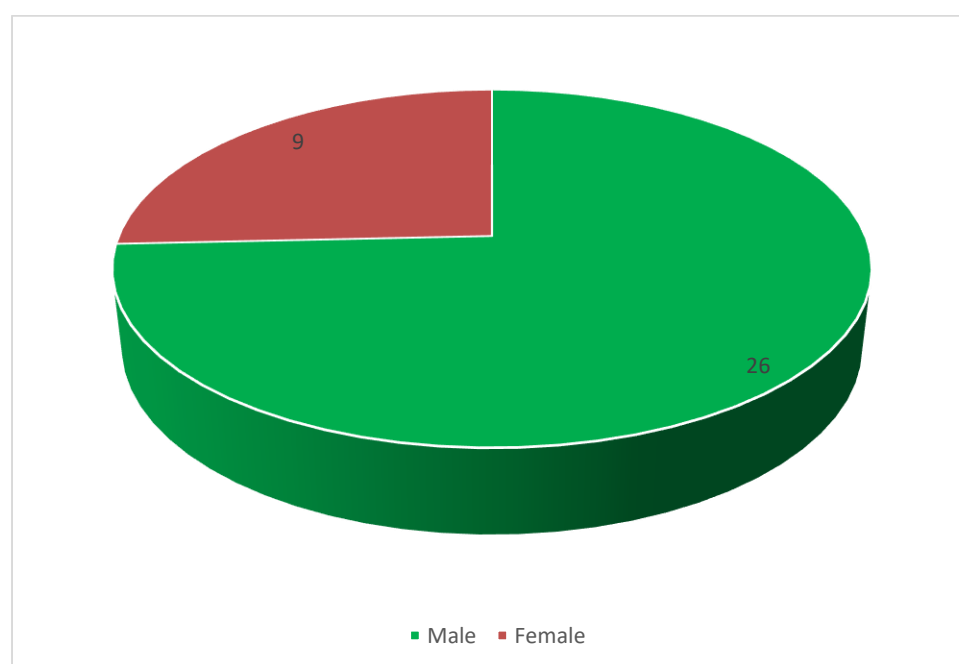
*Note: By Researcher, 2024*

#### **4.1.4 Composition of respondents based on sex**

During interview, out of 35 respondents, 9 were female and 26 were male. All of them agreed that there was remarkable progress in women's role after armed conflict. The context described paints a vivid picture of a society deeply affected by a prolonged armed conflict, where women were performing new roles like parental role, external job and leadership role.

**Figure 2:**

*Respondents based on sex*



*Note: Researcher Himself, 2024*

## 4.2 Findings and Discussion

### 4.2.1 Social status of Rukum West before armed conflict

The economic hardships were fuelled to generate a strong sense of deprivation and neglect among the people of Rukum West. The development project could not reach due to total absence of transport and communication access. The result of this was a creeping sense of inequality and discrimination among the people of Rukum. The education and health status of people was poor, dependent on agriculture and used to go to India for employment. It is the sense of inequality, which had more to do with the rise of insurgency than simply the poor level of development.

#### 4.2.1.1 Polarization and Radicalization

In the past, Rukum district was suffering from illiteracy, poor health status, and poor economic conditions. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including the misuse of political power, social inequality, and excluded from central government. Print media and radios were limited and could not have access to all the remote areas to highlight all the issues. There was no more division among the people regarding social issues. Before armed conflict, Rukum West was excluded from the main stream of government and political power. The state was in initial phase of multiparty democracy. The people of Rukum were struggling for their own basic needs. They were not familiarized in main stream politics and were not aware about their political rights. Only limited people were connected to the main political parties like Nepali Congress and CPUML and they were being advantageous for their personal benefit only. In general, there was no sentiments of polarization among the majority of the people but people were very sensitive and had radical thinking who had feeling of marginalized were not satisfied with state.

*P6: "People were excluded from main stream of development. Poverty and marginalization was wide spread in Rukum District.*

*P13: There was harmony among the people, there were no more division within societies, only they have grievances against governments.*

Politically, there was a general disillusionment among the populace, stanching from a loss of faith in established political entities. Many viewed politics as a morally compromised arena,

polluted by corruption and self-interest, leading to a widespread sense of lethargy and disengagement (Upreti, 2006).

The universal disillusionment with established political entities had fostered a fertile ground for the rise of armed conflict that pledged to break away from the existing norms. This trend was particularly pronounced among the younger generation, who were disillusioned with the leadership and were seeking alternative avenues for meaningful change.

Before armed conflict, Rukum West communities were not polarized, there was social harmony among people, and they were very rituals. People were supportive in each other, no social media was there that could create ethnic, political and economic feeling but they had feeling of being marginalized from main stream of state.

#### **4.2.1.2 Gender Dynamics and Women's Rights**

In the past, socio, political and economic situation of women in Rukum West was very pathetic. There was poverty everywhere and women were only limited to house wife. The educational and health status was very weak. Maternal mortality rate was high. Women were thought as third grade of citizen. Women had plunged into roles traditionally dominated by men. There was widespread livelihood insecurity, low life expectancy and poor health indicators. Agriculture was the backbone of the economy, providing livelihoods, but they lagged behind men in many human development indicators, including health, education, employment, political participation, and social welfare. They were downgraded to mostly reproductive roles. Overall, women faced discrimination both in private and public spheres due to deeply ingrained patriarchy, which was reinforced by religion.

*P1: Women were engaged only for house wife, they were not allowed to go outside, no access of resources, and were not allowed for public participation. They had to take care of their children. They were out reached from schoolings and excluded from external activities.*

*P6: Women were not politically aware, uneducated and had poor health status and life expectancy rate was low in comparison to men.*

The life expectancy of women is comparatively less than men. The other problems that were faced by women in Rukum West were domestic violence, weak health and illiteracy. These were very sensitive issues faced by women because of the social norms and cultural practices.

Gender inequality was the biggest problem in Rukum district where girls were always treated as subordinate to men. The situation in rural areas was not good. As compared to men, women were paid less for their wages.

Women used to have marriage at early age. They were even married to old man. The consequence of early marriage resulted to pregnancy in which most of the girls died because of health issues. Women who were widow were perceived as witches in the society and remarriage of women is not allowed. These widows were imposed with lot of restrictions as compared to other women.

When girls were menstruated, they were not allowed to participate in the social activities. The life expectancy of women is comparatively less than men. The other problems that are faced by women in Rukum West were domestic violence and illiteracy. Before armed conflict, these were very sensitive issues faced by women because of the social norms and cultural practices.

#### **4.2.1.3 Cultural Heritage**

Historical monuments, sacred sites, and artifacts, some dating back centuries, are the cultural property. The loss of cultural heritage deprives communities of their collective memory, identity, and sense of belonging. It continues the narratives impressed into the walls of ancient temples, silences the reverberations of prayers in sacred spaces, and severs the bonds that connect generations to their past. There were endeavors to safeguard, defend, and construct cultural and religious heritage, acting as examples of hope.

*P9: Worshipping in temples and religious festivals which have historical importance were continue before armed conflict. Religion was not thought as Opium. Marriage and other holy ceremonies were celebrated with great enthusiasm. Festival like Dasain and Tihar was source of holy practices.*

The preservation of cultural heritage was source of inspiration for social harmony. Preserving this cultural heritage was paramount, as it not only honours the struggles of the past but also serves as a foundation for rebuilding shattered societies. By safeguarding historical sites, monuments, and artefacts, ensure that future generations can connect with their roots and learn from the lessons of history.

**Photograph 1:***Changes in Cultural Heritage*

*Note:* Musikot Municipality, 2024

Furthermore, the preservation of culture plays a crucial role in facilitating reconciliation and fostering understanding among diverse groups. By restoring heritage sites and revitalizing cultural practices, communities can reclaim their narratives and establish bonds of solidarity that transcend the divisions that fuelled the conflict.

#### **4.2.1.4 Education and health status**

The situation of education and health was very weak in Rukum West. There was only one hospital in district headquarter but without specialist. Only medical officers were providing health services in district hospital. There were no proper diagnosis of diseases. Life expectancy was very low. Maternal mortality rate and child mortality was also high. Limited primary health centres were there but without competent human resource.

In the past there was only one college in Rukum. Students used to go Dang and Neplgunj for further study. There were no education, management, humanities, science and even like CTEVT institutions in district but still 50% students go to out of district for education. Limited

secondary and primary schools were providing educational services. Literacy rate of district was very low. Numbers of women were very limited even for primary education.

*P1: There were not good health facilities in Rukum West, only 15 bed medical facility was in district hospital. Some primary health centres were there in other areas but health workers did not want to go their posting due to remote geography. The health workers faced security threat due to absence of police in all areas.*

In the past, lack of qualitative health services and lack of qualified health workers, people are deprived of having better health care services. Students flow out of district was very high. The lack of adequate health infrastructure and qualified health workers posed serious challenges to accessing quality healthcare, particularly in remote areas where facilities were scarce and health workers were reluctant to serve due to security threats.

#### **4.2.1.5 Economy and Poverty**

Rukum West District is geographically a remote district. In the past, it was known as Rukum District. Economic condition of the people was very pathetic. Brahman, Chhetri, Thakuri and Dalits were the main casts residing in this region. Arable land was small in size. People used to go India for employment. Poverty was common in this region and economic activities were nowhere in that period. In the past, developmental activities were no more and the district was ignored by the state. The policies made by government did not address the necessity of this area. Women were discriminated and were not allowed to for external activities. Traditional thinking on health, education, participation on community activities were the main obstacles. Rukum West had possibilities of tourism and horticulture but any initiation was not taken by government.

*P7: "High rates of youth unemployment in Rukum West contributed to social instability and worsen poverty levels, making it a serious issue. In addition to having no access to education and skill-training programs, this worsened the poverty cycle and makes it more difficult to address the region's economic problems."*

Youth unemployment was a significant issue, with high rates contributing to social instability and exacerbated poverty levels. The lack of infrastructure and investment in social services hampered efforts to alleviate poverty and improve living standards for residents, particularly in rural and remote areas of Rukum West.

Social cohesion and community resilience were crucial in supporting vulnerable individuals and families, providing a foundation for collective efforts to overcome poverty and rebuild livelihoods. Sustainable development strategies in Rukum West were prioritized to fostering inclusive growth, empowering marginalized groups, and strengthening social networks.

#### **4.2.2 Post conflict social characteristics in West Rukum**

Due to armed conflict, the society of Rukum West has changed. Women are showing active participation in society. Women are performing parental roles as they were limited to house wife before armed conflict. Health and education status of Rukum West is improving. There is better improvement in removing cast discrimination issues. People are active in developmental activities. Polarization of Society is also being reduced. To analyze post conflict social structure of Rukum West, the issues like polarization of society, women's status, health status, educational level, economic condition of the society and social cohesion of the society are studied.

##### **4.2.2.1 Polarization and Radicalization**

In Rukum West, the prolonged armed conflict has led to sufficient instances of polarization and radicalization within communities. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including the misuse of political power, social inequality, and the lingering sense of revenge from the insurgency period. Efforts to mitigate polarization and promote dialogue have been made by governmental and local entities, although challenges persist due to political, ethnic, and economic tensions. Social media also plays a negative role, sometimes worsening conflicts through exaggeration or misinformation, as seen in the case of Nabaraj BK (Dahal, 2020). Local perceptions of politics and political leaders are marked by scepticism, with many viewing politics as a "dirty game" and turning away from established parties in favour of newer movements. These dynamics highlight the complex socio-political landscape shaped by the conflict and ongoing efforts to foster reconciliation and understanding within the community. The revealed findings are backed up by the verbatim as:

*P6: "Decade long armed conflict has divided the society in different political parties, different classes like haves and haves not, even the small issues are given political colour."*

*P12: "Though politically people are aware, they think politics as a dirty game as the established political party lost faith. The young generation have left country as they do not*

*believe on political leader. Only the active member of political party is advocating in favour of political party. The popularism of new political party is increasing day by day”*

*P13: Some groups are oppressed and marginalized, that contributes to polarization and radicalization. Democratic exercises are made to mitigate polarization. Social Medias are playing positive role to maintain social harmony, to accept the existence of each other and to give positive message. Solution for all things is politics but gap in ideology and implementation has created mistrust to the political leaders.*

The backdrop of this scenario suggests a nation struggling with the long consequences of a prolonged armed conflict that has significantly fractured its social fabric. This conflict, spanning over a decade, has left deep-seated divisions within society, manifesting in stark political affiliations, economic disparities, and social stratification. The impacts of this conflict have filled every aspect of daily life, with even minor issues becoming confused in the predominant political discourse.

Politically, there is a general disillusionment among the populace, stemming from a loss of faith in established political entities. Many view politics as a morally compromised arena, polluted by corruption and self-interest, leading to a widespread sense of lethargy and disengagement (Upreti, 2006). This disillusionment has been particularly pronounced among the younger generation, who see little hope in the leadership of the country and are increasingly opting to leave in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

A growing trend is the rising support for emerging political parties that pledge to break away from the existing state of affairs. These parties, known for their populist speeches and rejection of conventional political norms, are garnering backing from segments of the population who are discontent with the present political scenario.

The societal gaps exacerbated by the conflict have also fueled tensions and marginalization, leading to polarization and radicalization within certain groups. While democratic processes are intended to mitigate these divisions, the entrenched nature of societal grievances often hinders meaningful progress. However, there are sparks of hope in the form of social media platforms, which are being utilized to foster dialogue, promote tolerance, and advocate for social harmony. Despite these efforts, there remains a pervasive sense of mistrust towards political leaders, fueled by disconnect between ideological rhetoric and tangible action. The complex interplay of the factors contributing to polarization and radicalization in West

Rukum reflects a society deeply scarred by the legacy of prolonged armed conflict ( UN, 2013).

The universal disillusionment with established political entities has fostered a fertile ground for the rise of newer political parties that pledge to break away from the existing norms. This trend is particularly pronounced among the younger generation, who are disillusioned with the current leadership and are seeking alternative avenues for meaningful change.

In parallel, the societal divisions worsened by the conflict have led to polarization and radicalization within certain segments of the population. While efforts have been made to use democratic processes to bridge these divides, the deeply rooted grievances often hinder substantive progress. Nevertheless, there are signs of optimism in the form of social media platforms, which are being harnessed to cultivate dialogue, advocate for tolerance, and champion social harmony (Khanal, 2019). Despite these endeavors, there persists a widespread sense of distrust towards political leaders, fueled by a perceived disparity between rhetorical ideals and tangible actions.

The intertwining complexities of social, political, and economic factors underscore the urgency of fostering reconciliation and understanding within the community. It is imperative to acknowledge and address the deeply entrenched divisions and inequalities in order to pave the way for a more cohesive and inclusive society. Through sustained efforts to promote dialogue, mitigate prejudice, and bridge political and social disparities, there is potential to navigate towards a more harmonious and unified future for West Rukum.

#### **4.2.2.2 Gender Dynamics and Women's Rights**

The armed conflict in West Rukum has significantly reshaped gender dynamics and women's roles within families and communities. Women, faced with the absence of male family members due to conflict engagements or casualties, have taken on multifaceted roles, including involvement in armed activities, assuming both maternal and paternal responsibilities, and engaging in community leadership positions.

Despite the adversities they've faced, such as loss of loved ones, sexual exploitation, and exclusion from education and societal opportunities, women have displayed resilience and capacity for leadership, contributing to peace-building and conflict resolution efforts.

## Photograph 2:

### *Gender Dynamics and Women's Rights*



*Note:* Musikot Municipality, 2024

After armed conflict, there have been noticeable improvements in women's access to resources, decision-making, and participation in public life. Empowerment programs focusing on economic and political inclusion have emerged, aiming to mitigate the challenges women face and promote gender equality. However, significant barriers persist, including societal discrimination and the lingering effects of conflict trauma, highlighting the ongoing need for comprehensive support and advocacy for women's rights in Rukum west. This paragraph has been further backed up by the verbatim as follows:

*P1: Due to armed conflict, women have been engaged with arms and ammunition, engaged in command and control also. After husband death, woman played both mothers and fathers role also. Conflict made them engaged out of their home. They also engaged in community programs also. They developed the capacity to face with challenges and problem also that helped them to develop leadership capacity. So, armed conflict has positive role on gender equality. Either it is the result of armed conflict or the demand of time, in present time, the access of resources, decision capacity, and public participation of women has increased. Access in property, political participation are other assets of women. In Rukum West, female is in leadership position of different offices, like Red Cross office, Municipalities and playing the role of lawyer*

*also. During conflict many females lost their lives, faced sexual exploitation from opposition or from their own friends or faced the incident like rape also. They lost their husband and children. They have to take care of their children in the absence of their husband. They were out reached from schoolings. They were excluded, charged and tortured without any reason by society.*

*P2: Due to armed conflict, the access of women especially in resources, political participation, decision making and public participation is better than before. The education and health sectors are improved comparatively. Due to traditional norms and values, women could not have proper education and they do not have knowledge on their own rights. Recently women are engaged in local governance and they are employed in government jobs also. Some are engaged in journalism, health and educational sectors also. Through the involvement in these different sectors, they are supporting in peace building and conflict resolution.*

*P6: Women are politically aware, they are standing in their own efforts, and they are in leading position either government job or in private sectors. They are actively participating in public programs. Most of the males are out of home for employment and women have to bring up their children and it becomes difficult to leave their home for external activities like public participation, political engagement and economic activities also. Women in West Rukum were involved in peace building through involved in social welfare programme, political activities, decision making role and backward support for males. Small scale enterprise programs like Sewing and cutting, community for micro finance and beauty parlour training are some examples for women empowerment. During armed conflict, both education and business sectors were targeted. Investment in developmental activities were totally negligible. Those who were unemployed were involved in armed conflict. Now, small scale enterprises are connected through skill-based training like sewing and cutting, beauty parlour, computer training and so on. Sometimes, government and local governments are taking initiation for development programs for sustainable livelihood but they are not sufficient.*

In the wake of the conflict, women emerged as robust figures, not only shouldering the responsibilities of household and childcare but also assuming leadership positions in various spheres of public life. During the conflict, women found themselves actively engaged in armed combat, taking on roles in command and control, often after the loss of their husbands. In the absence of male family members, they navigated the challenges of single parenthood while also participating in community programs and initiatives (Sangroula, 2021). Despite facing immense adversity, the conflict served as a catalyst for empowering women, nurturing

their capacity to confront and overcome challenges, thus fostering leadership skills. In the aftermath of the conflict, there has been a noticeable shift in the status of women within society. Their access to resources, decision-making capacities, and participation in public life have seen significant improvement. In regions like Rukum West, women have ascended to leadership positions in various institutions, including the Red Cross, municipal offices, and advocacy roles. However, the legacy of the conflict continues to cast a long shadow, with many women having suffered unbelievable hardships, including loss of life, sexual exploitation, and the trauma of displacement.

Despite these challenges, women have demonstrated remarkable resilience, actively contributing to peace building and conflict resolution efforts. In the realm of education and economic empowerment, progress has been made, though hindered by lingering traditional norms and values that limit women's access to education and knowledge of their rights. Nevertheless, women are increasingly participating in local governance, securing employment in government and private sectors, and engaging in sectors such as journalism, healthcare, and education. The role of women in peace building and development initiatives cannot be undermined (Thapa & Hauff, 2005).

Through small-scale enterprise programs and skill-based training, they are not only improving their economic prospects but also playing a crucial role in rebuilding their communities. However, challenges persist, including inadequate investment in development activities and limited support from government and local authorities. Women are deeply involved in sustainable livelihood and reconstruction efforts, particularly in regions affected by long armed conflict. The aftermath of such conflicts has altered traditional gender dynamics, propelling women in to diverse leadership roles and active participation in public life. Their resilience is evident in shouldering household responsibilities, childcare, and even engaging in armed combat when necessary. This resilience fosters the development of leadership skills, empowering women to assume crucial roles across various societal spheres.

Despite enduring unbelievable hardships like loss of life, sexual exploitation, and displacement, women play a crucial role in peace building and conflict resolution endeavors. They contribute significantly to education and economic empowerment, increasingly participating in local governance, securing employment, and excelling in sectors like journalism, healthcare, and education. Their involvement in small-scale enterprise programs and skill-based training not only improves their economic prospects but also contributes

significantly to the reconstruction and revitalization of their communities. Challenges persist, including inadequate investment in development activities and limited support from government and local authorities. Nevertheless, the determination and firmness displayed by women continue to boost sustainable livelihood and reconstruction efforts towards a positive line.

#### **4.2.2.3 Changes in Cultural Heritage**

The aftermath of war often leaves a lasting impact on cultural and religious heritage. In the midst of conflicts, historical monuments, sacred sites, and artifacts that were dating back centuries, become casualties of destruction, reduced to ruins and debris. However, the physical devastation is only the beginning. The plundering of invaluable artifacts, the displacement of communities from their ancestral lands, and the deliberate dismantling of cultural identities soon follow. This erosion goes beyond the physical harm, permeating the very essence of societies torn apart by conflict.

The loss of cultural heritage deprives communities of their collective memory, identity, and sense of belonging. It erases the narratives etched into the walls of ancient temples, silences the reverberations of prayers in sacred spaces, and severs the bonds that connect generations to their past. Nevertheless, amidst the ruins, resilience emerges. There are endeavors to safeguard, defend, and reconstruct cultural and religious heritage, acting as inspirations of hope. From grassroots initiatives to international collaborations, individuals and organizations work tirelessly to salvage what remains and restore what has been lost. The paragraph is backed up by the respondents' responses as;

*P9: The temples which have historical importance were banned and the religious festivals on Ram Naomi was stopped. During insurgency, the rebellions charged against religion in the name of Opium but now they have regression for those activities.*

*P14: During the armed conflict, there was control to perform traditional rituals. Especially in Dasain, no offering of animals to Devi and obstacles were created against Kul Puja also. But now the situation is changed.*

*P2: Traditional feasts and festivals are disappearing due to armed conflict.*

In the wake of armed conflict, the preservation of cultural heritage emerges as an inspiration of resilience and hope amidst devastation. Beyond the physical ruins lies a rich needlepoint of

stories, traditions, and symbols that embody the collective memory and identity of affected communities. Preserving this cultural heritage is paramount, as it not only honours the struggles of the past but also serves as a foundation for rebuilding shattered societies. By safeguarding historical sites, monuments, and artefacts, we ensure that future generations can connect with their roots and learn from the lessons of history.

Furthermore, the preservation of culture plays a crucial role in facilitating reconciliation and fostering understanding among diverse groups. By restoring heritage sites and revitalizing cultural practices, communities can reclaim their narratives and establish bonds of solidarity that transcend the divisions that fuelled the conflict. Moreover, cultural preservation brings tangible benefits to post-conflict recovery, as heritage tourism and cultural industries can stimulate economic growth, create employment opportunities, and generate revenue. Therefore, investing in cultural preservation after armed conflict is not only a moral obligation but also a practical strategy for rebuilding economies and strengthening social cohesion. Ultimately, the preservation of culture in the aftermath of war reflects the resilience of the human spirit and a commitment to a more peaceful and inclusive future. Thus, the viewpoints expressed by the respondents align with the aforementioned premise.

*P1: Local people are trying to initiate to promote and preserve cultural heritage. Sometime, state has also been focusing to promote cultural heritage. Those heritages that were destroyed during conflict are being constructed. Those religious, funeral, spiritual and rituals that were disturbed during conflict are continue now.*

*P3: In local level, some clubs are registered with the intention to spread public awareness. Local government has been taking initiation for beautification, reconstruction and colouring of cultural heritages. Young generation are not serious to preserve their cultural heritage, due to decade long armed conflict young generation could not have proper education and for their better future, they are abroad.*

The background described paints a picture of a community striving to reclaim and preserve its cultural heritage in the aftermath of a devastating armed conflict. Despite the destruction twisted upon cultural sites and traditions during the conflict, there is a concerted effort among local residents to revive and promote their rich cultural legacy.

Both grassroots initiatives and state interventions are underway to restore and reconstruct heritage sites that fell victim to the ravages of war. Moreover, efforts are being made to

revitalize religious practices, funeral rites, and spiritual rituals that were disrupted by the conflict, ensuring their continuity and significance in community life.

At the local level, community clubs have been established with the explicit purpose of raising public awareness about the importance of cultural heritage preservation. Meanwhile, local government authorities are spearheading initiatives aimed at beautifying, reconstructing, and enhancing the aesthetic appeal of cultural landmarks.

However, despite these efforts, there are challenges posed by the disengagement of the younger generation. The legacy of the decade-long armed conflict has left a mark on youth, impacting their access to education and opportunities for personal growth. Many young people have been compelled to seek better prospects abroad, leading to a decline in their active involvement in preserving cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, amidst these challenges, there remains a real sense of resilience and determination within the community to safeguard its cultural identity. Through collaborative efforts between local residents, government bodies, and cultural organizations, there is hope for the revitalization and preservation of the community's cultural heritage for generations to come.

#### **4.2.2.4 Changes in education and health status**

In the past there was only one college in Rukum, but now there is 9 campuses in district where masters level education also available. Recently, there are education, management, humanities, science and even like CTEVT institutions are available in district but still 50% students go to out of district for education. Most of the students are studying school and college level education within district, though it was totally disturbed during armed conflict. Now there are 81 government high schools in Rukum West, around 4000 students attend the SEE exam every year.

The aftermath of armed conflict often brings significant changes to healthcare systems as a result of the urgent need to address the physical and psychological wounds inflicted by war. Restructuring post-conflict healthcare typically involves rebuilding infrastructure, restocking medical supplies, and providing retraining for healthcare personnel who may have been displaced or traumatized by the violence. Additionally, there is an increased focus on addressing the unique health challenges that arise in conflict-affected populations, such as treating injuries caused by explosive devices, managing infectious diseases in overcrowded displaced areas, and providing mental health support for survivors dealing with trauma and loss (Ghimire, 2009).

The concept of safe motherhood, focuses on birthing centre, upgrading the health posts into primary centres and availability of specialist doctors in district has positive impacts in health status. The district hospital is upgraded from 15 to 55 bed capacity. Furthermore, efforts are made to improve accessibility and equity in healthcare delivery, particularly for marginalized groups who may have faced discrimination or barriers to accessing healthcare services during the conflict. As communities strive to heal and rebuild in the aftermath of war, the transformation of healthcare systems plays a vital role in restoring health, resilience, and hope to affected populations.

However, it is important to note that after armed conflict, healthcare systems often experience severe degradation, leaving communities without essential services. The destruction of infrastructure, the scarcity of medical supplies, and the departure of healthcare professionals exacerbate the crisis. Displaced populations face increased mortality rates, particularly among vulnerable groups. Additionally, infectious diseases and mental health issues further strain already limited resources. Urgent humanitarian assistance and investment in rebuilding healthcare infrastructure are crucial to alleviate the suffering of affected populations. These premises are backed up by the sayings of the respondents as follows:

*P1: Decade long armed conflict had direct impact on children and young people. The government security forces looked at them in the eyes of insurgents. Likewise, rebellions used them in armed activities also. Those who lost their life or injured had direct impact on their children education due to absence of parenthood. Teachers were also involved in politics instead of teaching as a result they became underground. Schools were threatened by both forces. During armed conflict, there were not good health facilities in Rukum West, only 15 bed medical facility was in district hospital. Some primary health centres were there in other areas but health workers did not want to go their posting due to security threat. The health workers had faced security threat from both sides also.*

*P5: Damage to physical infrastructure: Schools themselves might have been damaged or destroyed during the conflict, rendering them unusable. This includes classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and administrative buildings. Lack of learning materials: Essential learning materials like textbooks, notebooks, and teaching aids might be lost or destroyed, hindering the learning process.*

*P8: Those who are settled in market centres have better access in education, others who reside in remote areas do not have access in proper education. Lack of qualitative health services and*

*lack of qualified health workers, people are deprived of having better health care services. To control students flow out of district, improve in physical infrastructure and availability of qualitative education must be focused. For better qualitative health facilities, infrastructure development and availability of competent health persons are essential. Teacher and health worker faced unnecessary troubles during armed conflict. Some of them were abducted also, some of them left their jobs and others lost their lives also.*

The backdrop outlined in the verbatim paints a stark picture of the profound impact that a decade-long armed conflict has had on the lives of children, young people, and the broader community in Rukum West.

During the conflict, children and young people were tragically caught in the crossfire, viewed with suspicion by government security forces and often exploited by insurgents for their own purposes. The loss of life or injury among parents disrupted the education of many children, depriving them of the stability and support necessary for academic success. Moreover, the politicization of teachers and threats to schools from both sides further hindered access to education and eroded the quality of teaching.

Physical infrastructure, including schools and health facilities, suffered extensive damage during the conflict, exacerbating the already challenging circumstances faced by residents. Schools were either damaged or destroyed, depriving students of essential learning environments and materials (Devkota, 2010). Similarly, the lack of adequate health infrastructure and qualified health workers posed serious challenges to accessing quality healthcare, particularly in remote areas where facilities were scarce and health workers were reluctant to serve due to security threats.

The disparities in access to education and healthcare between those settled in market centres and those residing in remote areas highlight the broader inequalities exacerbated by the conflict. Improving physical infrastructure and ensuring the availability of qualified personnel are identified as crucial steps towards addressing these disparities and enhancing the quality of education and healthcare services.

The plight of teachers and health workers, who faced abduction, threats, and even loss of life during the conflict, underscores the immense sacrifices made by those serving their communities in the face of adversity. Their experiences serve as a reminder of the ongoing

challenges faced in rebuilding and strengthening the social fabric of Rukum West in the aftermath of conflict.

#### **4.2.2.5 Changes in Social Cohesion**

Armed conflict can significantly damage social cohesion, fragmenting communities and deepening existing divisions. In the aftermath, trust may be severely eroded as violence breeds fear, suspicion, and resentment. Displacement, loss of livelihoods, and breakdown of social networks can further worsen social fragmentation and isolation.

However, there are also opportunities for positive change. Community-based initiatives, dialogue, and reconciliation efforts can help foster solidarity, empathy, and understanding across diverse groups. The shared experience of surviving conflict can sometimes galvanize communities, strengthening bonds of resilience.

Ultimately, rebuilding social cohesion after conflict requires sustained efforts to address root causes, promote inclusivity, and empower communities to actively shape a more peaceful and cohesive future. This aligns with the perspectives shared by the respondents.

*P2: The state has thought that conflict has resolved but the people affected by conflict could not forget what they have felt due to conflict and those people are looking for the appropriate moment to take revenge in another way though they are sharing same munch in many programs. In this context, the situation is different than described by government and state level. In the past, some initiatives for displaced people to return back to their homes were tried. Some programs to reunite between opposite groups and compensations programs were also initiated but unable to achieve its mission according to vision. In recent time, there is no programs related to affected and displaced people. For eg: Focuses on friendly sports are being conducted, Picnic programs and local feasts and festival. Breakdown of social cohesion affected traditional community structures seen through cultural and social erosion. Lack of acceptance in others good initiatives, project and programs. Political colours in all social issues. Especially there is no cultural or traditional practices and social cohesion is affected due to political division among the people.*

*P4: Though the places directly impacted by armed conflict is relatively weak in social cohesion but in general relatively social cohesion is maintained. There are some initiatives to rebuild social cohesion but due to feeling of political revenge, there is still some problems in social cohesion. There is no direct breakdown in social cohesion and traditional community structure*

*but the people want to have leadership from their own groups. Though there is no cultural practices in public places that breakdown social cohesion but in private level like marriage ceremony and other programs some practices are still against social cohesion.*

*P7: In the past, people were strictly divided in different groups according to their political ideology but in present time they are focusing on social cohesion rather than the political ideology. Efforts of accepting other's existence, gathering in social cultural and religious festivals. During the period of peace process, there was dilemma between groups either to accept traditional community structures or not.*

*P13: During armed conflict, the relation was bitter, they boycotted in each other and did not speak with each other but after peace process, their relation is being normal. Government, NGOs/INGOs have been making programs to rebuild social cohesion but it is not sufficient as there was deep pain provided by devastating armed conflict. Due to break down in social cohesion, the social unity is in weak condition. The traditional leadership is about to displaced by new one. In the armed conflict saving life is better than maintaining relation and the impact of that armed conflict is still in society, even after long time.*

The background described in the verbatim portrays a society grappling with the enduring scars of a past armed conflict, where the wounds of violence and division continue to linger, despite efforts towards reconciliation and social cohesion. The conflict may have officially ended, as perceived by the state, but for many individuals directly impacted, the memories and trauma persist, fuelling sentiments of resentment and a desire for revenge. Despite occasional participation in shared activities, such as sports events and festivals, the underlying tension and desire for political revenge create barriers to true social cohesion. Throughout these challenges, the restoration of social cohesion remains crucial, requiring sustained efforts to rebuild community trust and reinstate traditional structures. Achieving lasting peace and reconciliation necessitates collective action and unwavering dedication.

Various initiatives have been attempted in the past to address the needs of displaced individuals, promote reconciliation between opposing groups, and rebuild traditional community structures. However, these efforts have often fallen short of their objectives, hindered by political divisions, lack of acceptance, and the enduring pain of the conflict. There must be special programs by government side to enhance cohesion among all groups which is still insufficient.

**Photograph 3:***Social Cohesion*

*Note:* DCC Rukum West, 2024

While there are pockets of resilience and efforts towards rebuilding social cohesion, particularly in private settings like marriage ceremonies and other traditional practices, the predominant societal fabric remains frayed. Political ideology once sharply divided communities, but there is now a shifting focus towards social cohesion, although challenges persist in fully embracing traditional community structures. The aftermath of the peace process has seen tentative steps towards normalizing relations between formerly divided groups, yet the deep-rooted pain inflicted by the conflict continues to undermine efforts towards social unity (Medeiros et al., 2020). Government and non-governmental organizations have initiated programs aimed at rebuilding social cohesion, but their impact remains limited, unable to fully address the profound scars left by the devastating conflict.

The erosion of traditional leadership structures and the emergence of new dynamics reflect the evolving landscape of societal change. However, the legacy of the conflict, where saving lives often took precedence over maintaining relationships, has left a lasting imprint on the fabric of society, perpetuating a fragile state of social unity despite the passage of time.

#### 4.2.2.6 Trauma and Mental Challenges

After armed conflict, trauma and mental health challenges are prevalent, affecting individuals, families, and entire communities. Survivors often suffered deep psychological scars resulting from exposure to violence, loss of loved ones, displacement, and the upheaval of their lives.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders are prevalent, yet access to mental health services is often limited or non-existent in conflict-affected areas. Stigma surrounding mental illness further impedes help-seeking behaviour, exacerbating the suffering of those in need. Moreover, children were particularly vulnerable, experiencing developmental hindrances and long-term emotional distress due to the trauma they had suffered. Addressing mental health needs after armed conflict requires comprehensive support systems, including trauma-informed care, psychosocial support, and community-based interventions. Additionally, efforts to rebuild social networks, promote resilience, and address underlying socioeconomic factors are crucial for mitigating the long-term impact of trauma and fostering therapeutic and recovery in affected populations. These premises are backed up by the sayings of the respondents as follows:

*P7: Due to armed conflict, there is direct or indirect psychological impact on society. Victims are aggressive against those who made them victim. Especially, those who lost their family member are still feeling panic and are not ready to pardon them. The victims are seen aggressive. They hate politics and shows grievances against political parties and governments. They have still felled of insecure.*

*P19: They are still dependent rather than independent due to loss of their guardians. There is scholarship for student though it is not sufficient. In written document, conflict affected people are prioritized, in different skill learned programs though it is questionable in practice.*

After armed conflict, stabilizing mental health necessitates a comprehensive approach encompassing various strategies tailored to the needs of affected individuals and communities. Central to this effort is ensuring access to mental health services, including counselling, therapy, and psychiatric treatment, by establishing and strengthening mental health infrastructure. Community-based interventions play a crucial role in reducing stigma and increasing awareness of available resources, fostering peer support networks and outreach programs. Additionally, integrating mental health services into primary healthcare settings helps destigmatize mental illness and ensures early intervention (International, 2005). Addressing social determinants such as poverty and social inequality is essential for improving mental health outcomes, alongside

capacity-building initiatives to train local healthcare providers and community leaders in culturally sensitive care.

**Photograph 4:**

*Trauma and Health Challenges*



*Note:* HR Watch, 2014

Promoting resilience and coping skills through education and vocational training empowers individuals to navigate post-conflict challenges effectively. Furthermore, peace building and reconciliation efforts contribute to long-term mental health stability by addressing underlying causes of conflict and fostering social cohesion. Through coordinated implementation of these strategies, post-conflict societies can work towards stabilizing mental health and promoting collective well-being. The alignment has been pretty much similar to the responder responses.

*P1: Public awareness programs by governmental organization and non-governmental organization and different civic programs had been conducting for psychological therapy. To reduce the psychological trauma different skill learning programs, training and employment programs had conducted which were not sufficient.*

*P6: There are psychological counselling and respect programs for them who are directly affected by conflict have been conducting. Psychological counselling by different organizations and interactions programs different groups. Mental illness trainings are conducted to health workers so that they can provide psychological care also.*

Following an armed war, mental health issues and trauma become widespread in Rukum West society, leaving people with deep psychological scars on their own, in their families, and in their communities. Survivors bear the weight of violence, loss, displacement, and disruption, resulting in prevalent conditions like PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Thapa & Hauff, 2005). Unfortunately, access to mental health services remains scarce in Rukum West, compounded by the stigma surrounding mental illness, which discourages seeking help and prolongs suffering.

Children, in particular, are vulnerable, enduring developmental setbacks and enduring emotional distress. Rebuilding shattered lives requires comprehensive support systems, including trauma-informed care, psychosocial support, and community-based interventions. Efforts must extend beyond immediate psychological care to encompass rebuilding social networks, fostering resilience, and addressing underlying socioeconomic factors (Hart, 2001).

Respondents echo these challenges, emphasizing the pervasive psychological impact of conflict. Victims harbour deep-seated resentment and insecurity, struggling to reconcile their experiences and rebuild their lives. While there are initiatives such as scholarships and skill programs in Rukum West, their effectiveness is questionable, highlighting the need for more robust and sustainable support mechanisms. Governmental and non-governmental organizations play a pivotal role in raising public awareness and providing psychological therapy and counselling. However, these efforts often fall short, as the demand for mental health support exceeds available resources. Training programs for healthcare workers aim to bridge this gap, equipping them to provide essential psychological care to those in need.

In conclusion, stabilizing mental health post-conflict demands a multifaceted approach that addresses both immediate needs and long-term healing in Rukum West. By prioritizing access to mental health services, reducing stigma, and tackling underlying social determinants, societies can work towards fostering resilience, healing, and collective well-being.

#### **4.2.2.7 Economy and Poverty**

The armed conflict in Rukum West has led to significant social changes, including economic destruction, displacement, gender dynamics, youth unemployment, and limited access to basic services. The conflict has severely impacted sectors like agriculture, tourism, and small-scale businesses, exacerbating poverty levels. Many families have been displaced, disrupting social networks and community structures, making it difficult for individuals to access support systems

and resources for economic recovery. The absence of male family members has altered traditional gender roles, with women often taking on greater responsibility for household income generation. This has led to a lack of economic participation and limited access to resources and opportunities for women in Rukum West. During armed conflict, the migration was high and the main administrative centres had high pressure of migration but after the division of Rukum west, the economic activities are constant and due to Madhya Pahadi Lok Marg, the out migration is controlled, economic activities are increasing, new petrol pumps and hotels are opened due to regular governmental policies which was totally stopped during armed conflict. The displaced people are being adjusted in their new destinations but not returned back to their origin.

*P2: "Of course. The Rukum west armed conflict has had a significant effect on the local economy, causing extensive destruction in a number of different industries. Small-scale enterprises, tourism, and the agricultural sectors have all been badly impacted, which has increased poverty and presented challenging obstacles to the revival of the economy."*

*P5: "Gender dynamics have significantly changed as a result of the conflict, especially when it comes to conventional roles in families. When male family members are absent because of war or fatalities, women are frequently left to shoulder more of the burden of providing the household's income. Traditional gender roles have changed as a result women are facing obstacles to their ability to participate in the economy and access resources."*

*P7: "High rates of youth unemployment in Rukum West contribute to social instability and worsen poverty levels, making it a serious issue. In addition to having restricted access to education and skill-training programs, young people find it difficult to fulfilling work and establish long-term financial stability. This exacerbates the poverty cycle and makes it more difficult to address the region's economic problems."*

*P22: "Rukum West's post-conflict rebuilding initiatives are essential for combating poverty and fostering long-term economic prosperity. These consist of finance projects, training programs for occupational skills, and infrastructure development. Through the empowerment of excluded groups, the creation of jobs, the stimulation of the economy, and the development of social networks, these initiatives promote inclusive growth, durability, and long-term prosperity."*

Youth unemployment is a significant issue, with high rates contributing to social instability

and exacerbated poverty levels. The lack of infrastructure and investment in social services hampers efforts to alleviate poverty and improve living standards for residents, particularly in rural and remote areas of Rukum West.

Post-conflict reconstruction efforts aim to address the root causes of poverty and promote sustainable economic growth through initiatives such as infrastructure development, vocational training programs, and microfinance. Social cohesion and community resilience are crucial in supporting vulnerable individuals and families, providing a foundation for collective efforts to overcome poverty and rebuild livelihoods. Sustainable development strategies in Rukum West prioritize addressing these interconnected challenges by fostering inclusive growth, empowering marginalized groups, and strengthening social networks.

The violent conflict in Rukum West has impacted on societal changes, including increased youth unemployment, relocation, economic damage, and shifts in gender dynamics. Small-scale enterprises, tourism, and agriculture are all being affected, worsening poverty and impeding economic recovery efforts. Gender norms are in flux, with women now contributing more to household revenue. However, the unemployment of young people and limited access to education are exacerbating societal instability.

Initiatives for post-conflict rebuilding are currently prioritizing infrastructure, vocational training, and microfinance to address the root causes of poverty and promote sustainable economic growth. Social cohesiveness and community resilience are being emphasized to assist families and individuals in need (Dhakal & Burgess, 2020). Sustainable development programs in Rukum West are aiming to construct social networks, empower marginalized groups, and foster inclusive growth.

Despite these efforts, youth unemployment remains a pressing concern, fueling social instability and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Limited access to education and job opportunities continue to compound the challenges faced by young people, hindering their ability to secure meaningful work and achieve financial independence.

Reconstruction endeavors are actively targeting the underlying causes of poverty while striving to promote sustainable economic growth. Through infrastructure development, vocational training initiatives, and microfinance programs, the aim is to rebuild livelihoods

and empower marginalized communities, fostering inclusive growth and long-term prosperity (Medeiros et al., 2020).

At the heart of these efforts lies the cultivation of social cohesion and community resilience, with the ultimate goal of charting a path towards a future characterized by resilience, prosperity, and shared opportunity.

#### **4.2.2.8 Changes in population Dynamics and Displacement**

Decade long armed conflict continues to shape significant changes in population dynamics and patterns of displacement, profoundly impacting the social fabric of Rukum West. The conflict had led to widespread displacement of families, disrupting established population patterns and community structures. Many households had been uprooted from their homes and forced to seek refuge in safer areas or temporary shelters. This displacement has caused a fragmentation of social networks and community ties as individuals and families struggle to adapt to new environments. The inflow of displaced populations into host communities has strained resources and services, worsening existing challenges such as limited access to basic necessities like food, water, and healthcare. The sudden inflow of people has also placed pressure on housing and infrastructure, further complicating efforts to address the needs of both displaced and host populations. Moreover, the displacement of families has resulted in shifts in population demographics, with some areas experiencing an influx of new residents while others witnessing a decrease in population numbers.

This demographic upheaval has implications for community cohesion and identity, as residents handle with the integration of newcomers and the loss of familiar faces and voices. The ongoing displacement and changes in population dynamics highlight the enduring impact of the conflict on Rukum West's social landscape. As communities strive to rebuild and recover from the trauma of displacement, efforts to address the needs of displaced populations and foster social cohesion are crucial for promoting stability and resilience in the region.

During the armed conflict, there was high migration rate from villages to district HQ. to Dang, Nepalgunj and Kathmandu also. Around five thousand people are out of country for foreign employment, among them two thousands are in America and others are in European countries. Many People go to India for seasonal employment purpose also.

## Photograph 5

### *Population Dynamics and Displacement*



*Note: By Researcher, 2024*

*P2: "Population dynamics has been significantly impacted by the armed war in Rukum West, resulting in the massive displacement of families throughout the region. The need for many households to escape their homes in search of safety has caused a major upheaval to long-established demographic trends and community structures."*

*P4: "In addition to facing several difficulties, Rukum West's displaced people also struggle to get access to healthcare, food, and other essentials. The abrupt surge of newcomers puts a burden on the infrastructure and housing stock, straining available resources and services in the host towns."*

*P6: "In Rukum West, the demographic changes brought about by relocation have a big impact on identity and community cohesiveness. The promotion of social cohesiveness becomes more crucial as communities struggle with the integration of immigrants and the loss of well-known faces and voices in the area in order to support stability and durability."*

*P11: "A multifaceted strategy is needed to address the needs of displaced residents and foster social harmony in Rukum West. This entails investing in infrastructure and services to sustain both host communities and displaced populations, as well as granting access to basic*

*necessities like food, water, and healthcare. Moreover, establishing a feeling of togetherness and belonging in the area depends on initiatives to ease integration”.*

Rukum West's violent conflict significantly impacts the region's social fabric, with families uprooted and seeking refuge in safer areas or makeshift shelters. This disrupts long-established patterns and community structures, splintering social networks and placing a burden on resources and services. The inflow of displaced people also puts pressure on housing and infrastructure, making it harder to meet the needs of both the host community and the displaced people.

The demographic upheaval has an impact on identity and community harmony, as locals struggle with the integration of immigrants and the loss of familiar faces. Addressing the needs of displaced populations and fostering social cohesion are crucial for promoting stability and resilience in the region. The inflow of displaced populations into host communities' strains already stretched resources and services, exacerbating challenges such as limited access to essential needs like food, water, and healthcare. This sudden surge of people further strains housing and infrastructure, making it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of both displaced and host populations (Yadav, 2016 ). The ongoing displacement and evolving population dynamics underscore the lasting impact of conflict on Rukum West's social landscape. As communities rebuild and recover, addressing the needs of displaced populations and fostering social cohesion are imperative for promoting stability and resilience in the region.

### **4.3 Discussions**

Politically, the public is generally disappointed and has lost faith in established political entities. Many people see politics as a morally compromised arena polluted by corruption and self-interest, which has resulted in widespread lethargy and disengagement (Upreti, 2006). This disappointment is especially prominent among the younger generation, who have little confidence in the country's leadership and are increasingly leaving in search of better opportunities elsewhere. Despite this disappointment, there is a growing wave of support for new political parties that promise a departure from the current state of affairs. These parties, often characterized by populist rhetoric and a rejection of traditional political norms, are gaining power among segments of the population dissatisfied with the existing political landscape.

The conflicts in society have worsened societal divisions, leading to increased polarization and radicalization within certain groups. Although democratic processes are meant to address these divisions, deeply rooted societal grievances often hinder meaningful progress. Nevertheless, social media platforms offer some hope by facilitating dialogue, promoting tolerance, and advocating for social harmony. However, there is still a pervasive sense of mistrust towards political leaders due to disconnection between their ideological rhetoric and tangible actions.

The complex interplay of factors contributing to polarization and radicalization in Rukum West reflects a society deeply scratched by a lengthy armed conflict (United Nations, 2013). As the consequences of this conflict continue to unfold, it is evident that the fractures within the social fabric are deeply rooted and multifaceted. The universal disenchantment with established political entities has fostered a fertile ground for the rise of newer political parties that pledge to break away from the existing norms. This trend is particularly pronounced among the younger generation, who are disappointed with the current leadership and are seeking alternative avenues for meaningful change.

Moreover, the societal divisions worsened by the conflict have resulted in polarization and radicalization within specific population segments. Despite attempts to bridge these gaps through democratic processes, deeply rooted accusations often hamper significant progress. Nonetheless, there are reasons for hopefulness as social media platforms are being utilized to facilitate dialogue, advocate for tolerance, and promote social harmony (Khanal, 2019). However, a prevailing sense of mistrust towards political leaders persists, fueled by a perceived difference between their rhetoric and actual actions.

During the conflict, women actively participated in armed combat, arrogant command and control roles, often in the absence of their husbands. They faced the challenges of single parenthood while also engaging in community programs and initiatives (Sangroula, 2021). Despite enduring immense adversity, the conflict served as a catalyst for empowering women, nurturing their ability to confront and overcome challenges, thereby fostering leadership skills. In the aftermath of the conflict, there has been a noticeable change in the status of women within society. Their access to resources, decision-making abilities, and involvement in public life have significantly improved. In regions like Rukum West, women have risen to leadership positions in various institutions, including the Red Cross, municipal offices, and lawyer roles. However, the legacy of the conflict continues to cast a long

shadow, as many women have experienced unbelievable hardships, including loss of life, sexual exploitation, and the trauma of displacement.

Despite these challenges, women have demonstrated remarkable resilience, actively contributing to peace building and conflict resolution efforts. Progress has been made in the areas of education and economic empowerment, although it is hindered by persistent traditional norms and values that limit women's access to education and awareness of their rights. Nevertheless, women are increasingly participating in local governance, securing employment in the government and private sectors, and engaging in professions such as journalism, healthcare, and education. The role of women in peace building and development initiatives cannot be minimized (Thapa & Hauff, 2005). Through small-scale entrepreneurship programs and skill-based training, they are not only improving their economic prospects but also playing a crucial role in rebuilding their communities. However, challenges remain, including insufficient investment in development activities and limited support from the government and local authorities. Women are deeply involved in sustainable livelihood and reconstruction efforts, particularly in regions affected by long armed conflict. The aftermath of such conflicts has altered traditional gender dynamics, propelling women into diverse leadership roles and active participation in public life.

In terms of cultural heritage, local communities have established community clubs with the explicit aim of raising public awareness about the significance of preserving cultural heritage. Additionally, local government authorities are leading initiatives to beautify, reconstruct, and enhance the aesthetic appeal of cultural landmarks. However, despite these efforts, there are challenges stopping from the detachment of the younger generation. The lasting effects of the decade-long armed conflict have impacted the youth, limiting their access to education and opportunities for personal development. Many young individuals have been compelled to seek better prospects abroad, resulting in a decline in their active involvement in cultural heritage preservation.

During the conflict, children and young people tragically became victims, viewed with suspicion by government security forces and often exploited by insurgents for their own purposes. The loss of parents due to death or injury disrupted the education of many children, depriving them of the stability and support necessary for academic success. Furthermore, the politicization of teachers and threats to schools from both sides further hindered access to education and compromised the quality of teaching.

Physical infrastructure, including schools and healthcare facilities, suffered extensive damage during the conflict, worsening the already challenging conditions faced by residents. Schools were either damaged or destroyed, depriving students of essential learning environments and resources (Devkota, 2010). Similarly, the lack of adequate healthcare infrastructure and qualified healthcare professionals presented significant obstacles to accessing quality healthcare, particularly in remote areas where facilities were scarce and health workers were reluctant to serve due to security risks.

The disparities in access to education and healthcare between those residing in urban centres and those in remote areas highlight the broader inequalities intensified by the conflict. Improving physical infrastructure and ensuring the availability of qualified personnel are identified as crucial steps toward addressing these disparities and enhancing the quality of education and healthcare services. While the conflict may be officially declared as over by the state, for many individuals directly affected, the memories and trauma persist, fuelling feelings of hatred and a desire for revenge. Despite occasional participation in shared activities, such as sports events and festivals, underlying tensions and a desire for political justice create barriers to genuine social cohesion.

Numerous initiatives have been implemented in the past to address the needs of displaced individuals, promote reconciliation among opposing groups, and reconstruct traditional community structures. However, these efforts have often fallen short of their goals due to political divisions, lack of acceptance, and the enduring trauma of the conflict experience. While there are instances of resilience and attempts to rebuild social cohesion, especially in private settings like marriage ceremonies and other traditional practices, the overall fabric of society remains stressed. While political ideologies once sharply divided communities, there is now a shifting focus towards social unity, although challenges persist in fully embracing traditional community structures.

In the aftermath of the peace process, there have been tentative steps towards normalizing relations between previously divided groups. However, the profound pain inflicted by the conflict continues to undermine efforts towards social unity (Medeiros et al., 2020). Government and non-governmental organizations have initiated programs aimed at rebuilding social cohesion, but their impact remains limited, unable to fully address the deep scars left by the devastating conflict. Survivors bear the burden of violence, loss, displacement, and disruption, resulting in established conditions such as post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Thapa & Hauff, 2005). Unfortunately, access to mental health services is scarce in conflict-affected areas, compounded by the stigma surrounding mental illness, which discourages seeking help and prolongs suffering.

Children, in particular, are vulnerable, experiencing developmental setbacks and enduring emotional distress. Rebuilding shattered lives requires comprehensive support systems, including trauma-informed care, psychosocial support, and community-based interventions. Efforts should extend beyond immediate psychological care to encompass rebuilding social networks, fostering resilience, and addressing underlying socioeconomic factors (Hart, 2001). Respondents emphasize these challenges, highlighting the pervasive psychological impact of the conflict. Victims carry deep-seated anger and insecurity, struggling to reconcile their experiences and rebuild their lives. While initiatives such as scholarships and skill programs exist, their effectiveness is questionable, underscoring the need for more robust and sustainable support mechanisms.

Currently, post-conflict rebuilding initiatives are prioritizing infrastructure development, vocational training, and microfinance as means to address the underlying causes of poverty and promote sustainable economic growth. There is a focus on enhancing social cohesiveness and fostering community resilience to support families and individuals in need (Dhakal & Burgess, 2020). In Rukum West, sustainable development programs aim to establish social networks, empower marginalized groups, and promote inclusive growth.

However, despite these efforts, youth unemployment remains a significant concern, leading to social instability and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Limited access to education and job opportunities compound the challenges faced by young people, hindering their ability to secure meaningful employment and attain financial independence. Reconstruction efforts actively target the root causes of poverty while striving to promote sustainable economic growth. Through infrastructure development, vocational training initiatives, and microfinance programs, the goal is to rebuild livelihoods and empower marginalized communities, fostering inclusive growth and long-term prosperity (Medeiros et al., 2020). The sudden arrival of people due to displacement further tensions housing and infrastructure, making it increasingly challenging to meet the needs of both displaced individuals and host populations (Yadav, 2016). The ongoing displacement and evolving population dynamics highlight the lasting impact of the conflict on the social landscape of Rukum West.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary

Rukum West is smaller in size but the population strength is bigger than East Rukum. Unlike Rukum East, the majority of people belongs to Brahmin, Chhetri and Thakuri. Rukum District was divided in to two parts in 2015, the main cause was political and ethnic. Before 2030 BS Rukumkot was district headquarter. There was unemployment and people used to do agriculture, husbandry and used to go India for seasonal employment also. Some people are still engaged in unethical business like opium and hasis production in upper belt and trading also. In the past there was Tibetan refugee camp in Dhorpatan area, as a result, the external activities were also seen in that area. There was low presence of government in remote area of Rukum also. The narcotic drug production had been increasing in the past ten. People's illegal activities helped to increase the distance with government.

During the armed conflict, there was high migration from villages to urban centers, and out migration from Rukum to other districts. Around five thousand people are out of country for foreign employment, among them around two thousands are in America and others are in European countries. Many People go to India for seasonal employment also. In the past there was only one college in Rukum, but now there is 9 campuses in district where masters level education also available. Recently, there are education, management, humanities, science and even like CCVT institutions are available in district but still 50% students go to out of district for education. Most of the students are studying school and college level education within district, though it was totally disturbed during armed conflict. Now there are 81 government high schools in Rukum West, around 4000 students attend the SEE exam every year. Many people are having government jobs, especially teacher, security forces and public administration.

The situation of women empowerment is better. Women are in leading position in different offices like District Coordination committee, Election Office, Red Cross and performing the role of lawyer also. Though the health status was poor in the past due to decade long armed conflict, it is in better situation in present time. The concept of safe motherhood, focuses on birthing center, upgrading the health posts into primary centers and availability of specialist

doctors in district has positive impacts in health status. The district hospital is upgraded from 15 to 55 bed capacity. During armed conflict, the migration was high and the main administrative centers had high pressure of migration but after the division of Rukum west, the economic activities are constant and due to Madhya Pahadi Lok Marg, the out migration is controlled, economic activities are increasing, new petrol pumps and hotels are opened through governmental policies which was totally stopped during armed conflict.

The displaced people are being adjusted in their new destinations but not returned back to their origin. Cast hierarchy is being thin, the case of Navaraj BK is highlighted in the past. During armed conflict, around 900 people were killed from both sides, more than 2000 people lost their parents, more than 1000 people were seriously injured, around 5000 people are displaced to district headquarter and around 5000 people are displaced to out of district. Changing religion trend is seen mostly in ethnic and Dalit groups. The impact of armed conflict has deep rooted in the mind of victim, it would be forgotten only after the recent generation.

The young generation who are out of education due to armed conflict hate recent politics and political leaders. The data and information from different peoples reveals that the cast system, health status, educational level and gender equality is in better position. The researcher has observed that during his travelling in public bus, out of 18 passengers, 14 were females that shows, males are out of their homes due to the employment. Likewise, out look of those people indicates that most of them are from low income family. Women were travelling with their small children, among them two children had serious health problem. One had burned legs and going for treatment to the district headquarter and another child had breathing problem since two months ago and looking for local Jhakri and Dhami. This indicates that the poor health and educational status in the district.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The communities have become divided and radicalized due to the armed conflict, worsened by political tensions and deep-rooted social inequality. Sometimes, Social media also plays a negative role in intensifying conflict narratives and hindering efforts to foster dialogue and reduce polarization. However, amidst this turmoil, the preservation of cultural heritage stands as a resilient example, offering a path towards reconciliation. Nevertheless, the impact of the conflict extends beyond physical destruction, necessitating restructuring of healthcare

systems to address the profound physical and psychological wounds inflicted. While progress has been made in healthcare restructuring, access to mental health services remains limited, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive support.

Furthermore, the conflict in West Rukum has brought about notable changes in gender dynamics, with women taking on leadership roles and actively participating in public life. Despite facing discrimination and trauma, women have shown remarkable resilience and made significant contributions to peace-building endeavors. However, systemic barriers persist, demanding ongoing advocacy and support to advance women's rights and promote gender equality in the region. Throughout these challenges, the restoration of social cohesion remains crucial, requiring sustained efforts to rebuild community trust and reinstate traditional structures. Achieving lasting peace and reconciliation necessitates collective action and unwavering dedication.

Continuous support is vital for empowerment programs that focus on the economic and political inclusion of women affected by the conflict. Investment in development activities and collaboration with the government and local authorities are important to address persistent barriers to women's rights. Efforts should be made to mitigate polarization and promote dialogue within communities, addressing underlying tensions that arose during the conflict. Further research and analysis are needed to better comprehend the evolving gender dynamics and the impact of the conflict on women's roles in Rukum West. Implementing new policies is essential, particularly in conflict-affected areas such as Rukum district.

Encouraging the documentation and preservation of historical records, narratives, and testimonies related to the armed conflict is crucial. Supporting initiatives that promote truth and reconciliation processes, memorialization, and the preservation of cultural heritage is also essential. Advocacy for international collaboration and support in addressing social changes in West Rukum is necessary. Sharing experiences, best practices, and lessons learned from post-conflict situations in other countries can inform strategies and interventions in Nepal. .

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## ANNEXES

### Interview Guideline

#### **In-depth Interview Guideline (*Survivors of the armed conflict war*)**

##### **General Information**

1. Age:
2. Sex:
3. Ethnicity:
4. Religion:
5. Occupation:

##### **1. Changes in Population Dynamics & Displacement of Populations:**

- Can you describe any personal experiences or observations of people being displaced from their homes due to the armed conflict in West Rukum?
- How have the caste hierarchy and religious affiliations of the people have transformed after post conflict situation?
- How has the displacement of populations affected the social dynamics and cohesion within communities in West Rukum?
- What challenges do displaced individuals and families face in terms of accessing basic services, livelihood opportunities, and social support networks?
- How do displaced individuals and families cope with the loss of their homes and communities in terms of emotional and psychological well-being?
- What role do local NGOs or humanitarian organizations play in assisting displaced populations in West Rukum, and what are the gaps in their support services?

##### **2. Breakdown of Social Cohesion:**

- In what ways have you noticed a breakdown in social cohesion within communities in West Rukum as a result of the armed conflict?
- How have relationships between different social groups or communities been affected by the conflict?
- Are there any efforts or initiatives underway to rebuild social cohesion and trust within communities? If so, what are they and how effective do you perceive them to be?

- How has the breakdown of social cohesion affected traditional community structures and leadership in West Rukum?
- Are there any cultural or traditional practices that have emerged or evolved as a response to the breakdown of social cohesion?

### **3. Trauma and Mental Health Challenges:**

- Can you describe the psychological toll that the armed conflict has had on individuals and families in West Rukum?
- What are some common signs or symptoms of trauma and mental health challenges that you have observed among those affected by the conflict?
- Are there any existing support systems or services available to address the mental health needs of people in West Rukum? If so, how accessible and effective are they?
- How do cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding mental health impact the willingness of individuals in West Rukum to seek support or treatment?
- What strategies could be implemented to increase awareness and reduce stigma around mental health issues in conflict-affected communities?

### **4. Disruption of Education and Healthcare:**

- How has the armed conflict impacted access to education for children and young people in West Rukum?
- What challenges do schools and educational institutions face in providing quality education amidst the conflict?
- Similarly, how has access to healthcare services been affected by the conflict? Are there any specific healthcare needs or concerns that have emerged as a result?
- What long-term consequences do you foresee for the education and healthcare systems in West Rukum as a result of the prolonged conflict?
- How do teachers and healthcare workers navigate their roles and responsibilities amidst the conflict, and what support do they require?

### **5. Erosion of Cultural Heritage:**

- Can you describe any instances of cultural heritage being affected or undermined by the armed conflict in West Rukum?
- How do communities in West Rukum perceive the importance of preserving and safeguarding their cultural heritage amidst the conflict?

- Are there any grassroots initiatives or cultural preservation efforts underway to counteract the erosion of cultural heritage? If so, what are they and how effective have they been?
- Have there been any efforts to document or preserve cultural practices and traditions that are at risk of being lost due to the conflict?
- How do younger generations in West Rukum perceive their cultural heritage, and what initiatives are in place to ensure its transmission to future generations?

#### **6. Gender Dynamics and Women's Rights:**

- How have gender dynamics and women's roles within families and communities been impacted by the armed conflict in West Rukum?
- Have there been any noticeable changes in women's access to resources, decision-making power, or participation in public life as a result of the conflict?
- What are some of the key challenges and barriers that women face in asserting their rights and achieving gender equality in the context of the conflict?
- How have women in West Rukum been involved in peace building or conflict resolution efforts, and what challenges do they face in these roles?
- Are there specific programs or interventions aimed at empowering women economically or politically in the aftermath of the conflict?

#### **7. Economic Instability and Poverty:**

- How has the armed conflict contributed to economic instability and poverty in West Rukum?
- What are some of the primary livelihood sources that have been affected by the conflict, and how have people adapted to these challenges?
- Are there any economic development initiatives or programs aimed at addressing poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods in the region? If so, what impact have they had?
- How has the conflict affected access to credit and financial resources for small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers in West Rukum?
- What role can sustainable agriculture and natural resource management play in promoting economic stability and resilience in conflict-affected areas?

#### **8. Polarization and Radicalization:**

- Have you observed any instances of polarization or radicalization within communities in West Rukum as a result of the armed conflict?

- What factors or grievances do you believe contribute to the polarization and radicalization of certain groups or individuals?
- Are there any efforts or strategies being implemented to mitigate polarization and promote dialogue and understanding among different segments of society? If so, how effective do you perceive them to be?
- How do local media outlets and social media platforms influence perceptions and narratives surrounding the conflict, and what measures could be taken to mitigate misinformation and polarization?
- Are there any interfaith or interethnic dialogue initiatives in West Rukum aimed at promoting tolerance and understanding among diverse communities? If so, how effective have they been in fostering reconciliation?