Knowledge Production and Learning in Nepal's Madhes Movement: Struggle, Achievements and Disappointments

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Nepal Case Study: The Nepal Madhesh Foundation (NEMAF)

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Preface

This Nepal Madhes case study is part of a broader project, funded by the UK's Economic & Social Research Council, under grant number ES/R00403X/1: *'Social Movement Learning and Knowledge Production in the Struggle for Peace with Social Justice: Case Studies from Four Conflict-Affected Contexts'*. This preface will provide a generic overview of the broader research rationale, theory, methodology and aims of this project.

Research Rationale

In an era of increasing global inequality, conflict and rising authoritarianism (Streeck, 2016; Piketty, 2014, Scarhill, 2013, Rogers, 2016) social movements often represent a first line of defence for some of the most marginalized communities on the planet, seeking to defend and extend the conditions for a basic and dignified human existence. That is to say, 'social movements matter' (Cox, 2018; SC, IDS and UNESCO, 2016; McAdam et al, 1999). Yet in the developing world, they often operate, organise and advocate in conditions of state repression, threats and insecurity, conditions which can serve to undermine movement cohesion, solidarity and effectiveness (Earl, 2013). This is particularly the case in countries affected by or emerging out of armed conflicts.

This research seeks to explore the learning and knowledge production processes of four very different organisations that are part of broader social movements, located in four distinct countries and continents, as they advocate for peace with social justice in contexts of violent conflict and/or its aftermath. These institutions, who are core partners in the proposed research, are NOMADESC, a grassroots NGO based in Colombia; The Housing Assembly, a grassroots organisation from South Africa; The HDK (Peoples' Democratic Congress), an umbrella organisation that brings together different social movements in Turkey; and the Madhes Foundation, Nepal, an organisation that works with and for the excluded Madhes community of the Tarai, the Southern plains of Nepal. Each organisation, in different ways, advocates with and for marginalized communities seeking to defend and extend their basic rights to education, health, housing, life, dignity and equal treatment before the law. Each organisation, to different degrees, has also been victim of state repression, violence against it members and activists, and sustained surveillance and persecution.

The research combines detailed case studies of the learning and knowledge production processes of each social movement institution, and incorporates within that a dynamic process of inter-movement learning and knowledge exchange, facilitated through a series of workshops and field visits to each of the country contexts, with the objective of building collective knowledge and inter-movement solidarity.

The overarching aim of the study is to identify and critically analyse the strategic knowledge and learning processes of the four social movement organisations operating in conflict affected contexts. This was done through a co-produced process of intra- and inter-movement reflection on these strategic knowledges and learning processes with a view to improving their effectiveness and supporting the promotion of more equitable and sustainable peacebuilding processes.

The specific objectives are:

- Critically examine the learning and knowledge production processes of four social movements in conflict affected contexts
- Strengthen the respective social movements' learning and knowledge production processes, their reflexivity and strategic development
- Promote South-South and North-South dialogue and relationships to promote improved practice and international solidarity
- Enhance national and global understanding of social movement learning and the role of social movements in promoting sustainable peacebuilding
- Co-produce four detailed social movement case studies and a critical comparative synthesis, extracted from the case studies.

These objectives will be achieved through empirically grounded, co-produced case studies of each respective social movement organisation, combined with inter-movement engagement, drawing on popular education techniques and ethnographic research methods to answer the following research questions:

RQ1) *How do social movements, located in complex conflict affected situations learn and produce knowledge, and how does this process of learning and knowledge production assist in the development of strategy to achieve the demands of their constituencies?*

RQ 2) *What knowledge have the social movements developed and what have they learned?*

RQ 3) *What have been the effects of these social movements on the promotion and realization of peace with social justice within their country context?*

RQ 4) *What can we extract from the four case studies about learning and knowledge production within social movements in complex, conflict-affected contexts that can assist in assessing the possibilities for strengthening civil society movements' role in building peace with social justice?*

Theory

For the purpose of this research, we draw on the work of Paul Routledge, who defines social movements as:

"organisations of varying size that share a collective identity and solidarity, are engaged in forms of conflict in opposition to an adversary (such as a government or corporation), and attempt to challenge or transform particular elements within a social system (such as governments, laws, policies, cultural codes and so on)"(Routledge, 2018:4).

Our particular definition, emphasises the geographical nature of social movements, which sees them as:

"networks of people, resources and connections. Most operate at the intersection of a series of overlapping scales – from more local municipalities, through regions to the nation state and, increasingly, international forums. These different politics of scale – and their associated networks of activity – provide movements with a range of opportunities and constraints (ibid,6).

As a body of work, social movement research emerged from North America and Europe in the 1950s, with the functionalist 'resource mobilisation theory' (RMT) becoming a dominant strand that focused on social movement organization, resources, and opportunities (Tilly, 1985; Tarrow, 1999; McAdam, 1982). Resource mobilization theorists have been criticised for their overtly structural approach and a tendency to extract the struggles of social movements from the broader analysis of the socio-economic context (Choudry, 2015; Scandrett, 2012). They also tended to arrive at levels of abstraction and generalisation which inevitably produced reductive, simplified theory. 'New Social Movement' (NSM) theory emerged from Europe to challenge RMT (see Buechler, 2013; Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1980) and the inadequacy of orthodox structural approaches, both Functionalist and Marxist, to account for social movements which began to emerge from 1968 onwards as significant subjects of struggle, but which could not easily be slotted into the traditional class analyses of these theories, e.g. the peace movement and the

women's movement. NSM theorists tend to have a concern for questions around why new social actors emerge, and take into account cultural factors such as the construction of collective identities and lifestyles. Some strands seek to analyse motivation, experience and communication networks of individual activists involved in social movements (Melucci, 1980). Such theories can be useful in helping us to grasp the internal dynamics and heterogeneous characteristics of social movements. In development studies, the political and economic struggles of social movements have increasingly been linked to battles over knowledge, coloniality and modernity, with alternative ways of knowing, being and producing at the heart of debates (c.f Escobar, 2004). Finally, there are important literatures on the way social movements in the contemporary era of globalization, use space and operate across borders to strengthen their claim-making (Kriesi et al, 2016, Routledge, 2018).

One general criticism, which has been made of much social movement theory, is that they often lack relevance for the movements themselves and '*often have little of substance to say about the struggles of the day*' (Cox and Nilsen, 2014:p17). Flacks (2004) surveying the ever-growing field of social movement scholarship asked '*What is all this analysis for? In what way does the validation, elaboration, and refinement of concepts provide useable knowledge for those seeking social change*?' (ibid, p138). From Flacks' critical starting point, a small but significant body of literature has emerged over the past decade which seeks to radically turn the mainstream trend on its head, challenging the detachment of the scholar from the movement by prioritising the aim of making research relevant and accountable to social movements themselves (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Novelli, 2006, 2010,2004; Choudry, 2015; Cox & Nilsen, 2014; McNally, 2013). Flacks, Bevington and Dixon call for a new wave of 'movement-relevant theory' that is useful to those involved in struggles for social change (2005). This type of research represents an opportunity to increase both the academic utility and credibility of social movement research and its support for social impact. In relation to this, the study of social movement organising and learning processes has been identified as one particularly relevant area for social movement analysis, which seeks to be movement-relevant (Zibechi, 2007; Santos, 2006; Della Porta and Pavan, 2017).

Moving slightly away from social movements to issues of conflict, in much of the literature on peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding there is a recognition that the voices of civil society, and the social movements that emerge from them, are often insufficiently included in

determining the nature of peace agreements and post-conflict development policies (Pugh et al, 2016; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011). Too often, national political elites, armed movements, and international actors fail sufficiently to take into account the demands of civil society actors and social movements for access to basic rights and basic goods – demands and grievances that underpin many conflicts - favouring agreements that prioritize security, democratic elections and the promotion of markets (Paris, 2004). These peace agreements often result in what Galtung (1976) has famously termed 'negative peace', characterised by the cessation of armed violence without addressing the underlying drivers of conflict that underpinned the violence. Instead Galtung argued for 'positive peace', which seeks to end both violence and the underlying causes of that violence. At the heart of the drivers of conflict in many contexts is inequality, in its multiple economic, political, cultural dimensions (Cramer, 2005; Stewart, 2005; 2010): unequal access to resources, land, food, housing, education, healthcare, and unequal treatment before the law and/or the political system, particularly for different cultural and ethnic communities. As a result, for many social movements in conflict affected contexts, the struggle for peace cannot be separated from the struggle for social justice – with many drawing on the discourse of 'peace with social justice' as the rallying call. For many analysts, failure to build 'positive peace' lies at the heart of why many peace agreements fail and relapse into violence. Strengthening social movements and the organisations that they form, and seeking to pressurise states to redress inequalities, is therefore a crucial peacebuilding measure. How these organisations develop strategies, develop their members and build capacity, extend contacts and solidarities with other movements, and their effects on national policy in these conflict contexts is central to the concern of our research, yet has often been overlooked by research on security, conflict and peacebuilding (Richmond, 2016).

Linked to the role, nature and importance of social movements is also the role of knowledge within these movements. Social movement knowledge production and learning have been key to the historical evolution of social scientific thought. Central to this argument is both a critique of top down knowledge, which presumes that academics theorise and social movements produce empirical evidence and receive theory, to a much more grounded understanding that social movements at the point of praxis build knowledge from below that can move social scientific thought forward and change the world. Laurence Cox (2018), Aziz Choudry (2015), Shukaitis & Graeber (2007) argue that those at the coal face – suffering the harshest contradictions of

contemporary neoliberal capitalist development - have privileged knowledge about the nature of the system under which we all reside.

Similarly, it is when academics engage with social movements that provides the most fruitful potential for breakthroughs in social science. Critical theory owes its roots to intellectuals' engagement with social movements – not just Marxism, but feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism etc. However, since the 1980s onwards critical theory, particularly in the USA and Western Europe, has become distanced from grassroots struggles and has developed in very particular directions. This has made it less relevant and powerful – and also distorted its focus (Shukaitis & Graeber 2007).

Part of the argument – and position - we are developing here, also feeds into the broader debate around the 'decolonization' of knowledge – the subaltern knowledge of social movements-in its worker, indigenous, feminist, black and anti-racist forms has been silenced/undermined/hidden through processes of both imperialism and elitism – that have prioritized Northern knowledge over Southern knowledge; University Knowledge over Social Movement knowledge, Elite academic over Movement Intellectual, Middle class knowledge over working class and peasant knowledge; Traditional Intellectuals over Organic Intellectuals. This is not a plea for the abandoning of Universities, but for reconnecting and reinvigorating them, alongside a recognition and vindication of alternative modes of knowing and thinking, to produce what Boaventura de Sousa Santos called an 'ecology of knowledges' and a challenge to the process of 'epistemicide' that is impoverishing our capacity to see, think and move beyond our contemporary, highly unequal and brutal world.

Knowledge, therefore, takes on a particular importance in the pursuit of social transformation and social justice. The importance of education and knowledge production in the contemporary era has not been lost on those engaged in processes of hegemonic globalisation, and it is common to hear corporations talking of themselves as 'learning organisations', ' knowledge institutions' and discussing the 'learning society', the 'information society' , 'the knowledge economy' and recognising the need to set up structures able to change and adapt to new circumstances, be that fast capitalism, lean production, flexible accumulation, which reflect the need for more mobile structures and a workforce skilled to adapt to a fast changing environment (Ranson, 1994; Jarvis, 2001). In this context it appears logical to ask how social movements are taking seriously the necessity to rethink strategies through processes of research, investigation and learning. In social

movement studies there has been little focus on knowledge and education processes. However, more recently, from both the margins of the field (Cox,2018; Choudry, 2015; Novelli & Ferus Comelo, 2007) and from the centre (Della Porta & Pavan, 2017) there is an increased recognition that knowledge in social movements really matters:

In their effort to pursue or resist social and political changes, these actors do not limit themselves to protesting in the streets or the squares. Rather, they form collective spaces of knowledge production wherein collaboration and participation lead to the "rethinking [of] democracy; the generation of expertise and new paradigms of being, as well as different modes of analyses of relevant political and social conjunctures" (Casas-Cortes et al., 2008, p. 20, cited in Della Porta, A & Pavan, E (2017)

Della Porta & Pavani (2017:300) call for the study of 'repertoires of knowledge practices'. Which they define:

" as the set of practices that foster the coordination of disconnected, local, and highly personal experiences and rationalities within a shared cognitive system able to provide movements and their supporters with a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce social, political, and cultural changes"

Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' (Marxism) was accompanied by his interest in a 'pedagogy of praxis' (Pizzolato and Holst, 2017) which saw the construction of both hegemony and counter-hegemony as fundamentally pedagogical. Gramsci (1971), noted a distinction between 'common sense' (which reflected hegemonic knowledge) and 'good sense' (that knowledge emerging from the peoples own analysis derived from the everyday), and his work had a strong focus on workers education.

So what types of knowledge do social movements produce? As Chesters notes:

"social movements have long been bearers of knowledge about forms of oppression and injustice, expressing political claims, identifying social and economic grievances and bringing new or neglected issues to public prominence "(Chesters, 2012, p. 153).

As Casas-Cortes et al. (2008:42-3), note, this knowledge is often:

"embedded in and embodied through lived, place-based experiences, [able to] offer different kinds of answers than more abstract knowledge [...] situated and embodied, rather than supposedly neutral and distant".

Classically, we can see that social movement knowledge production has operated at three levels. Firstly, all movements seek to provide a structural critique: *how can we understand the oppression we are suffering?* This might be thematic – why are people being pushed off their land? To more macro-societal, such as a critique of capitalism/feudalism etc. Secondly, and emergent from the first, they develop a strategic critique – how can we challenge the oppression we are facing? This is both in terms of modes of resistance (strikes, protests, occupations etc) and institutional forms (the centralized party, the umbrella organization, popular front/united front, the trade union etc). Thirdly, movements develop an alternative vision: What is our alternative vision to the problem? This might be thematic – solutions to social housing, or societal: the vision of a new society - communism/socialism etc. In summary, what the above is suggesting is that social movement knowledges produce knowledge on the nature of the system, the strategies and tactics to overthrow it, and defend the space once taken, and finally develop visions of what it might be replaced with: Critique, Resistance, Alternatives. According to Cox (2018) because academic/top down knowledge has become separated from the movements it has been less able to address Resistance & Alternatives, and therefore focussed largely on Critique. However, to paraphrase Marx, the task is not just to understand the world, but to change it. In order to do that – we need to reunite the trilogy of Critique, Resistance, Alternatives in order to build real viable alternative solutions to the highly unequal and brutal world that we live in.

As Gramsci notes every 'revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism'(Gramsci, 1977, p.12). Within this process, Gramsci talked of the important role of 'organic intellectuals', committed to an alternative counter-hegemonic project and able to articulate, strategise and transmit this to broader publics (Gramsci, 1986, pp.3-24). While Gramsci often portrayed this function rather mechanistically and unidirectional, another influential Marxist educator, Paolo Freire, would later provide a far more dialectical conceptualisation of this process. According to Freire (2000), true education is not a monological but a dialogical process between teachers and learners: leaders cannot merely tell activists what to do. If this occurs, then even a victory is a hollow achievement. Nor can education ever be understood as 'neutral', but instead a process

riven with differences in power and placed at the service of competing political projects. Popular education is seen as one of the vehicles through which the process of challenging unequal structures can be achieved (Kane, 2001). It has, at its centre, a fundamental commitment to social change in the interests of oppressed and marginalised classes. Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between this type of education and the institutions and organisations, such as trade unions and social movements, that have historically emerged to defend the interests of the poor and the marginalised – movements that this education seeks explicitly to strengthen (Jara, 1989 cited in Kane, 2001, p.9). This organic relationship means that the 'organisation' becomes the 'school' in which popular education takes place, and their "struggles and actions, their forms of organisation, their 'culture', in the broadest sense, constitute the starting point of popular education and its field of enquiry" (Kane, 2001, p.13).

In that sense, 'popular education' needs to be seen as not only involving formal educational events in social movements, but as part of much bigger processes which, though appearing 'informal' and 'arbitrary,' are very deliberate. In this definition, both the 'popular education' events that take place, and the actual practice of 'strategy development' and 'protest actions' can be seen as examples of popular education, whereby the 'school' (the social movement) learns. The first occurs whereby people consciously engage in educational practices (schooling), and the second whereby people are learning through social action. Foley (1999) suggests that a broad conception of education and learning should include *formal education* (taking place in educational institutions), *incidental learning* (taking place as we live, work and engage in social action), *informal education* (where people teach and learn from each other in workplaces, families, communities, social movements) and *non-formal education* (structured systematic teaching and learning in a range of social settings). There is also a need to think through the relationship between individual learning processes and movement learning processes – which represent the transfer or fusion of individual experiences into the collective or institutional learning. We also have to ask questions about the temporality of learning – short, medium, long term processes and the way different forms of learning interact.

If we are to explore these educational processes, then we need to extend our gaze beyond formal training courses for activists and develop an analytical framework that is 'open' and which allows for the rich diversity of ways that social movements (their organisations, activists and supporters) engage in learning. In studying these different types of education and learning, Foley (1999, p.10)

suggests this needs to be firmly grounded in an analysis of the political economy, ideology and discourse of the focus of study. Recent work has built on these foundations to theorise how processes of neoliberalism and globalization have affected social movement learning and praxis, and the way movements are learning to operate transnationally to achieve their objectives (see Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010). Similarly, Choudry's (2015) work on *'Learning Activism: the intellectual life of contemporary social movements'*, provides both a vindication of the importance of social movements as sites of knowledge production, and an insider's view of the complex ways that education, knowledge and strategy development are built in and through social movement struggles. More recently, Choudry & Vally (2017) have deepened the historical aspects of this, to evidence the importance of learning from the history of previous struggles, through archive work, to inform the battles of today.

Methodology

In the multiplicity of approaches which have emerged within popular education, there has long been an interest in research strategies which are able to somehow capture the collective learning and knowledge production processes that take place within social movements (Torres Carrillo, 1999; 2010). This has meant an overlap between popular education and participatory research, since participatory research methods and strategies have been developed to be implemented in popular education contexts (ibid). The most prominent example here is the work of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, whose technique of "participatory action research" (PAR) has been enormously influential and is recognised as one of the most commonly used research techniques in popular education, especially in Latin America (ibid, Fals Borda, 1979, 1987, 2008).

During the 1990s, a participatory popular education research method known as the 'systematisation of experiences' gained prominence within the field of Latin American popular education. Based on the recognition that unique, valuable knowledge can be produced through popular education processes, the systematisation of experiences is a collective process which seeks to deepen understanding and improve practice through collective reflection and analysis of experience (Jara, 1997, 2015; Kane, 2012; Torres Carrillo, 2010, Ruiz Muñoz, 2004). Systematisation:

> 'enables organisations and educators to learn from each other's experiences, successes, problems and failures; it helps educators analyse and evaluate their own work; it is part

of the educative process itself, in which encouraging people to interpret developments helps them reach new levels of understanding' (Kane, 2012:p78).

There exist a range of different systematisation methodologies, however it can be understood as an intentional, collective process of knowledge production which tries to *recover and interpret the meanings that manifest themselves in social practices, with the purpose of strengthening them'* (Torres Carrillo, 2010: p196). The following passage from Chilean popular educator Oscar Jara demonstrate the relevance of systematisation for the study of social movements:

> ... the new scenario of this end of the (20th)century has raised questions over the practices and theoretical conceptions of Latin American social movements and social sciences. We are faced with new questions and challenges. It is a privileged historical moment full of creation, but the answers to the new questions will not arise from any other place but from accumulated historical experience. Unfortunately we have not yet accumulated the necessary learning contained in these (social movement) experiences. Systematisation, as a rigorous learning exercise and critical interpretation of lived processes, remains a pending task and today more than ever can decisively contribute to the re-creation of the social movement practices and to renew theoretical production within social sciences , based on the daily experience of the peoples of Latin America, in particular those committed to processes of popular education and organisation (Jara, 1994).

The systematization of experiences means a critical interpretation of an experience (process or event), beginning with its reconstruction and ordering, in order to discover the logic of the process, the factors that have influenced it, how they are related to each other, and why things happened as they did (Jara 2015, Torres 2004). To reconstruct, to order or organise, in order to understand and interpret what happened and to then be able to draw lessons from that experience and transform practice (Jara, 2004). It is an investigative process that seeks to allow the experience to speak for itself, through all the voices of those who have been part of the experience (or at least a representative section) (Jara, 2004).According to Jara, one of the purposes of systematisation is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas, for example between different social and pedagogical processes, because it allows the protagonists of a process to communicate their process effectively.

Jara argues that:

'it is not the same to exchange stories about experiences, as to exchange systematized products of experiences; because many times in the exchanges of experiences we waste the opportunity to have exchanges of substance and we limit ourselves to exchanging stories in which each person or organization tells what they do and everybody says: "oh, yes, very interesting ..." and the others reply: "Well, that was your experience ... Now, mine ..." and it does not get beyond this (Jara, 2004)

In line with this, our approach builds in ample space for critical, collective reflection and engagement in order to create spaces where the protagonists of the movement can engage in dialogue and exchange.

Phase One

The initial stage of the systematisation involves a process that seeks to 'reconstruct' the lived experience of the movement, using any and every means of data available, and in line with the thematic threads identified for the process. This involved individual interviews with key informants, archive and documentary analysis, newspaper articles, photos, videos, and much more. This phase required a process of organising and classifying information, which facilitated a descriptive account of the evolution of the movement in question, based upon multiple sources. This is the foundational phase, and involved forming some initial analysis in identifying emergent themes and points of interest, which were later fed into the subsequent phase of the process. This stage is carried out in a collective manner, and has the participation of many people who have been protagonists in the process to guide and support the research process.

Phase Two

This is the key moment of the systematisation process, which seeks to 'discover the logic of what happened in the course of the experience' (Taberes Fernandes et al, 2002, p26). Based on the initial framing of the systematisation process, this phase involves a collective process of reflection and analysis by those people who have lived the experience. The point here is not to arrive at a single, unified viewpoint, but to access the multiple voices in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the lived experience. This necessitates engaging with a broader cross-section of constituencies, then stage 1, with multiple workshops and focus groups with leaders, activists, supporters. These participatory space allow for a rich engagement between the researchers and

the participants to develop research findings, check them with participants and refine and develop ideas.

Phase Three

The Systematisation processes will lead to the production of a final written report, but will also involve a number of other creative end products such as videos, leaflets and theatre productions. One important consideration is the issue of the communication of the knowledge produced in the process is not only how is it going to be made available, but also to whom and in what languages and media? And, why these audiences and not others? It is also the case that some of the knowledge produced will be for internal use only, not to be shared with broader audiences. These are important questions, and decisions which are being taken collectively as the research has progressed.

Phase Four

In this phase, with the case studies produced, we then move into a dialogical process of attempting to explore whether the synthesis of the four case studies, might produce more than its component parts. What collective insights can we draw from the cases on the nature of social movement knowledge production and learning in the contemporary era? The outcomes will emerge out of a one week retreat by the core research team to explore, debate and discuss key emergent ideas from the research that will underpin the final synthesis document.

PROCESS

To clarify, there are two parallel, but interlinked processes taking place across the two-and-a-half-year research period. Firstly, there is *National Data Collection Process*: This 'systematisation' process has take place in the respective country of each of the social movements. This included multiple focus groups, in-depth interviews with key movement activists, review of movement documentation, in order to develop detailed narratives of their experiences and processes of movement organisation and develop the social movement case studies. Secondly, there are a series of *Inter-Movement Meetings and Engagement*. These research team meetings are being held across the cycle of the project – and in the countries involved in the project. These meetings provide a moment for the researchers to engage in a public event targeted at social movements and academic researchers in each of the respective countries, and an opportunity for the visitors to learn more about the particular history and struggles of social movements in the host country.

Throughout the research period, research teams have been able to engage regularly and to share experiences, challenges and insights.

Conclusions

We hope that you enjoy these studies, that they are thought provoking and useful, and that they help to move the discussion forward. On behalf of the research team we can attest to the extremely inspiring and transformative process that we have been through during this project. We wish to thank all the amazing activists and leaders from the respective movements that we have had the privilege to engage with for sharing their thoughts, their passions and their stories: their struggles have become our struggles in rich, unpredictable and inspiring ways.

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1. Introduction to Case Study

On 16 January 2007, a group of Madhesi activists representing Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal led by their leader Upendra Yadav burnt copies of the interim constitution at Maitighar Mandala in Kathmandu. They accused the government of ignoring the Madhesi people's demands for federalism. The leader and the activists were detained and charged with a public order offence. This triggered a series of protests in the Southern plains of Nepal leading to the death of 16-year-old student, Ramash Kumar Mahato in Lahan. The mass demonstration following the killing turned into the first Madhes uprising which lasted for 21 days. The following year, the second Madhes uprising erupted demanding reforms in the electoral system to address the problem of underrepresentation of Madhesis and their equitable access to state mechanisms such as the bureaucracy, judiciary and security domains. The third uprising in 2015 was linked with the declaration of the 2015 constitution of Nepal which undermined the inclusive rights of the Interim 2008 constitution of Nepal and various historical agreements between previous governments and the Madhes movement. The political background of these uprisings was fermented in the backdrop to the longstanding struggle of the Madhesi people that began in early 1950s.

1.1 Background

Nepal has experienced a turbulent political system over the last two centuries constituting absolute monarchies under the Shah Kings (1769- 1846), Rana oligarchy with monarchies as titular heads (1846- 1951), a fragile period of governance shared by the monarchy and various political parties (1951-1959), a brief period of parliamentary democracy (1959-1960) leading to the reestablishment of absolute monarchy (1960-1990), constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy (1990- 2006) and finally, a democratic republic after the abolition of the monarchy in 2006. Despite the series of political shifts over time, the basic structure of the society remains the same in which the country has been ruled by political elites who have enjoyed widespread power and control over resources. Ethnic minorities and indigenous communities have long been marginalised and excluded from opportunity in the state's decision-making and processes of development (Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011). One of the main ethnic groups who have been at the margins is the Madhesi community, living in the Southern plains of the country. Even though public consciousness about inequalities and injustices has widened due to pro-poor political

revolutions such as the Maoist rebellion (1996-2006), fundamental social and economic structures remain unchanged whereby historically privileged social/ caste groups continue to monopolise political power and control economic resources.

Following the historical peace agreement between the Maoists rebels and the government of Nepal in 2006, the longstanding Madhes movement turned into a series of mass uprisings to disrupt historical power structures by asserting their rights to representation in the political sphere; to equitable access to economic means; and to recognition of their ethnic identities in the new system of democracy. The Madhes uprising was a largely peaceful mass resistance of the Madhesi ethnic groups who disrupted political processes over a period of eight years (2007 – 2015) and remained at the centre of political negotiations to design a new progressive constitution that would address grievances of the Madhesi people who had been historically denied equitable representation in politics and recognition as equal citizens of Nepal. The Madhes uprising was the culmination of a longstanding ethnic struggle that had surfaced in national political spheres in different forms since the 1950s, but gained renewed momentum against the backdrop of Nepal's Maoist rebellion (1996 – 2006) and the subsequent opportunities for state restructuring at the political moment when the traditional Nepali state was forced to negotiate with popular forces.

The existing body of literature around the Madhes movement either discusses the forms of historical marginalisation of Madhesis in the Nepali state, providing a rationale for the struggle; or the processes of the movement, highlighting the chronology of political negotiations, the role of movement leaders and the outcomes of mass protests. There has been, however, no previous attempt to study the process of learning and knowledge production within the movement in a way that could be theorised and drawn on by activists to strengthen their struggle. This research aims to fill this gap by focussing on developing an understanding of how the Madhes movement produced knowledge about structural inequalities, political marginalisation and dehumanisation of Madhesis in Nepal's nation building process. In this this process, it aims to show how the movement organisation, the Nepal Madhes Foundation (NEMAF) in our case, contributed to establishing and developing the intellectual life of the Madhes movement. Hence, we examine the following research questions:

RQ1) How does the Madhes movement, located in Nepal's current social, political and economic structure, learn and produce knowledge, and how does this process of learning and knowledge

production assist in the development of strategy to achieve the demands of Madhesi communities?

RQ 2) What knowledge has the Madhes movement developed and what has it learned in relation to key dimensions: Security; Objectives; Leverage for Change; Communication; Internal Cohesion; Inter-Movement Alliances; International Solidarity?

RQ 3) What has been the effects of the Madhes movement on the promotion and realization of peace with social justice in Nepal?

RQ 4) What can we theorise about learning and knowledge production within Nepal's Madhes movement that can assist in assessing the possibilities for strengthening civil society movements' role in building peace with social justice in Nepal?

1.2 The historical context of Madhes movement in Nepal

Madhesis are identified as the people who largely live in the Southern plains of Tarai and speak the languages: Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Hindi and Urdu. They are a people with their own regional languages and dialects, unique patterns of cultural practices, dresses and traditions. Madhesi communities comprise of various cultural groups such as Hindu caste groups, Muslims, and indigenous people of the Tarai. Many of these groups share cultural traditions and marital ties with people living to the South, bordering Indian states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. In general, Madhesi is a community sharing a common imagination of history, culture, language and ethnic origin that lives within a clearly defined and a contiguous territory (Lal, 2012: 2). The term Madhesi is ambiguous. Migrants to the Tarai from the hills in Nepal and the indigenous Tharu people do not consider themselves as Madhesi. The definition of ethnic Madhesi population is embroiled in deep contention vis-à-vis Madhesi identity and the geographical territory of Tarai, i.e. the plains that are currently being asserted as Madhes. Gaige (1975) in his pioneering work conducted an extensive analysis of various factors which could differentiate the character of Madhesis from those of Hill origin who are identified as Pahadi in Tarai. These characteristics included the difference in everyday life such as, personal mannerisms, food habits, dress patterns, marital rituals as well as religious beliefs and practices.

Historically, Madhesi people have experienced wide-ranging discriminations by the Nepali state. During and before the Rana period, resource extraction in the Southern plains was extensive. The fertile land in Tarai was largely controlled by traditional landlords who enjoyed the patronage of

the political class in the capital. During the Rana regime, Ranas distributed the land to their own family members and military officers. However, academic analysis of the causes of Madhesi discrimination, their continuous state subjugation and the need for political struggle is rather sparse. In recent years, Madhes studies have acknowledged two main issues: firstly, Madhesis have been historically oppressed and marginalised in Nepal's political and development processes; and secondly, there is suspicion concerning Madhesis' loyalty to the Nepali nation and their true 'Nepaliness' (Gautam, 2008: 117). These discourses have resulted in recognition of the subordinate positions of Madhesis as Nepali citizens; their negligible representation in the state structure; and the emergence and establishment of Madhes-based regional and ethnic political parties in the national political sphere (Gautam, 2008: 117).

After the overthrow of Rana rule in 1951, a group of Madhesi elites initiated the idea of forming a separate political party- Nepali Tarai Congress (NTC) to capitalise on newly available political opportunities. The NTC called for an autonomous Tarai state, recognition of Hindi language as the official language in Tarai, equitable representation of Madhesis in the civil service and the formation of a Tarai regiment in the Nepal Army (Geige, 1975: 109). In 1958, Raghunath Thakur established the Madhes Liberation Movement to end state oppression, political and social discrimination and historical injustices by securing an independent Madhes state. The establishment of NTC almost seven decades ago indicates that the Madhes movement has a long history but only came fully to the surface at the end of oppressive Rana oligarchy and the onset of a democratic polity that allowed political participation and civil liberties. However, these demands were ignored by the post-Rana political leadership that embarked upon a process of building a modern nation without recognising the cultural and ethnic diversity in the country. In 1960, tragically, democracy and political freedom was stolen by a royal coup, following a period of Panchayat regime which promoted a unitary state and pursued a national homogenization project under the policy of monarchy, Nepali language and Panchayat polity (Onta, 1996).

Since Prithvi Narayan Shah's imperial campaigns (1743 – 1775) for territorial expansion and the annexation of the Southern plains into the Nepali state, Madhesi people have experienced systemic discrimination, exclusion in the state structures, and non-recognition of their culture in the national identity. The domination of state power by Khas- Arya ethnic groups, particularly the hill high castes, and their control over economic resources, have led to the systematic marginalisation of Madhesi communities whose cultural and ethnic character is absent in state-

sponsored Nepaliness (Gaize, 1975; Mishra, 2064 BS; Yadav, 2003, cited in Ghimire, 2013). Even before Nepal's unification campaign, the Nepali hills (Pahad) were the centre of political power. From the very beginning, the ruling high caste hilly people (Pahadi) saw themselves as cultured and civilised, and undermined Madhesis as subordinate citizens (Heumo, 2007). The struggle of Madhesis is to reclaim their cultural/ ethnic identity on the national stage; gain political rights of equitable representation; and assert redistributive economic policies that redress the historical grievances experienced by the Madhesi people. In other words, their demands include representation of Madhesi cultures in the manifestation of Nepali national identity; social respect and dignified life as a non-Nepali speaking and culturally distinct community within the majority Nepali-speaking nation; and constitutional guarantees for their equitable representation within state institutions.

However, the struggle threatens the hegemonic dominance of the Pahadi political class who popularise an ethno-nationalism that depicts Madhesis as an untrustworthy and unpatriotic people which can be exploited by the Indian establishment in order to jeopardise Nepal's national unity and political stability. This tension undermines the legitimate social justice demands, resulting in the Madhes movement often being portrayed as a threat to national integrity. The concerns about national unity are not entirely baseless albeit largely perceptual, during the latter part of the Madhes movement, a Madhesi separatist movement emerged led by CK Raut which attempted to draw upon the frustrations amongst Madhesi youth to justify its political goals to achieve an independent Madhes nation. The failure or hesitance of Madhes-based political parties to publicly reject the separatist sentiments and their continuing anti-establishment provocations complicate the distinction between the legitimate social justice goals of the Madhes movement and the highly sensitive issue of Nepali nationalism. However, after Raut's agreement with the government on 21 March 2019, the politics of self-determination seems to have demised.

Additionally, there are also internal social tensions based on caste hierarchies and religious divisions within the Madhes. Although the caste system was abolished in 1963 and *Muluki Ain* (The National Civil Code) was promulgated in 1964, the caste system still exists in rural areas of the country and the Tarai region of Nepal is no exception to this. Firstly, while all Madhesi groups have united in their collective struggle against the exclusionary centralised state, there are grievances among low caste groups such as *Dom, Dusadh, Musahar, Chamar, Tatma, Khatwe* and

Dhobi who feel that they have been historically oppressed by the upper caste groups within Madhesi communities. Secondly, Tharus who live mainly in the Western Tarai consider themselves a distinct indigenous community of Nepal and hence, express their reservations about identifying themselves as Madhesis. Thirdly, there have been tensions between Hindus and Muslims in Kapilvastu and Nepalgunj districts in the past which have created spatial and social divisions in the region. Finally, even though Hindi is a *lingua franca* in the region, there are at least four main languages spoken by the people across the Tarai region: *Maithali, Bhojpuri, Abadi* and *Tharu*. Rakesh (2015) argues that the prevalence of social, cultural and linguistic diversity in Madhes inhibits the notion of a pan-Madhesi identity. Even though the growing awareness of social inequality, the effects of recent democratic changes in the country and ongoing social movements in Tarai have sensitised the issue of caste-based discrimination, debates about internal social problems have been largely been absent in the Madhes movement.

1.3 A political economy, history and geopolitical terrain

Historical context of economy

Historically, Nepal's trade links have been stronger with Tibet as compared to India because of Kathmandu's Newar rulers trading with Tibet and access to India being geographically inaccessible due to Tarai's impenetrable dense forests, known as *charkoshe jhadi*. Nepal fought three wars against Tibet between 1786 and 1855, and forced Tibet to provide privileged access to business and trade for Nepali businessmen but the British East India Company opened a trade link with Tibet in 1904 via Sikkim, ending Nepal's unilateral trade relationship with Tibet (Shakya, 2010). Even during this period, the Muluki Ain (the civil code) which was enforced by then Prime Minister Junga Bahadur Rana, 'forbade non-trader castes to engage in entrepreneurial activities' (Shakya, 2010: 51). After the invasion of Tibet by China in 1950 and closure of the borders between Nepal and Tibet, economic activities between the two countries significantly reduced. During the Rana Regime, Marwaris, a business community from India were invited to establish industries in the Tarai in partnership with Rana rulers. A rapid process of deforestation in Tarai in the first half of the twentieth century and later the removal of natural barriers increased trade links between Nepal and India but the major beneficiaries of these new economic activities were the Marwaris and the Rana rulers.

During the 1950s and Panchayat era (1960-1990), protectionist economic policies largely benefitted the high caste groups who had dominance in government institutions and positions of power. For example, in the first democratically elected parliament in 1959,

> the Bahun-Chhetris who were numerically a minority were overwhelmingly represented in the new parliament, while the indigenous nationalities and low caste people were grossly underrepresented. This paved the way for the passage of the controversial economic and governance policies that established the Bahuns as the primary beneficiaries of economic protection by the state (Shakya, 2010: 52).

Political economy of development in the wake of liberal democracy

During the Panchayat regime, the monarchy enjoyed absolute powers and the royal family remained above the constitution. The monarchy was the centre of feudalism and the royal family's patronage was essential to establish industries and businesses. The ethnic groups and political elites who were close to the royal family benefitted from access to power and economic resources. The people's movement in 1990 established the supremacy of the constitution by curtailing powers of the monarchy. However, the monarchy kept the military under its control and exercised its power to influence politics, economic activities and social relationships. Despite the constitutional recognition of cultural diversity and equal treatment under the law, the state did not address the historical problem of unequal distribution of power and wealth across different social groups, allowing the privileged ethnic and high caste groups to reap off the benefits of business enterprises. Even though all castes and ethnicities were encouraged to set up business enterprises, the historically marginalised caste and ethnic communities who had little wealth were unable to participate in profit-making business activities. Hence, as Shakya (2010: 54) concludes, '*modernisation and democratisation have not necessarily led to an ethnicity-neutral socio-entrepreneurial order in Nepal. Modern organizations continue to be characterised by the same ethnic divides as the old ones'*.

In the wake of parliamentary democracy in 1990, Nepal initiated outward facing economic reforms by entering the period of neoliberal reforms, implementing the lending contracts signed with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in 1986 and 1989 respectively. Even the country's communist parties signed up to market-based capitalism, paving the way for privatisation of state-owned industries. In this process, international organisations promoted

economic liberalisation within parliamentary democracy, however there were no programmes to redress social and cultural divisions, the semi-feudalistic nature of the national economy, and hegemonic control of the state system by the traditional political class. Shrestha (2010) points out that neoliberal reforms during 1990s have failed to reduce levels of poverty as expected and the major contribution to poverty reduction comes not from national means of production but from remittances which are unsustainable. The most worrying problem relates to the growing income inequality that widened the gap between the rich and poor. The Gini coeficient, a measure of inequality, increased from 0.34 in 1995/96 to 0.41 in 2003/04 (CBS, 2004) and further worsening to 0.46 in 2008/09 (NPC, 2010).

Due to liberalisation of the economy and uncontrolled flow of cheaper foreign goods, traditional cottage industries gradually dried out and the traditional artisan community (e.g. weavers, potters, carpenters, cobblers, masons, blacksmiths, goldsmiths and tailors) that relied on local demand gradually lost their means of livelihood as they could not survive the competition. Their survival was left in the hands of the market without any state programmes to support economic transition. The state's withdrawal from investment in job creation such as infrastructure and manufacturing; decreased subsidy in agriculture; and increased competition due to free trade policies has produced a large number of unemployed youth, many of whom migrate to Gulf countries for manual labour. As a result, the national economy now heavily relies on remittance and the growth of Gross Domestic Product is based on credits that are used to purchase foreign products such as, automobiles, TV, computers, food and other daily products (Chandrasekhar, 2017). This has led Nepal into an agrarian crisis in which the cost of production is higher than its market value due to the flow of cheaper foreign goods. In the education sector, privatisation has increased exponentially since the neoliberal reforms began, and the quality of learning and teaching in public schools, where the majority of children from poor communities attend, has deteriorated. The World Bank, the largest donor in the education sector, promotes policies around freedom of market, private investment in education and decentralisation in order to reduce public spending which is most needed to support those who cannot afford to pay for private education (Regmi, 2017; Bhatta and Pherali, 2017; Pherali, 2012).

The majority of Madhesi people were doubly trapped in the exclusionary structures characterised by Khas-Arya dominance and internal feudalism which benefitted a small minority of landowners and upper caste Madhesis; and the neoliberal capitalism that promoted marketisation and

reduced state funding in public services. The historical marginalisation of Madhesi communities, low literacy rates, and structural exclusion from positions of power and civil service employment left most Madhesis at the margins. New development initiatives and social empowerment programmes which proliferated in the wake of liberal democracy were largely monopolised by urban Khas-Arya elites who were able to mobilise their networks in the capital to channel these programmes in the hilly areas. Exceptions to this were some programmes targeted at Dalits and indigenous communities, again, largely in the hilly areas which ignored the Madhesi Dalits and poor. These communities gradually fell into the trap of liberal programmes of NGOs rather than pursuing radical agendas of social transformation (explored in detail later), whereas Madhesi communities were mobilised under the political agenda of Madhes movement, leading to significant disruption through mass mobilisation.

Geopolitical context

Nepal is geopolitically vulnerable because of its geographical location between two rapidly growing economies, China in the North and India on all other sides, that are in competition to exert global influence. Khadka (1992: 137) argues that '*geopolitical vulnerability is determined by relative strength in territorial size, population, level of development, and other factors*' and in all of these aspects, '*Nepal has the least advantageous position*'. The dynamics of Nepal's complex ethnic structure also add to crucial geopolitical sensitivities. Around 8 percent of the population living in the Northern mountains are of Tibetan descent and 45 percent of the Tarai's population is of Indian descent (Khadka, 1992). Unlike in the Southern border that spans 800 kilometres of flat land with open access to India, the Himalayas in the North serve as natural borders with China. In this context, Nepal has had to pursue international relations sensitively in order to advance its goals for economic development with three objectives:

1. To play a growing role in both regional and international politics;
2. To pursue an independent domestic and foreign policy as dictated by its geopolitical position; and
3. To achieve internal stability, peace, and development (Khadka, 1992: 143).

Nepal's reliance on India is geographically more favourable than that on China due to its accessible borders, close cultural ties between the peoples, and open borders between the two

countries. However, India has historically viewed Nepal's Himalayas as their security frontiers. In a statement, the Indian Prime Minister Jwaharlal Nehru once noted:

> … apart from our sympathetic interest in Nepal, we are also interested in the security of our own country. From time immemorial, the Himalayas have provided us with a magnificent frontier. Of course, they are no longer as impassable as they used to be, but they are still fairly effective. We cannot allow that barrier to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India (Nehru, 1971).

This statement still seems to guide Indian foreign policy towards Nepal; and to fulfil their security interests, India tends to interfere in the internal politics of Nepal.

In economic terms, Nepal's abundant water and natural resources are of great importance to India's growth and development. Nepal's current annual hydropower output barely exceeds 700 megawatts (MW) but theoretical hydroelectric potential is estimated to be around 83,000 megawatts (MW) and about 42,000 MW is technically and economically viable (Bergner, 2013: 7). When this untapped potential is materialised, it could have a transformative impact on Nepal's foreign currency gains and economic development. However, India is almost the sole market for Nepal's vast potential of electricity production and India also intends to secure its increasing levels of electricity and irrigation needs by drawing on Nepal's water resources. Consequently, Nepal's endeavours to freely negotiate foreign direct investments in hydropower projects are limited due to India's stringent conditions around energy import from Nepal (Nepal Energy Forum, 2018).

Currently, Nepal heavily relies on India for its basic commodities such as fuel, machinery, automobiles, and food items. Recent statistics show that Nepal is India's top importer among its neighbours, above Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan, with exports in the Fiscal Year 2017-2018 of worth $6.38 billion whereas, Nepal's export to India is only worth $437 million (Financial Express, 2019). Hence, Nepal's overreliance on the Indian market for its basic necessities also adds to Nepal's geopolitical vulnerability.

Furthermore, the longstanding tensions between India and Pakistan over the contested territory of Kashmir, and Nepal's independent diplomatic relations with Pakistan, add another geopolitical dimension to Nepal-India relationship (Bhatnagar and Ahmed, 2020: 7). India is concerned about infiltration by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) into Kashmir via Nepal.

Nepal's political instability works in favour of India by preserving its mediatory role that implicitly serves its own national interests (Bhatnagar and Ahmed, 2020: 6; Pherali, Smith and Vaux, 2011). More importantly, '*India's policy towards Nepal has been guided by economic and geo-strategic calculations*' (Bhatnagar and Ahmed, 2020: 5) and Nepal's nation-building has been underpinned by political discourses against India's expansionist policy as observed in the annexation of Sikkim in 1975 and border disputes in Nepal's Southern borders such as the Susta area and more recently, on the Western front where the Indian military was granted permission to set up camps on Nepali soil during the Indo-China war in 1962 and have remained permanently since then. The latest tension emerged after the Indian foreign minister virtually inaugurated the 80 km-long road connecting India with Tibetan plateau through Lipulekh pass which has been Nepal's territory since the Sugauli Treaty signed between Nepal and the British Raj to end the Anglo-Nepal war (1814-1816). Nepal protested this incident and on 10 June 2020, Nepal's parliament endorsed a new map claiming 400 sq. km of land in the East of Mahakali river. Even though India has agreed to engage in a dialogue to resolve the dispute, it does not share Nepal's sense of urgency (Xavier, 2020; Bhatnagar and Ahmed, 2020). Nepal's claim over the territory and its inclusion of the revised map in the national emblem has benefitted the nationalist government of Nepal led by K P Oli that faces internal opposition within his own party. This has however significantly ruptured the Nepal-India relationship and India has blamed China for inciting anti-Indian politics in Nepal even though such a claim has been considered baseless (Xavier, 2020). As the anti-Indian sentiments accelerate to the peak, any support to Madhes movement from the Indian establishment or Madhesi leaders' silence about India's claim over Lipulekh and Kalapani could be fatal to the movement. The People's Socialist Party which emerged as a unified national party after the merger between major Madhesi political forces extended its support to the government's proposal on constitutional amendment to include the revised map in the national emblem.

Likewise, China's main security concerns relate to free Tibet campaigns organised by Tibetan refugees in Nepal. Nepal has shown full support to China's security needs and repeatedly repressed anti-China demonstrations in Kathmandu claiming that '… *policies on refugees are guided by geopolitical sensitivities*' (Foreign Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha, cited in HRW, 2014). As Human Rights Watch report notes:

Nepal has signed several security and "intelligence-sharing" agreements with China since 2008; operationalized border security cooperation; partially enforced a ban on Tibetan public demonstrations; implemented close monitoring of the Tibetan community, its leaders, and real or perceived activists; and deployed intimidating numbers of Nepali armed police in Tibetan neighborhoods on politically sensitive dates, such as the anniversary of the Dalai Lama, International Human Rights Day (December 10), or high-level visits by Chinese dignitaries. (HRW, 2014: 1)

In recent years, China has been increasingly interested in Nepal's political affairs as a key geopolitical player. Nepal has also exploited the troubled relationship with India, particularly when India backed the Madhes movement and imposed a 2015 blockade, Nepal responded by expanding trade links with China in order to reduce its excessive dependence on India. In March 2016, Nepal signed a historic trade and transit agreement with China and in the following year, joined China's Belt and Road Initiative 2017 (Sigdel, 2017). Even though India continues to remain the biggest foreign investor in Nepal, China's investment is also increasing gradually, amounting to US\$ 621 million in 2015-2016, which is 42 percent of the total foreign direct investment in Nepal (Chalise, 2017).

US geopolitical interests are also central to Nepal's struggle for development. The US is rhetorically considered the third 'neighbour' of Nepal that cannot be replaced. The US is pushing for the Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) Nepal Compact, a programme that was designed to address weak impacts of US foreign aid programmes in low income countries through corporate interventions. The MCC's stated aim is to reduce poverty and promote economic growth by promoting free market policies in key development and governance sectors such as, agriculture and irrigation, education, power and energy, transportation and water supply. It also focuses on anti-corruption measures, health and sanitation and reforms in land rights. Even though the current Oli government intends to ratify the compact in the current parliament, there have been controversies around the Compact's strategic military interest aligned with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, which aims to counter China's growing military influence in the region through collaborations in security, governance and economics of the countries in the region. Most importantly, due to the condition that provisions in the Compact would prevail over Nepal's existing laws in the event of dispute, many political leaders are against the MCC. Nevertheless, the crux of the MCC is not necessarily so much about security interests, but rather worryingly aggressive marketisation and financialisation of public sectors that pay no attention to social security for the most marginalised populations in Nepal. Yet again, Nepal's social and economic

inequalities are unlikely to be addressed through these neoliberal interventions and the marginalised groups such as Madhesis may be left out of the economic benefits that are reaped off by the corporate sectors.

1.4 Background to the report

The purpose of this research paper is to provide an overview of the Madhes movement, critically analysing the historic and political context of Nepal in which Madhesi ethnic groups have been treated as 'second class citizens' on the basis of their supposed disloyalty to Nepali nation due to the history of migration, geographic and cultural proximity to Northern India; the historical processes of building Nepali identity that symbolised the cultural, linguistic and geographical character of the people who live in the hilly regions of Nepal; and the historical economic processes in which Madhes/ Tarai has been exploited mainly as a source of revenue extraction by Nepal's political class. It is in this historical backdrop that this study engages with the emergence and growth of Madhes movement. We focus particularly on NEMAF, a social movement organisation that is an integral part of the Madhes movement, as a way in to exploring the broader processes of learning and knowledge production in the Madhes struggle for social justice.

In the history of Madhes struggle, there have been some key moments when Madhesi activists have established pro-Madhesi organisations to mobilise Madhesis to struggle for their rights and challenge the hill-centric hegemony of the state. However, the most significant organisations including Madhes-based political parties emerged only after the first Madhes uprising in September 2007. This study is about how the movement is learning, what is being learnt, and what knowledge is being produced around the Madhes movement. As a community of disadvantaged populations, Madhes has rarely been studied, debated or written about within the broad domains of Nepal studies. Nepal has largely been studied around the hill-centric social, cultural and political processes and the cultural representations of Nepal also dominate the hill-centric mosaic portraying the country as a mystic land of mountains, tourism, geopolitical position as sandwiched between India and Nepal and the cultural richness of the Kathmandu valley. Madhes has been largely absent from academic debates, development discourses and its relationship with the power centre. It was only after their first uprising that Madhesis appeared at the forefront of political discussions and research among academics and the development sector of Nepal. In this study, we approach the Madhes movement from the perspective of

Madhesis, and enter into the debate about knowledge production drawing upon the activism promoted by the Nepal Madhes Foundation (NEMAF), a social movement organisation that advocates for the rights of Madhesi communities. We analyse the conception of the organisation, its strategy and methodology of knowledge production to promote the agenda of equity. In that regard, it examines how NEMAF emerged with its primary objective of Madhes Studies Centre, as an intellectual project to redress historical omission of and disseminate academic analysis from a Madhesi perspective. We provide an analysis of historical, economic, social, cultural, political and geographical context of Madhes in which systemic marginalisation and injustices are reproduced. Then, we analyse the different historical moments of Madhes uprisings that were situated in the context of Nepal's post-war constitution making process that followed the peace agreement between the Maoists and Government of Nepal in 2006. We then report on learning in the movement drawing upon qualitive interviews with a broad range of respondents including Madhesi activists, political leaders, journalists, youth and business communities in Madhes. Finally, we develop an analysis of concepts, issues and processes of learning, focusing on: Learning about the movement agenda, exploring how activists developed their critical understanding of the goals of the movement; Learning about the movement/ resistance strategies, examining how activists improved their strategies and tactics of resistance over a period of time to survive state hostilities; and finally, Learning about the movement survival strategy through which the movement preserves its critical position, protects itself from turning violent or being co-opted in the hegemonic manipulation.

It is important to clarify that we view the political parties that are at the forefront of the movement and movement organisations such as NEMAF as separate but integral constituencies of the Madhes movement. We conceptualise the Madhes movement as a collective struggle of the excluded, marginalised, oppressed or invisible people of Madhes, which enables them to challenge discrimination and political exclusion based on their ethnic identity, and claim their equitable rights to representation and recognition in the Nepali state. The movement, political parties and movement organisations are interconnected and, sometimes, operate interchangeably, and therefore, it is our claim that the inquiry into how the Madhes movement learns could only be meaningful through this holistic lens. Hence, we focus on NEMAF, the movement organisation as an entry point for learning, refer to political actors of Madhes as movement leaders and approach the movement as a case study for the purpose of this research.

Another point to clarify is the use of term Madhes or Tarai. The term 'Madhes' represents the political, social and cultural characteristics of the Southern plains of Nepal. It is also crucial to recognise that the term Madhes is itself a mosaic of different castes, cultures and linguistic group and Tharu communities, the indigenous populations of this region sometimes reject this labelling. Tarai is a geographical representation of the region where diverse communities of Madhesi people as well as migrants from the hills have historically lived in. Even though the Tarai region now spans across six politically divided provinces, Madhesi activists still prefer to use the term 'Madhes' for cultural and emotional kinship. The hegemonic narratives tend to refer to the region of Tarai as a neutral geographical territory of the Nepali state.

1.5 Methodology

As noted in the preface, this study was part of the broader social movement learning project which aimed at understanding the processes of learning within four social movements in four different countries – Colombia, Nepal, South Africa and Turkey. Beyond the academic inquiry into how social movements produce knowledge as they create a space for collective agendas for social justice, the project engaged with the process of knowledge exchange amongst social activists across the four countries. The project also aimed to provide an opportunity for inter-movement learning, building solidarity among the activists and most importantly, to investigate approaches through which the knowledge produced from research is relevant and applicable for the activists to inform their strategies for struggle. The research methodology was underpinned by a collaborative and dialogical process among the case studies of social movements that informed the approach to national level research. The research team consisted of social researchers and movement activists who constantly engaged in critical debates about the movement agenda, movement strategies and processes of knowledge production.

The core research team was led by an experienced researcher of Nepali origin and Khas Arya ethnicity who was based at a British university. The second researcher was a young Madhesi female scholar whose experience of being a Madhesi woman within the Nepali academic circle brought distinct perspectives to the project. The third co-researcher was a prominent Madhesi activist, political analysist and development practitioner who had led the establishment of the movement organisation in 2008 to systematise knowledge of the movement and provide an intellectual backbone to Madhesi activism. This researcher's experience of systematising the knowledge about the movement was invaluable in capturing nuanced processes of the

movement, Madhesi cultural values and insights into political dynamics around the Madhes uprisings. This approach enriched our participatory action research that fed back into NEMAF's activism on Madhes issues among both political and intellectual circle in Kathmandu as well as among activists in Madhes. We were also able to access the historical memory and lived experiences of the activists, particularly focusing on the experience of those who have been Madhes movement's 'protagonists' (Jara, 2012: 135). Interactions with youth activists and leaders of the movement enabled us to grasp the logic of their collective reflection as well as facilitating critical analysis of their experiences during the Madhes movement and the way that activists related to each other for mass mobilisation. Central to our study has been the process of historicising the conditions of marginality and discrimination through which Madhesi activists come together to rationalise their struggle. These conditions run through generations and the forms of discrimination are experienced by all Madhesi social groups at all levels in different ways. Hence, we frame the study through the lens of systematisation as a rigorous learning exercise (Jara, 1994) in which Madhesi activists constantly interpret their movement from the point of view of critical interpretation of lived experiences. The aim here is to systematise the experiences of the Madhes movement as well as the movement organisation (NEMAF in this case) to understand activism – organising, communicating, mobilising resources, co-creating movement tactics and advancing the impact of the struggle through collective reflection and critical analysis of experiences (Kane, 2012; Torres and Carrillo, 2010). The research participants constantly make reference to their historical memory of incidents, the role of the movement leaders, geopolitical dynamics and national political sentiments when they describe their participation in the movement. Then they relate these historical events with deeply rooted structural inequalities, ethnic discrimination and systemic marginalisation of Madhesis in key realms of the society. Also, for the movement organisation, the focus of movement activities depended on security situations, national political dynamics and critical reflection of the ongoing work.

We recognise that there are disagreements and tensions about whether the Madhes movement is a social movement or political uprising of Madhes-based forces to secure access to political power. For this research, we define social movements as forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands. They are comprised of *'an organised set of constituents pursuing a common*

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political agenda of change through collective action' (Batliwala 2012: 3). Furthermore, social movements are *'processes that build the collective power of an organised constituency of excluded, marginalised, oppressed or invisible people, around a change agenda that enables them to access the full body of human rights, challenge the distribution of wealth and control of resources, challenge dominant ideologies, and transform social power relations in their favour'* (Batliwala 2010, cited in Horn, 2013: 22). For us, the Madhes movement does reflect these tensions and manifest characteristics of collective action against social, political and economic inequalities, and draws on the constituency of disenfranchised ethnic groups who have struggled to gain equity in political representation.

This research draws upon Roy Bhaskar's theory of critical realism that characterises social reality as comprising three layers, recognising that there are causal mechanisms beneath what is observed empirically. Critical realism allows us to study mechanisms and structures that have reproductive effects. In other words, critical realism enables researchers to reveal what is absent from the empirical inquiry by asking questions about history, culture and deeply entrenched social values. In this sense critical realism is a theory of absence that studies the being and becoming of the social phenomenon in which the external environment plays a role (Norrie, 2010: 33). When we observe events and narratives, we need to look for what is absent through the lens of inter-relations between the tri-unity – causality, time and space. The cause of social struggle is influenced by time (the effects of our past) and space (the effects of our context). The study of social movement as it manifests (being) has to be related to how it has come to being (becoming). In this sense, the past is always in the present - the meshwork that is the process of our constitution (Norrie, 2010: 33).

Bhaskar's three levels of reality depict the empirical (experience thought) that we experience, observe and record the reality (e.g experience of being Madhesis, mass demonstrations, blockade of roads and border, physical violence, disappearance of activists, imprisonment, self-awareness of discrimination, emotions, memories and political intentions); the actual (objects, events and being) that underpin observable actions (e.g. actual embodied Madhesi identity, decisions about protests, interactions between people, resistance strategies, movement resources – agents interacting with structures); and the real (causal mechanisms) that are invisible but come to being through their effects (e.g. Madhesi people's motives, authoritarianism, ultranationalism, values, memories, complicity or resistance to social,

economic, political structures or injustices, histories, geopolitics and cultural and symbolic violence of the state). These notions provide intellectual tools to understand social reality, much of which *'exists and operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it. Reality does not wholly answer to empirical surveying or hermeneutical examination'* (Archer et al, 2016). As Archer et al (2016) argue *'critical realism is concerned with the nature of causation, agency, structure, and relations, and the implicit or explicit ontologies we are operating with'*. For example, the absence of popular mass demonstration could be observable empirical reality which is explained by the actual events that underpin the low participation such as movement fatigue, protractedness of the same movement tactic, increased police brutality or lack of women's participation in mass demonstration. These events have the real mechanisms beneath such as Pahadi dominance in the police force, history of oppression by the state causing internalisation of fear, the media controlled by the state or Pahadis and women's subordinate or constrained role in Madhesi communities. This does not necessarily mean that the movement is fading away, instead, activists might be organising in different forms, developing new strategies, reflecting on the events and systematising their knowledge to inform new movement strategies. These actual movement processes are beneath the empirical reality and therefore, require a deeper level inquiry and analysis. Before resistance becomes observable, a great deal of organising, dialogue and strategising takes place in which activists at the grassroots are involved in preparing grounds for movement actions. Archer el al (2016: n.p.) argue that *'critical realists are concerned with mapping the ontological character of social reality: those realities which produce the facts and events that we experience and empirically examine'*. In other words, *'… combining explanation and interpretation, the aim is an historical inquiry into artefacts, culture, social structures, persons, and what affects human action and interaction'* and therefore, *'we require a good account of the nature of the social world which does not naïvely import causal models from natural sciences'* (Archer et al, 2016: n.p.). Critical Realism holds the notion that a social world can be understood through philosophy and social science (Danermark et al, 2002), but claims that *'some knowledge can be closer to reality than other knowledge'* (Fletcher, 2017: 182) and critical realists are able to study social phenomena *'in terms of theories, which can be more or less truth like'* (Danermark et al., 2002: 10). As Fletcher (2017: 182) argues:

> The ability to engage in explanation and causal analysis (rather than engaging in thick empirical description of a given context) makes CR useful for analysing social problems and suggesting solutions for social change. The ability to engage in explanation and causal analysis (rather than engaging in

> thick empirical description of a given context) makes CR useful for analysing social problems and suggesting solutions for social change.

Metaphorically, the way that underlying invisible structures of gravity and tectonic plates cause earthquakes (i.e. shaking of the earth) and we only observe the falling of buildings and chaos on the surface, the social phenomena cannot be understood in their entirety unless their actual and real mechanisms are critically examined to explain what is empirical. The table below highlights how the three levels of reality are useful to capture the holistic meaning of the Madhes movement.

Three levels of reality	Explaining the natural science behind earthquake	Madhes uprising – ontology/being
Empirical Experience thought	Experience, observe and record the chaos, falling buildings, casualties, noise, losses etc.	Experiences of being Madhesis, demonstrations, blockade, disappearance, police violence, imprisonment, subjective experience, self-aware, reflexive, emotions, memories, intentions, ↓↑
Actual objects, events, being	Actual shaking of the land, objects and falling, constant conjunctions, variables	Actual embodied Madhesi identity, decisions about protests, interactions between people, resistance strategies, mass rally, movement resources – agents interact with structures↓↑
Real causal mechanisms	Cause of shaking, falling buildings and broken roads – gravity, tectonic plates *(unseen except in its effects)*	Madhesi people's motives, authoritarianism, ultranationalism, values, memories, to resist or conform with natural + social, economic and political structures of (in)justices, history, geo-politics, cultural repression unjust policies of the state ↓↑

Table 1: Understanding the Madhes movement through critical realism

Given the ethnic nature of the Madhes movement and the dominant research culture in Nepal (which has been traditionally monopolised by non-Madhesi researchers), this research has been a continuous process of critical reflection, disagreements and tensions amongst researchers derived from the ideological and preconditions of the researchers. A constant dialogical process, engaging with the causality and underlying mechanisms enabled us to reveal much deeper explanations that were logically satisfying to observable reality and the knowledge we were able to generate.

While reviewing the earlier work on the Madhes movement, much of the analysis has crucially focused on the historical causes of the conditions of marginalisation in Madhes and the rationale or motivation for resistance (Gautam, 2012; Tewari and Sah, 2012; Kantha, 2010; Gautam, 2008; ICG, 2007). There are also narratives of discontent with regards to constitutional limitations failing to fulfil demands of the movement or evolution of the agenda in the process of the movement and negotiations with the state. The analysis of the movement in the past has often focused on narratives of suppression, exclusion and injustices but there seems to be lack of an overarching ideological/ theoretical framework that could provide an intellectual base to understand the processes and achievement of the movement. More specifically, this research aims to understand the Madhes movement from the perspectives of Madhesi activists.

Using the critical realist framework and systematisation methodology, this research sought to understand how the Madhes movement produces knowledge, develops strategy, and educates activists to institutionalise the movement outcomes and then set out new agenda for future. In this process, we explore some of the key dimensions of the movement such as movement agenda, movement organisation, leadership, financing of the movement activities and sustainability, security, strategy, communication, resistance techniques, internal cohesion, internal and international alliance and solidarity.

1.5.1 Systematization: NEMAF learning process

In this research, we have attempted to combine the processes of learning both at the organisational level and the movement wide learning. We trace the learning process within NEMAF, an independent non-governmental organisation that was established to support the movement by producing knowledge about the struggle and then draw upon a broad range of experiences that movement activists have had over the decades to theorise what knowledge Madhes movement produced and what has it learned in relation to the movement agenda; movement/ resistance strategies; and sustainability of the movement during different epochs of political dynamics. In 2007 Madhesis took to the streets to demand equality of status and opportunity under the constitution. It was only after this mass uprising, the terms 'Madhes' and 'Madhesi' gained public acceptance and the people of Madhes gained confidence to claim their ethnic identity at the national level. The establishment of NEMAF alongside other pro-Madhesi civil society organisations and Madhes-focused activism also gained public legitimacy building

upon the success of the 2007 mass protests, and created a political space to work and speak freely about injustices experienced by Madhesis.

NEMAF's earlier work focused on constitutional issues such as federalism, social inclusion, state restructuring, citizenship rights and electoral reforms. It held a series of discussions, dialogues and public events to create public awareness about structural inequalities, discrimination and political exclusion of Madhes. The discussion programmes in Janakpur, Biratnagar, Birgunj and other parts of Madhes and in Kathmandu aimed at creating knowledge sharing platforms between public intellectuals who could draw on the history, geography, economy and ethnic diversity of Nepal to explain dimensions of ethnic exclusion and the causes of the Madhes uprising and the general public who needed intellectual resources to conceptualise and express their conditions of marginality and injustices. Most importantly, the objective was to nationalise the Madhesi agenda and the narratives of struggle which had been silenced over the decades. It began with the premise that the non-Madhesi public was unaware of the ethnic bias that was deeply entrenched in the Nepali state and Madhesis lacked tools, skills and language to articulate their grievances due to longstanding neglect and marginalisation which had obscured their history, culture and ethnic identity in the process of nation building. Nevertheless, Madhesis were emotionally united through their shared experiences of discrimination, but lacked the language, evidence-based justification and movement strategy to mobilise for their struggle. Producing evidence, documenting alternative historical narratives and creating new narratives of struggle were essential to laying the intellectual foundations of the movement. Equally, NEMAF's activities were aimed at building national solidarity for equitable representation of Madhesis in the state structures and addressing the ethnic injustices they had experienced within the Nepali state. To serve this purpose, NEMAF began the process of documenting and publishing issues raised during these discussion forums in a serious of publications entitled Nepal Madhes Manthan [Nepal Madhes Brainstroming]. NEMAF also published its first English journal The Landscape of Madhes in 2012, and a research-based journal called Madhes Adhayan [Madhes Studies] focusing on social, political, economic and cultural dimensions of Madhes and its relationships with the Nepali state. It has also collaborated with national and international organisations such as GTZ, Safer World, Small Arms Survey, UNESCO, Danida HUGOU, Martin Chautari, Social Science Baha, Samata Foundation, and the THRD Alliance who work on a similar agenda relating to Madhes and social change in Nepal. NEMAF is currently lobbying political

parties on Madhes agendas, building upon its past experiences to communicate with people and supporting the implementation of the 2015 constitution.

1.5.2 Methodological Approach

This research employed a multitude of approaches to gain insights into the Madhes movement. In January 2018, the research teams from the four countries met in Kathmandu in order to set out the research plan and create an opportunity for Madhes movement activists to interact with social movement activists from Colombia, Turkey and South Africa. From Colombia, activists represented NOMADESC, an NGO based in Cali, Colombia, and operating in the South West of the country, working with social movement activists from trade union, black communities, indigenous, displaced peoples and environmental constituencies to help them build capacity, develop strategy and build synergies between the different movements to strengthen their capacity to realise their rights as Colombian citizens. Their work on human rights and diploma courses in human rights and how to mobilise marginalised communities amid conditions of violence, death threats and harassment enabled NEMAF to relate with their own immersion course on Madhes Studies and other advocacy and development works in the Madhes region. The HDK (Peoples Democratic Congress/Halklarin Demokrasi Kongresi) from Turkey an umbrella organisation that brings together various political and social movements, organisations and individuals around a broad-based peace with social justice agenda, with a strong social movement focus. Given their political agenda for the rights of the oppressed populations, its members have suffered brutal repression both from state and non-state armed actors. This movement was interesting in terms of how to transform Nepal's Madhes movement away from a narrow ethnic and regional struggle into a broader national movement of marginalised communities. Finally, the activists from Housing Assembly in South Africa were leading their struggle for housing inequality in Cape Town. They organise shack dwellers, back-yarders, people living in Transit Camps and those living in social housing. The activists from the Housing Assembly reminded Madhesi activists of the importance of descent housing and basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation in most deprived communities in Madhes, something that Madhes movement had not really developed a vision for. The Madhes movement has mainly concentrated on the agenda of political representation due to its intensity during the period of Nepal's constitution making. The South African activists pointed out that the end of apartheid and promulgation of progressive constitution in 1994 did not address the needs of the majority

of black and minority ethnic communities. It was an important reminder for Madhesi activists that the movement would need to learn and adapt to new circumstances for the rights of those who are left behind despite some of the political gains.

We organised interaction programmes with Madhesi activists, provincial Madhesi leaders and local communities in Janakpur, Saptari and Lahan, the origin of Madhes uprising in 2007. These events provided a sense of solidarity to Madhesi communities at the local level that their struggle was not an isolated endeavour and ethnic and racial minorities, indigenous peoples and deprived communities across the world were also struggling for their political rights, freedom from oppression and life with dignity. It was a resourceful learning opportunity for NEMAF in terms of how social movement organisations in different parts of the world were organising; how they produced movement knowledge and nurtured the intellectual life of the struggle. Though the organisations' political and historical contexts and specificities in terms of the agenda were quite distinct in nature, it was evident that all of the social movement organisations were struggling for social justice and represented the voice of the most marginalised, oppressed and deprived peoples in their societies. NEMAF was able to familiarise not only with the techniques, methodologies and strategies of the three social movements involved in the project but was also able to relate to the coping mechanisms that are needed to sustain and revitalise the struggle when sentiments are low, and the effects of violence are at times severe.

Secondly, we carried out qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with a broad range of movement activists across the Madhes region and then half a day workshop with 25 Kathmandu-based academics, activists, journalists and Madhesi scholars who had been working on Madhes issues at least over five years. Below is the summary of research methods and research participants.

SN	Categories	Number	Male	Female	Method
1	Political Leaders	11	10	2	Semi-structured Interview and Personal Narrative
2	Activists	9	7	2	Semi-structured Interview, Personal Narrative and Focus Group Discussion
3	Businesspeople	2	2	-	Semi-structured Interview
4	Journalists	5	5	-	Semi-structured Interview
5	Civil Society Member	4	3	1	Semi-structured Interview
6	Protestors/local people	28	25	3	Focus Group Discussion and Personal Narrative

7	Madhesi youth in Kathmandu	8	7	1	Focus Group Discussion
8	Madhesi activists based in Madhes (Birgunj and Nepalgunj)	19	12	7	Focus Group Discussion
9	Madhesi community members (Birgunj, Saptari and Bhairahawa)	27	24	3	Focus Group Discussion
Total		113	95	18	

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents

1.5.3 Interviews

In total, 29 interviews were conducted with prominent individuals who were involved in the Madhes movement. The interviews were approximately an hour long. The time and place for the interviews were selected as per the interviewee's convenience. Interview checklists were prepared and piloted to ensure consistency and relevance to the research questions (attached in appendix). All the interviews were audio recorded with participants' permission and brief notes were also taken during the interview. As all interviews were conducted in the Nepali medium, the data was transcribed and analysed in Nepali language and relevant quotes were translated into English to include in this report.

1.5.4 Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

In total, six FGDs were conducted which included one FGD with the Kathmandu based youth activists, two with activists in Birgunj and Nepalgunj and three with the local people of Birgunj, Saptari and Bhairahawa. The FGDs were also recorded and transcribed later for a detailed analysis.

1.5.5 Personal narratives

Five personal narratives were recorded during the research. These included interviewees' stories about their lives as activists, their involvement in Madhes uprisings and their process of becoming activists. These narratives served the purpose of developing an understanding of individual experiences of the movement and implications in their lives. The detailed account of these narratives reflected activists' personal observations of key events and contextual dynamics and their individual locations in events.

Throughout the process of data collection, participants' experiences of historical memory of injustices, relevance of the context, perceptions of informants, political affiliations,

interpretations and reasoning around political events were accounted for. Through the systematisation lens the researchers observed how interviewees were reporting on critical reflection on their movement activities and strategising their subsequent steps to effectively advocate, mobilise masses and build solidarity and a shared purpose of the struggle. In addition to the collection of primary data through interviews, the study drew upon the existing knowledge which was often scattered and located in different places and forms. The secondary information disseminated in movement documents, reports, articles and books were also built upon to provide a historical narrative of the movement and analyse interview data. The secondary data helped in devising the conceptual and contextual framework to develop detailed narratives of experiences and processes of the movement.

1.5.6 The Rationale for selection of the research sites

To conduct fieldwork for this study, two sites in the Tarai region (Nepalgunj and Bhairahawa) in the West and two from the East (Saptari and Birgunj) were selected. Before embarking on the field visit to the Madhes region, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Kathmandu with a range of Madhesi activists who were involved in different domains of Madhes activism. The research sites in Madhes were central to the emergence and intensity of Madhes uprisings. A month-long field visit was conducted starting from the West (Nepalgunj) to East (Birgunj) during October – November 2018. Prior to this extensive fieldwork, research tools were piloted in Birgunj, Janakpur and Birgunj. Finally, a workshop with prominent Madhesi activists, academics and journalists were conducted in Kathmandu to validate the preliminary findings of the fieldwork in Madhes and gain their insights.

Nepalgunj is considered the origin of 2007 Madhes uprising where Nepal Sadbhawana Party (NSP), demanding the rights of Madhesis, launched a civil strike on 26 December 2006. This led to communal riots between Pahadis and Madhesis in Nepalgunj. Following this event, a video was made public showing Madhesis severely beaten up by Pahadi people during the strike. This triggered Madhes-wide resistance opposing police brutality and Pahadi assaults on Madhesi activists. Similarly, two interviews were conducted with Tharu activists in Bardiya, a neighbouring district to understand perspectives around inter-movement alliance during the Madhes movement.

Similarly, several episodes of mass demonstrations were organised in Bhairahawa during all three Madhes uprisings. The Sunauli-Bhairahawa border was blocked by the activists during the 2015

protests against the promulgation of the constitution. There were incidents of state repression on Madhesi people in Bethari, a small village 3 km south-east of Bhairahawa, where six civilians including a four-year-old child, Chandan Patel, were killed by the police at a crowded weekly village market. Likewise, in Saptari, Rajiv Rawat, the first martyr of the 2015 uprising was killed by the police on 18th August. Saptari endured the loss of six Madhesi activists including dozens who were injured during the mass protest.

The border town of Birgunj remained as the epicentre and stronghold of resistance due to its proximity with India and the density of Madhesi communities during all three Madhes uprisings. The protesters occupied a transit bridge on no-man's land between Birgunj and Raxual of India. They blocked the border halting the flow of goods on 23 September 2015. Birgunj, home to Nepal's largest customs office in terms of revenue collection, handles almost two-thirds of Nepal's trade with India remained blocked for six months.

1.5.7 Data organisation and analysis

All data collected was first reviewed and organised as loose thematic categories relating to research questions about how the movement produced knowledge. The data was transcribed in the Nepali language in the form of textual information. All the information was then critically analysed to systematically develop nuanced themes that reflected the process of learning. Relevant and important quotes were included in the study. Observational notes taken during the research were also reviewed during the analysis which informed the process of interpretation. The themes which emerged in the data represented empirical findings based on participants' perspectives about the justification for the movement and their experiences during the uprisings, which critical realists would call 'demi-regularities'. These descriptive findings were further elaborated on, drawing upon theoretical concepts, a process known as 'abduction' to raise 'the level of theoretical engagement beyond thick description of the empirical entities' (Fletcher, 2017: 189). As Danermark et al (2002: 205) note, abduction is a process of '*inference or thought operation, implying that a particular phenomenon or event is interpreted from a set of general ideas or concepts*'. The descriptive categories of the movement agenda, activities, and mass demonstration techniques were explained through the lens of deeper levels of reality to fully understand the causal mechanisms. This process of constantly moving between empirical, actual and real levels of reality is called 'retroduction' where the goal is '*to identify the necessary contextual conditions for a particular causal mechanism to take effect and to result in the*

empirical trends observed' (Fletcher, 2017: 189). Throughout the analysis, we critically historicise the movement and constantly critique the social conditions in which Madhesi people live in.

1.6 Ethical considerations

The ethical approval for this research was gained from University of Sussex and University College London. All participants were invited to take part in interviews or FGDs and share their personal narratives on a voluntary basis. We recognised that details about participation in the movement contained sensitive information and therefore the data was anonymised while referring to specific quotes in this report. Research participants were informed about the objective of study and they were explained that they could withhold any information or even withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

Even though this research was co-designed with Madhesi movement activists and the primary aim was to give voice to the activists, we encountered some tensions within the research team with regards to selection of participants, division of labour in transcribing, analysis and interpretation of the data and writing up the report. Firstly, this research was funded by the United Kingdom's Research Council, which required specific research outputs to be delivered at the end of the project which were expected to meet the international standards of theoretically informed original knowledge. For movement activists, academic outputs were not necessarily the key priorities even though knowledge production and dissemination is an integral part of movement activities. For the movement organisation, the process of engagement, interaction with activists and re-energising relationships was prominent. More importantly, it appeared that production and dissemination of outputs in more accessible language such as Nepali or Madhesi languages was crucial in support of the movement rather than through academic publications in the English language. As the lead researcher of this study was an academic based in a British university, there was a natural interest in producing academic outputs in the English language. Through internal dialogue, we agreed that the activists would disseminate findings in more accessible media such as National Dailies, online news or opinion platforms and on TV shows whereas, the lead researcher would write a more comprehensive academic report that could be disseminated internationally. As a native of Nepal, the lead academic also made some contributions by publishing several articles in Nepali newspapers and appeared on talk shows.

Secondly, the activist researchers were emotionally connected to the Madhes struggle; represented the Madhesi community and shared the lived experiences of social exclusion and participation in protests. For them, the inquiry into the Madhes movement learning was a critical analysis of their own lives, culture and aspirations for social justice. This would occasionally problematise interpretations of the data, which clearly reflected their own meanings of events, approaches and movement methodologies but holistically, it was an asset to the process of analysis. Nevertheless, an honest, yet critical, dialogue between members of the research team enabled us to develop transformative narratives of the participants' voice. The activist researchers played a role in critically reviewing the analysis, mostly at discussions during the data analysis retreats whereas the lead researcher led the entire data analysis process and writing of the report.

Thirdly, the lead researcher's Khas-Arya ethnicity and hill-high-caste background occasionally created tensions during the fieldwork in terms of building trust with research participants. It was difficult to persuade some activists that this research was being carried out to understand how the movement learnt and how the research findings could support the struggle in the future. Some activists readily turned defensive rather than reflective about the process, approach and agenda of their struggle. In some research contexts, there was a sense that '*You are not a Madhesi so, you cannot understand how I feel as a Madhesi and you did not have to face the state repression*.' This push back was legitimate and also helpful in interpretating the data. The presence of an activist researcher who had gained a national level reputation as a Madhesi political analyst helped overcome some of these tensions. Occasionally, the researcher's lack of proficiency in local Madhesi language was also a barrier but it was mitigated by simultaneous translation between colleagues. Additionally, the research team was able to harness each other's local knowledge and networks to select interviewees and conduct the fieldwork.

The central objective was to capture activists' perspectives about their own movement experiences and learning, and we believe that the analysis of findings in this report does justice to this endeavour. Despite several disagreements during the initial phase, through a process of critical dialogues we felt that our perspectives were converging as we began to approach each other's views from a critical realist perspective. Our commitment to honour the participants' voice helped us step back and critique our own predispositions about different political, social

and cultural dimensions of Madhesi society created an opportunity for transformative learning experiences and advancing each other's knowledge and theoretical positions.

2. The context and agenda of the Madhes movement

2.1 Structural denial and Madhesis within the Nepali state

Nepal's Madhes region has historically been neglected, marginalised and suppressed in the process of nation building. Nepal's territorial expansion in the 18th century was led by the hilly Gorkha state that maintained hegemony of Pahadi communities. Even though the official history depicts this territorial consolidation as 'unification' of Nepal, some scholars claim that it was a military conquest and imposition of authority on the people of new territories rather than a process of building a 'unity' among them (Pandey, 2007; Lawoti, 2010). Madhes was largely controlled for resource appropriation (e.g. gradual control of fertile land by Pahadi landlords and appropriation of resources from Tarai's dense forests) (Gaige, 2009; Shrestha, 1990). This process continued and even escalated during the Rana oligarchy until 1951 when '*the Rana rulers viewed the Tarai as their "personal estate," whereby they successfully appropriated and allocated much of the revenue collected from the export of timber and conversion of forests into agricultural land into their personal coffers or used it to dispense patronage*' (Sijapati, 2013: 150). The end of the Rana oligarchy and onset of democratic polity between 1951 and 1962 did very little in recognising the historical marginalisation of Madhes and the need to address Madhesi grievances.

After the demise of multi-party democracy and declaration of the Panchayati constitution of 1962, the principles of national homogeneity and an assimilative ideology which Gaige (1975) calls 'Nepalisation' or 'Nepalese cultural assimilation' gained prominence. The underlying ideology of the Panchayati system was that cultural and ethnic diversities were a threat to national unity, so the nation-building project disregarded cultural, social and religious diversities. The character of national identity dominated the values, symbols and geographies of the Khas-Arya cultural groups (Lawoti, 2007). In this process, the cultural groups that did not confirm to the official character of 'Nepaliness' (e.g. Nepali language, *daura suruwal* - national dress code, Hindu religious practices and cultural and historical symbols determined by the then Khas-Arya political class) were systematically neglected by the state and nor were there any serious attempts at empowerment of ethnic and indigenous communities to enable them to participate in the process of nation building. As a result, diverse cultural, linguistic and religious characteristics of Nepalis living in diverse geographical locations were subjugated (Lawoti, 2005).

The Tarai region that did not resemble the state description of a true Nepali was the target of Nepalisation project. Historically, the political control of Tarai by Kathmandu authority depicted features of 'internal colonisation' (Lawoti, 2005: 97). As Whelpton (2005: 58) notes:

> The Tarai was also in many ways a colony, a better managed one. The great bulk of the cultivators were always from the plains and, in the pre-Rana period, so were many of those in intermediate positions in the revenue – extraction hierarchy. However, Madhesis were never part of inner core of the *bharadari* [courtiers] and when the *jimindar* system [landlordism] for tax collection was introduced by Jung Bahadur, those appointed were predominantly from the hills. The superior status of the Hillmen in the Nepalese state was made clear in the *Muluki Ain* [national code] which ranked *parvatiya* [hilly] brahmans higher than Madhesi ones. Since a common sense of separation from the plains was the main thing that hill Nepalese shared, Madhesis were naturally felt to be outsiders. Conversely, even though they might appreciate the Nepalese government's land tenure policy, few Madhesis can have felt any strong sense of identity with the Gorkhali state.

Until 1958, Madhesis were required to gain an entry permit to travel to capital Kathmandu (Thakur, 1996: 21-22) which indicates that the state used to treat its own people from the Southern region as alien. This also demonstrates systemic discrimination against Madhesis and the way they have been treated historically.

Firstly, since the control of malaria, which was a major epidemic in the Tarai until 1950s, the state encouraged the migration of hill populations to the Tarai. As a result, migrants from the hilly regions increased by 29 percent between 1952-1954 and 2001 in the Tarai region which constitutes 36.31 percent of hilly communities as compared to only 4 percent in 1952-1954 (Gautam, 2008; Shah, 2006). During the period of the Panchayat regime (1960-1990), the state resettled families of retired British and Indian Gurkhas as well as returnees from Burma and Indian state of Assam in the Southern borders through a resettlement programme and the 1964 Land Reform Act (Geige, 1975). As Gunaratne (2009: xx) argues, given that the people of Tarai had been socially and culturally connected with communities in Northern states of India such as, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, '*the state's goal was to create in the Tarai a population of whose loyalty it had no doubt and which would thus act as a counterweight against the plains people whose loyalty it questioned*.' As the resettlement programmes expanded, the Tharu community of Western Tarai, who were once landowners, turned into land tillers and eventually agricultural and bonded labourers (Kamaiya). Particularly in the Western Tarai, a massive scale of

deforestation occurred as hilly people were encouraged to migrate and cultivate the fertile plains.

Secondly, the construction of East-West highway during 1960s also played a strategic role in undermining the development agenda of Madhesi people. The road was built in the periphery of Madhesi communities near the foothills. This encouraged new settlements of hilly communities in the areas close to the highway and strategically reduced economic overreliance of Madhesis across the border. No serious efforts were made to connect Tarai villages with the highway. Alongside other discriminatory policies, the construction of the East-West highway did not serve the interest of Madhesi people. The restructuring of 75 administrative districts was unfairly based on the land mass rather than density of population which resulted in hills covering 55 districts and Tarai expanding over 20 districts only. This had political implications in terms of hills returning more elected representatives than the Tarai, which clearly benefitted hill domination in policies and development initiatives during the Panchayat regime.

Thirdly, there was an organised campaign to develop Nepali nationalism based on hilly culture and traditions which have been based on the four key principles: Nepali language, Hindu religion, monarchy and the tradition of writing the national history (Onta, 1996; Burghart, 1994; Shah, 1993). The monarchy and Hindu religion complemented each other, and the national dress and symbols represented Nepali speaking hilly communities and dominance of mountainous geographies, whilst Madhesi geographies, cultural practices, languages and literature became invisible in the state's narratives. During the Panchayat period, these values and symbols were systematically embedded in education as symbols of national pride. The schools adopted Nepali as the medium of instruction, taught the history prescribed by the state, celebrated the anniversary of royals and marked the events that symbolised significant national days (Pherali and Garratt, 2014). None of these practices represented Madhesi culture, history and way of life. Thus, the whole process of nation building was geared towards creation of the character of 'Nepalipan' [Nepaliness] in which Madhesi culture, history and way of life was absent (Lal, 2012).

Finally, the promulgation of the 1962 Constitution and the 1964 Citizenship Act excluded many Madhesis from the right to citizenship due to the vague criterion that anyone applying for Nepali citizenship needed to prove that they spoke Nepali and were *'a person of Nepali origin'* (Gautam, 2008). Madhesis spoke Maithali, Bhojpuri, Awadi or Tharu languages as their mother tongue, therefore the condition that they had to speak Nepali was a blatant ploy to bar them from

obtaining Nepali citizenship. The state interpreted the issue of citizenship in Madhes as a risk to national security. The history of migration, Madhesis' cultural and social ties, shared ethnic identity and language with Northern India were viewed by the state as untrustworthy attributes of Madhesis to become Nepali citizens. Further to this was the 'threat' of Indian expansionism that people of Indian origin would illegally acquire Nepali citizenships, risking Nepal's national integrity (as often referred to the case of Sikkim which was annexed by India in 1975). The state also adopted a monolingual policy in the public service commission, which added structural barriers to non-Nepali speaking Madhesis to succeed in the civil service exams even if they held citizenship. The security institutions such as military and police were also exclusionary where Madhesi representation is negligible even today.

These biased legal arrangements and prejudiced regulations created barriers to the Madhesi people to own land, participate in politics and join the civil service, as well as to access even basic public services such as education and health. Further measures included the administrative and political restructuring of 1963, which gerrymandered 20 districts merging (cross-cutting) Tarai and hilly districts; the introduction of the land reforms system to confiscate Madhesis land holdings; the development of the East-West highway through the dense forests away from Madhesi settlements; and the 'return to village movement' during Panchayat to facilitate internal colonisation of Madhes. All of these were intended to systematically weaken (exclude) Madhesi identity and representation in key realms of democracy and development (Gautam, 2008: 124). Hence, Nepali nationalism survived and flourished on the basis of biased and exclusionary policies enacted against its own people to reproduce injustices but offer benefits to the elite political class. As a result, experiences of exclusion became common among Madhesi populations. Even though the lack of good governance has been a national problem, the unjust constitutional provision was particularly detrimental to Madhesis. The following diagram which was developed by our co-researcher Tula Narayan Shah, depicts the multidimensional problem of Nepali state from the Madhes movement perspective:
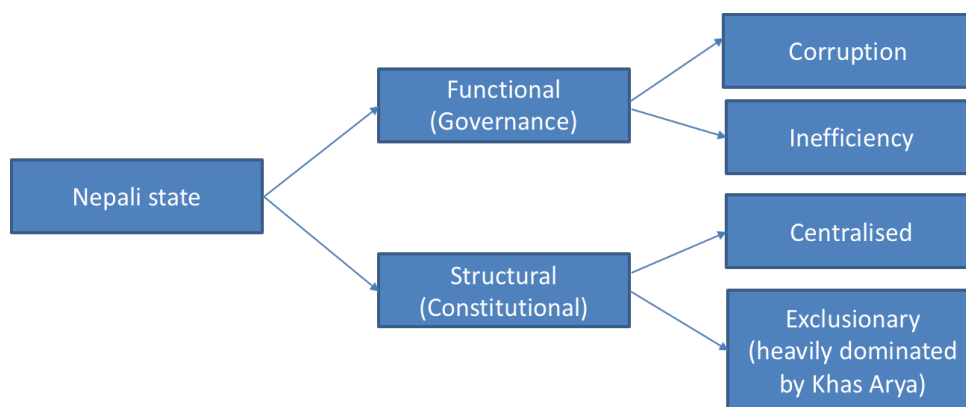
Figure 1: The multidimensional problem of Nepali state

Whilst the vast majority of Madhesi people experienced discrimination from the state, a small minority of Madhesi community including, members of the traditional landlords, very few upper caste Madhesis and Marwaris who are primarily involved in business and trade have historically benefitted from being close to the mainstream hegemonic structures. In essence, the conventional political parties have historically maintained their control in Madhes by including a small minority of elite Madhesis within the centralised political structure. The Marwaris have usually navigated discriminatory structures by establishing their influence in the economic sector such as industries, trade, and banking.

2.2 Madhesi population in Tarai

Once densely covered with malarial jungles and sparsely populated, Tarai is now home to almost half of Nepal's population with a major agricultural and industrial contribution to Nepal's GDP (ICG, 2007). According to Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2002), people who live in the Tarai can be broadly divided into five categories:

SN	Category	Ethnic backgrounds
1	Indigenous groups	Tharu, Dhimal, Gangai, Jhangad, Danuwar, Koche, Meche and Rajbanshis
2	Communities who fall in the Hindu caste system	Maithali Brahman, Landlords, Rajput, Kayastha and Yadav and 'so-called' untouchable caste groups including, Khatwe, Musahar, Dushad, Chamar, Dom etc.
3	Communities who are outside the Hindu caste system	Muslims
4	Religiously and culturally diverse business communities	Marwadi, Bangali and Shikhs who immigrated to Nepal from India in the later period of history and have cross-border cultural, linguistic and kinship links

| 5 | Communities of hilly origin who immigrated to Tarai mainly after 1950s | Brahmin, Chhetri, Newars and other hilly Khas-Arya and indigenous groups |

Table 3: Demography of Madhes

The second and the third category of people identify themselves as Madhesis even though some Muslims prefer to assert their distinct religious identity as a different category. The fourth category of people also considers themselves Madhesis, but the first category of communities identifies itself as indigenous populations. However, Hathechhu (2013) argues that Madhesi is a common broad identity that addresses cultural diversity of the people including Hindu castes, Muslims and indigenous communities (except the people of hilly origin) who live in the plains in South of Chure mountains and the North Indian border. He further notes that Madhesis represent regional cultural nationalism within Nepal (Hathechhu, 2013: 30) that is characterised by their distinct religious traditions, language, caste system, food, dress, life style and behaviour that is close to those of people in the neighbouring Bihar and Uttar Pradesh of India (Gaige, 1975). Even though it is claimed that 32 percent of Tarai's population is Madhesis, it is difficult to estimate the exact number (Gautam, 2008: 123). However, it is undeniable that Madhesis were considerably under-represented in politics until 2007. Even though this scenario has changed now due to federalisation of the country and the inclusive constitutional arrangement, Madhesi representation in state institutions, particularly, security forces remains less than 5 percent.

2.3 Madhesi agenda in the political movement in 1990 and later

Throughout the history of Nepal's democratic struggle, the debate about ethnic and regional disparities has surfaced only in the aftermath of major democratic successes. During authoritarian regimes in the country, the Madhes movement has also been a victim of the oppressive state. For example, the establishment of the Tarai Congress in 1951 by Vedanand Jha (who was co-opted by the Panchayat), formation of *Madhesi Mukti Andolan* by Raghunath Thakur in 1965 (who was killed by the Panchayat regime in 1981) (Thakur, 1996), and campaigns led by *Nepal Sadbhavana Party* after 1985 were all either suppressed by the state or co-opted within the dominant political system.

Madhesi communities have always joined Nepal's struggle for democracy given that democratically elected governments were likely to be less hostile to social movements. The Nepali Congress, during its armed struggle against the Rana regime in early 1950s, and during the

Panchayat rule, '*had made the Tarai its base for political mobilisation*' (Pandey, 2017: 308). Madhes was also geographically favourable for clandestine political mobilisation due to its proximity and open border with India which allowed political activists to escape across the border whenever there were at risk of arrests. For example, Madhesis participated actively in the people's movement in 1990 against the monarchy. But the restoration of multiparty democracy and the new constitution made no significant provisions for redressing political exclusion of Madhes. There were strikes and demonstrations in the Tarai region following the promulgation of the 1990 constitution.

The Maoist armed struggle (1996-2006) gave a new turn to Madhes movement particularly after the establishment of *Madhesi National Liberation Front* (MNLF) by the Maoists (Pandey, 2017). The question of inclusive democracy, recognition of diverse ethnic identities and socioeconomic restructuring of Nepali state were the primary aims of the Maoist rebellion (Pherali, 2011; Lawoti, 2010; Hutt, 2004). In the early 2000s the CPN-M framed Madhesi marginalisation as 'internal colonisation', 'second- rate nationality' and 'deprived class' (Bhattarai 2064 v.s. citied in Gautam 2012). CPN-M mobilised Madhesis at a historically unprecedented level that no other political force had done before. MNLF, the Maoist wing which drove rebellion in the Tarai, campaigned against historical repression and the exclusion of Madhes. Madhesi youth were ideologically and militarily trained to join the rebellion. Hachhethu (2009) argues that the Maoist movement not only established the agenda of inclusion, recognition of Madhesi languages, cultural rights and right to self-determination among broadly united Madhesi communities, but also celebrated the idea of ethnonationalism. During the multi-party democracy (1990-2007), representation of Madhesi Community was dismal, as argued by Madhesi leaders and intellectuals, was due to deliberately designed electoral system that allowed a disproportionately low number of constituencies in the Tarai as compared to that in hilly districts. Therefore, population-based electoral reform was one of the major demands of the 1st and 2nd Madhes uprisings (Kamat and Shah, 2013).

Building upon the historical development of the Madhesi movement, including substantive political and mass mobilisation during the Maoists' 'People's War', the Madhes uprising broke out in 2007. Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), initially formed as a civil society organisation for the rights of Madhesi people, succeeded in garnering overwhelming support from across the Southern plains to launch the Madhes uprising (Madhes Andolan I) in 2007. This was triggered

by the failure of the interim constitution of 2007 to guarantee federalism. The desire for political and cultural autonomy is captured by one of the enduring slogans of the Madhes Movement:

> Apana prant, apna shasan, apni sanskriti, apna prashasan
> Apna police, apna nyayalaya, apni bhasa me apni bidhyalaya

(Our province, our rule, our culture, our administration Our police, our court, education in our language in our schools) (Tamang, 2017: 103).

2.4 Madhes Uprisings

Clear signs of resentment amongst Madhesis became evident in the aftermath of the April 2006 people's movement when the mainstream political parties were rejoicing their return to power and focused on negotiations with the Maoists, but failed to address the demands of Madhesis. When the draft of the Interim Constitution was made public in December 2006 by the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Maoists, without adequate consultations with other political groups, Madhesi organisations including Madhesi members of the parliament (MPs) representing various parties objected to the draft constitution that had failed to address the issue of federalism and the unfair electoral system. Under the draft Constitution, the electoral constituencies were not delineated according to population distribution in the country (Sijapati, 2009: 45).

Nepal Sadabhawana Party (NSP) held a strike on 26 December 2006 which progressed into communal riots between Pahadis and Madhesis in Nepalgunj, a western town of Tarai. The party's main agendas were: federalism, Hindi as a second national language, rights to citizenship, and proportional representation based on population and reservation quotas for Madhesis. As the interim constitution did not address these demands, NSP announced a series of resistance activities between 17 December – 25th December and called for a general strike on 26th December claiming that such constitution would continue to discriminate Madhesis. However, the general strike turned into a communal riot, following the release of a video showing the Madhesis being assaulted by Pahadis.

In January 2007, a group of Madhesi activists affiliated to Upendra Yadav-led MJF-N burnt copies of the interim constitution at Maitighar Mandala, Kathmandu, as a symbolic rejection. This led to a mass outbreak of the longstanding discontent among Madhesi populations across the Tarai region. The demonstrators along with Upendra Yadav were arrested and detained in Kathmandu. Fourteen of them were issued a detention warrant for 10 days on the charge of violating the

public order. Following this incident, Upendra Yadav's supporters called for a strike in Madhes demanding the release of the protestors (Mishra, 2012). As Sijapati (2013: 146) notes, the intensity of the movement '*and the support it generated from different segments of the Madhesi population caught most, including Madhesi leaders themselves, by surprise*'. On January 19, a mass demonstration in Lahan was confronted by the Maoist Cadres who had recently entered the peace process. The Madhesi strike was perceived as a threat to the ongoing peace process and Maoists' chance to gain control over national politics. The local demonstrators were violently dispersed by the police, who shot and killed Ramesh Mahato, a schoolboy. Following this incident, violence broke out in other districts of Madhes and angry protesters began to set fire to transportation vehicles and government offices across the region. Businesses were shut down for twenty-one days. The East-West Mahendra Highway, the only route that served the supply of goods and services in Kathmandu was blocked, creating a shortage of basic supplies to the country (Gautam, 2012).

Madhesis felt that their support to the Maoists did not materialise into the political change that they had hoped for, and that the Maoist leadership, which was dominated by the hilly ethnic groups, was yet again sacrificing the agenda of Madhesi representation in the political structure. As a result, Madhesi-Maoist alliance collapsed, leading to escalation of violence and death of twenty-eight people, and hundreds severely injured out of which an additional twelve activists died of their injuries. The repressive measures adopted by the government led the MJF to continue with protests indefinitely until the interim constitution was amended, thus sparking off what became known as the first *Madhes Andolan I* (Madhes uprising) (ICG 2007). The movement forced the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to directly address the nation twice. The movement temporally subsided only when Upendra Yadav, the head of MJF and Ram Chandra Poudel, on behalf of the government of Nepal, signed a 22-point Agreement on August 30, 2007 (Appendix I). The core point in the agreement implied a change in the constitution to enact federalisation of the political structure for the first time in Nepal's political history.

Following the 22-point agreement, the Madhesi parties formed a temporary political front under the banner of Samyukta Loktantrik Madheshi Morcha (United Democratic Madhesi Front) (SLMM) to challenge the government's indifference in implementing the past agreements which promised to reform the electoral system (Mathema, 2011). This led to the second Madhes uprising starting in mid- February 2008 and lasting for 17 days. The key agendas of the struggle

were: federalism, proportional representation and population-based election constituencies, which were later enshrined in the Interim Constitution of Nepal - 2008. The strike ended with an eight-point agreement with the government (Appendix II) as well as further institutionalising Madhesi demands and strengthening the 'bargaining power' of Madhesi political parties (Pandey, 2017: 310). During this second uprising, demands were concerned with autonomous Madhes province, proportional and inclusive representation in the state politics; and mass entry of Madhesis into the Nepal Army. The second Madhes uprising established Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) led by Mahanta Thakur, an influential political leader who defected his long-affiliated Nepali Congress. Subsequently, the April 2008 election resulted in the election of 77 Madhesi members in the constituent assembly, representing various Madhes-based parties, who began to play a significant role in the process of designing the new constitution as well as the power sharing in the national government. The outcome of the election was historical in the sense that for the first time, Madhesis disrupted historical monopoly of national parties and elected ethnic Madhesis as their representatives, sending a message to Kathmandu that Madhesis were a key constituency in Nepal's politics. The victory of Madhesi parties helped them popularise the agenda of "One Madhes, One Prades (province)".

The first Constituent Assembly was dissolved on May 28, 2012 after its original and extended total tenure of 4 years, due to its failure in the process of drafting a new constitution. After being postponed several times, the elections for the second constituent assembly were held on November 19, 2013. The results of this election were detrimental to both the CPN-M, that was the largest party in the first constituent assembly, and to the Madhes movement as many of its parties had been too occupied in power politics and faced factionalism. After two years of political negotiations and in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in April 2015, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 came into effect on Sept 20, 2015, replacing the Interim Constitution of 2007.

However, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 ignored some of the provisions that were already guaranteed by the Interim Constitution 2007, and undermined the 22 point and 8 point agreements signed between the United Democratic Madhesi Front and the Government of Nepal on 30 August 2007 and 28 February 2008 respectively. This triggered the third Madhes resistance, following the proposal of a new constitution and the 16-point agreement between four parties i.e. Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, Unified CPN-M and Bijay Kumar Gachhadar led- Madhesi

Janadhikar Forum for the promulgation of a new constitution on 14 July 2015. United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF), a political coalition of three Madhes – based political parties i.e. Rajendra Mahato-led Sadvhavana Party, Mahant Thakur- led Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik Party and Upendra Yadav-led Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum protested against the 16-point agreement and the draft constitution. UDMF rejected the draft constitution citing the failure of the proposed constitution to demarcate federal provinces and the discriminatory citizenship provision. The nature of federalism, constitutional provision for inclusion, recognition of identity and other progressive agendas were argued to have been either only partially met or completely ignored in the draft constitution. The Third Madhes movement had the following four major demands which were ignored by the new constitution despite previous political commitments and formal agreements:

- Federal restructuring of the state with provision of creation of two provinces in the Tarai-Madhes region: one from Jhapa to Chitwan to be named as Madhes Province and another from Chitwan to Kanchanpur to be named as Tharuhat Province.

- Delineation of electoral constituencies to be based only on population and not considering large geography as a factor, which would provide fair representation of populous Madhes.

- Proportional representation of all ethnic groups in all state organs (Legislative, executive and Judiciary including, security forces).

- Fair citizenship provisions so as to also provide citizenship to children born to Nepali mothers. (Shah, 2015)

The 2015 Constitution created seven provinces, five of which spread across hills and the Tarai region. Madhesi leaders argue that this is against the spirit of what was agreed in past agreements. Madhesis fear that the Pahadi dominance in the the provinces which are combined with hills would not improve political representation of Madhesis. Madhesis argue that electoral constituencies '*based on the population fixed by the national census'* has been changed to '*based on geography, population and provincial balance*' in the new constitution which has weakened the agenda of population-based representation (Shah, 2015: n.p.). Again, the previously agreed point on '*proportional representation in all state organs*' has been changed into the following clause:

> Right to social justice: (1) Socially backward women, Dalits, Adibasi, Janjati, Khas Arya, Madhesi, Tharu, minority groups, marginalized groups, Muslim, backward classes, gender and sexually minority groups, youths, peasants, labourers, the oppressed and the citizens of backward regions, shall have the right to employment in state structures and public service on the basis of the principle of inclusion (Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

Finally, the children of a Nepali father who is married to a woman of a foreign origin would enjoy full citizenship rights, but the child of a Nepali mother born to a marriage with a foreign father would be only eligible for a naturalised citizenship which does not provide full social and political rights. Madhesis continue to demand gender equality via fair citizenship provisions for children to Nepali mothers (Shah, 2015).

UDMF carried out a peaceful agitation for a month to oppose these clauses in the constitution but the government continued to ignore these demands. Protests escalated, and agitators and security forces engaged in frequent confrontations. The government responded with excessive force, killing 57 protestors (ICG, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2015). The ICG (2016: ii) report notes that:

> The security forces are seen as discriminating against Madhesis and using excessive force. Employing them repeatedly to quell local protests fuels anger and radicalisation, could encourage armed Madhesi groups, of which the region has a history, and might also allow a fringe Madhesi secessionist movement to gain traction. While unlikely to be successful or widespread, it would increase the volatility of a complex region.

According to Madhesi Tarai Human Rights Defenders Alliance (THRD), a number of those who died had been shot on the back or the chest, and in some cases from far distances. As the government refused to make any amendments to the constitution, the Madhesi parties decided to change their resistance tactics. The locations of protests moved from towns and streets across Madhes to the Nepal-India border, blocking supplies and trade between Nepal and India and generating pressures on Kathmandu (Jha, 2016). The protesters occupied a transit bridge at no-man's land between Birgunj and the Indian border of Raxual on 23 September 2015 and clashed with police during the early weeks, as the government continued to repress the movement. The border town of Birgunj became the epicentre of violent protests. As one of the Madhesi leaders explained:

> We have no other option. The government declared curfews and prohibitory orders in urban centers and highways. When we tried breaching them, the police shot and killed the people. We couldn't just protest in village and

fields. No one would listen. So, we decided to occupy the border. (Hridayesh Tripathi, deputy chairman, Tarai Madhes Loktrantrik Party, speaking at a program in Kathmandu on 6 November 2015) (ICG, 2016: 19-20).

The blockade lasted for almost five months and resulted in a severe shortage of fuel and some essential items across the country, such as medicine and food supplies. Madhesis kept urging Kathmandu to come up with a political package to address the four points of contention: state boundaries; constituency delineation; electoral representation and representation in state organs; and citizenship (ICG, 2016; Shah, 2015). The border blockade was only opened in February 2016, after two amendments - constituency delineation and inclusion, were made to the constitution but failed to address the major demands of reconfiguration of state boundaries and the question of citizenship (ICG, 2016). The Madhesis wanted an immediate deal on federal boundaries. They wanted a guarantee on the mandate and the constitutional validity of the mechanism to reflect amendments as closely as possible to the text of the interim constitution. But the ruling parties, particularly the Communist Party of Nepal – Unified Marxist-Lenin (UML) did not agree to the terms and conditions (Jha, 2016).

Madhesi blockade ended without achieving amendments in federal boundaries. Madhesi parties were pressurised by the local constituents to end the blockade as they were fatigued from six-month of protests. The protest also turned ineffective due to parallel supply chains through the illegal network. India too nudged the Madhesi leaders to rethink their resistance strategy (Jha, 2016).
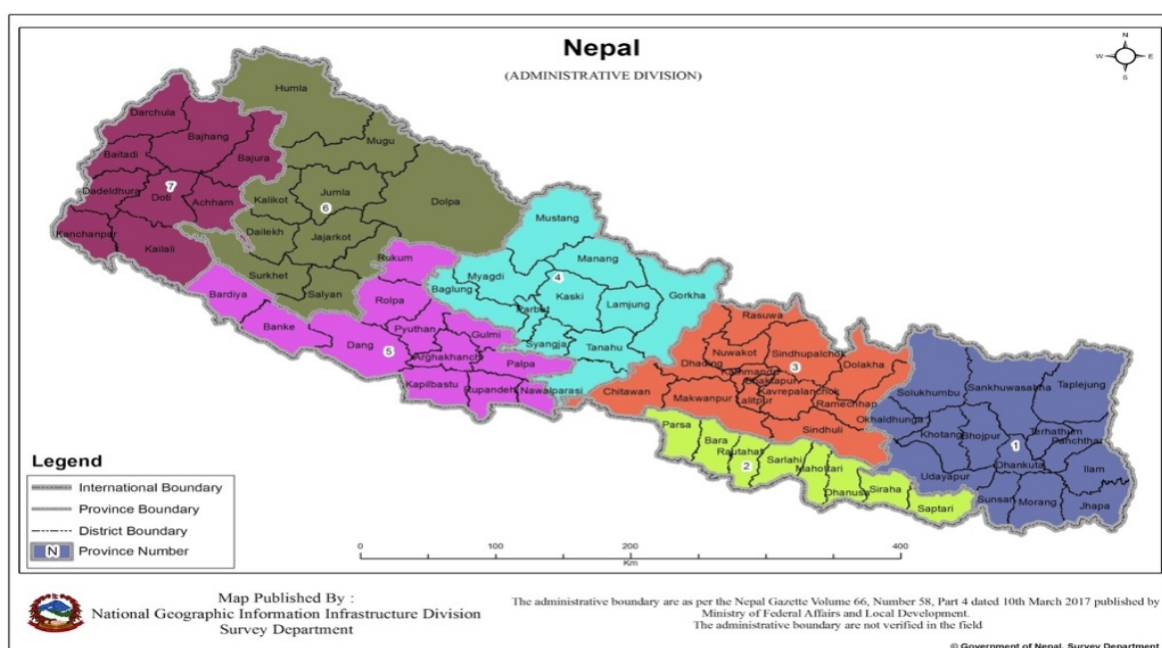
Figure 2: The provincial map of Nepal, 2015

The following table shows the chronology of the Madhes movement:

Dates	Key events
1950s	Identity and federalism by Nepal Tarai Congress – Vedanand Jha
1970s	Language movement by Raghunath Thakur
1980s	Citizenship Movement by Gajendra Narayan Singh (Sadbhavna Council)
1990s	Federalism, Inclusion, Language and Citizenship by Nepal Sadbhavna Party
1996	Maoist Movement (Madhesi National Liberation Front)
2004/5	Armed Movement for Separate Madhes by Jantantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha
2007	Madhes Movement-1 for Identity, Federalism and Inclusion by Madhesi Jnadikar Forum (MJF) led by Upendra Yadav
2008	Madhes Movement-2 for Electoral Reform and Inclusion by MJF + Tarai Madhes Democratic Party + Sadbhavana Party led by Mahanta Thakur
2013	Peaceful movement for separate Madhes by Dr. CK Raut
2015	Madhes Movement-3 against New Constitution
2019	CK Raut abandons his separate Madhes agenda and enters the mainstream politics

Table 4: The chronology of the Madhes movement

2.5 The establishment of Madhesi identity in national politics

Madhes uprisings and political events since 2007 have formally established the importance of ethnic identities and the agenda of Madhesi rights at the core of Nepal's politics. Over the last decade, the historically marginalised position of Madhesis has transformed in to Madhesis becoming a significant political player. However, the rise of ethno-nationalism has also caused some strain on the relationship between Pahadis and Madhesis (Yhome 2006). Pandey (2017: 318) also notes that the debate about 'ethnicity' has:

> … contributed to legitimise the hill-Madhes polarisation. The new form of ethnic contention between the Pahadis and the Madhesis redefined the way these people were interacting with each other. Despite the diversities and hierarchies within the Madhesis, the formation of the Madhesi identity in contradiction with the Pahadi further widened psycho-social divisions in the form of broader categories of the Pahadis and the Madhesis.

The politics of Madhesi identity has entered a critical juncture, as 'Madhesi' itself does not represent a homogenous cultural identity. The unity among marginalised populations in Tarai was achieved on the basis of shared narratives about oppression caused by the Pahadi-dominated state. However, the efforts of political and cultural homogenisation of Madhesi

identity, ignoring the distinct Tharu indigenous community, have caused a political backlash in the Madhesi discourse. The Madhes movement:

> lacked clarity in concisely redefining the Madhesi identity and building trust with the Tarai ethnics and others. Thus, the agitation itself sowed the seed of the Tharuhat agitation when the Madhesi advocates failed to recognise the diversities and complexities of the region (Pandey, 2017: 319).

In 2009, the Tharu, the largest ethnic group in the Tarai constituting 1.7 million people, scattered East to West across the region, detached themselves from the Madhes movement and launched their own agitation. Tharus demanded their own Tharuhat province in the Western Tarai as opposed to the Madhesi demand of a single pan-Tarai Madhes province (Pandey, 2017). This has been one of the intra-movement contentions, weakening the narrative of 'Madhesi' as a homogenous category with implications for the original political goals of the Madhes movement. In recent elections, Madhes-based political parties have either become the victim of factionalism or have been more attracted to positions of power in the government. As a result, they have experienced a gradual loss of support from Madhesi populations. After the merger of the Maoists with Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the left voice that has been most strongly in favour of the Madhes movement has also suffered a set-back.

Nevertheless, Madhesi identity has become central to Nepal's political and social discourses in recent years. Madhesi youth are more actively engaged in political activism, generating new possibilities.

2.6 Economic and political dimensions of the Madhes movement

The problem of economic disparities between hills and Tarai has been one of the main agendas of the Madhes movement. The Madhesi community contributes 32 percent of the total human resource, but its exclusion from economic resources reproduce inequalities and unequal processes of wealth distribution. As Nayak (2011: 643) notes:

> Seventy-six per cent of the total revenue of the country is collected from Madhes. Madhesis are poorer and have lower education and health indicators than Pahadis. Despite having fertile land and industrial hubs, the unemployment rate is highest in the Tarai region and per capita income is lower than Hills region.

Tarai is the most productive agricultural and industrial region of Nepal, with fertile land and dense forest in the countryside. It includes the 23.1 percent of the total area of Nepal, with 70

percent of cultivable land where around 74 percent of paddy cultivation of Nepal is in Tarai and 80 percent of cultivable land in Tarai grows paddy (Bevan and Gautam, 2008). As well as agricultural products, the export of forest products is also high. It is estimated that Tarai is the source of 65 percent of gross domestic products (GDP) and 73 percent of industrial products (Nayak, 2011; Bevan and Gautam, 2008). As Nepal's GDP accumulates primarily from agricultural activity, the Tarai region generates much of the country's national wealth and most of the Nepali state's revenue. Tarai districts' production of 11 major crops alone accounted for 48 percent of Nepal's total agriculture product in 1975 (Gaige 1975: 26), a figure which stands at around the same level even today. Hence, the economic importance of the Tarai is further underscored by the volume of agricultural surplus it produces. However, despite having good transport links, fertile land and rich natural resources, Tarai region is largely poverty stricken. For example, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts of Tarai region are ranked among the worst poverty-stricken districts in the country, whilst the poverty level is reported to be much lower in Jhapa, Chitwan and Morang where the majority of people are of the hilly origin (Sharma and Shah, 2002; ICIMOD, 1997).

The uprisings were also fuelled by the economic failures of the country that was caused in recent years by neoliberal policies, and the frustration of young people who struggled to find employment opportunities (DFID, 2015). After 1990's political change that re-established a multiparty polity under constitutional monarchy, Nepal entered the era of neoliberal reforms. Nepal's economy was opened up to foreign direct investment, alongside the entry of a large number of international NGOs in the name of development. These foreign organisations provided employment for the elite social class mainly in the capital Kathmandu to pursue 'development' activities. Local industries gradually disappeared due to deregulation, free trade and their inability to compete against foreign goods. For example, the import of clothing from China wiped out Nepal's cottage garment industries which used local cotton and eco-friendly industries to weave clothing. As a result, youth migration increased, rapidly reaching more than one third of the country's youth population being employed in Malaysia, Korea and the Gulf countries. Whilst the country needed to create jobs through industrialisation, on the contrary, a vast amount of national assets including, large scale industries were privatised. The neoliberal policies of the 1990s hit the poorest populations in the country. The Human Development Index (1998) shows that Brahmins had the highest score of 135, Indigenous nationalities – 92.21, Dalit

– 73.62, Madhesi- 96.28 and Muslim – 73.67 (NESAC, 1998). Poverty levels rose from 33 percent in 1976 -77 to 42 percent by 1995-96, and the income share of the top 10 percent of the people rose from 21 percent in 1980s to 35 percent by the mid-1990s, while the share of the bottom 40 percent shrank from 24 percent to 15 percent in the same period (Sharma, 2006: 1245). Poverty reduced between 1995/96 and 2003/4 for the upper castes Brahmin and Chhetri was 46 percent; for Muslims – 6 percent; Hill Indigenous nationalities – 10 percent; and Dalit – 21 percent (Tiwari, 2008: 74). As the Madhesi communities were largely at the bottom pile in Nepali society, they were the hardest hit by the neoliberal policies of economic liberalisation.

The economic linkage between Nepal and India is historically strong and facilitated by the open border policy between the two countries. The population residing on the border of Nepal are engaged in cross-border trade and business. A large number of Nepal's industries that export products to the Indian market are based in the Tarai. As the border with China is mountainous and poses restriction for trade, Nepal imports 60.1 percent of its goods from India whereas its exports to India amounts to 65.9 percent of its total goods, indicating a remarkable trade deficit (TEPC, 2017). The data compiled by Trade and Export Promotion Centre (TEPC, 2017) shows Nepal's import with India is worth NRS. 591 billion whereas, the export is limited barely to NRS 36 billion per year. A large proportion of imports are accounted for by for petroleum products.

Historical evidence suggests that in the ancient and medieval periods, the Tarai remained a rich agricultural region that provided the economic base for several important political and cultural centres. The Gurkha rulers who were aware of the economic strength of this region controlled Tarai and used it to cope with two main challenges. Firstly, the dense forests of Tarai helped contain the imperial advancement of the British East India Company, and secondly, Tarai's resources including forests and agricultural productivity helped sustain Gorkhali state's military establishment and its own imperial expansion using the revenue gained from the resource affluent Tarai (Sijapati, 2009: 14). The nature of Nepal's land ownership in the Tarai is the consequence of 240 years of autocratic monarchy and Rana regime who captured the fertile land of Tarai, distributing large tracts of land to the people who were close to the political class and their families, including government officials, priests and military leaders in lieu of or as gifts for their devotions (Upadhyaya, 2015; Sijapati, 2013). Following the mass migration of people from the hills who suffered from landlessness and lack of productivity in the hills, both Tharu and Madhesis lost their land (often by the fraudulent means) to hill migrants, creating deep

resentment. This was further compounded by the lack of land registration in the hands of the traditional Madhesi owners of the land. This meant that many lost their land in the process of either state-sponsored resettlement programmes or to the government's land reform initiatives (Gunaratne, 2009). This has given rise to social tensions, prejudiced development and discrimination against the traditional owners of land.

Apart from the historical injustices, the Madhes uprisings and political instabilities between 2007 and 2016 also adversely affected the economic wellbeing of Madhesis. Madhes strikes that involved closure of all business activities to pressurise the government damaged economy of the country as a whole, and pushed many poor Madhesis to deprivation. The direct economic cost of a one day nationwide general strike is estimated to be NRs.1.8 billion (US$ 14.7 million), largely affecting the service and industry sector (Shrestha and Chaudhary, 2013). The three Madhesi uprisings, mainly the third uprising that involved blockade on the border with India for six months, affected the industrial sector with irregularities in supply of raw materials due to travel disruption, acute shortage and price hiking. This added to the economic hardships caused by the decade-long Maoist conflict that had caused economic recession reducing the annual growth rate to an average of 3 percent between fiscal years 2001- 2006 (IIDS, 2012).

The blockade imposed at the Nepal-India border on 23 September 2015 affected every major highway custom-points. For example, a single day revenue collection of NRS. 1.2 billion (US$ 9.8 million) at Mechi custom point of Kakadvita dropped to NRS. 47 thousand (US$ 383) per day (Nayapatrika, Sep 26, 2015). Nepal's Department of Customs reported the single day revenue collection across the country dropping to as low as NRS. 200,000 (US$ 1,633) immediately after the border blockade (The Himalayan Times, 2016). Similarly, the border town of Birgunj, home to Nepal's largest source of revenue where almost two-thirds of Nepal's trade with India constituting over 60 percent of Nepal's imports, became the epicentre of Madhes protests. According to the customs office, its revenue collection dropped from NRS. 91 billion (US$ 74.32 million) to NRS. 56 billion (US$ 54.74) in that fiscal year (The Kathmandu Post, Aug 11, 2016). Birgunj became the target of protesting Madhesi parties who sought to create a crisis in the capital Kathmandu in order to pressurise the government to amend the constitution. Cargo containers were forced to stay in ever-lengthening lines. Due to enormous loss in revenue, the government's fiscal estimates were adversely affected, jeopardising all of its planned development activities.

Nepal's government accused India of imposing an undeclared blockade in support of Madhesis. India denied the allegations, stating that the blockade was imposed by Madhesi protesters within Nepal. The Indian government continued to maintain this position and argued that Indian truck drivers were afraid to cross the border due to fear of violent attack. India maintained the position that Nepal needed to address the demands of Madhesis, and the resolution of ongoing resistance could only be found through the dialogue between the protesters and the Nepalese government (Pokharel, 2015).

The blockade created an economic and humanitarian crisis mainly in urban areas, resulting in families resorting to raw food or canned products. The lack of cooking gas supply gave rise to a black economy, serving the economically privileged and those who had strong social networks. Restaurants had to amend their menus, and many had to close down due to the shortage of cooking gas. The tourism industry suffered from cancellations of trekking and tour packages, throwing Nepal's tourism- dependent economy into further turmoil (Brown, 2015). The absence of fuel and raw materials led industries either to close down or operate in very low quantity.

In April/ May 2015, Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake causing the death of nearly 9,000 people (National Planning Commission, 2015). It is estimated that the total economic loss caused by the earthquake was US$7 billion, and almost 700,000 people were estimated to be pushed into poverty in 2015-2016 due to the disaster (National Planning Commission, 2015). Almost half a million homes were destroyed or significantly damaged, and the blockade added further hardships to the poorest and those who were struck by the humanitarian disaster. Agriculture was the worst hit due to the shortage of fertilisers and pesticides. The World Bank's projection of 5.1 percent growth in 2015/16 was revised to 4.5 percent after the earthquake and 1.7 percent during the blockade (National Planning Commission, 2015). The only mechanisms for economic survival were remittance and black market. The blockade also reemphasised Nepal's dependency on India for its basic supplies (ICG, 2016).

The post-earthquake rehabilitation and reconstruction process was severely delayed due to poor planning and politicisation of National Reconstruction Commission. However, the disaster provided the government with a political opportunity to mobilise nationalistic sentiments against the Indian blockade and Madhes movement. Madhesi parties felt under pressure to abandon the agitation to show national solidarity, consequently leading to promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal 2015.

2.7 Social dimensions of the Madhes movement

The famous Nepalese anthropologist Harka Gurung argues that there are three main social groups in Nepal which have been marginalised by the state's monopolistic policy: Janajati (indigenous groups) on the basis of culture, the Dalits (untouchables) on the basis of caste and the Madhesi on the basis of geography (Gurung, 2003). For the Madhesi social group, he provides a basic typology of problems and intervention that is needed to correct it:

Social Group	Problems	Intervention
Madhesi	*Cultural* 1. Linguistic discrimination	1. Official status to Tarai languages
	Economic 2. Employment bar	2. Recruitment in army
	Political 3. Hill dominance 4. Citizenship problem	3. Regional autonomy 4. Ascertain long-term residents vis-à-vis recent immigrants

Table 5: The typology of problems in Madhes (Gurung, 2003: 21)

In light of these dimensions of discrimination, Gurung argues that:

> … there is still the possibility of more aggressive expressions, even violence and irredentism, if legitimate demands for social justice and political equality are not conceded by those entrenched in power. What Nepal now needs to devise is a polycentric nationalism that fosters a feeling of belonging among all sections of society which in turn will promote national integration. (Gurung, 2003: 22)

The social dimension of the Madhes movement primarily represents the unequal power relationship between dominant Khas-Arya ethnic groups and Madhesis. As Madhesi culture, traditions, ways of life, language, and geography have been excluded in the official narratives of nationhood; as Madhesi representation in politics has been historically negligible; and, as the definition and operationalisation of national identity and characteristics make Madhesis invisible in the national picture; Madhesis do not generally register as Nepalis in the mindset of common Pahadi communities. Pherali and Garratt (2014: 42) provide the following two scenes to illustrate how social humiliation of Madhesis occurs in the capital:

> **Scene 1:**
>
> A pahadi hawker knocks on the gate of Kathmandu city's house with strawberries in his daalo (traditional hilly basket).
>
> The landlady asks: *Dai kafal kasari ho? [*Elder brother, what rate are the strawberries?] Pahadi Hawker: *Bis ruppe mana ho bainee*. [Twenty rupees per mana, younger sister.]

> The landlady: *Bis ta mango bhayena ra dai? Milayera dinus na?* [Isn't twenty expensive, elder brother? Could you consider the price please?]
>
> **Scene 2:**
>
> A Madhesi hawker shouts outside the gate: *Ye A . . .. Aalu, kauli, ramtoria, tamator.* [ye… potatoes, cauliflowers, ladyfingers, tomatoes…]
> The same landlady: *Ye madhise golbheda kasari ho?* [Hey, Madhesi, how much are the tomatoes?]
> Madhesi hawker: *Hajur. . . kilo ko dus rupaiya parchha hajur.* [My lady, then rupees per kilo, madam.]
> The landlady: *Kati mango, ali sasto de.* [That's expensive. Make it cheaper.]

Table 6: Illustration of social humiliation of Madhesis

Pherali and Garratt (2014: 42) note that '*the above two scenes can be read as textual and linguistic representations and political allegories of the negative attitudes of Kathmandu city dwellers towards impoverished 'hawkers' in Nepal*'. Scene 2 in particular portrays a discriminatory attitude that is deeply rooted amongst dominant Khas-Arya groups in the capital towards the Madhesi people. It is rather a typical reflection on culture, and of the mindset of socially and politically privileged classes (living in the hills) towards people of the southern plains (Tarai/Madhes) (Pherali and Garratt, 2014: 42).

Sangraula (2070 BS: 15-16) also lists a number of statements from Madhesi communities who feel that they have been treated unfairly by the Nepali state:

> The police are friendly with Pahadi who commits murder but Madhesi goes to prison even for minor crimes.
>
> The police assaults Madhesi entering the hospital during the Madhesi protests.
>
> Reservation quotas are not allocated to the rightful marginalised and disabled but to those who are recommended by the powerful and privileged.
>
> When a Madhesi goes to a government office, the officer does not look at the paperwork but on the face of the Madhesi and interrogates him unnecessarily.
>
> In government offices, Pahadi's work gets done swiftly but a Madhesi is held on, exploited and humiliated.
>
> The face of this state does not resemble mine.
>
> The officer does not know our language, we cannot speak in their accents. Then we get lost and tricked.

When we go to obtain a citizenship certificate, despite all the paperwork in place, they ask for a police report. They are not really looking for a report but bribe.

These expressions from Madhesi participants at a discussion forum represent the corollary of what has been experienced by Madhesi communities since the making of the Nepali state. The Madhes movement in Nepal is driven by deeply ingrained experiences such as these which demonstrate the relationship between the state and Madhesi society.

Madhesis feel insulted not only in Kathmandu, they also feel exploited and discriminated against by the upper caste Pahadi migrant communities who live in the Tarai. As noted earlier in this paper, Madhesis' cultural affiliation with Indian provinces of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh has historically been interpreted as a threat to national integrity. This has influenced the Nepali state's discriminatory policies against Madhesis. The "one nation, one culture" policy implemented by King Mahendra during his absolute rule created not only a setback to Madhesi cultures, but also created an atmosphere in which they were considered as untrustworthy or unpatriotic. Hence, Madhesi concerns are related to both reclaiming identity and life with dignity. In 2006, murals began to appear on the walls of Kathmandu stating: *"Speak with Pride that you are Madhesi: not a foreign fugitive but a son of the soil"*. This feeling of deprivation and exclusion were asserted in the capital and indicated Madhes as a fertile ground of political resistance (Tamang, 2017).

The Maoist rebellion had sensitised Madhesi grievances and induced anti-state sentiments among Madhesi people, particularly through the political campaign of Madhesi National Liberation Front. Yet the 2007 Madhes movement turned into an anti-Maoist movement, seeking a distinctive political identity. It was necessarily a significant political endeavour to counter the historical tendency of democratic movements to draw strength from Madhesis in their fight against autocracy, only to later re-establish Pahadi hegemony. There was widespread anger in Madhes against Pahadi communities which also led to the sporadic occurrence of communal violence in some areas. Some Pahadis were reported to have been displaced from urban areas of some Tarai districts due to fear of attack from violent protesters. For example, around 4,300 Pahadis were forced to flee homes when the Madhesi-Pahadi violence broke out in Kapilvastu in September 2007 (IRIN, 2007). However, the communal violence was significantly low and during the third Madhesi uprising in 2015, the resistance was entirely directed against the state, and some Pahadi communities supported Madhesis in their resistance. The prolonged political

transition after the Maoists entered the peace agreement, and the repeated Madhes agitations, provided the wider Nepalese communities a space to reflect upon the political arrangements and marginalisation of ethnic and indigenous nationalities. Consequently, some signs of solidarity among Pahadi community in Tarai towards the demands of Madhesi people were also observed. This was not necessarily the manifestation of geographical solidarity for the movement but was rather the evidence of recognition of grievances experienced by fellow Nepalis who represented an ethnic or regional identity that were historically suppressed. A significant event was the merger of the *Madhesi Janadhikar Forum, Nepal*, a Tarai based political party and the *Federal Socialist Party Nepal* which primarily represented the marginalised indigenous communities in the hills to form the *Federal Socialist Forum, Nepal* on 15 June 2015. This was the first time that any Madhes-based political party had merged with another political force that had its support base in the hills.

Given the social diversity within Madhes, different constituencies in the Madhesi community had different motivations for their involvement in the movement. For example, the well-educated urban groups (usually, the upper-caste Madhesis) felt discriminated against due to derogatory attitudes and discrimination faced in their professional environments. For them, the Madhes movement was a means to gain equal treatment in their professional and social lives in urban settings. Madhesi landholders had been affected by Maoist mobilisation of the landless and Dalits who were their traditional subalterns – the Madhes movement gave them an egress to channel their anger and reclaim their superiority as liberators of Khas-Arya's dominance. The majority of protesters, however, came from semi-urban or rural areas and emerging townships surrounding Biratnagar, Lahan, Nepalgunj, Janakpur, or Birgunj. Their motivation was to assert the Madhes agenda of ethnic recognition and representation in the public realm of the country through a new political structure.

Shakya (2013:76) notes that Nepal's economic endeavours since 1950s have been ethnicised by providing a dominant space to high caste elites in '*various entrepreneurial mechanisms while ostensibly denying the representation of ethnic voices in policy discourses, and thereby developing a hegemonic narrative of ethnic neutrality*'. She further argues:

> As long as political rule informs the way ethnic order is interpreted, ethnicity will continue to cross paths with economic policymaking and practice. Such crisscrossing may take the form of loyalty, alliance, rivalry, and attempts of subjugation. Consequently, while the great bulk of state economic policy is

framed in a universalist language entirely indifferent to the local power structures, its implementation is hardly indifferent to such power struggles. (Shakya, 2013: 77)

2.8 Madhes movement and organisations

During 1770s and 1780s the Shah rulers encouraged immigration of people from Bihar to the Tarai region of Nepal, where they needed settlers in order to convert the forests into agricultural land. The flow of immigration also increased due to famine in Bihar and flooding caused by the Koshi river. More importantly, rulers needed to increase their revenue from farmers, duties from trade of timber and taxes for using pastures. The Rana rulers also continued to encourage immigration until their departure in 1950, as they needed people to work in the fertile land which was owned by wealthy landlords. The volume of agricultural land expanded significantly during this period and Madhes became the major source of income for the Nepali state. However, after the onset of democracy, the Nepali state missed the opportunity to incorporate wider diversity of the Nepali society in the state functionaries. Due to the absence of Madhesi voices in the government, bureaucracy, military and other state institutions, and invisibility of their culture in the national identity, Madhesis began to organise to demand their recognition and equitable access to state functionaries. The following table shows the emergence of the Madhes movement organisations and their agenda in the last seven decades.

Period	Movement Organisations	Key leaders	Key agenda
1954-1961	Tarai Congress	Vedananda Jha	Federalism, reservation, language recognition (save Hindi movement) **Scope**: *limited,* Madhes-based campaigns, attempts to negotiate with the state
1960s-mid 70s	Nepal Jankrantikari Dal	Ragunath Thakur	Recognition of Hindi language, reservation, land reforms and citizenship rights **Scope**: *limited*, clandestine activities, repressed by the state
1980s	Sadbhavana Council	Gajendra Narayan Singh	Right to citizenship, language recognition, federalism, reservation **Scope**: *moderate*, repressed by the state, some national level engagement demanding political rights for Madhesis
1990s-2016	Sadhbhavana Party (council converted into party)	Gajendra Narayan Singh	Federalism, Language, Inclusion, Citizenship **Scope**: *Significant*, participation in parliamentary democracy, some recognition by the state, largely undermined by the political orthodoxy, increased mobilisation of Madhesi political activists

1999-2008	Maoist Movement (Madhesi National Liberation Front)	Jay Krisha Goit, Matrika Yadav, Prabhu Shah, Jwala Singh	Autonomous Madhes state, liberation from internal colonization, social, political, gender, caste, ethnic and ethnic inclusion **Scope**: *significant*, a Maoist wing mobilising Madhesis against the state, armed struggle with frequent clashes with security forces, Madhes wide clandestine political campaigns, ethno-Marxist ideology promising ethnic liberation and ethnicity-based province within Nepal
2003-present	People's Tarai Liberation Front	Jay Krishna Goit	Independent Madhes, armed struggle for independence **Scope**: *limited*, a breakaway faction of Maoist party, ethnic armed struggle with occasional clashes with security forces
2003-2013	Madhesi People's Rights Forum	Upendra Yadav	Federalism, proportional political representation, inclusion, citizenship rights **Scope**: *highly significant*, peaceful political campaign for ethnic liberation, history of association with the Maoist party, mass mobilisation across the Tarai region, revival of Madhesi rights and success in establishing Madhesi agenda, the leading organisation of three Madhes uprisings and influence in political negotiations and constitution-making
2007 - present	Nepal Madhes Foundation	Tula Narayan Shah, Digvijay Mishra, Dhirendra Premarshi	Sensitising Madhesi agenda at national and international levels, dialogue, discussion, research, Madhesi intellectual capacity development and knowledge production, nationalizing Madhesi issues **Scope**: *significant*, social development programmes across Madhes, promotion of Madhesi rights, *significant* gains in knowledge production and publication of Madhes-focused literature, contributions to debates on constitution and providing intellectual resources to Madhesi leaders and activists
2008 - 2016	Tarai Madhes Democratic Party	Mahanta Thakur	Electoral reform, inclusion of Madhesi in bureaucracy, military and judiciary, citizenship rights **Scope**: *significant*, led by a highly respected Madhesi leader, political campaign in Madhes, participation in the parliamentary and constitution-making processes
2009 - present	Tarai Human Right Defenders Alliance	Dipendra Jha	Monitoring human rights violation in Madhes, legal battles with Nepali state on Madhesi discrimination, advocating constitutional reforms **Scope**: *significant*, led by a Madhesi lawyer, social development programmes in Madhes, contribution in debates about legal issues and Madhesi discrimination, civil society initiative to support the Madhes movement
2013-2019	Swaraj	Dr. CK Raut	Peaceful separatist movement for independent Madhes **Scope**: *limited*, led by a highly qualified Madhesi academic, mobilisation of youth who felt the Madhes movement was exploited by corrupt Madhesi leaders and the Khas-Arya hegemony could only end under the

			sovereign Madhes, inspired by Gandhian philosophy of non-violence
2014 – 2019	Federal Socialist Forum Nepal	Upendra Yadav, Ashok Rai, Rajendra Shrestha	Federalism, inclusion, protection of rights and recognition of ethnic and indigenous nationalities **Scope**: *limited*, political party that represented Madhesi as well as hilly indigenous groups, limited influence (except the legacy of former leaders of influential political forces)
2015 - present	Tarai Madhes National Council (TMNC)	Saroj Ray and Kashindra Yadav	Dialogue, discussion and resistance campaigns on issues of Madhesi rights, reservation for Madhesis in key realms of Nepali **Scope**: *limited*, civil society initiative led by Madhesi youth
2015	United Democratic Madhesi Front	Upendra Yadav, Mahanta Thakur, Hridayash Tripathi, Sharad Singh Bhandari and Rajendra Mahato	Third Madhes uprising against the Constitution of Nepal 2015 **Scope**: *significant*, the single unified force, national level campaigns for Madhesi rights, led by influential Madhesi leaders, significant effects on negotiations with the state and constitution-making
2019-2020	The Socialist Party	Baburam Bhattarai, Upendra Yadav, Ashok Rai, Rajendra Shrestha	Inclusive and participatory democracy, inclusive development, empowerment of marginalized communities in Nepal **Scope**: *limited*, political party that represented Madhesi as well as hilly indigenous groups, a clear ideological and political vision, limited influence (except the legacy of former leaders of influential political forces)
2020- present	Nepal Socialist Party	Baburam Bhattarai, Upendra Yadav, Ashok Rai, Rajendra Shrestha, Mahant Thakur, Rajendra Mahato	Inclusive and participatory democracy, inclusive development, liberal democracy based on equity and proportional representation, socialist ideology focused on development, empowerment of marginalized communities in Nepal **Scope**: *limited*, political party that represented Madhesi, hilly indigenous groups, and the most disenfranchised groups across the country, a clear ideological and political vision, emerged out of risks of manipulation by the KP Oli led government to remain in power, a new political entity, leaders with diverse contested political history, limited influence (except the legacy of former leaders of influential political forces)

Table 7: The chronology of Madhes movement organisations

3. Nepal Madhes Foundation and the Madhes movement

This chapter provides a detailed overview of NEMAF, the Madhes movement organisation which operates as a government registered civil society organisation. The organisation empathises with the aspirations of Madhesi communities and advocates for the rights, freedoms and political representation of Madhesis in Nepali state structures. It is at times critical of the political strategies of movement parties and its leaders, while constantly providing intellectual resources and contributing to the debate about the struggle. Hence, the role of the organisation is conceptualised as an organised agency supporting the movement's goals, whilst the movement itself as an organic force emerging out of complex social, political and economic dynamics across historical moments of Nepal's struggles for socio-political change. In other words, for us, the Madhes movement and NEMAF are inseparable entities for movement learning and hence, in this chapter, we focus on the organisation's various activities, its pedagogical approach and campaigning strategies as well as the critical analysis of the Madhes movement.

3.1 Nepal Madhes Foundation: Introduction

The Nepal Madhes Foundation (NEMAF) is a non-governmental organisation that works as an independent intellectual and advocacy arm of the Madhes movement. Established in 2007, in the aftermath of the first Madhes uprising, the organisation's work broadly focuses on social, political and economic development in the most marginalised areas of Tarai. In the past 12 years, it has implemented a wide range of programmes to promote social harmony, peace, security and good governance in Madhes. At the core of its work is the goal of social justice through the empowerment of the Madhesi people. NEMAF aims to help secure social, economic and political rights for Madhesis within the Nepali state. NEMAF conceptualises the notion of empowerment as a process of gaining critical knowledge about Madhesi history, language and literature, geography, social issues; and promotes these through activism at grassroots, national and international levels. This organisation was conceived by a group of youth who were inspired by the historic Madhes uprising which, for the first time, compelled the government to seriously engage with Madhesi demands. Located officially at Lalitpur, NEMAF conducts its activities both at the central and local levels in collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders including Nepal's think tanks, human rights activists, NGOs and international development partners.

NEMAF primarily operates within two interrelated domains of activity: the first of which relates to activism which primarily supports and strengthens the gains of Madhes movement and advocates for the protection of these gains – such as reservation for Madhesis in civil service, legislatives and security forces as well as promoting good governance and protection of human rights in Madhes. It publishes opinion pieces in national newspapers and digital media, organises public discussion forums and documents and archives knowledge about Madhes. The second domain is purely under the auspices of an NGO framework which operates with the support from external funding to implement development projects in Madhes. It also carries out funded research to support programme implementation, advocacy and policy debate. All these activities are interconnected and mutually reinforcing to the Madhesi cause.

3.2 History of the Organisation/Movement

The history of NEMAF relates to the history of the Madhes Movement, the oldest ethnic struggle among Nepal's diverse ethnic groups which have been marginalised in the process of nation building. The birth of Nepali Tarai Congress (NTC) in 1951 indicates that Madhes was not only the victim of autocracy but also suffered from Khas-Arya socio-political domination. Pro-Madhes activists sought to capitalise on the political change to claim their cultural and political representation in the Nepali state. During the last sixty years, the Madhes movement has demanded an autonomous Tarai/ Madhes province, recognition of Hindi as a national language of Tarai, representation of Madhesi in government services and inclusion of Madhesis in Nepal Army. As these debates were beginning to take on momentum, the multiparty democracy was crushed by the monarchy resulting in all political movements, including the Madhes struggle, having to go clandestine. This brought both Madhesi activists and democratic forces together to struggle for democracy until 1990 when the Panchayat system was overthrown by a popular movement. Panchayat had done significant social and political damage to Madhesis by repressing their ethnic and indigenous languages, introducing land reforms and resettlement programmes, and then denying citizenship rights to a vast number of Madhesis throughout the region (Gautam, 2008). The national cultural homogenisation project (Onta, 1996) of the state had repressed Madhesi cultural identity, language and way of life and cultural identity rights in the process of forming an assimilative national identity based on cultural representation of Pahadi Khas-Arya cultures. The restoration of democracy in 1990 reinstated the functioning of political parties, but Madhesis were side-lined again as the inequalities in state structures and

grievances of Madhesi people were ignored, giving rise to new forms of resistance across the Tarai region.

The success of the Madhes movement in 2007 was that the term 'Madhes' and 'Madhesi' gained constitutional acceptance, which was an historic achievement. Soon after this, NEMAF was officially registered and started advocating in favour of Madhesi rights to support the movement. Many of the NEMAF members had been involved in the movement in different forms including writing about the Madhesi issues in the media, fighting legal battles against discriminatory practices, and mobilising youth and cultural groups to join the Madhes struggle. Their backgrounds enabled the process of knowledge production through continuous engagement with grassroots populations and reporting of their grievances and struggle through publications. This systematic documentation has contributed to the legitimation of the struggle – that the resistance had a theoretical rationale based on intellectual ideas, social and political realities and the desperation and aspiration of the Madhesi population to achieve a dignified life in various realms of Nepali society. By engaging with public intellectuals, political leadership and the media, these grassroots narratives were translated into authoritative movement discourses to inform movement actions as well as to put pressure on the state to accede to social justice reforms.

In the early years of its inception, NEMAF concentrated its work on advocacy for constitutional issues such as federalism, social inclusion, state restructuring, citizenship rights, electoral reforms etc. It organised a series of discussions, dialogues and seminars and began to document, compile and publish ideas emerging in these events. Aligning its activities with the agendas of the Madhes movement, it provided evidence-based justification to the grievances of the Madhes among the urban elites in Kathmandu. These events contributed to the sensitisation of the prevalence of historical state domination and discrimination against the Madhesi people. In this sense, NEMAF served as a *dialogic bridge* between the dominant political discourses in the centre and Madhesi democratic rights, the question of equity and civic engagement. This could be understood as a process of '*political translation*,' '*a disruptive and communicative practice developed by activists and grassroots community organisers to address the inequities that hinder democratic deliberation, and to entreat powerful groups to work more inclusively with disempowered ones*' (Doerr, 2018: 3). NEMAF plays a role not as a neutral facilitator of the dialogue between the marginalised Madhesi voice and elitism but as a '*disruptive third*' that is able to utilise its persuasive power drawn from its understanding of '*the values of the privileged groups and the*

needs of marginalized ones' by '*…directing attention to power imbalances and drawing on the egalitarian commitments of those who otherwise would be unlikely to recognise their own structural privilege*' (Doerr, 2018: 4). The *dialogic bridge* is built not only through the translation of Madhesi grievances into evidence-based persuasive narratives that rupture elitist approaches to purported grassroots representation, but also as a process in which the dominant political actors are compelled to listen to lived experiences of Madhesis in discussion forums. Hence, NEMAF's intellectual endeavours are not limited to mitigation of linguistic or cultural subordination of Madhesis, but seek to develop agency for transformative change.

The historical repression of Madhesi communities has systematically obscured Madhesi grievances in mainstream academic and political debates at the national level, leading to the inability of Madhesis to articulate and effectively negotiate their agendas with the state. Some Madhesi public intellectuals had also been co-opted by dominant political narratives and the agenda of ethnic and cultural liberation had hence been largely unacknowledged. NEMAF assisted the Madhes movement in intellectually articulating and revindicating those agendas in the wider political arena, through intellectual public debates and publication of relevant analysis which would have been rare previously. As the founder of NEMAF reported:

> I felt that non-Madhesis were unable to understand the notion of ethnic domination and therefore, could not make sense of Madhesi agitation. Likewise, Madhesis lacked in ability and sophistication in presenting well founded arguments about structural domination. In other words, they were unable to articulate their feelings and experiences of discrimination when challenged about the rationale for their discontent towards the state. (Madhesi civil society leader 1, Kathmandu)

The hegemonic control of discourses and systematic marginalisation of Madhesis over centuries had resulted in the normalisation of existing power relationships and the weakening of intellectual ability of Madhesis to be able to critique the system of oppression. As postcolonial theorists would argue, this process of control is a mode of exercising non-coercive power on 'subaltern' populations in a way that the interests of the ruling class become those of the entire population (Spivak, 1988). In the same vein as the postcolonial critique exposes the limitations and misrepresentations of colonised subjects' lived experiences, it is the same kind of 'epistemic fallacy' (i.e. knowledge misrepresentation) (Bhaskar, 2008) that occurs in most literature produced by non-Madhesi writers. Without social and cultural experiences of being a Madhesi and fully appreciating the causal mechanisms (e.g. actual and real), the study and portrayal of

Madhesi discrimination is likely to be a partial description of the reality. The dominance of Khas-Arya authors in the intellectual circle including the media sector suffers from framing the Madhesi struggle through a non-native lens. In the context of United Kingdom, Confino (2010: n.p.) also notes,

> The reason this matters is because if journalists predominantly come from one section of society, they will often carry a particular worldview and therefore tend to unconsciously reflect their own values and beliefs. … without a deep understanding of the different groups that make up our society, it is easy to fall into the trap of stereotyping communities which runs the risk of damaging social cohesion, rather than bringing people closer together.

Hence, the question is – can Madhesis speak for themselves? The systematic process of cultural repression, non-recognition of Madhesi languages in the national arena and systemic exclusion in all domains of national processes have left Madhesis with strong emotions of anger and feelings of grievances that are structurally deprived of intellectual spaces to unpack and explicate the processes of their marginalisation. This problem is also exacerbated by the repression of Madhesi languages in the national domain and communication barriers created by cultural and political marginalisation of Madhes.

In this context, NEMAF has played a role as the knowledge enabler, making research-based evidence and arguments available to movement actors such as political leaders and activists. As the NEMAF director further mentions:

> We worked on three areas to support the movement. We developed a practical approach in which we worked with public intellectuals to produce literature and evidence-based narratives about discrimination and marginalisation of Madhesis in Nepali society and got them to train Madhesis law makers who were involved in the constitution making process. The Madhesi leaders represented emotions of Madhesi people but they lacked in robust political substance to assert and justify their positions. (Tula Narayan Shah, Kathmandu)

NEMAF claims that its research and training programmes helped instil the intellectual and theoretical soul to the movement by offering research-based knowledge about the social realities

in which the struggle was born. Its series of publications on 'Madhes Manthan[1]' [Madhes Brainstorming] deal with a broad range of issues relating to the Madhes movement (NEMAF, 2020). These collections include discussions on the relationship between society and state; Madhes, Federalism and the debate about violence; Madhesism, inclusion and elections debate; Madhes in the new constitution; the Inclusion Act, Madhesis in the army and Madhes in state restructuring. In the Madhes Manthan on the 'Relationship between Society and State', Lal (2013) points out the disconnection between the Nepali state and Madhesi society. He argues

> we have, so far, been living in the state that inflicts fear. We have not even reached to a contract with the state. There is a continuous conflict between the state and society. Citizens have no faith in the state. So, we should search for the basis of a contract. (Lal, 2013: 21)

He highlights the absence of Madhesis in state structures, citing a list of recently promoted civil servants, the majority of whom belong to the dominant ethnic groups. Similarly, another civil society activist, public intellectual and author argues that:

> the relationship between the rulers/ administrators and the general public seems like the one that is of an oppressor and the oppressed. The rulers/ administrators have not yet transformed into servants or friends of the public. Due to these problems, federalism has surfaced as a question in the political process (Sangraula, 2013: 29).

He further notes how the state's language policy has become central to the elimination of Madhesi identity:

> In order to eliminate the identity of a cultural group, one should kill the language their language. By legislating Nepali as the mandatory language of instruction in the curriculum and negating rest of the native languages in the media and public offices, all cultural and indigenous groups were linguistically repressed. If one is weak in Nepali language, despite possessing the wealth of information, knowledge, skills and aptitudes, they would barely be able to express one fourth of these. In this situation, it is inevitable that non-native speakers of Nepali language would lag behind in accessing

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[1] *Madhes Manthan* is a compilation of discussions organised by NEMAF on different contemporary issues relating to the Madhes movement. These publications capture the voice of Madhesi people in their own words (some translated into Nepali whereas many would share their views in a Madhesi language) that describe their grievances and lived experiences of marginalisation. http://nemaf.org.np/madhesh-manthan/

public services, compete for opportunities and engage in public debates.
(Sangraula, 2013: 30)

The Madhes Manthan series also documents perspectives and experiences of Madhesi participants in Bardaiya, Kapilvastu, Sunsari, Siriha, Bara and other parts of Madhes and response to participants' comments and questions from public intellectuals. At least six books of Madhes Manthan, published over a period of ten years (2008 – 2018), document rich accounts of public debates on Madhes issues and their relevance to the movement. These processes enabled Madhesi activists to engage in public debates to sharpen their ability to articulate their thoughts, and documented their narratives and debates for wider readership. The involvement of public intellectuals in these regional events also inspired them to write opinion pieces in national newspapers and present their reflections at national level events. This process contributed to knowledge production and documentation of the Madhes movement. Occasionally, public intellectuals who were sympathetic to the Madhesi struggle were blamed as spoilers of peace and social cohesion in Nepali society. Lal (2070 BS: 24) cites a thought-provoking poem by an Indian poet called Gorakh Pandeya in a response to this blame:

A thousand years old is his rage,

A thousand years old is his hatred,

I am simply returning his scattered words,

In rhythm and logic,

But you fear,

That I am fuelling the fire.

[Author's translation from Hindi]

Figure 3: Illustration of resistance of the oppressed people [Picture from Rajendra Maharjan's Facebook Wall]

Similarly, NEMAF's 'Madhes Adhdhayan[2]'[Madhes Studies] series serves as the only Nepali academic journal that is primarily dedicated to Madhes studies. As a biannual journal, it publishes research-based academic articles on issues relating to the exclusion of Madhesis, issue of citizenship, Madhesi identity, culture, intra-Madhes political dynamics, Madhesi Dalits, and state-Madhesi relations. These articles provide an evidence-based academic basis to justify the need for a transformative political agenda, provide resources to scientific research on Madhes and contribute to revendicate the struggle of Madhesi people. Occasionally, the journal also publishes poems that capture the revolutionary sentiments of Madhesis. Dhirendra Premarshi, a Madhesi poet writes:

Tarai on Fire:

Equal sweat had we paid to soak the soil

But,

You tricked us while sowing the seed.

All along, when we endured the pain peacefully,

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[2] Madhes Adhdhayan is a is a semi academic journal published biannually by NEMAF in Nepali language. The publications are available to download freely at: http://nemaf.org.np/madhesh-adhyan/

You treated us as voiceless and barren;

Stole our meals and kept serving your own.

Now, give us both toil and wage equally.

Else, we will continue our resistence.

(Premarshi, 2013: 5)

Hence, Madhes Adhdhayan is a major knowledge contribution of NEMAF to Nepal's academic and public scholarship, which lays strong foundations for research and policy debates.

3.3 NEMAF's campaigning strategy

NEMAF has adopted various strategies for assisting the Madhes movement. It was recognised that Madhesis had emotional engagement with the movement and their involvement in the protests was the manifestation of historical discrimination, yet the movement needed to sharpen its theoretical base to enable activists to assert logical arguments and articulate narratives of grievances effectively both in movement organising and political negotiations. To broaden the movement's intellectual space, NEMAF's programmes were designed to systematically articulate the Madhesi agenda by working with political analysists, sociologists and human rights activists who engaged in analysis of Madhesi history, geography, politics, culture and identities by documenting knowledge, publishing research, and dissemination of knowledge through various means. As discussed earlier, the public discussion programmes and dialogue brought together a broad range of academics and activists, and the ideas discussed were documented in the Madhes Manthan [Madhes Brainstorming] and published for access to a wider readership. In addition, recognising the need for peaceful agitation, NEMAF organised a series of training programmes for journalists associated with the print media and FM radio stations to orient them on how to practise effective and ethical journalism at a time of political instability. Interviews were conducted with senior journalists who had worked in conflict-affected areas and a series of radio programmes were produced to educate journalists on conflict-sensitive reporting. Similarly, hoarding boards were erected, and peace rallies were organised in various places to advocate for peaceful transition and political transformation at a time when there was widespread anger among Madhesis and risks of violence were prevalent. NEMAF also published a report on Harmony, Security and Governance in the Plains based on a research study which was conducted in 2011 (NEMAF, 2013). Some of the publications were released in English in order to appeal to youths and international readers to critically appreciate Madhes issues, constitutional limitations and a way forward for a progressive political system. The first English journal -*The Landscape of*

Madhes- was published in 2012. It contains a broad range of articles on Madhes studies (Tewari and Sah, 2012). Over the past decade, NEMAF has concentrated on establishing Madhes studies as an area of research and scholarly domain.

The Madhes uprisings were broadly peaceful, since it had been evident from the preceding Maoist rebellion that overthrowing traditional power structures through an armed struggle was an impossible task due to Nepal's geopolitical situation. Another benefit of peaceful mass protests was that civil society organisations were able to organise their activities in support of the movement without facing state repression directly. This approach enabled NEMAF to promote public advocacy and academic debates in support of the Madhes movement in the capital Kathmandu. The 'Madhes Adhayayan' (Madhes Studies) journal was an integral part of its wider efforts to contribute to the movement by expanding knowledge about Madhesi demands, location of Madhesi issues in the state structures and evidence-based analysis of socio-political issues in Madhes. By engaging in the above initiatives, NEMAF has maintained its distinct role within the Madhes movement as an institution of knowledge production and a vehicle of channelling activists' emotions and anger for resistance as well as development of logic, articulation and argumentation as part of the movement learning process.

NEMAF now also holds a monthly discussion series in collaboration with Martin Chautari, a Kathmandu-based research institution, where it invites speakers with a broad range of expertise on Madhes movement. Similarly, owing to the marginal stake and historical exclusion of Madhes in academic studies, NEMAF also organises an immersion course on Madhes studies aimed at educating young scholars with critical studies on Madhes, the Nepali state and political change. It targets young researchers, activists and policy makers who shape the public discourse on Madhes politics. This course mainly intends to promote knowledge production and translation of knowledge into practice such social activism, policy making and leadership development.

3.4 NEMAF's pedagogical approach to activism

Since its inception, NEMAF's pedagogical approach has been based on the idea of participatory discussion, academic publications and community engagement, which can be best described as 'public pedagogy' which is '*a critical public engagement that challenges existing social practices and hegemonic forms of discrimination*' (Brady, 2006: 58). It is an approach to learning that acknowledges learning sites as dynamic and intersectional, and is ethically committed to critical engagement with democratic principles. What is important to appreciate is that public

pedagogues are not merely educators, they include a broad range of activists and community groups that constantly produce a democratic vision that problematises inequalities and injustices in social institutions and people's everyday practice (Dentith and Brady, 2005). As Brady (2006: 58) argues-

> It is an activism embedded in collective action, not only situated in institutionalized structures, but in multiple spaces, including grassroots organizations, neighborhood projects, art collectives, and town meetings— spaces that provide a site for compassion, outrage, humor, and action. Such pedagogy disrupts processes of injustice and creates opportunities for the expression of complex, contesting, and subaltern perspectives.

In this sense, the '*public pedagogy is concerned with both the socially reproductive and counterhegemonic dimensions of pedagogical sites that are distinct from formal schooling*' and hence, research into public pedagogy focuses on social contexts in order to '*advance either dominant oppressive structures or possibilities for democratic resistance and reconfiguration*' (O'Malley, Sandlin and Burdick, 2010: 2). In social movements, Giroux's notion of critical public pedagogy is particularly relevant in the context of Madhes movement (Giroux, 2000). Drawing upon Stuart Hall's work on culture, politics and power, Giroux (2000) argues that public intellectuals working in diverse social and political domains can enhance possibilities for democratic struggles. Hall's work is relevant in understanding pedagogy as a cultural critique, allowing those involved to challenge '*the conditions under which knowledge is produced and subject positions are put into place, negotiated, taken up, or refused*' (Giroux, 2000: 342). Hall (1996) points out that culture is embedded in manifestations of power through educational, political and economic institutions. Therefore, NEMAF's work particularly concentrates on exposing the hegemonic culture that is implicit in legitimising the state's power despite its exclusionary treatment to Madhesi cultural groups. Simultaneously, it provides a space for reclaiming history, culture and language of the Madhesis. As Hall (1996: 3) argues:

> By using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

Critical public pedagogy requires '… *critical examination of daily experience and the complex interactions of government, media, and popular culture, public pedagogy creates sites of struggle in which images, discourses, canonical themes, and commonly accepted understandings of reality are disputed*' (O'Malley, Sandlin and Burdick, 2010: 2). NEMAF's public interaction initiatives

provide opportunities for grassroots communities to express lived experiences that are characterised by discrimination and social exclusion. These pedagogical processes are located in learning spaces that are beyond institutional structures. Dentith and Brady (2005) also note that public pedagogies represent a grassroots and communal phenomenon, and allow social movements to engage in informed activism from positions of social inequality by pursuing transformative actions. NEMAF, through its Madhes Manthan publications, works against hegemonic ideologies by legitimising and celebrating the grassroots perspectives in shaping the public discourse of the Madhes movement. As Hall (1986: 52) notes *'the politics which follows from saying that the masses are nothing but a passive reflection of the historical, economic and political forces which have gone into the construction of modern industrial mass society, seems to me historically incorrect and politically inadequate'*. Here, Hall's (1986: 52) theory of articulation is relevant:

> The silent majorities do think; if they do not speak, it may be because we have taken their speech away from them, deprived them of the means of enunciation, not because they have nothing to say. I would argue that, in spite of the fact that the popular masses have never been able to become in any complete sense the subject-authors of the cultural practices in the twentieth century, their continuing presence, as a kind of passive historical-cultural force, has constantly interrupted, limited and disrupted everything else. It is as if the masses have kept a secret to themselves while the intellectuals keep running around in circles trying to make out what it is, what is going on.

What Hall (1986) notes above resonates the ethos of this research and is also rooted in the philosophy and ethics of NEMAF's work. The idea that social movements are the site of knowledge production and activists as producers of that knowledge challenges the elitist representation of the social movements and their learning processes. Social movement activist and scholar Aziz Choudry provides a resourceful critique of the narratives of social change that are attributed to individual charismatic leadership, arguing that glorification of *'individual achievements, characteristics or charism'* as the factor of movement success *'often do disservice to understanding social movements and the learning that takes place within and about them'* and *'… such accounts of history and of movements can obscure or divert attention away from the real nature of the dynamics of broader struggles for social change, rendering invisible the role of a wider array of social forces for transformation'* (Choudry, 2015: 13). Drawing upon his own vast experience of social justice activism, he argues that *'Movements are made up of ordinary people.*

Activists and organisers are ordinary people. But ordinary people make change' (Choudry, 2015: 12). This idea also questions the way that movement knowledge is distanced from the grassroots activists who are deprived of being able to utilise that knowledge for the benefit of their struggle. NEMAF's publication of uninterpreted concrete voices of grassroots activists in Madhes Manthan can be understood as an attempt to disrupt elitisation of public narratives that are often detached from movement needs. The narratives of the people provide readers an opportunity to connect with vivid descriptions of Madhesi's lived experiences. The public interaction programmes across the Madhes region served as non-formal learning spaces in addition to the broad informal and incidental learning that was happening within communities and public places as the people participated in the movement.

During the initial phase of NEMAF's work, it focused on establishing a culture of intellectual debates about Madhes in Kathmandu. The general public in Kathmandu usually dismissed the discourse of Madhesi marginalisation and Madhes-related issues were rarely debated in academic and intellectual forums in the capital. The Madhes movement was regularly characterised as being based on the manipulation of Madhesis by leaders who were motivated by their own political gains rather than representing the demands of Madhesi people. There was also a sense that India's geopolitical interests were fuelling instability in Madhes. The dominant orthodoxy relied on the notion that the existing political system was fair, and that the blame for any problems lay in inefficient and corrupt local governance. Additionally, there was a lack of intellectual resources to promote serious debates about Madhesi grievances. This clearly indicated the absence of Madhesi voices in the national intellectual realms and the need to fill this gap. A Madhesi civil society leader mentions that:

> We needed the content for our activism which could logically shape the discourse and narrative of exclusion – which could be explained in a way that made sense both to the audience in Kathmandu and activists in Madhes. More importantly, we needed to identify the location of the problem. The problem lay not in the way Pahadi people viewed Madhesis but the historical discourses and constitutional provisions that maintained and legitimised structural inequalities. These issues were related to the crisis of identity, inequitable political representation and exclusion of Madhesis in the state apparatus. (Madhesi civil society leader 1, Kathmandu)

The quote highlights a deeper level problem of normalisation of social realities through hegemonic narratives, and therefore the need for counter-hegemonic discourses that rupture '*the blending of persuasion and coercion*' (Carroll, 2007: 19). To this end, these disruptive

narratives could only emerge out of the revindication of the people's histories and lived experiences that have been obscured, silenced or repressed. From a critical realist perspective, the empirical representation of discrimination without interrogating the 'generative mechanisms' such as history, structures of the state apparatus and constitutional provisions cannot explain the social reality in its totality (Alderson, 2019). Fraser (1995) argues that, in order to abolish underlying generative mechanisms of injustice, a politics of recognition and representation would be needed. NEMAF's work on critical dialogue within Madhesi communities and Madhes Studies publications was aimed at advancing this process of understanding.

Before the 2007 Madhes uprising, only a handful of academics and public intellectuals wrote occasionally about discrimination against Madhesis in the media but largely, Madhes was a marginal topic in intellectual circles. Even educated Madhesis who lived in the capital were either apathetic or lacked in confidence to publicly advocate for Madhesi rights. Hence, Madhesi concerns were often side-lined as regional insignificant issues rather than matters of national concerns. Again, the NEMAF director Shah further notes that:

> Madhes uprising in 2007 helped gain interest in and gradual acceptance of Madhesi concerns in the capital. We began with the discussion about the issues relating to small armed groups in Madhes. This was indeed a matter of national security concern so, people were generally interested to learn about the causes of the emergence of new types of armed violence in the post-Maoist times. As I had already developed links with the media as a journalist and member of Nepali congress, it helped me bring together political leaders such as Pradeep Giri and then Peace Minister to the discussion forum. The occasional dialogue sessions became regular events after international donor agency GIZ agreed to support our initiative financially. (Tula Narayan Shah, Kathmandu)

It was soon realised that there was a lack of educational materials that people could read about and draw on to engage in Madhes issues. None of such discussions were ever systematically documented to build a knowledge base. So, NEMAF began to record and publish the summary of the ideas discussed in the discussion forums. This process gradually evolved as NEMAF's pedagogical approach sought to respond to the need for compiling/ documenting the scarce and scattered knowledge about Madhes in order to disseminate it for the wider good of the movement. NEMAF concentrated on developing *intellectual resources* for the Madhesi leaders who were trusted by the Madhesi people. There was clearly the interest and enthusiasm among Kathmandu-based Pahadi intellectuals to learn, research and write about Madhes movement but

in the post 2007 period, the level of distrust towards Pahadi intellectuals was so high that their analysis would be rejected by the grassroots Madhesi activists. NEMAF felt that Madhesi movement leaders who were the opinion makers of Madhes needed to build their narratives on evidence and critical analysis of the history rather than emotions. This could offer the basis of logical argumentation and increase capacity to unravel hegemonic discourses that had maintained the status quo. The dialogical forums hence served as an integral part of NEMAF's public pedagogy for Madhes movement learning.

However, there were contesting agendas at play around the interest in politics of armed violence in Madhes during the post 2007 Madhes uprising. The Kathmandu intelligentsia was willing to engage in Madhes-focused debates because of the political instability and violence that jeopardised peace and the interests of the dominant social and ethnic class. The underlying agenda, some of which may have been subconscious due to hegemonic conditioning, was to stablise or pacify the agitating groups rather than recognising underlying grievances. As critical theories on 'pacification' claim, security-related processes of pacification-

> need to be understood not just as military action to crush the enemy insurgency, but also a broader and far-reaching action to construct a new social order. Such an order would be one in which insurgency would not and could not occur, but it would also be an order in which capitalist accumulation might flourish (Neocleous, Rigakos and Wall, 2013: 1).

Furthermore, Neocleous (2011) argues that 'pacification' is a useful notion for understanding the security discourse. For the intelligentsia, the interest in discussing armed violence in Madhes stemmed from the motivation that the struggle did not escalate, and stability should be maintained and managed. This objective also aligned with global discourse on security and stabilisation. However, NEMAF was serving a different objective of providing Madhesi leaders with intellectual legitimation for their struggle and the interest was on transformation which required recognition and redressing of underlying forms of injustices. Hence, there were inherently competing agendas in which NEMAF tried to capitalise on the space of orthodoxy to steer the direction of debates towards the need to reconfigure political structures beyond the discourse of pacification. This dynamic meant that, at times, NEMAF got caught in a pacification rather than liberation agenda.

Between 2008 and 2010, NEMAF concentrated on creating a learning space where public and academic intellectuals could produce materials/movement content to use for popular education,

as well as to inform the political class and Pahadi focused discourse that obscured pro-Madhesi discourses in Kathmandu. NEMAF collaborated with well-known Pahadi academics and public intellectuals to develop well-founded narratives about the Madhes movement. These intellectuals were advocates of social justice and human rights and had sympathy for the Madhesi struggle. Then, more importantly, the discussion forums also provided these intellectuals with an opportunity to listen to and appreciate the voices of Madhesi people, who would then produce learning contents through their academic and journalist writings or TV talk shows to inform the wider populations.

The following diagram provides NEMAF's key strategic areas of work in support of the Madhes movement.
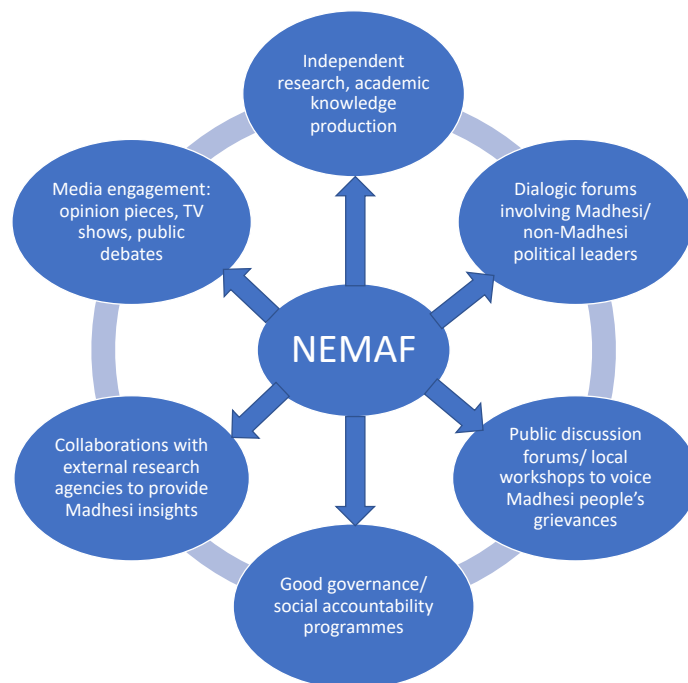
Figure 4: NEMAF's strategic areas of engagement

After the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015 and successful elections of the federal, provincial and local level elections, the political landscape drastically changed with the federalisation of political power and decentralised governance structures. With elected bodies across all levels of administration, the issue of good governance, development and autonomous policymaking at local levels has become NEMAF's area of political campaign. Local authorities have now been given constitutional rights to shape their social and development policies and oversee services such as education, health and social care. The provincial legislatures are

engaged in formulating relevant laws and setting out regulations appropriate to their own regions and the needs of their populations. With the constitutional provision of proportional representation across diverse ethnic groups and genders, executive and legislative bodies have increased representation of historically marginalised groups. This is a significant change in Nepal's political structures. In this new political environment, NEMAF is also beginning to adapt its programmatic focus to the governance agenda by strengthening local voices to enhance political accountability in Madhes. This is a new approach to its pedagogical and development engagement. For example, currently NEMAF is working in 16 districts of Tarai (Panchthar, Illam, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Bara, Parsa, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Banke, Surkhet and Kailali), forming Civil Pressure Groups (CPG) in each district to identify and debate governance related issues. With this project, NEMAF aims to improve public understanding of the role of local governments in service delivery and planning development activities in Madhes. It also aims to strengthen knowledge, skills and abilities of Madhesi people, in order to exert their rights to play active roles in decision-making, planning and managing local development activities. It continues to organise various training programmes for community empowerment aimed at enhancing awareness of constitutional rights and how to capitalise on the achievements that have been gained through the almost decade-long struggle.

The following table shows NEMAF's key initiatives to promote knowledge about Madhes movement during distinct periods of the struggle:

Time	Issues	Activity/ pedagogy	Research	Intended/ Unintended outcomes
2007-2010	Armed groups in Tarai, need for peace negotiation, federalism debate, movement ongoing	Dialogue sessions on peace building in Madhes, Kathmandu based leaders, activists brought together, lobbying for peaceful response to the crisis	No support at the start but later supported by Safer World to research on violence in Tarai – abduction and killings – by-product of Maoist insurgency – motivated by personal gains – criminalisation	More autonomous approach to research and knowledge dissemination during independent research and the focus was to protect the movement from misinterpretation but seemed to have no control over the analysis and tone of the report when it entered into external research collaboration.

			– security forces utilised criminal groups who were previously untrained Maoist cadres, – cross border dynamics of criminality	
2008-2013	Constitution making, ongoing movement in Madhes, needs to understand the location of problem – structural/ constitutional – needed to produce evidence-based, theoretically informed discourses and contents for Madhesi leaders and activists	Involvement of key public intellectuals to provide theoretical ideas and broader knowledge about the issues of marginalisation, federalism etc. to the people and then they would listen to the grievances of Madhesi people and publish reports/ opinion pieces in the national newspapers and Madhes Studies journal	*Madhes Manthan* – based on the dialogues between experts and opinion makers (10-12) *Madhes Adhyayan* - academics and intellectuals contributed to the journals (7th Issue now)	Established Madhes Studies as a key area of research and public debate mainly among the intellectual circle. The impact of this knowledge production on Madhesi leaders and grassroots activists may have been indirect but little known about direct contributions of these publications.
2013 - 2018	Local Madhes based issues – change of course in politics – second constituent assembly – power dynamics changed making Madhesi parties weaker-exposure of local caste/ class-based contentions – Dalits issues – focus shifted to the issue of governance	Activities focused on how to deliver good governance at the local level and campaigning to make communities aware for social accountability Empowering communities to enforce social accountability 'Strengthening civil society project' – 20 villages – 3 service providers (school, VDC and health) – civil pressure groups (4 in one group), interaction between Civil Society Groups and service providers	NEMAF learns that NGO based activities are less effective in promoting social accountability in Madhes whereas, people are more responsive to political parties, but the roadmap of social change is unclear among Madhes-based political parties NEMAF also learns that people are committed to political and religious organisations more than development activities facilitated by NGOs	NEMAF begins to get trapped into the liberal framework of social development and experiences bureaucratic challenges of staffing, auditing and elements of NGOisation. Local communities and Madhesi elites begin to view NEMAF as an organisation working for donor money rather than for the Madhes movement.

2018-2019	New constitution 2015, Madhes still dissatisfied by the constitution, Madhesi parties being consolidated after factionalism, sense of defeat and disappointment among Madhesi people, reflective period of the movement	Research collaboration with international organisations – social movement learning (with Sussex and University College London), Dalit engagement in provincial law making (international alert), feminisation of agriculture due to male youth migration (Wanigyan University, Netherlands); discussion forums in Kathmandu in collaboration with Martin Chautari once a month	Focus on Madhes-based politics and governance issues in province 2 Madhes movement learning study report Dalit representation is tokenistic, and their involvement in decision making/ policy making is negligible despite their significant population size Opportunity for migrant labour and collapse of the nexus between police and criminal groups resulted in reduction of armed activities.	NEMAF's area of work is more focused on intra-Madhes social dynamics. NEMAF is connected with internal social movements and participates in building solidarity for the rights of marginalised communities beyond Nepal.

Table 8: NEMAF's strategic activities to support the Madhes movement

Hence, NEMAF as a social movement organisation constantly and dynamically rearticulates its role in public spheres through its public pedagogy and development projects. It recognises that there are several intra-movement tensions which are manifested across caste, gender, ethnicity and regional levels in Madhes. What appears to be the case now is that movement organisations such as NEMAF have a wider role in diversifying activism beyond ethnic lines as well as recalibrating the dimensions of the movement to engage with social inequalities within and across the movements. As Giroux (2000) notes, the concept of articulation is a crucial notion in public pedagogy. He further notes:

> Central to such a project is the need to begin at those intersections where people actually live their lives and where meaning is produced, assumed, and contested in the unequal relations of power that construct the mundane acts of everyday relations. Public pedagogy in this context becomes part of a critical practice designed to understand the social context of everyday life as lived relations of power. (Giroux, 2000: 355)

NEMAF took a critical position to engage with the processes of Madhes movement. This involved questioning movement strategies, political decisions of Madhesi leaders and the political

integrity of Madhesi leaders as well as challenging state hegemony. This led to increased state surveillance on NEMAF, and at the same time, mistrust from movement leaders.

Through critical reflection, NEMAF has learnt over the years that movement organisations which operate with the support from international development funding are likely to get trapped in financial, political and bureaucratic complexities. The involvement of NGOs in social movements can often lead to commercialisation of movement agendas and liberalisation of movement processes, thereby weakening the innate motivation of activists for social justice and corrupting the organic nature of the struggle. NGOs which rely on international funding and operate within the regulatory framework of the state can inadvertently liberalise the approach to activism, standardise and financialise movement processes, gradually spoiling the organic nature of the struggle. Unless there is a clear focus, relentless commitment and uncompromising loyalty to the struggle of the disenfranchised, there is a risk of manipulation by the hegemonic state through its legal mechanisms. The failure to navigate these pressures can result in social movement organisations activities being co-opted within the limits of liberal systemic boundaries. The social movement is essentially aimed at overthrowing the established legal, social and political mechanisms that legitimise structural inequalities, and advocating for the rights of oppressed people. Organisations may not be able to serve this objective within legal frameworks that undermine the rights of the marginalised people. Without exception, NEMAF has also faced these challenges over the past decade. It has systematised these experiences and learning to develop transformative strategic objectives as the Madhes movement evolves amidst wider political change in Nepal.

There is also a sense within NEMAF that working as an organisation of a homogeneous group of Madhesis has somewhat limited the scope for intellectual growth within the organisation. NEMAF members indicated that discussions within the organisation have not sufficiently gone beyond the dominant emotions of grievances despite its array of works that promote production of evidence, critical analysis and logical arguments. This is an important learning process that involves critical self-reflection and enables NEMAF to cross the boundaries of a narrow ethnic agenda to one that consciously appreciates the need for cross-movement solidarity. More recently, NEMAF has strategically recruited staff from other marginalised communities to diversify its organisational environment. On this issue of the organisation's operation as an NGO, NEMAF's founding director stated:

NEMAF has often struggled to recruit high calibre professional staff from the Madhesi community, and the NGO practitioners from Pahadi communities usually do not own the agenda of Madhes. The representation of Madhesis in the NGO sector is negligible as compared to the members of Pahadi communities. Madhesi youth who joined the NGO work, mainly after the Madhes uprising are heavily influenced by rebellious sentiments and are emotional about Madhes issues but often lack in professional capacities to work in the NGO sector. This is probably due to the longstanding exclusion of Madhesis in the social sector and their lack of opportunities historically. (Tula Narayan Shah, Kathmandu)

The above view highlights the tension between organic movement organising and more structured NGO-based development programming in which the latter is restrictive, bureaucratic and donor controlled. NEMAF tries to balance its activities between the two but is both critically aware of the limitations and potential risks of donor-funded peacebuilding and social empowerment programmes and the significance of grassroots movement organising. In particular, the above quote also points out the NGO-isation of social movement activism that is bounded by professional standards of how knowledge is produced (e.g. methodological process), presented (e.g. textual forms) and disseminated (e.g. access to networks). Expounding on the forms of knowledge produced in social movements, Choudry (2015: 82) argues that there are *'tensions and contradictions inherent in the production of such knowledge as well as internal struggles within movement milieus – particularly, surrounding notions of expertise, NGOisation, and the dominance of professionalised forms of knowledge in many activist settings'*. NGOs, as a professional sector, demand certain standards of modus operandi (e.g. writing competitive technical proposals, English language skills, networking, knowledge about the NGO community of practice etc.) that activists might not possess or may not want to adhere to and therefore, lose out on much needed resources.

Finally, tensions also prevail at a broad level with regards to the question whether social movement organisations operating within the auspices of civil society or voluntary sector occupy the same perch as social movements within social reality. Gellner (2009: 3) notes that-

Radical activists often claim that the terms 'civil society' and 'the Third Sector' are the language of activists who have abandoned social movements, and that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are just denatured political movements. From this point of view, the assumption that there are three sectors of society – politics, the market, and the voluntary action defined by different goals and different motivations – is an excuse to remove radical alternatives.

NEMAF is located within the voluntary sector, unapologetically expressing views and organising activities in support of the Madhes movement. NEMAF does occasionally get targetted by Madhesi activists for its methods of engagement as an NGO receiving international funding, as well as for expressing critical views on movement strategies at different times. However, Gellner (2009: 3) further notes, '...*civil society and activism do belong to the same social field, despite the fact that those who are happy with one kind of terminology may reject the other*' and corruption, disillusionment and co-option can occur in any domain. Drawing upon the case of Bangladesh, Lewis (2009) argues that within the broad patterns of routinisation of social movements, there are also some NGO activists who manage to retain a militant approach or are complicit of the processes in which '*social movement ideals of commitment and personal austerity that have been abandoned by their larger and better known colleagues*' (Gellner, 2009: 3). Lewis (2009) highlights the idea of activist co-option through NGOisation vs 'activist insider' to illustrate the process of civil society activism.

> The conventional 'story' of the relationship between activists and NGOs in one in which NGOs serve to tame or domesticate the unruliness of the activists. An activist, already mobilised by some earlier engagement within the political arena (such as, within the student movement or environmental campaigning), comes into contact with international development agencies and eventually sees an opportunity or is persuaded to establish his or her own NGO. In setting up an NGO, the 'activist impulse' then becomes contained within this more formal vehicle, and begins to lose its radical edge and, for many other activists, its legitimacy. The activist becomes constrained within the apparatus of the international development industry where, depending on one's point of view, a person either becomes an 'activist insider' working to subvert neo-liberal development policies from within or alternatively, is fatally co-opted within 'the system' by foreign aid, its associated managerialism, and the wider workings of Ferguson's 'anti-politics machine'. (Lewis, 2009: 175)

Lewis' (2009) depiction above reflects the tension within NEMAF and its commitment to retain its role as an 'activist insider' asserting the Madhes movement ideals within the changing structures of Nepal's political and social spectrum. With its unique role in production of knowledge about Madhes movement, NEMAF is committed to the Madhes cause. For this reason, unlike other Madhes based NGOs, NEMAF has been frequently targetted and has received the same treatment at the hands of the Nepali state as the Madhes movement. NEMAF tends to get some leeway in its activities whenever the Madhes movement is in on good terms with the state but has faced strong criticism and threats by the state and the Pahadi intellectual

circle at times when the locus of the movement is weak (e.g. wrong movement strategies, factionalism within movement forces, moral degradation of movement leaders, violent and morally controversial actions by movement activists etc.).

At the local level, the Madhesi people show resentment towards NGOs-led social development activities that are silent about the structural causes of grievances simply to promote peace and social harmony within the existing social and political arrangements. NEMAF as a social movement organisation which operates with the help of development funding from various external donors has at times faced resistance in the areas where it operates. The NEMAF Director describes challenges around working on social accountability within the NGO framework:

> Men spend their resources to attend political activities, participation in mass rallies and party meetings and are prepared to face direct state violence. Women participate in various religious activities. They are prepared to spend money in travelling or offering to religious events. But they do not use their resources to hold public institutions accountable. If you encourage them to engage with public institutions, they demand allowance from the NGO that works on good governance and accountability. They do not consider NGO activities as their own public responsibility. But religious leaders and political leaders do not educate the people to hold public institutions accountable. There is a strong feeling among the public in Madhes that NGOs should provide monetary benefits for doing the work that benefits the people themselves. So, I realised that politics is more effective in facilitating social transformation so, it is necessary to change the politics because political movement taught people to resist. It demanded federalism, proportional representation and people followed the same agenda. So, politics needs to promote public accountability and good governance should become the political agenda. (Tula Narayan Shah, Kathmandu)

It is interesting to see that the grassroots populations identify themselves with political activism which has the roots in their own communities; speaks to and draws strengths form their lived experiences, but show indifference to NGO-led initiatives despite the fact that civil society programmes are also aimed at benefitting their lives. This may be because of the source of the agenda, programmes and resources, which originate remotely and are often top-down and driven by priorities that are set outside the Madhesi communities.

3.5 Madhes movement's relationships with other social movements in Nepal

Nepal underwent momentous political change between 2006 and 2015. In addition to the Madhes Movement, various other social movements, such as the Adivasi/Janajati [indigenous nationalities] movement and Dalit Movements, have emerged into the mainstream political

debates and played historically unique roles in resketching the political landscape of Nepal. With the implementation of the new constitution in 2015, the agenda of inclusion, secularism, ethnic and linguistic recognition have become central policy issues. Toffin (2009: 29) notes that *'the Janajati Movement may be seen as a response to strained unification in the 19th century and to the discriminations and inequalities resulting'*. It was first launched by individual activists during the late 1980s to protect the rights of indigenous people, enshrined in the national and international legal frameworks (UN, 2007) but gained momentum in 1990 after *'the Panchayat party-less system - a disguised form of royal autocracy – collapsed'* (Toffin, 2009: 29). The end of the monarchy and onset of the multiparty democracy in 1990 also paved the way for identity-based politics, hence reviving ethnic movements in Nepal. The expansion of the voluntary sector in the 1990s largely subsumed Janajati movement into a liberal NGO culture.

Lawoti (2013) provides an insightful comparative analysis between the indigenous movement and Madhes movement. He argues that the prevalence of widespread discrimination; international support to indigenous rights; construction of identity as indigenous peoples; and a distinct culture from that of the dominant social group all contributed to the growth of indigenous movements in Nepal. However, the linguistic differences across different indigenous nationalities; similarity of everyday working language with the dominant groups; lack of effective coordination of the movements; and varied treatment of the state to different indigenous groups made their movement less successful as compared to the Madhes movement. In contrast, the Madhes movement had a longer history; became intense at the time when the process of making a new constitution was underway; collectivised the experience of cultural and political discrimination; was not recognised as a unique cultural community; was ignored by the state for a long period of time; intensified during the favourable international context; and represented distinct linguistic and cultural identity, which contributed to a greater level of movement success (Lawoti, 2013: 69).

Similarly, the Dalit movement also has a long history of resistance to Hindu caste orthodoxy (Bishwakarma, 2017). Comprising 13 percent of the Nepalese population, Dalits have been historically treated as an untouchable group and suffer from economic marginalisation such as forced/bonded labour and landlessness. The literacy rate among Dalits is 52.4% compared to 81.9% for the higher caste Brahmin (Sharma, 2014). Bishwakarma (2017: 262) argues that social exclusion of Dalits *'has detrimental effects on the political dimension'* who are *'neither sufficiently*

represented in the political party structure nor in the governance mechanism'. The Dalit movement in Nepal is, therefore, largely emancipatory in nature as Dalits seek to renew selfhood by way of overcoming alienation, untouchability and dehumanisation. It is also an emerging struggle within Madhes as the deeply rooted hierarchical structures continue to exclude Madhesi Dalits from the opportunity to equitably participate in local politics and they are still socially discriminated. Broadly speaking, all social movements have the same agenda of social inclusion, political representation and cultural recognition, and share the history of subjugation and marginalisation by the state and privileged social and political class. Yet, there has been little or no collaboration between these movements historically.

In the last three decades, Janajati/Dalit movements have been extensively NGO-ised, largely depending on development funding received from foreign donors. However, the Madhes movement solely relied on active participation of the grassroots populations who were mobilised to create political pressures on the state. In this sense, the movement was politicised and organically intensified. Consequently, the outcomes of these different social movements also varied. For example, the politicised Madhes movement produced political leaders who won elections in their constituencies and secured positions of power in the government whilst leaders of the NGO-ised movements were more likely to be appointed as governors/ ambassadors. The mass resistance and grassroots organising of the Madhes movement created strong political base for the agenda of social inclusion, political representation and recognition of Madhesis as well as made great strides towards promulgation of a progressive constitution. However, the Janajati/ Dalit movements that operated under the NGO framework got gradually co-opted within the existing system. However, since 2016, it appears that the Madhes movement is transitioning from the decade-long politics of resistance to the routinised process of parliamentary politics. This would potentially generate new dimensions and constituencies of marginalised voices and see the expansion of the voluntary sector in Madhes to follow the NGOisation process as has been prevalent in Janajati and Dalit movements.

NEMAF, as a Madhes movement organisation, has focused its work solely on issues relating to the Madhes movement. However, NEMAF's pedagogical approaches and theoretical foundations also percolate across non-Madhesi marginalised sections, and the Madhes movement's demands, negotiations and achievements have also paved the way for an inclusive politics that equally benefits other marginalised communities.

However, from the grassroots perspective, NEMAF's systematisation of social movement learning may have been limited in terms of direct benefits to rural Madhesi activists in their struggle. The challenge is how to create a learning space which benefits the rural and usually illiterate members of the Madhes movement. Activists' language and grammar of resistance have originality in their own social and cultural location, and the effort to legitimise those narratives in high level linguistic representation might have created lexical complexities for the grassroots activists to access the knowledge. NEMAF does appreciate that the knowledge documented and published through their research was not always accessible to these grassroots activists, and hence the pedagogical approach at times was less effective in engaging Madhesi grassroots populations. As the NEMAF's director lamented:

> We sent 10 books of Madhes Studies journal to Janakpur but none of the books were taken by the activists when we checked after 2 years. The immersion course which was designed to provide an opportunity for Madhesi youth to study about their culture, history and society, surprisingly, did not attract many Madhesi activists. The vast majority of participants in the course and the readership of our work was predominantly the Pahadi learners. (Tula Narayan Shah, Kathmandu)

It is therefore important to de-elitise the production and dissemination of knowledge beyond the usual textual forms. There is a clear need for production of different types of educational materials, plurality in modes of dissemination and a variety of pedagogical approaches. For example, the production of knowledge in the form of short films, radio drama, popular songs and public information posters; dissemination of the knowledge via the social media, public discussion forum, media channels, mobilisation of social groups (e.g. youth, women, religious groups and Dalit communities) would serve for more effective public pedagogies to promote active social activism. It can also be argued that NEMAF's work contributed to provide an awareness of the Madhesi agenda to members of the Pahadi community. What seems to have worked more effectively in Madhes is NEMAF's dissemination of knowledge through public interaction programmes or community-based workshops relating to various development projects. At the national level, NEMAF's research-based op-eds in national dailies or in online portals were effective ways of knowledge dissemination that reached both activists and political leaders who did not always have the time to read longer pieces of research.

It appears that NEMAF was more interested in quality of knowledge production and learning rather than increasing its portfolios of funded projects. Its focus on Madhes based programmes

enabled the organisation to develop organisational expertise over the years, creating professional development opportunities for its young researchers. One of the NEMAF staff noted that-

> Before joining NEMAF, I did not have critical awareness of pertinent social issues in Nepali society and I was also able to apply my theoretical knowledge about research methodologies which I had gained from university education in various projects at NEMAF. I was able to collaborate with other researchers and activists to publish over two dozen of books over 7 years. This experience has made me a more skilled researcher. (Social movement researcher at NEMAF 1, Kathmandu).

The only legal framework available in Nepal to operate for a social movement organisation is to operate under the Economic Administration Regulations so, NEMAF is required to report its financial and programme details to the Social Welfare Council. Unlike Madhes movement's grassroots activism that involves organising and mass mobilisation at the local level, NEMAF's work on knowledge production has largely depended on external funding by donors. NEMAF staff report that such funding is attached with conditions and government regulations. Nevertheless, the political capital gained by the movement enables its organisations to secure resources for design and implementation of programmes that promote the movement's agenda. It can be argued that access to international donor funding has enabled NEMAF to mobilise its resources in support of movement goals but there are always risks of diversions from the core necessary tasks of the movement organisation falling into the trap of NGO bureaucracy and liberal compromise, and hence undermining the urgency of structural transformation that Madhesis aspire to achieve through their movement. NEMAF appears to be balancing these contradictions and staying focused on its core agenda of the Madhes struggle. This has meant that the organisation often has small portfolios of programmes and staff are hired on the basis of availability of funding on Madhesi issues.

One critical example of this dilemma relates to NEMAF's collaboration on 'Mass Information for the Conflict Resolution in Tarai Region of Nepal' with UNESCO in 2010 to educate youths of the Madhes region. The aim was to promote peaceful means to struggle for Madhesi rights. NEMAF implemented this programme when over 109 self-proclaimed rebellious groups, including 23 armed groups were carrying out violent activities against the state in the Tarai demanding Madhesi freedom. Increases in the activities of various armed groups had led the government to declare Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha and Mahottari as sensitive districts. Furthermore, NEMAF

collaborated with Safer World, Small Arms Survey and Interdisciplinary Analysts on research into the emergence of small armed groups in Tarai in 2007-2010 which provided insights into security challenges, tensions and intersections between the peaceful movement and criminal activities. The study revealed that the emergence of armed groups had links with the decade long Maoist insurgency. The multidimensional analysis of security challenges in Madhes provided the tools to critically understand the emergence of new armed groups and reveal criminal motives of some of the armed groups who were operating under the guise of the political agenda of Madhesi liberation. The most severely affected victims of the armed groups were ordinary people of Madhes. Funded by the Safer World, an international NGO, this research was commissioned from the point of view of understanding the causes of instability and security risks in Madhes and the logic was situated in the international discourse of 'stability' and 'pacification' (Neocleous, Rigakos and Wall, 2013) – security challenges as spoilers of peace – rather than supporting the genuine causes of the Madhes movement. This demonstrates how local social movement organisations such as NEMAF that are committed to promoting knowledge production and dialogue to support the social struggle can inadvertently become complicit in national security goals and part of global security discourse through the funding mechanisms of international agencies.

However, NEMAF published several research pieces and media outputs drawn from this study to establish that armed activities in Madhes stemmed from ongoing state repression and historical political complexities, including the spill-over from Maoist insurgency, and to show that the Madhes movement had no direct association with criminality. This was to protect the movement from misinterpretation and misinformation amid perceptions that there was a nexus between some of the movement leaders and criminal gangs. The conceptual model that emerged out of this research revealed the nexus between political leaders, police, traders and criminals, and exposed the complicit relationship between the security apparatus and criminal gangs (Interdisciplinary Analysts, Nepal Madhes Foundation, Small Arms Survey and Saferworld, 2011). This revelation contributed to the government's decision to mass relocation of police personnel from unstable areas of Madhes and carry out extra-judicial killings of 'criminals' in Madhes. Even though this may characterise social movement organisation's inadvertent co-option by serving the state's security goals, or potential loss in independence of thinking and being used by elites to pacify resistance without redressing the grievances and underlying issues, we would argue

that it is equally possible that movement organisations may collaborate with organisations, including the state when there are mutually beneficial outcomes that do not compromise the core objectives of the movement. Hence, movement organisations are usually capable of finding ways to capitalise on collaborative opportunities with non-movement organisations and mobilise their own methods and channels to promote their organisational goals.

Madhesi society is still emotionally agitative but less successful in institutionalising political voices and in building democratic structures within its political organisations. The political forces that gained prominence nationally seem to be stuck in the politics of mass resistance, winning elections and gaining the political power to secure government positions. Despite Madhes movement's aspirations for social transformation, many of its key leaders tend to concentrate on government positions and self-centred political careers. However, most recently, there are signs of national level collaboration and consolidation in social movements through the merger of several Madhesi parties with those that have political base in the hills. It appears that the Madhesi parties that emerged out of the Madhes movement are keen to broaden their monolithic agenda of ethnic marginalisation to encompass wider structural grievances experienced by various disenfranchised groups. The newly formed People's Socialist Party [PSP] brings together key Madhesi leaders such as Upendra Yadav, Rajendra Mahato and Mahant Thakur; hill-based leaders representing indigenous nationalities such as Ashok Rai and Rajendra Maharjan; and former Prime Minister and Maoist ideologue Dr Baburam Bhattarai who, at least presently, are committed to building solidarity among all ethnic groups, historically marginalised groups and indigenous nationalities to form a new political force that holds a socialist ideology and is representative of ethnic and social diversity in the party organisational structure. Historically, even though the Madhes movement and Maoist rebellion have championed the agenda of equitable representation and recognition of diversity, the inclusion of members from Dalit, Tharu, Muslim and other disenfranchised communities in their leadership has been largely tokenistic. It is yet to be seen the extent to which PSP transforms its party structure to make it truly representative.

To sum up, the Madhes movement primarily has three key dimensions: 1) Madhes' power relationship with Kathmandu, 2) the agenda of social transformation within Madhes; and 3) the movement's relationship with India's political interests in Nepal. Since 2007, the Madhes movement has mainly concentrated on how to reconfigure its political relationship between the

capital and Madhes whereas, intra-Madhes problems related to social divisions, discrimination of low caste groups within Madhes, and unequal power relationship between the Western and Eastern Madhes have yet to become the subject of discussion or critical reflection within the movement. In this political conjuncture, however, NEMAF has worked on knowledge production and public education programmes to promote critical understanding of Nepal's process of nation building and location of Madhes within it. It also offers rich historical knowledge and theoretical foundations about the Madhes movement. The primary focus of NEMAF's work has been on the agenda of social transformation in Madhes by redressing power imbalances between the political centre and Madhes. As discussed in this chapter, through research, academic debates, public interactions and publications, NEMAF makes a unique contribution to this significant social struggle in Nepal.

4. Knowledge production and learning in the Madhes movement

This chapter will draw extensively on experiences and perspectives of Madhesi activists, journalists, political leaders and representatives from civil society organisations to elaborate on how they conceptualised the Madhesi position within the Nepali nation, and the experiences which led to their participation in the Madhes uprisings. In this process, the chapter will show movement processes, techniques and organising strategies to provide an account of participants' understanding of and reflections on their movement.

4.1 Understanding Nepal's geopolitical location and the Madhes movement

The open border with India in the South, and ethnic similarities between Madhesis and people in Northern India, have played a crucial role in the political dynamics of the Madhes movement. Particularly during the period of Madhes uprisings (2007 – 2015) which coincided with the process of constitution making and restructuring of the state, India has utilised Madhesi concerns to negotiate with Kathmandu to secure their own strategic interests in the area of security and trade. Likewise, China has been against federalism in Nepal, particularly an ethnic federal arrangement which could potentially create a Sherpa province in the North East of Nepal bordering Tibet. The cultural similarities between the indigenous people in the mountains and Tibetans was viewed as a threat to China's control over Tibet, since Nepal is the host of Tibetan refugees and the transit point for Tibetans to escape to India where the Tibetan government in exile is based. Most importantly, China was also against the idea of the entire Tarai belt as a Madhes province which could be utilised by India to enhance its influence on Kathmandu. A reputed journalist in Kathmandu mentioned:

> China had the view that Nepal as a small nation could not sustain a federal system. They must have viewed it from the perspective of their own governance system in China where 90 percent of ethnic groups are Han Chinese. They had clearly conveyed their position to the political leadership in Nepal. When they realised that the agenda of federalism could not be blocked, they vocally resisted the idea of Sherpa province which could align with the free Tibet movement. (Journalist 1, Kathmandu)

India's interference in Nepal's political dynamics is historically well-documented. The overthrow of the Rana oligarchy in Nepal in 1951 is attributed largely to the support of India that provided

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safe sanctuary to the rebelling Nepali Congress leaders. After the restoration of democratic polity until 1961, India had a strong influence on Nepal's political affairs which only began to diminish during the period of absolute monarchy (1961 – 1990). In 1990, India supported the political movement in Nepal and brokered a deal with political parties and monarchy to restore multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy. Even though India has aligned with different political forces at different times of history, Indian political, security and economic interests have always been at the centre of their involvement in Nepal's political affairs. In the case of Madhes movement, Madhesi leaders increasingly relied on Indian patronage and sympathy on the Madhes movement. However, the movement leadership insufficiently appreciated that India's role would shift to suit their own strategic interests which could be better fulfilled through alignment with the power centre in Kathmandu. In other words, India would utilise instability in Madhes as a negotiating position with Kathmandu but would barely risk its favourable diplomatic relations with the central political leadership in Nepal. As the journalist of prominent national daily notes:

> I do not think the establishment in Delhi was sympathetic to Madhes at all. They had not imposed the blockade to support the Madhes struggle. (Journalist 1, Kathmandu)

A Madhesi activist in Birgunj also mentioned,

> We are charged for getting Indian support during the movement. If this could have been the fact [India's intention to split Madhes from Nepal], nobody could stop it. (FGD 1, Birgunj).

This statement indicates that Madhesi activist do see India as a decisive factor in Nepal's political movements but are also aware that Indian support to Madhes movement was no different from their self-serving role in Nepal's political history. Another journalist who is based in Madhes and reports regularly on Madhes issues reported:

> Delhi felt that the [blockade] could no longer be sustained. Various forces played up in this juncture. Delhi began to negotiate with Kathmandu that demanded border to be opened and at the same time, some Madhesi leaders were involved in illegal trade and were weak in asserting their positions. This resulted in loss of people's enthusiasm to continue with the protest. When Delhi shifted its position and withdrew their support for the movement, the six-monthlong blockade ended without securing its key demands. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

A prominent Madhesi leader provides much deeper insights into the role of India in the Madhes movement. He notes:

> The reality is that Beijing and New Delhi deal with Kathmandu. I can claim this not just from my knowledge but the experience I have had as a government minister. I have observed the reality from very close. If India had not supported the political movement in 1990, the Panchayat system would not have been defeated. Why would India choose to play with the issues of Madhes? If it did so, it would distance itself from the mainstream political establishment in Nepal. All the leaders here ultimately do business with the Indian establishment. They have nothing to do with the ideology. It is really nonsense to say that India wants to add Madhes in its territory. (Madhesi leader 1)

The above perspective is particularly interesting in the sense that Nepali nationalism mobilises the fear that India intends to see Madhes seceded from Nepal and their sympathetic views and support to Madhesi leaders is to achieve this goal. Ethno-nationalist leaders in Nepal continue to spread this fear in their political campaigns, and ordinary Nepalis in the hills are broadly convinced by this narrative. Another Madhesi youth activist in Kathmandu also agrees with the misunderstanding that India is loyal to the Madhesi cause. He lamented:

> Madhesi people believe that India supports them, and it can be seen during the time of blockade also. Though India has its own hidden interest behind the blockade, the common Madhesis believed that the bigger power India was with them. Because of this belief, they kept hope and stayed motivated in the protest. But I feel India had nothing to do with the Madhesi cause nor has any kinds of sympathy with Madhes. It only uses Madhes as a bargaining chip. Though we have grievances with our own state, we, Madhesis have never seen [merger with] India as an option for us. (Activist 1, Kathmandu)

Here, the participant alludes that the assumption that Madhesis are loyal to India due to their ethnic affinity with North Indian people is flawed. He is also conscious about the fact that Madhes struggle is strictly about securing justice, dignity and constitutional recognition as equal citizens within Nepal's political system. Throughout our interviews and FGDs with Madhesi activists, we find that they were aware of the lack of trust from Pahadi communities with regards to national integrity, but there is a strong sense that this questioning of their loyalty to their own nation is a reactionary ploy to maintain the status quo and deprive them of their legitimate rights to equity in all realms of the society. Therefore, they rarely see the need to reassure anyone about their being Nepali. In this sense, the Madhesi agenda is to rupture the hegemonic notion of what it means to be 'Nepali' and diversify the manifestation of national identity which truly represents

their own culture, unlike the characteristics of Nepaliness that the state has historically promoted.

However, given the incidence of collaboration of Madhesi leaders with Indian establishment to negotiate their demands with the political leadership in Nepal; India's frequent sympathetic gestures towards Madhesi issues; and the media representation of Madhes movement and political negotiations, it is rather difficult for the general public to disassociate Madhes movement with the interests of Indian establishment. A Madhesi businessman in Birgunj reported:

> Indian government allowing the Madhesi protestors for the sit-in protest in the no man's land showed a clear Indian support to the movement. By 2015, the mobilisation of masses in Madhes was also becoming difficult to sustain due to security repression and movement fatigue among the protesters. The movement also needed to change its course. Political cadres across the border in Raxaul also participated and assisted the movement as people form Nepal had supported them during their social movements in Bihar. For example, Nepalis in Madhes had previously provided shelter to Indian activists such as Jay Prakash Narayan when he was leading a rights movement in Patna, India. Similarly, historically, Nepalese politicians also participated in the Indian independence movement. This background of cross-border solidarity in struggle cannot be forgotten. (Madhesi businessman 1, Birgunj)

Similarly, another Madhesi activist argued:

> The multiparty democracy was gained in Nepal when the Indian leader Chandra Sekhar visited Nepal and delivered a speech in Kathmandu in support of the people's movement in 1990. (Youth activist 2, Kathmandu)

The role of India has, by and large, been a contentious factor in the Madhes movement. Like any other democratic struggles in the history of Nepal, the Madhes movement also does look to India for support. Madhesi activists are often ambivalent about how to define their relationship with India and the movement leadership has always been silent about their position on India-Madhes relationship. However, the nature of the geopolitics of the Madhes movement is that both the movement and Indian establishment maintain opportunistic, cautious and self-serving relationships with each other. Given the strong social, cultural and family ties between people across the border, the hegemonic Nepali state views Madhesis as untrustworthy in preserving Nepal's sovereignty and national integrity. The political elite usually finds it easier to mobilise

nationalist sentiment against the Madhes movement by citing Indian involvement and support to Madhesis. Another Madhesi activist in Kathmandu reported:

> A narrative has been propagated by the ruling class that there is India behind the movement of Madhes and the turmoil in Madhes will create a security threat to Nepal. Such narrative has also been promoted against indigenous movement which is accused of being provoked and financially supported by European Union. Similarly, another discourse is that China has always supported the establishment but not the progressive forces. Instead, India has always supported the otherwise. (Youth activist 3, Kathmandu)

This activist points out that any dissenting voice is accused of foul play, citing the example of the indigenous movement. Unlike the indigenous movement's NGO-based activism, the Madhes movement has political character and its intensity directly affects the political and economic life of the entire country. The indigenous movement is rarely seen as a threat to national integrity, unlike the popular Madhes movement given its geographical location as well as the cross-border cultural affinities between the people. An activist in Kathmandu explains:

> Nepali state promotes the discourse that Madhes represents Indian interests in Nepal. But why would I not feel myself close to India? In my childhood, I felt myself closer to India. I was never taught about my culture in my textbooks, rather, I was taught 'we wear new clothes in Dashain, play swing, etc.' But the Dashain we celebrate in Madhes is totally different from what I was taught at school. I found our practices more similar with the people across the border (Youth activist 1, Kathmandu)

This view reflects what Shakya (2013: 76) refers to as the paradox of Nepal's twentieth century politics in which on the one hand, the state allowed and facilitated disproportionate representation of dominant ethnic groups in policy discourses, and denied representation of ethnic voices on the other, feigning ethnic neutrality. As reported by the participant above, education was one domain that promoted the Khas-Arya cultural identity, which bore no resonance with the reality of Madhesi communities. The assimilative and exclusionary role of education and its contribution in fostering violent conflict has been examined elsewhere (Pherali, 2011; 2016). Due to the fact that Madhesis felt unrepresented in official narratives of national history, culture and social institutions such as education, they rather felt culturally identified with people across the border.

Hence, Madhes occupies a complex geopolitical location, exposing it to the strategic interests of India as well as the internal colonisation of Khas-Arya political dogma. Nevertheless, the resourcefulness of the geography of Madhes plays a central role in Nepal's economic

development. Madhesis have a strong feeling that the state has historically owned Madhesi territory but not its people, which drives their discontent, and brought about the emergence of the movement. In recent years, the Madhes movement has developed an explanatory framework to decipher this complexity and explain the different dimensions of the relationship between Madhes and the Nepali state. Even though the Madhes uprisings were driven by lived experiences of discrimination and systemic marginalisation, the dynamic processes of the movement have taught Madhesi activists to explain their political position in a way that exposes the exclusionary hegemonic narratives and increasingly allows non-Madhesi people to appreciate the genuine historical grievances of Madhes. Most importantly, the Madhes movement has also appreciated that India's sympathy towards Madhes is linked to the country's wider geopolitical goals rather than solidarity with the Madhesi cause.

4.2 Overcoming social differences for a common purpose

Different caste groups in Madhes collectively played an instrumental role in the expansion and sustenance of the Madhes movement. Historically, caste-based organisations in Madhes have struggled for their own caste interests, dignity and rights within Madhes. During the Madhes uprisings, these sub-groups were mobilised for mass protests. Because there were already existing organisational structures within various caste groups, the movement was able to draw strengths more easily through their members. A Madhesi journalist notes:

> There is indigenous knowledge about struggle for rights in Madhes in terms of mobilisation of communal or caste groups. As a predominantly Hindu caste system, there are a number of caste-based community organisations in Madhesi society. For example, Teli, Yadav, Brahman and Kayastha have their own caste-based organisations. Madhesi leaders were able to collectivise and harmonise the narratives of grievances across all caste groups which persuaded these organisations to join the movement with the hope of freedom from caste-based discriminations, collective rights and representation in the centre. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

As noted elsewhere, Madhes has also been a key source of support for Nepal's democratic struggles. Historically, whenever democracy has been at risk, parliamentary parties have reached out to Madhesis promoting the narratives of marginalisation and structural domination fuelled by the authoritarian regimes in the past. Even though the mainstream political parties did not prioritise representation of Madhesis in state structures, their political campaigns did contribute to raise critical awareness which, when the mainstream political forces subsequently abandoned

Madhesis, was utilised in support of the Madhes movement. As another Madhes activist in Birgunj highlights:

> Nepali Congress and CPN-UML delivered speeches in Hindi language at mass rallies in Madhes to gain emotional support for their struggle from Madhesi people. They advocated for the recognition of Madhesi identity and concerns of Madhes. When the interim constitution was promulgated, none of these issues were addressed which made Madhesi people feel that they were misled by the Pahadi led parliamentary parties. (Youth activist 3, Birgunj)

There have been several favourable conditions for Madhes uprisings. Firstly, the geographical convenience, high density of population and strong feelings of discrimination seem to have been conducive to mass mobilisation. Also, cross-border flow of historical knowledge and caste-based movement processes inspired struggle in Madhes. For example, Tharu Welfare Council one of the oldest political parties in Madhes, was inspired by the peasant movement in Northern India that shared cultural and social connections with the marginalised populations living in the southern plains of Nepal.

Secondly, the Maoist movement played a contributing role to intensifying Madhes uprisings. For example, there were two diverging outcomes of Maoist influence in Madhes that began around 2001. On the one hand, the formation of Madhesi National Liberation Front within the Maoist party paved the way for an organised campaign against ethnic marginalisation in Madhes and, built confidence to resist the exclusionary state. The Front's organisational expansion and political campaigns sensitised the deeply rooted issues of discrimination, and mobilised Madhesi youth into the Maoist ranks. On the other hand, the Maoist leadership failed to manage its political campaign, creating a space for criminalisation towards the latter stage of the rebellion. As a result, Madhesi community gradually turned against the Maoist political movement. Additionally, Madhesi people began to realise that even the Maoist party and its political campaign was insensitive towards Madhesi grievances. The movement that claimed to have been resisting ethnic marginalisation harboured Khas-Arya monopoly in its top leadership, party ranks and policy formulation. Further analysis of the interactions between the Madhes movement and Maoist rebellion is provided below in section 4.3.

Thirdly, Kathmandu's attitude towards the Madhes movement was perceived to be biased. At the early stage of the Madhes uprising, the movement was portrayed as a social unrest fuelled by Madhesi landlords who sought political space in the national politics, influenced also by Indian

strategic interests. Along these lines, the Kathmandu-based media often depicted a negative picture of Madhesi leaders or promoted a narrative of negation. For example, following the promulgation of the interim constitution of Nepal 2008, a progressively inclusive constituent assembly was achieved through the 60 percent proportional representation and increased number of constituencies in the historically underrepresented Tarai region. As a result, some of the nationally unknown grassroots leaders were elected. These new leaders were often mocked at by the Kathmandu-based media about their ordinary public backgrounds. There were headlines such as 'Clearers turned MP' and 'Barber turned MP' that aimed to delegitimise the voice of movement leaders and grassroots activists. The underlying message was that political leadership is an elite enterprise. Nevertheless, the Maoist uprising and the Madhes movement, to a great extent, did succeed in securing a unique constituent assembly, rupturing the bourgeois notion of who deserved to represent the people. Madhes-based media such as local newspapers and FM radios played a crucial role in promoting the voice of the movement and their representatives. A journalist in Birgunj noted that -

> Kathmandu's media was biased towards the news of Madhes but the local media in Madhes was fully in support of the Madhes. The local FM radios would disseminate information about the details about movement activities such as protest, blockade and mass rallies. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

Some Madhesi journalists who were writing in established National Dailies made efforts to present movement perspectives, trying to problematise the hegemonic discourses and making a case about why Madhes was resisting. They were either forced to resign or side-lined by media owners. One of the Madhesi youth activists lamented:

> During the first Madhes movement, I used to run a Maithali language programme called "Kamala Koshi" through *Nepal FM*. My programme became little political during that time because I started reporting the 'right' and complete news about the movement which the Nepali media did not do. For doing this, I was fired from my job. (Madhesi Youth activist 4, Kathmandu)

As they realised that the media in the capital was also controlled by the interests of the hegemonic state, Madhesi activists learned to mobilise their local media to share information and communicate important messages to Madhesi people. As the struggle was protracted, there was increased use of the social media among the young activists. Hence, the movement learnt that despite the exclusionary behaviour of the national media, the locally owned and managed

media could be usefully mobilised to disseminate the agenda of the movement and organise the activists.

4.3 Relationship between Nepal's Maoist movement and the Madhes movement

The Maoist struggle originated in the hills because of the history of left movements in the rural mountains of Nepal which provided safe hideouts to communist leaders during the oppressive regimes (Lawoti, 2010; Hutt, 2004), as well as the fact that Maoists predominantly represented Khas-Arya and indigenous ethnic groups who lived in the hilly areas. As they successfully expanded their base territory in the hills, they also needed to nationalise the struggle by bringing Madhesi groups into their rebellion. When the Maoists launched their armed campaigns in Madhes, they undermined the distinct social and political characteristics of Madhes and prematurely began with rebel recruitment without sufficiently providing ideological training or vetting of cadres, which led to involvement of some individuals who had personal interests in taking up arms (e.g. personal vendetta, desires for financial gains or escape from criminal charges).

Unlike in the Maoist base in the hills, there was no prior history of communist struggle in Madhes and the newly recruited cadres were not fully immersed in the political ideology that underpinned the Maoist struggle. As Kantha (2010: 160) notes, '*The Tarai was never a bastion of communist ideology; instead, it remained a stronghold of the democratic movement during both the anti-Rana protests and anti-King protests following the royal coup of December 1960*'. Without sufficiently gauging this historical political context and the need for political education, Maoists began to arm Madhesi youth. As a consequence, the armed activities that followed were sometimes out of the party line. Hence, many of the violent activities under the banner of the Maoist movement involved assaults on or murder of innocent people and rape of women. When the Maoist leadership initiated disciplinary actions on those who were involved in violent activities outside the party policy and decisions of the leadership, some of the Madhesi rebels defected from the Maoist militia to form their own armed groups and also sometimes passing on Maoists' military tactics, action plans and information about their physical movement to the security forces. As a result, Maoists struggled to maintain political influence in Madhes as they had to fight against their own former armed members and face surprise offensives by the security forces. The security forces, former Maoist rebels and the Indian intelligentsia created an anti-

Maoist nexus in Madhes, causing some serious setbacks for Maoists to sustain their organised armed resistance.

Even though the Maoist political campaign in Madhes laid a strong foundation for liberation of the Madhesi community, '*the idea of a centralised communist government had little appeal in the Tarai*' (Kantha, 2010: 160). Kantha (2010) further notes that the anti-Indian stance of Maoists has little resonance among the Madhesis whose ethnic and cultural roots are deeply connected to the people across the border. More importantly, Madhesis' dissatisfaction has been based on ethnic exclusion and repression of their cultural identity rather than on social class or nationalism in terms of Indian interreference on Nepalese politics. After the 2006 peace agreement between the Maoists and the Government of Nepal, there was a clear division between the Maoists and Madhesis who felt that the political gains would not benefit the wider Madhesis and their agenda of political representation was likely to be undermined whilst the Maoists intended to progress with the roadmap of political transformation through a Constituent Assembly. Hence, for Maoists, who emerged victorious with the peace agreement in 2006, the Madhesi agitation in 2007 was an unnecessary distraction for their political transitioning and accession to power.

There had been another significant episode of tension with the Maoist party relating to the Madhes movement in 2003 when three Maoist leaders, including Upendra Yadav, Suresh Ale Magar and Matrika Yadav were arrested in Patna, India by the Indian security agency. Upendra Yadav was later released while the others remained in jail. The Maoist leadership concluded that Upendra Yadav had colluded with the Indian intelligentsia against the Maoist movement and therefore had committed treason to the party. Fearing Maoist action against him, Yadav then disassociated himself from the CPN-M and revived Madhesi Rights Forum as a separate political organisation with a renewed agenda of liberation of Madhesi community. One key Madhesi leader, Jay Prakash Gupta from Nepali Congress, who was facing investigation for corruption, joined the Forum as the general secretary and began to engage in public awareness campaigns about Madhesi issues both in Kathmandu and Madhes, preparing the ground for the 2007 Madhes uprising. By this time, the Madhes movement had become a distinct political struggle under the banner of Madhesi People's Rights Forum, entirely detached from the Maoist movement and its United Madhesi Liberation Front. The Forum activists started confronting Maoist cadres in Madhes who were attempting to disrupt the Madhes uprising. The Maoists killed Ramesh Mahato in Lahan, Siraha in a bid to dispel Madhesi civil disobedience and road

blockades disrupting the physical movement of Maoist leaders. Subsequently, a tragic incident occurred in Gaur in March 2007 where 29 Maoists cadres were brutally murdered in the clash between MJF activists and Maoists. This marked the end of Maoist dominance in Madhes in the subsequent years.

The Madhes movement gained significant political knowledge in this process. Firstly, it realised that a distinct peaceful rebellion outside the realm of left movement was necessary to unite Madhesis under the agenda of ethnic liberation. Secondly, that grassroots campaigning and strategy building is significant in order to create public consciousness and mobilise masses for mass resistance. Thirdly, at the weak stage of the movement, its leaders are more likely to be targetted for violent attacks, so the survival of movement leadership is a key challenge particularly at the early stage until the movement gains political strength. Overall, the Madhes movement was able to develop its own unique political identity by strategically prioritising the agenda of ethnic Madhesi rights and freedom; protecting it from turning into an armed rebellion; and departing from the patronage of the Maoist movement.

4.4 Movement strategies

People's motivations for the struggle

Two key themes emerge in this research about people's motivation for involvement in the Madhes movement. Firstly, the experience of discrimination by the state and poor living conditions in Madhes fuelled anger among Madhesis which spontaneously brought them together to join the movement. Secondly, the movement mobilised activists at the grassroots to create political consciousness and persuade them to join mass demonstrations. The movement was utilising the historic opportunity of the post-war constitution-making process by creating pressures on the political leadership for the new constitution to pave the way for redressing inequalities and exclusion of Madhes. Hence, the collective sense of grievances among the ethnic Madhesis contributed to their innate motivation to participate in mass protests. A Madhesi youth noted:

> The villagers do not know what in the constitution excluded Madhesis from opportunities, but they all have experienced discriminations. Their feeling of discrimination was so high that they participated in the movement by bringing their own food supplies from home and cooking and feeding themselves on the roadside while organising mass protests. (Madhesi youth 5, FGD, Birgunj)

The movement agenda spoke to the people of all ages. Participants reported that it was the movement in which parents were encouraging their children and children were motivating their parents to join the mass demonstrations. The entire family was involved, villages and towns across Madhes were united. As one activist notes:

> People of all age joined the movement. This is the first movement in which both parents and children participated equally. (Youth activist 6, FGD Birgunj)

The activists were intrinsically motivated for the cause they were fighting for. They were full of emotions, honesty and commitment to the struggle. An adult Madhesi villager reported emotionally:

> Every single day before we went to protest at the border [no-man's land/ Miteri Pul (Friendship Bridge)], I would pray to the *Lord Hanuman* for success of the movement. I used to pray to the God making a wish that the oppressive rulers would gain some sense so that our demands would be addressed. (Madhesi farmer 1, FGD, Birgunj)

This statement shows that ordinary Madhesis were so emotionally committed to the struggle that they were even praying to God for help, pleading for recognition. Although there was the collective agenda of liberation, specific motivations underneath the narrative of liberation were variously articulated. A Madhesi businessman in Birgunj mentioned:

> The motivations for getting involved in the movement are different for urban and rural Madhesis. For villagers, the lack of economic opportunities, underdevelopment and the life in poverty are the major factors. For them the intangible things such as identity, and constitution amendments don't matter. They seek change in their life conditions. They want to ensure job opportunities for their children, good roads and irrigation facilities for their agricultural land. While for more educated people of Birgunj, their concerns were relating to recognition of their identity and equal representation in the state structures. (Madhesi businessman 1, Birgunj)

Mobilisation

The movement leaders often reached out to the grassroots to organise political meetings and mobilise people for resistance. They strategically collaborated with Madhesi individuals who had respected positions and reputations within local communities to organise political meetings and mass gatherings. There were also public campaigns in towns and villages. A Madhesi youth in Birgunj reported:

> Leaders along with their cadre used to visit door to door in the villages from early morning to late evening to convince the people to join the movement. They used to talk to the village head (Mukhiya) about the activities planned. Sometimes, loudspeaker was used to impart the message about the movement activities and to appeal for mass participation. (Youth activist 6, FGD, Birgunj)

Another youth described how they organised movement activities:

> We fitted a loudspeaker in our vehicles and drove around announcing the programme to the general public. The public meetings often had big success. During informal meetings in the village, we would discuss the details of planned resistance activities among ourselves. Each of us would share the programme details in our respective villages. People from neighboring villages would first gather at Pokharia [a local town] and then travel to Birgunj together for mass demonstrations. (Youth activist 7, Birgunj)

Some of the movement leaders who were elected in the 2017 elections also described how door-to-door canvassing was a key approach to mobilise support. Through this process, movement leaders were able to connect with local people; understand their concerns; and communicate the political agenda of the movement. For them, this was also an opportunity to build their political base which they were able to draw upon during the elections. As one of the political leaders of the movement reported:

> During the first Madhes movement [uprising], I was the chairperson of the Women's Committee of the Sadhbhavana Party. I used to visit different villages, interact with people and publicise our position on citizenship rights, identity and representation in the state. I have visited almost all the villages of Parsa and all the 22 districts of Madhes (Madhesi woman leader, Birgunj).

The activists were constantly on the move and busy in strategising, developing new techniques and doing everything possible to bring people to the mass demonstrations. They were self-motivated and using their own resources individually and collectively to generate as much pressure on the state as possible. Here, a youth activist describes:

> People generally came willingly but sometimes, we had to call on people to participate in demonstrations. I myself went to different villages on my motorbike to inform people about the movement activities and encourage them to attend because not all people in the village listen to the radio or read newspapers. Even the mobile phone was not that popular in 2007. (Youth activist 6, FGD, Nepalgunj)

Much of this mundane and micro level organising work of individual activists as described above often go unnoticed in social movement studies (Choudry, 2015), yet provide enormous strength

and foundations for learning and success of the movement. Conversations between activists and ordinary people about their everyday social experiences has a significant educational value. Another Madhesi leader who had now been elected as the member of the Province 5 legislative assembly mentioned:

> We travelled around villages to convince people about the importance of the movement. We interacted with them, listened to their stories and convinced them that we could only achieve the rights of Madhesis through the movement. We would go around spreading messages via a loudspeaker. People owned the Madhesi agenda as they were the victim of the longstanding discriminations by the state. (Madhes movement leader 3, Bhairahawa)

This shows that the Madhes uprising was based on extensive mobilisation of people both politically through political education and narratives of the struggle but also by motivating people to show strength through physical presence, chanting slogans and rallying on the streets, towns and cities. Members of the movement played an active role in bringing people together in this process. The same Madhesi leader in Bhairahawa mentioned:

> Apart from these events, we travelled to different villages to organise formal assemblies and informal interactions with people to mobilise them for the movement. Our Madhesi singer, Harikesh also joined us in meetings who sang people's songs to spread the message of the movement (Madhes movement leader 3, Bhairahawa)

> There was a song released during the 2015 movement "*Nepal avi band ba* (Nepal is still closed). Different forms of resistance techniques were used by the protestors during that time. Both men and women used to sing revolutionary songs in Maithli language. (Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

There are numerous popular songs about the Madhes movement that highlight Madhesi culture, pride, grievances and commitment to the struggle. There are also Madhesi poets such as, Dhirendra Premarshi, who write about injustices in Madhes. As noted above, 'progressive songs' have been part of Nepal's social and political movements throughout the history and the Madhes movement was no exception. Through artistic performances, activists try to '*reach beyond the dedicated party workers and to "the people"*' (Grandin, 1994: 175). Drawing upon the role of progressive songs during the Panchayat era, Grandin (1994) notes that these songs would help the ordinary Nepalis realise that the present reality was full of injustices and it was necessary to change for the better. These songs also helped identify a common enemy (e.g. exclusionary state/ landowners/ Khas-Arya dominated public institutions) and promoted the importance of the

struggle. Catchy melodies and cultural performances were also central to the Maoist movement's popular education work. Maoist cultural troupes travelled across the country '*offering villagers colourful politico-cultural programmes*' particularly, '*during public political meetings to entertain and educate the audience between the speeches of the party leaders*' (Mottin, 2010: 53-54).

As reported throughout this report, mass mobilisation was the main form of resistance during the Madhes uprisings. For the activists, it was vital to demonstrate that the movement had the popular support of the general masses but also to show that the movement was capable of causing serious disruptions. A female Muslim leader of the Madhes movement stated:

> I remember the day of the first movement [uprising] where there were more than 50,000 people in the streets, protesting against the government. We wanted to show our strength and pressurise the government (Madhesi woman leader 1, Birgunj)

The protesters would often clash with the police on the streets, and often the police would beat the protesters and even shoot at them to disperse rallies. The protesters would organise public gatherings and mass rallies with dead bodies of the martyrs to venerate their sacrifice and turn the grief into anger and determination for the struggle. But the anti-movement forces including the state security forces would attempt to prevent these commemorative events often through violent means. A Madhesi activist in Bhairahawa lamented that:

> We had decided to organise a condolence ceremony of Ramesh Mahato here in Bhairahawa but some Maoist leaders warned us not to hold the event. But we decided to go ahead as it was going to be a peaceful gathering. But the Maoists attacked on us. They grabbed me on the road and beat me badly. This incident made people furious and even more people joined the movement. Subsequently, we organised another ceremony in the presence of Upendra Yadav, which was again attacked by Maoist's Madhes Liberation Font. They set fire on our vehicles. We also retaliated by burning down their vehicles. (Madhesi leader 4, Bhairahawa)

The clashes during the first Madhes uprising were not just between the Madhesi protesters and police, but also with the Maoists who felt threatened by the growing popularity of the Madhes movement. Although organised as peaceful events, the demonstrations would quickly turn violent with frequent loss of lives.

Growing support amid movement success

As the movement gained its momentum, its base expanded rapidly across the Tarai region. When public sentiment in Madhes increased in favour of the Madhes movement, several Madhesi

political leaders and cadres who were affiliated to the mainstream political parties began to defect to join the movement either by establishing their own Madhes-based political parties or entering the Madhesi People's Rights Forum which was leading the movement. A Madhesi woman activist in Kathmandu mentioned:

> Millions of people participated in the movement. Not only those who supported Madhesi parties but also the local leaders from Congress, UML and Maoists began to organise in support of the movement. It was because they had to rely on their constituents who would boycott them unless they were on the side of the movement. Many people supported the movement silently. The government officials also went on strike and refused to do the work. The caste-based organisations also supported the movement by organising rallies. Professional organisations like labour organisations, organisations of journalists, and organisations of doctors also participated in the movement (Madhesi woman activist 2, Kathmandu)

This shows that the struggle received support not only from ordinary Madhesis in villages and towns but also from professional organisations who were key constituencies of state institutions. However, there was no participation of non-Madhesi public, or individuals in the named organisations above from non-Madhesi backgrounds. After 2012, the non-Madhesi public was beginning to recognise that Madhes had been historically suppressed and the grievances were genuine. However, the 2015 blockade had a direct impact on hilly people's everyday life and therefore intensified anti-Madhes and anti-Indian sentiments among non-Madhesi populations. Madhesis continued to support the resistance in different ways. Those who did not explicitly participate in mass demonstrations also supported the protesters through other means. For example, another youth in Birgunj reported:

> People sustained tear gas in their eyes and wounds in their bodies but did not give up protesting. Women from their rooftop used to pour water at the protestors on the street to provide relief to their burning eyes and skin. (Youth activist 6, FGD Birgunj)

There were different levels of movement processes. Mass demonstrations were the key movement action, but in the background, activists were engaged in planning meetings, close interactions with their leaders and developing strategies before decisions were taken about where to stage demonstrations, when to gather and how to mobilise people. Here, another activist describes the communication and organising approaches to seek maximum impact from protest actions:

> People were informed about the movement activities, time and place to assemble for the following day. Meetings were organised to discuss about the plan of the movement. The participants of the meeting brought together people from their respective villages. (Woman activist 3, FGD, Nepalgunj)

Participants also noted that they had to deal with anti-movement elements that infiltrated during protests. The state used to spy on activists to find out about movement strategies and information relating to their daily protest plans. During the FGD, participants in Birgunj reported that there were several incidents of infiltration of non-Madhesi elements in the movement:

> Whenever mass rallies were organised, UML/ Congress cadres infiltrated in our masses would pelt stones at the police to provoke them. Then the police would get angry and retaliate. If any policeman is hit or hurt, they would go as far as shooting at the protesters randomly. (Youth activist 7, FGD, Birgunj)

Participants reported of some positive social impact within the movement as a result of the ways in which activists were organising. During FGDs in Birgunj, participants reported that the movement helped reduce social divisions between different caste groups across the region. Low caste groups such as Musahar, Dhobi, Paswan, Chamar etc., who were experiencing social exclusions and discrimination, put their internal grievances aside and joined the movement. The collective feeling of victimisation by the state and the goal of achieving broader Madhesi rights and political representation reduced intra-community differences and hierarchies. This shows that the creation of a collective enemy increases intergroup solidarity. A Madhesi activist puts it as:

> During the protests, everyone used to eat together and share their meals at the common place. Even Dalits who are usually considered untouchable sat together with upper caste people to share their food. Dalits cooked meals for everyone when the highway was blocked in Siraha. In the Madhesi community, women generally do not eat alongside men. But during protests and sit-ins, everyone ate together. (Youth activist 8, Siraha)

It is interesting to see that internal practices of social discrimination diminished, at least during times of mass agitation, through the imagination of a collective goal of ethnic liberation. This did not necessarily mean that suppressed caste groups within Madhes felt completely emancipated within the social order of the Madhesi society, but their experience of concrete behavioural change during the protest provided them with a sense of equality and acceptance. The promotion of collective Madhesi identity, irrespective of caste and gender, within the context of a caste-based society had an immense benefit for the social struggle. As Sampson (1993) argues, the construction of collective identity among the marginalised groups serves as a tool for social

change and liberation from oppression. Similarly, Hammack (2010: 174) conceptualises collective identity both as a *burden* and *benefit* in contexts of political struggles. He points out that collective identity can become *burden* in relation to the reproduction of social processes in which the bearers turn into '*blind appropriators of a status quo of narrative stalemate, thus unwittingly participating in the essentialism and reification of identity that reproduces conflict*' (Hammack, 2010: 174). However, during times of political uncertainty and repressive environment, activists feel a sense of security and solidarity as belonging to a group that shares common experiences and aspirations, which may be considered a '*benefit'* to the movement. For hegemonic groups, however, identity politics is an unnecessary distraction to the socio-political order that preserves their privileges and superiority. As Hammack (2010: 175) further notes:

> … a critique of identity might benefit hegemonic intergroup relations by subverting the attempts of the subaltern and the subordinated to gain legitimacy and recognition within a larger matrix of power. In other words, viewing identity solely as a burden, rather than also as a benefit in the struggle for social justice and change, might paradoxically support a status quo of hegemony by undermining the claims of the subordinated.

Despite the prevalence of a broad range internal social divisions within Madhes, the movement has so far remained silent about regional, caste-based and gender inequalities and primarily concentrated in representing itself as one collective Madhesi population resisting the state-sponsored Pahadi domination. The Madhes movement largely parked the problems of internal divisions, such as caste-based, regional, gender-related and class-based inequalities within the Madhesi society in order to concentrate on the struggle against the state-sponsored structural denial. This did not mean that there was no recognition of internal socio-cultural inequalities within the movement. In fact, the collective organising work, to some extent, contributed to mitigation of caste-based and gender discriminations. In normal circumstances, Dalits would have been treated as untouchable but during prolonged mass demonstrations, members of the Madhesi Dalit communities cooked for everyone. Women and men sat together to eat their meals, which symbolised prefigurative social practices. The reactionary voices in hegemonic circles, however, would often point out the deeply entrenched intra-communal tensions within Madhes as a counter movement technique, but the activists deliberately remained undeflected from the collective goal of Madhesi emancipation.

The use of media in the movement

The use of social media, local radio and newspapers played a key role in mobilising the people in the movement. Activists had to rely on local media to disseminate information about the movement. The local FM radios usually invited Madhesi leaders to participate in talk programmes through which they would raise issues of Madhes and educate people about the struggle. Local radios stations also campaigned about mass demonstrations, and informed people about the date, time, venue and other details about movement activities. Local newspapers reported on movement activities; incidents of police brutality; and provided critical analyses of political negotiations with the government that were taking place in Kathmandu. At a time when the national media was by and large unfriendly towards the Madhes uprising, the local media in Madhes unapologetically promoted the voice of the movement.

Several participants reported that the mainstream media would largely portray their movement negatively by campaigning against the Madhesi agenda and highlighting the adverse effects of the movement on political stability and economic development. They underreported the loss endured by the movement such as deaths during mass demonstrations but highlighted minor incidents and damage on the part of security forces. In some parts of Madhes, copies of national newspapers were set on fire as a protest against biased coverage of the movement. Consequently, over a period of time, the tone of reporting began to change to a more balanced manner. A Madhesi activist in Kathmandu mentioned:

> We used local media to make our agenda heard at the grassroots. When the first draft of the constitution was made public, each day, I used to upload one status on Facebook about the missing part in the constitution. Daily newspapers like Kathmandu Post, Himalayan Times and the online portal like "Setopati" also supported us. But some newspapers such as, Kantipur Daily were biased against the Madhes movement at that time. (Madhesi lawyer 1, Janakpur)

Activists used a variety of media channels to communicate their messages during the movement. For those who were not connected with any digital media, local movement committees made public announcements across towns and villages using loudspeakers. One of the participants noted that *Al Jazeera* reported on the Madhes movement quite extensively, which helped to internationalise concerns about human rights violations. Likewise, some youth activists were actively involved in social media campaigning to reach out to the international community. For example, during the third Madhes uprising, Facebook played a key role in organising young

activists in the movement. It also exposed them to anti-Madhesi posts on Facebook which occasionally radicalised their views. One youth activist puts it as:

> During 2015 movement, my friends and I started the *statedaily*, a Facebook page, which now has over 7000 followers, to upload the news related to the movement. In social media, our Pahadi counterparts across Simara would post abusive racial comments (such as, Black, Dhoti etc.) to ridicule us. This angered all of us and we decided to counter them. Running this social media page also helped me learn more about Madhes but we were so angry to the extent that I wrote "Jai Swaraj" [Hail self-rule] on my Facebook wall, supporting C.K Raut's independent Madhes agenda. On the day, the 2015 constitution was released, I wrote "Not my Constitution" on my Facebook cover page. (Youth activist 9, Birgunj)

Similarly, another female activist noted that she learnt about the plan of creating the East – West human chain for protest through the Facebook page called "Youth of Birgunj". She found it interesting and requested the head of her college to allow students to join the human chain. All the students from her college then participated in the human chain of thousands of people across the Tarai region. It is interesting to see that social media had multiplier effects in the organisation of movement activities and most importantly, young activists capitalised on their learning to develop new approaches, methodologies and tactics of activism. Another activist reported that:

> The photos of police brutality and derogatory comments on Facebook infuriated me. The Pahadi people across Simara posted comments like "You bloody Dhoti, go back to Bihar," "These bloody Madhesis should be shot on their head." (Youth activist 10, Birgunj)

The social media also hardened negativity and divisions as there were exchanges of abusive messages between Madhesi and Khas-Arya communities. These virtual confrontations seemed to have fuelled inter-community tensions with longer term psychological impact.

Some youths initiated a chat group on Facebook where youth of 22 districts of Madhes were connected. Although the activists did not know each other in person, they used to discuss how they were organising in their districts, what had worked more effectively and what mistakes were to avoid. The participants shared their movement strategies to learn from each other. This is a key example of how activists organically develop methods of resistance without being directly instructed by their leaders. These social media platforms provided them a sense of unity and belonging to the movement. They were able to learn about how to be safe; deal with police repression; and put pressures on their leaders to hold their positions in negotiations with the

state. Some of the movement techniques were replicated widely across the region. As one young Madhesi in Birgunj said:

> We made human 100 (People standing in the shape of 100) on the 100th day of the movement to show our solidarity and commemorate the movement and spread the message that the movement was not something driven from somewhere else but was born from the within. We did this in Birgunj first and later the same technique was adopted in 30- 35 places of different districts including in Kathmandu (Youth activist 12, FGD Birgunj)

Figure 5: Madhesi activists stand in a shape to mark the 100th day of the protest

Additionally, local media, particularly, FM radio stations helped generate resources for movement activities by publicly recognising those who had financially contributed to the movement. As thousands of poor people were mobilised for several days during the uprisings and the economic activities were largely on hold, protesters needed food supplies to be able to stay on the streets. One of the Madhesi youths mentioned:

> Local FM radios not only broadcasted the news related with the movement, but they also informed how many people were supporting financially to sustain the movement. This also motivated other people to play their part and contribute financially during the movement. (Youth activist 13, Kathmandu)

This analysis reveals that social/political movements are likely to be more effective when activists are able to use diverse approaches for mass mobilisation. Firstly, building a wide network of activists and communicating their experiences, ideas and techniques provides them useful

knowledge and motivation for the struggle. Secondly, the use of the local media such as radio and social media is instrumental for learning activism. Thirdly, participation in the movement and active engagement with fellow activists provides a sense of identity and undeterred commitment to the collective agenda of freedom. Finally, movement strategies emerge out of active interactions between activists, particularly the youth who are able to think creatively about how to mobilise people more effectively.

State tactics to foil the movement since 2007

The Madhes movement remained at the centre of political debates in Nepal between 2007 and 2016. All three Madhes uprisings broke out as a response to key moments of the constitution-making process. After the 2007 uprising, there were some positive gestures from the political leadership in Kathmandu that gave assurances about addressing Madhesi agendas in the constitution. However, as this Madhesi civil society activist lamented, the state's bureaucratic system would decimate any attempts to enshrine the agreements in the law:

> The ruling state often delayed in passing the relevant laws as per the agreement with the Madhesi parties. It created many unfavourable conditions that would restrict Madhesis from achieving their rights. For example, if any agreements were made and laws drafted according to the agreements, some groups would petition against these laws, filing a case in the court. Then, the interim order would stop it. There are many instances, such as the Citizenship Act; laws on the use of official language at the local level; recruiting Madhesis in the armed forces; appointment of Madhesis jobs such as a lecturer or professor etc. At the same time, media groups were created to defame our movement's agendas (Madhesi lawer 1, Janakpur)

However, the post-peace-agreement political transition was volatile in terms of uncertainty around the demobilisation of the Maoist People's Liberation Army and deep differences about political restructuring and details of the constitution. Several coalition governments were formed in which political parties including the ones representing the Madhes movement got heavily entangled in the power sharing exercise in government rather than upholding movement gains and concentrating on constitution-making. This led to factionalism within the Madhesi Rights Forum which was once the most influential political organisation representing Madhes, but which weakened significantly due to fragmentation and corruption. Additionally, public support for the Maoists, who were in favour of federalism, had also declined by 2013. As a result, the movement was negatively affected by complex political dynamics in the capital where movement

leaders made compromises to secure positions in the government. Continuously repressed by the hegemonic state, unfriendly national media and loss of public trust in its leaders, the movement faced difficulties in maintaining the same level of enthusiasm.

Hence, the state took a three dimensional approach to deal with the movement: firstly, it adopted the strategy of *persuasion* by assuring the movement leaders that the constitution would address their demands and continued resistance was an unnecessary distraction to political stability that was needed for peace and prosperity; secondly, they used excessive force to *frighten* activists and movement leaders in Madhes; and finally, they took the approach of 'managing' the movement – neither meeting the demands nor letting the movement escalate, a tactic that was used to *exhaust* the movement. After the constituent assembly elections in 2013, Madhesi forces were penalised by their voters which compelled them to build a new alliance among their factions. But the movement needed to sustain the momentum and continue maintaining pressures on the government.

Demonstrations with symbolic meanings

A range of creative and symbolically meaningful demonstrations were observed during the Madhes movement. These methods of resistance helped gain media attention and added soul to conventionally mundane methods of mass demonstration that simply involved marching with slogans. For example, activists organised lamp rallies during the day. This symbolised the quest for justice even in the daylight (obviously visible) and also the sense that justice was lost, and that the state had ignored Madhesi grievances to an extent that a lamp was needed even during the day. In some places, protesters used donkeys in the rallies to satirise the authorities and symbolise that they lacked wisdom. On a different occasion, activists presented themselves on the streets with chains in their hands symbolising the plight of Madhesis as prisoners in their own country and making a point that they were fighting for their freedom. Similarly, activists played dead on the road to commemorate the death of their comrades. It was also aimed at reminding the state how repressive and inhumane it had become against the Madhesi people. On a different occasion, they rallied half-naked on the road to symbolise that the state was shameless in treating Madhesis as the second-class citizens. As this female activist mentioned:

> We organised different rallies like "Chura Julush" [bangle rallies], "Bhaisi Julush" [buffalo rallies], "Thal Julush" [plate rallies] etc. (Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

Some of the features of the demonstration were also meant to communicate a message to the general public. One of the activists in Nepalgunj mentioned:

> The 'Mashal Julush' (torch rally) used to be organised the night before the strike. It had a symbolic meaning to inform people that there was going to be a general strike from the following day. During the strike the leaders addressed the demonstrators at various locations. (Madhesi activist 5, Nepalgunj)

> We installed tents on the side of the road in "Barmeli tol" to stop the passage of trucks carrying goods to Kathmandu. (Madhesi leader 4, Bhairahawa)

Whilst Madhesis were actively protesting against the government, the government launched a public consultation of the draft constitution. Madhesis felt that the consultation was merely a formality and there was no genuine intention to incorporate the feedback of Madhesi people. Due to this deep distrust between the state and the Madhesi people, the public consultation was largely a failure in Madhes. A young activist who was later elected as Mayor of a municipality in Siraha reported:

> We also protested by showing a black flag to the committee collecting public feedback on the draft constitution. I even tore the draft and burnt it down. We burnt tyres, pelted stones and continued protesting with rallies. We organised assemblies in the villages where people participated with black flags on the day the constitution was declared. We marked the day as "Black Out". People from the villages went to Birgunj on bicycle, motorcycle and tractors to oppose the curfew that day. People in Kathmandu burnt the Indian Flag, the country with whom we Madhesi have different sorts of relationships "roti-beti sambandha" [bread and kinship relations]. As a response, we burnt the flag of China in Birgunj. We organised different caste based and Union based rallies (Madhesi leader 5, Siraha)

The declaration of the new constitution in 2015 was a major breakthrough and culmination of the long peace process since the Maoists entered the peace process in 2006. Despite being promulgated by a vast majority of the Constituent Assembly, Madhesis felt that their demands were not entirely addressed by this historic document. India also had reservations on the ground that the Nepal's Constituent Assembly had failed to respect the voice of Madhesi people and therefore, did not welcome the move. Instead, India supported the Madhes movement by imposing the blockade at the Nepal-India border. However, China endorsed Nepal's new constitution. This was clearly a reflection of geopolitical tensions in the region that fuelled antagonism between the divided political forces in Nepal.

It was interesting to observe that participants viewed China's endorsement of the constitution as supporting the establishment, undermining the struggle of the Madhesi people, whereas the Indian blockade was resented in Kathmandu and across the hilly regions of the country. Nevertheless, as reported by the Madhesi leader 5 above, the 'burning of the flag' of both neighbouring nations indicates the prevalence of ultra-nationalism, stark political divisions between Madhes and Kathmandu and the perceived interference of the powerful neighbours in Nepal's politics of constitution making.

Figure 6: Madhesi women protest lying on the road   Figure 7: Activists organise buffalo rallies Prime Minister's picture

Figure 8: Protesters stage on the road as dead   Figure 9: Protesters demonstrate posing as mourners

Figure 10: Protesters demonstrate with sticks in their hands

Figure 11: Mass demonstration in Birgunj

Figure 12: Protesters confront police on the street

Some activists argued that local leaders, youths and ordinary Madhesis played more important roles in sustaining the movement than the national level Madhesi leaders. It was however recognised that during the 2007 and 2008 protests, key movement leaders would lead the demonstrations at the front with their cadre behind them but by 2015, there was some movement fatigue and fragmentation that required more efforts and strategic organising. However, the Madhes movement had produced active local leaders by then who were determined to carry on the struggle until the 'discriminatory constitution' was revoked. A Muslim Madhesi youth from Nepalgunj said:

> The 2007 uprising was very organic. People participated spontaneously. Gentle strategies were set out; there was division of labour and communication channels for mass mobilisation. At every 100-200m, people lit fire and stood with 'lathi' [stick] in their hand. But during the 3rd uprising, leaders had to convince the people for protests as the momentum was lost by then. More thoughtful strategy was needed to organise the movement during the second and third uprisings. (Youth activist 14, Nepalgunj)

This reveals that mass mobilisation cannot be sustained for a long period of time. When the leaders quell the movement by compromising or securing victory over the state, it is difficult to gain the same level of enthusiasm and intensity in the second time should the state not deliver its promises. Hence, an organic mass protest may be achieved on the back of longstanding frustration and grievances, but in order to maintain the same level of enthusiasm, commitment and participation in resistance, the movement requires a carefully thought-out plan of action, political education and most importantly, a trained cadre of activists. As one youth activists in Birgunj said:

> For the protest in 2015 movement, we formed a team of 30 members. We all used to gather at 6 in the morning and burn tyres at the major crossroads like Ghantaghar, Maisthan, Murli, Chhapkiaya, Powerhouse and others. We did this regularly for 20 days. (Youth activist 3, FGD, Birgunj)

4.5 Humiliation as Madhesis

The experience of social discrimination and being humiliated was the most recurring theme in all the interviews and FGDs. Every Madhesi activist who participated in this study had their own unique story of how they had been discriminated against for being a Madhesi – the way they looked and spoke: the abuses they experienced relating to their darker complexion, dress, and accent when they spoke in Nepali which is not their mother tongue. Most importantly, these personal experiences were the entry points of learning in the movement which allowed them to

reach beyond the descriptive empirical experiences of neglect, dismissal and belittlement to engage in more reflective dialogue about the underlying causal mechanisms that generated those experiences. The activists realised that the structural subjugation, exclusion in state structures and domination by the Khas-Arya hegemony were the 'actual' generative mechanisms of their everyday discrimination (Alderson, 2019; Bhaskar, 2008). In order to redress the historical forms of dominance, Madhesis realised that a new constitutional arrangement was necessary to ensure that their political rights were guaranteed, culture and language recognised and affirmative actions were set in motion.

The widespread experience of humiliation and exclusionary behaviour of state institutions had a deep psychological impact on Madhesi people. We observed that most incidents of verbal abuse, physical violence and trivialisation were manifested at two levels: firstly, while traveling on public transport and living in the capital and Pahadi dominated urban areas, Madhesis were ridiculed and treated by people of hilly origin as non-Nepali subjects and therefore worthless. Secondly, they were often degraded while dealing with state authorities, such as the District Administration Office (DAO), revenue office and police administration. Despite being a Nepali citizen, they were treated as Indian immigrants by the Pahadi dominated public offices because of their physical appearance and non-Nepali mother-tongue. These experiences cumulatively made them feel neglected and humiliated within their own nation. A prominent movement leader described his experience of maltreatment as the following:

> After the movement of 2007/2008, I was returning to Birgunj from Kathmandu. I was travelling with an ex-Minister. At Bhimphedi, a hitchhiker raised his hand. I reduced the speed of my car. He used obscene language to us. I was furious. I wanted to stop the car and challenge him why he was rude to us. But I thought that he was angry about the Madhes movement and wanted to throw his displeasure towards us. I decided to carry on because I felt that the general impression in the hills was that the movement was against Pahadis and therefore the response was manifestation of his denial to our struggle that demanded respect for our dignity. I had seen several incidents of atrocities caused by Pahadi people in Birgunj as well. After returning to Birgunj, I started meeting with Madhesi intellectuals and began to engage in discussion about broader issues of discrimination against Madhesis. (Madhesi leader 8, Birgunj)

When an individual is targeted with derogatory remarks based on their ethnic identity, they begin to relate it with a broad range of discriminations that their fellow ethnic members have experienced. The perception in Madhes is that Pahadis get the courage to discriminate against

Madhesis because of their dominance in the state apparatus. For an ordinary Madhesi, this means that Pahadis are protected by the state institutions which are monopolised by people of their ethnic origin. At a deeper level mechanism, Pahadis' mindset is shaped by dominant discourses that characterise the authentic Nepaliness as equivalent to the cultural character of the Khas-Arya ethnic groups. These discourses are constantly legitimised through messages in the national media; promoted in the education system; religious and cultural celebrations; promotion of Nepali language and literature; and monopoly in state structures such as, bureaucracy, judiciary, military institutions and civil society organisations. Madhesis felt that they had no resort to a fair justice system, as the state was deeply biased and oppressive towards the people who did not confirm to the state sponsored national identity. The same Madhesi leader vividly describes his own past experiences as a Madhesi:

> When I personally encountered verbal abuse from a Pahadi individual on my way to Birgunj, I started reflecting on similar incidents which I had witnessed in my own town. Around 1996, one day, I went to the cinema in Birgunj. The cinema hall was crowded so, there was a long queue to buy the cinema tickets. While waiting in the queue, a Madhesi young man broke the queue. The Pahadi bouncer in the cinema hall started beating him up with his belt. The youth started vomiting blood. No one in the crowd defended the man. I had observed that cruelty myself. On another incident, in 1998, I remember an elderly Madhesi being beaten up by a local Pahadi thug in front of the police station. The police did not intervene despite witnessing the physical abuse. No one defended the old Madhesi. This made me feel that even the police administration was indifferent towards injustices against Madhesis. In 1998, Chandra Man Joshi, a Pahadi, was the chair of my village, Maniyari. I was the secretary for a neighbouring village where only one Pahadi family lived. Even in this village, Dhan Prasad Joshi from the only Pahadi family was the village chair. I had visited Kathmandu once with Chandra Man Joshi whose relative was transferred to the revenue office in Birgunj. They celebrated the success of transfer to the financially lucrative region of Birgunj by butchering a goat. Madhes was an appealing workstation for Pahadi civil servants. Madhesis are submissive in nature who could be easily dominated and exploited. Even though there were a handful of Pahadi people settled in Birgunj, they always had the upper hand in Madhesi society. There were Pahadi gangs that were violent against Madhesis, but they used Madhesi youth as their obedient porters. (Madhesi leader 8, Birgunj)

Making of the Madhesi activist: The Madhes movement allowed activists like the one above to critically reflect back on their experiences of discrimination, exclusion and exploitation. These vivid memories are powerful and reinforcing factors that damage activists' self-belief and provoke quest for answers to psychologically disturbing experiences as a Madhesi. Activists were

able to collectivise their experiences to develop a shared narrative of injustice which united and motivated them to engage in the struggle. Most importantly, activists were able to learn how to channel the anger of being trivialised into a resource for their activism. They also developed critical consciousness about their social positions as compared to the dominant ethnic groups in their society. They particularly felt that the existing political parties, despite their claim to being democratic, would rarely come to their defence against the Pahadi dominated state apparatus. An activist in Bhairahawa (Madhesi activist 14, Bhairahawa) reported that Nepali Congress had been a dominant political party in Madhes since 1990 but despite getting support of Madhesi voters in elections, they continued to ignore the widespread culture of maltreatment against Madhesis at public administration offices. Another activist added:

> Some Nepali Congress supporters filed a case against me. They accused me of my involvement in a case of public disorder despite my absence at the scene when the incident occurred. Even though I was affiliated to the Rastriya Prajatantra Party at that time, the party gave no support to me. (Madhesi activist 15, Bhairahawa)

The Rastraya Prajatantra Party [National Democratic Party] (RPP) is another political party which was established by the former Panchayat system supporters and has benefitted from broad political support in Madhes since 1990s. The activist above points out that being a Madhesi was a key identity marker for the experience of injustice and the allegiance to a Pahadi led political party did not necessarily protect a Madhesi from unfair treatment by the state.

Madhes has historically been a source of votes for the Pahadi dominated political parties. During petty disputes among Madhesi communities, people would look to these political parties for support. The Madhesi people were divided between cadres or supporters of different political parties. But when Madhesis interacted with power centres, they realised that they would be discriminated against even within their own parties because of their ethnic identity. This made them realise that the divisions were more real along ethnic lines rather than across political differences. This realisation contributed to the construction of an 'activist with Madhesi identity' which went beyond other forms of ideological labelling such as, communist, democrat or liberal. For Madhesis, the Khas-Arya ethnicity and its oppressive nexus with the state symbolised the major barrier to Madhesis' dignified life within the Nepali society and this gave birth to politically informed and emotionally charged Madhesi activists. The range of shared discriminatory experiences, critical reflections of the history and sociopolitical processes brought fellow

Madhesis together to identity with the idea of an ethnic struggle. This was essentially the awareness of 'generative mechanisms' of their grievances that provided a logic for the struggle and informed their grassroots organising.

The use of violent actions: This research also reveals an interesting dimension of how activists decide the boundaries of protest actions. We find that struggles for political rights can sometimes adopt what may be considered violent movement strategies that react to the often-repressive actions by the state. As della Porta (2008: 222) notes, '*during cycles of protest, the development of the forms of protest actions follows a reciprocal process of innovation and adaptation, with each side responding to the other*'. Activists are also prepared to use some degree of violence in response to state repression and violence; when they feel that their peaceful protests are being ignored by the state; or that resistance is losing its momentum. This is part of their tactical adaptation to continue mobilisation in order to counter their adversaries' repressive behaviour (della Porta, 2008). We find plenty of examples in the Madhes movement whereby activists were involved in violence either to defend themselves, to counter police brutality or to strategically intensify resistance by pelting stones at security forces, vandalising government properties, throwing petrol bombs at the police and violent attacks on the people and businesses that disobeyed their call for strike. These forms of violence were manifestations of anger and means of defence against state repression rather than random acts of violence.

As one of the movement leaders mentioned:

> I gathered a dozen of my close youth activists. We filled water bottles with petrol. Six of them hid the bottles inside their jackets and from Birtatol to Ghantaghar, we burnt tyres at six locations which created an ambience of resistance in the city. The vehicle movement stopped, people landed on the streets and demonstrations began. When we arrived at the Birta police station, we pelted stones at the police station. To intensify the protest, we had to provoke the police. At Adarshanagar, we pelted rocks at a few banks. We moved forward up to Maisthan but the police did not intervene. Then my fellow activists started pelting stones at the telecommunication office. The staff of the telecom office responded by throwing bricks at us. I was then hit by a brick and sustained injury on my head. I climbed on the wall of the telecom office and threatened them – 'Listen, my name is [annonymised]. I know you and your families. Unless you stop throwing bricks at us, you will see what we can do at night. Then they stopped. (Madhesi leader 8, Birgunj)

The above description shows activists resort to calculated violent methods to maintain the pressure of resistance. They learn to coordinate their activities, decide to target strategic locations to cause the maximum level of disruption, and harness courage to take risky actions to maintain the momentum of the movement. It is also observed that activists often overcome the fear of being targeted by security forces and trivialise associated physical risks on their own lives when they are part of a popular resistance. In some ways, it also represents the joy of resistance in which an activist ascends to a new identity as a protester or freedom fighter, absenting from all other personal identities. Another Madhesi leader in Nepalgunj mentioned:

> During the first movement, we threw a bomb into the army camp and blasted one gas cylinder on the road. Our main motive was to counter the Maoist dominance. We even fell trees to obstruct the road and stop Maoist cadres and their leaders from gathering for party meetings. (Madhesi leader 9, Nepalgunj)

This shows that the activists did not hesitate to use violence where they needed to defend themselves and felt that their resistance needed to be escalated to maximise the pressure on the state. Unlike the Maoist movement that adopted armed struggle as its main strategy, violent activities in the Madhes movement were in defence against state repression and an organic response for movement survival. The activists were aware that an organised armed resistance was not an option and therefore, movement leaders were cautious about the use of violence in protests to ensure that it is used only in defence of the movement and the peaceful resistance did not get derailed from its course. When it was realised that the movement was heading towards a more violent path, the leaders often switched tactics to prevent loss. A Madhesi leader in Nepalgunj mentioned:

> When the movement became out of control during 2015, we decided to postpone some of our programmes to minimise the loss. (Madhesi leader 2, Nepalgunj)

International solidarity in the Madhes movement: The Madhes movement was geographically limited within Madhes except for occasional demonstrations in Kathmandu. India was vocally in favour of the movement but was usually manipulative and precarious in terms of its stand. Madhesi leaders also engaged with foreign diplomatic missions based in Kathmandu to garner their support, particularly on the issue of human rights violations. Occasionally, Madhesi intellectuals used UN platforms abroad to raise the issues of Madhes. One Madhesi intellectual described:

In 2015 when I went to Geneva to attend a UN meeting, I raised the issue of human rights violations by the Nepali state. On behalf of my organisation, I wrote a letter to the Secretary General and chairpersons of different UN committees drawing on their attention. I also wrote a letter to the US Department of Foreign Affairs. I did briefings about the Madhesi struggle at the Houses of Parliament in the UK. The British Bar and British Parliament also released statements in our favour. Prashant Jha, a prominent Nepali journalist based in India also regularly wrote about Madhes struggle by raising the issue in the Indian media. Similarly, Madhesi diaspora in the United States also raised issues about injustices in Madhes. (Madhesi lawyer 1, Janakpur)

Here, we observe that Madhesi activists were not only agitating on the streets of Madhes, some of them were also reaching out to the international community to gain their support. The United Nations, an organisation with the mandate to protect the rights of ethnic and indigenous nationalities and promote peace, was also involved actively in Nepal's peace process as an external observer in the aftermath of the peace agreement. Madhesi civil society leaders mobilised international support, including that of the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, in Nepal's constitutional debate. Madhesi civil society members staged a sit-in outside the UN office in Kathmandu to create international pressures on the government. This demonstrates that Madhesi activists pursued multilevel and multidimensional strategies: resistance on the streets; utilising national assemblies and legislatives to influence the process of constitution-making; and international engagement to build external pressures on the state. However, the Madhes movement seemed to have paid little attention to the possibility of building international solidarity with similar social/ political movements in other countries. There appear to be some genuine reasons behind the lack of interest in building international social movement collaborations. Firstly, the Madhes movement was intensified at a unique political juncture of post-insurgency constitution-making when an intense pressure was necessary for the maximum constitutional outcomes in favour of Madhes. Secondly, the Madhes movement was often portrayed by the state as an externally fermented agitation (by India) rather than representing internal grievances. Strategic collaborations or links with international social movements could deflect or weaken its central narrative of struggle against injustices and internal colonisation. More importantly, the hegemonic state could exploit the movement's links with international social movements to fuel anti-Madhes nationalist ideology. Hence, it was strategically important to deter further ethno-nationalist attacks on the movement. Despite these reasons, civil society actors, as described above, did make attempts to gain international

support within the global legal frameworks by interacting with diplomatic missions in Kathmandu.

The grassroots at the helm of organising – Madhes movement literature rarely prioritises analysis of grassroots activists' actual movement actions: the processes of mass involvement in the movement; sources of motivations; innovative movement actions; and the organising process of grassroots activists and wider Madhesi ordinary people. Even though the extent of success of social movements relies heavily on how people on the ground maintain resistance, research generally focuses on the analysis of movement agendas, the role of leadership and the movement's macro level interactions with the state. As a result, how the foot soldiers of the movements perform activism and how they learn, adapt and mobilise their cadres is usually obscured (Choudry, 2015). Hence, this research makes a unique contribution by investigating the movement experiences of grassroots activists, particularly highlighting descriptions of how activists mobilise their movement actions at the local levels.

In the Madhes movement, caste-based leaders and organisations were effectively mobilised at community level. Local businessmen provided activists with their tractors to bring people to towns and the East-West highway to take part in demonstrations. The Tarai-based business community also financially supported the movement, paying for fuel or hiring buses for transportation; food for protesters; and covering expenses for overnight accommodation during strikes in urban areas. Village wards were assigned specific days to organise mass rallies; and the local influential leaders were given the responsibility to mobilise the masses. Mobilisation of women was also key to reduce police repression on activists as the security forces would be less brutal on female protesters (further analysis on gender dynamics is provided in the next section). Women's presence in the mass demonstration also put social pressure on some men who were hesitant to join the protest. Educational institutions were also forced to close down in support of the strike. Where the heads of schools were reluctant to close, they were either persuaded to take part in the mass rallies or sometimes, threatened with forceful closure should they refrain from supporting the movement. These multidimensional strategies were not necessarily planned by movement leaders, but were adopted over a period as tactical approaches to sustain the movement. However, the activists were also sensitive and adaptive to contextual political dynamics to minimise the loss. A movement leader in Birgunj noted:

During the 2007 movement, we formed a separate team of university students to mobilise people. We realised that the movement should not only concentrate in Birgunj and the support from rural villages was also crucial. It was not easy to convince the people in the villages which were largely under the political control of Nepali Congress. But we organised political education programmes to convince people that the struggle was not just for ourselves, it was to achieve a brighter future for our children and to liberate the next generation of Madhesis from the types of discriminations that ours and the past generations had experienced. When the government imposed curfew in urban areas of Birgunj, we focused our activities in the villages. (Madhesi leader 5, Birgunj)

Here, the activist describes how they had to politicise the Madhesi agenda so that, firstly, the rural people were able to gain critical awareness of their social and political positions as Madhesis and secondly, were self-motivated to participate in the movement. In this process, it was necessary to break up their longstanding loyalty to the traditional political parties, which served as a major obstacle to ethnic liberation. The activists also learnt that mass protest within the towns was not strong enough to pressurise the government, so the role of people who lived in rural areas of Madhes was crucial. However, ordinary rural Madhesis had internalised the status quo; and the vision and narrative of the movement did not readily make sense to their deeply rooted political psychology. In order to break this political naivety, educated university students played a useful role as public educators who travelled to villages to promote the agenda of the movement and mobilise their support in the protests.

With regards to the question of where these movement strategies originated, activists reported that the top movement leadership would plan and coordinate mass demonstrations, but a number of organic and locally adaptable tactics also emerged simultaneously. All interviewees acknowledged Upendra Yadav as the main leader of the Madhes movement, but some recognised that Jay Prakash Gupta had played a major role in organisational development and political education among the grassroots.

There were, however, some contestations about who played prominent roles of organising movement actions. The senior movement leaders held the view that the movement was strategised centrally whereas, local youths and community members claimed that local activists were in charge of devising and implementing movement actions. A Madhesi youth leader in Kathmandu reported that:

> The strategy for the activities during the movement were decided by the core Madhesi leaders. All the programme of the movement used to be set out at the central level like when to declare the general strike, when to hold the torch rally, when to tie the black flag in the arms to show symbolic protest etc. The district level political leaders put together their programmes on the basis of the resistance roadmap given by the central leadership. The nature and level of police repression during the movement also determined the kind of strategy that would be suitable to deal with the situation. (Madeshi youth leader 3, Kathmandu)

However, a female activist claimed that:

> Although it appeared that the core movement leaders had devised the strategy for the movement, it was not always the case. At the local level youth formed their own organisations and political committees. They would not wait for instructions [from the movement leaders]. They would work together and decide what actions to take. During the day, they would participate in the protest and in the evening, they would gather and develop an appropriate strategy for the following day. (Madhesi woman activist 2, Kathmandu)

As the above interviewee notes, local activists were systematising the knowledge generated through the experience of struggle. Through planning and daily post-action reflective meetings, they were synthesising their learning and using it to strategise subsequent actions. They were becoming aware of local level anti-movement elements that needed to be dealt with tactfully through critical reflections and strategising. One of the youth Madhesi leaders who was now working in the central committee of one of the key Madhesi political parties lamented:

> The mainstream political parties adopted the strategy to defame Madhes movement by accusing us of a separatist movement. There was a ploy of the national media to defame the movement by spreading the false news about supposedly the criminal behaviour of Madhesi activists and using it to misrepresent the agenda of the movement. (Madhesi youth leader 3, Kathmandu)

Even though the movement leadership at the top was faced with the problem of fragmentation, local activists were engaged in building comradery and unity. This was only possible through local activists' collaborative work across different sections of the movement. The process of developing and implementing resistance activities at the local level also enabled activists to own their movement actions; learn from their mistakes; adapt local circumstances into their movement planning and build confidence about what worked and what did not.

To sum up, even though ordinary Madhesis did not always understand the deeper level structural causes, they were able to easily identify with personal experiences of humiliation that their fellow Madhesis had accumulated over a period of time. As they began to unite for the movement, activists strategically engaged at multiple levels – internationally interacting with UN agencies and foreign diplomatic missions; at national assemblies through their elected members of Madhesi community; and on the streets through mass demonstrations to crystallise pressures on the state.

Madhesi activists were learning about activism organically – mobilising university students, creating critical awareness and promoting the political agenda among rural populations, planning movement actions collectively and reflecting regularly on the daily programmes of protests. All these processes embed invaluable knowledge and pedagogies of activism, and are crucial dimensions of movement learning that require further documentation and critical analysis.

4.6 Inter-movement solidarity

The counter-movement strategy of the state that labelled the Madhes movement as inspired by separatism created barriers to building solidarity with other movements of marginalised communities such as Dalits, Tharu and indigenous peoples. Some civil society leaders from the Pahadi community also supported the Madhes movement, but many who were sympathetic to the movement were afraid to publicly support due to the fear that they would be ostracised by their own community. There were some progressive writers from Pahadi community who wrote opinion pieces in National Dailies in favour of the movement. A Madhesi civil society activist in Kathmandu/ Janakpur mentioned that:

> Some lawyers from indigenous community, Dalits and some female lawyers joined my discussion on Madhes issues. Some supported us temporarily but there were others who conspired against us. As I was leading an NGO which received international funding for Madhes-based social empowerment programmes, some people accused us of "dollar farming" on Madhesi agenda and claimed that European Union was supporting the separatist movement in Madhes. (Madhesi lawyer 1, Kathmandu/ Janakpur)

There is also a sense among some local Madhesis that the elite Madhesis in Kathmandu were making financial gains in the name of the Madhes movement. Even though they recognised that some educated members of their community made a distinct contribution by exposing human rights violations by the state at the national and international fora and by defending the struggle in public debates, there was also belief that some of these individuals gained direct financial,

personal and professional benefits through international aid which did not necessarily support the 'foot soldiers' of the movement. Nevertheless, some Madhesi activists in Kathmandu were also involved in various civil society campaigning, and most importantly, as a female activist based in Kathmandu mentioned –

> Youth doctors of Madhesi backgrounds established an organization called "Koshish Foundation" to provide free treatment to the injured activists. (Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

She further highlights:

> Some youths and I formed a loose network called "Kathmandu with Madhes" and conducted various activities in Maitighar Mandala to pressurise the government here. There was one gentleman from the Pahadi community named "Nishan" who visited several places in Madhes to support the activists who were injured in the movement. During the time of blockade, a Marwadi businessman from Raxual used to serve food for free to the protestors of the movement. (Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

Another activist in Kathmandu added:

> During the movement, Bijay Kant Karn [Madhesi academic who was later appointed as an Ambassador] had formed a group that included Madhesi parliamentarians, doctors, engineers and others who were living in Kathmandu. I also joined that group and went for the protest in Baneshwar. We continuously protested for six months at Maitighar Mandala by holding banners and pamphlets (Youth activist 3, Kathmandu)

It appears that with a proper coordination, different types of engagements across the local and national levels can be mutually reinforcing to the movement cause. Some activists reported that non-Madhesi social movements such as, the Tharu movement, indigenous movement and Dalits movement, though quite sceptic about the ethnic nature of the Madhes movement in early days, were beginning to align themselves with the Madhesi demands for equity, and largely recognised that the Madhes movement was a national movement reflecting the common agenda of all marginalised communities in Nepal. A Madhesi literary figure noted that:

> Madhesis have often jointly organised campaigns with the indigenous groups to advocate for the promotion and recognition of the mother tongue. (Madhesi activist 5, Kathmandu)

The importance of a broad movement alliance had been long raised by a veteran Madhesi leader Ramraja Prasad Singh. One of the interviewees puts it as:

> Rajaram Prasad Singh has always said that the movement of Madhes can only succeed if a broader alliance between the Madhesi and indigenous people's movements is formed. Gajendra Narayan Singh, the most prominent Madhesi leader before Madhes uprisings, had also tried to form such an alliance but the narrative at the time that Madhesis were promoting the "Save Hindi Campaign" because they wanted to align themselves with India defeated this objective. This narrative repelled the indigenous group from collaborating with Madhesis as they saw this as an anti-national aspiration. During the 3rd Madhes uprising also, C.K Raut's "Separatist Movement" reinforced this narrative. As a result, the movement failed to gain solidarity from other social movements (Madhesi youth activist 3, Kathmandu)

Broadly speaking, the hegemonic discourse of nationalism that has been promoted in Nepal over the last seventy years created barriers for collaboration between Nepal's other social movements (e.g. Dalit movement, indigenous movement and gender movement) and the Madhes movement. Firstly, Madhes' ethnic affinity, family relationships and close livelihood ties with Northern India makes Madhes visibly closer to the South than with Kathmandu. Secondly, Madhes represented a unique geopolitical characteristic given the open border with India and free movement of people across the border. Thirdly, Madhes is geographically different from the rest of Nepal and the culture and livelihood patterns significantly differ from those in the mountains and hills of Nepal. Fourthly, ethnic identity in Madhes is more homogenous than in the hills. Fifthly, Madhes movement was an ethnically closed movement which was culturally and geographically based in Madhes. Finally, Madhes movement was founded on the sweeping discourse that the state was entirely hill-centric which inadvertently collectivised all Khas-Arya and indigenous people as the political opponent of Madhesis. As a result, the common interests of diverse social movements, which were abundant, were not articulated in the Madhes movement. Even the Tharu movement of the indigenous people of Madhes felt underrepresented in the Madhes movement as the focal point of the movement was mainly the eastern Tarai which undermined Tharu dominated Western Tarai in the landscape of the Madhes struggle. Hence, a broader solidarity for Madhes movement was notably low among other social movements of marginalised peoples in Nepal.

This shows that the question of national sovereignty is key with regards to possibilities and barriers to inter-movement solidarity. In the case of Nepal, social justice movements gain impetus as long as they demonstrate unquestionable loyalty to national integrity. Nepal as a small country, strategically located between two populous and geographically vast nations, has

sensitive national vulnerability. The Madhes movement's often silent position and hesitance to express its allegiance to Nepali nationalism (though quite understandable as the discourses of Nepali nationalism exclude Madhesi identity) jeopardises the possibility of alliance with other social movements.

4.7 Financial sustainability of the movement

The Madhes movement relied upon common Madhesi people's spontaneous participation and individual contributions. The main resource of the movement was the people themselves. A Madhesi intellectual and literary figure in Kathmandu said:

> The movement was not expensive in its operation. There were no expensive media channels, programmes or technologies used in the movement. It was the movement of the people so, they managed it with locally available resources. The protestors tied their snacks in their "gamchha" [towel] and protested the whole day eating their own food. I interviewed one Rickshaw puller during the movement in my radio programme "Hello Mithila" and asked him about how he was managing his family expenses to be able to participate in the protest. He replied, "I am ready to face this crisis for a certain time period but will support the movement because it is my struggle." (Madhesi activist 5, Kathmandu)

During the movement, as interviewees reported, some people offered financial help without disclosing their identity. People would voluntarily donate money to make banners and activists collected money when they needed it for specific activities. Another activist noted that some affluent Madhesis, and occasionally, some Indian businessmen also supported with food for the protestors (Interview with Madhesi woman activist 2, Kathmandu). The following two extracts provides insights into how the movement was sustained financially -

> People in the movement used to manage their expenses for food and transportation themselves. I had observed this at the Bindhawashini of Parsa district where people were joining the movement carrying rice, vegetables and other necessary things with them in tractors. Some companies in Birgunj provided mineral water and fruit juice to the protestors in support of the movement. We also collected fund to pay for the treatment of the injured. (Madhesi woman activist 1, Kathmandu)

> I myself donated money to buy food for some protestors who could not afford. Some gave diesel for the tractors to collect the people from the villages. Movement leaders also provided recharge cards, fuel and snacks to the protestors. (Youth activist 3, Kathmandu)

Even though social movements are usually organic and self-funded by the activists themselves, additional financial resources are needed to cover for a range of logistical expenses. As Corrigall-Brown (2016: 330) notes, '*grassroots mobilisation also requires resources, including money to pay for buses to transport individuals to events, make signs at protests, or print flyers to be distributed*'. Madhesi activists generally report that no major funding was available to support the movement even though a businessman in Birgunj mentioned that those who were able to afford voluntarily contributed donations including himself who claimed to have provided 5-10 thousand rupees on a regular basis. There were also rumours that the former King, who was unhappy about abolition of monarchy in 2006, had provided financial support to Upendra Yadav, the movement leader who was resisting the post-monarchy government. A Madhesi youth reported that:

> Various rumours were heard that the palace had provided financial assistance to Upendra Yadav and India also secretly provided financial help to Tarai Madhes Democratic Party during the movement. Some wealthy Madhesis regularly provided mineral water and snacks for the protestors. (Madhesi youth activist 4, Kathmandu)

Research on funding social movements discusses the prevalence of two major types of funding sources. Firstly, the funding from members and constituents is the primary source of funding in grassroots struggles. The resource mobilisation theory assumes that '*the movement's mass base or "potential beneficiaries" are often too poor or powerless to generate the resources required to spawn or maintain a movement*' (Corrigall-Brown, 2016: 332). This model overlooks the intrinsic motivation and indigenous resources of the grassroots activists to engage in activism. As Corrigall-Brown (2016: 332) notes, '*although the mass base might not have monetary resources, they have negative inducements – such as the ability to cause disruption in the form of protesting or striking*'. Secondly, there may be the availability of elite funding from prominent individuals who support the movement, charitable organisations, international donors, corporate organisations or governments. But social movement funding from elite sources is neither common nor 'benign'. The elite funders might be seeking indirect benefits to themselves in return for the funding, or try to assuage or deflect radical demands of the movement. As reported earlier, the perceived support from the former monarch or India to the Madhes movement would not have been to express solidarity to the movement necessarily but to secure their own political interests.

There was no financial motivation for people to participate in the movement even though basic costs of food and transportation were occasionally covered by some elite individuals. Additionally, the movement organisation and structures were loosely institutionalised and the logistical expenses of the movement were minimal. As another activist reported –

> Generally, people participated willingly tying *Chiura-chini* [flattened rice and sugar] in their *ghamcha* [towel]. When the Madhes movement became more organised and the nexus of the political parties grew stronger, it became easier for the leaders to finance the movement' (Madhesi youth activist 4, Kathmandu).

After some of the movement leaders joined the government, they had more access to economic means to help ease the financial pressures on the movement. In contrast to resource mobilisation theory's claim that deprived and marginalised people are incapable of mobilising without interpolation of external resources (Jenkins and Perrow, 1977), the Madhes movement reveals the opposite, as shown above.

4.8 Gendered dimensions of the Madhes movement

The involvement of women in political movements is not new in Nepal. Despite cultural barriers and traditions that limited women's role to the domestic sphere, women had participated in Nepal's historical democratic struggles. In the struggle to restore multiparty democracy in 1990, three female protesters, Janaki Devi Yadav, Bhuwaneshwori Devi Yadav and Sonawati Devi Yadav, from Yadukuha village were shot dead in Dhanusha district (Yadav, 2003). During the Maoist movement, gender equality was one of the key agendas. Points 19, 20 and 21 of the '40-points demand' submitted by the Maoists before declaring the rebellion raised women's issues.

> *19. Patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women should be stopped, girls should be allowed to access paternal property as their brothers.*
> *20. All racial exploitation and suppression should be stopped. Where ethnic communities are in the majority, they should be allowed to form their own autonomous governments.*
> *21. Discrimination against downtrodden and backward people should be stopped. The system of untouchability should be eliminated. (Karki and Seddon, 2003: 185)*

During the Maoist insurgency, women played prominent roles in the People's Liberation Army and they 'felt empowered by the Maoist ideology as they were able to raise their voice against the suffering they were witnessing and resist the inequalities and discrimination they and their

families were experiencing' (K.C. and Van Der Haar, 2019: 441). In particular, as K.C. and Van Der Haar (2019: 443 – 444) reported, women found the Maoist commitment to women's issue to be real on the ground, at least during the period of armed resistance, women were often assigned '*public roles equal to and sometimes above their male peers, and in some cases, placed in powerful positions: managing military tasks, and taking charge of various attacks and departments*'.

The Madhes movement also produced new political leaders representing diverse constituencies of Madhes such as women, marginalised castes and deprived social groups. There was a strong belief amongst women activists that they were involved in the movement in order to secure a brighter future for their children. They recognised that structural inequalities and marginalisation that had disadvantaged their families, and therefore the Madhes movement was no longer a male-dominated phenomenon unlike most gendered tasks, given the cultural traditions in Madhes. Even though women's freedom from patriarchy was a central gender-based agenda in the Maoist movement, the Madhes movement did not explicitly spell out women's suppressed social positions. Women joined the movement like anyone else to struggle for their ethnic rights, freedoms and representation. As a result, female activists also emerged as political leaders as an outcome of the Madhes movement.

The historical democratic movements of Nepal had only benefited a few privileged Madhesis by providing them a political space in Kathmandu. But the first Madhes uprising ruptured the conventional notion of political leadership being reserved for elites. As a result, the Madhes movement recognised Dalit, women, Muslim and other socially disadvantaged groups in the national political landscape and established

> … *women leaders, such as Kalawati Paswan (Dalit woman), Karima Begam (Muslim woman), Salma Khatun (Muslim woman) and Ramani Ram (Dalit) as the leaders of Madhes (Madhesi civil society leader 1, Kathmandu).*

Despite the largely disadvantaged position of women in Madhesi society, their role in the movement has been significant. During the 2015 uprising, women were at the forefront of the movement to oppose the constitutional provision that children of Madhesi women who are married to Indian citizens would be deprived of citizen rights. Their stance concentrated on the demand for a legislative remedy on the right to citizenship for their children. In total, at least 10 women lost their life during the three Madhes uprisings. However, when discussing Madhesi

women, much attention is placed on the needs of empowerment rather than their agency and strengths to shape the struggle, and their contribution to the Madhes movement has not yet been systematically examined.

The recognition of Madhesi women's participation in the movement is also important to deconstruct stereotypes that portray women as victims and defenceless members of Madhesi society. This section of the report particularly highlights two key aspects of women's participation in the Madhes movement: the multitude of ways Madhesi women participated in the protests, and the challenges they faced by them during the uprisings. In this process, we discuss women's aspirations and empowerment through participation in the movement; their role as 'safety walls' against police repression during mass demonstrations; women's involvement as the inspiration and moral pressure for wider mass mobilisation and movement sustainability; sexual violence/ harassment of women by the police during demonstration; and the barriers women faced in terms of mobility, childcare, cultural attitude, household responsibilities, physical needs and privacy during the mass demonstration.

Female activists reported that they were able to engage in political debates about Madhesi issues during the movement which provided them with an opportunity to learn about societal issues beyond the boundaries of their homes. It was an opportunity to educate themselves and connect with fellow Madhesi activists to understand structural inequalities and marginalisation of Madhesis, which inspired them to take equal responsibility to participate in the struggle for freedom, rights and representation. A female Former State Minister and current member of the Provincial Legislative of province 2 from Birgunj puts it as -

> … there were mostly men participating in the movement. It made me think what we, women would be doing by staying at home while our husbands and sons were risking their lives by fighting the oppressive state; it is our movement so both male and female should fight together for justice. (Madhesi woman leader 1, Birgunj)

Another female protester in Nepalgunj reported:

> During the 2007 Madhes movement, my husband tried to pull me inside the room and lock it from the outside so that I could not go for the demonstration. According to him, women should not participate in the protest activities like men as it's quite impractical, but I reacted and pushed him back and locked the room for outside and went for the demonstration. I believe that the women should also speak for their society as they are part of it. (Madhesi woman activist 3, Nepalgunj)

This reveals that women were intrinsically motivated to participate in the protest. As mentioned by the female activist above, the ongoing movement enabled her to rebel against the cultural barriers within her home and claim her equal rights to protest. Particularly during the 2015 movement, women performed various constructive roles. Firstly, their presence in the movement increased general enthusiasm amongst all protesters; symbolised inclusivity; and minimised the loss during the demonstration by providing a security defence to the protesters. When the movement reached its peak and the police violence increased, Madhesi women came to the front line of demonstrations. Women participated in the funeral marches of the activists who had been killed by the police firing. The police would hesitate to use force at the same level of cruelty that they did against the male protesters. Women even went to the Aryaghat (cremation place) for performing the death rituals, which is culturally and religiously barred in the Madhesi Hindu community.

Some of the creative movement actions involving women included "*Chudi Julush* (bangle rally)", "*Kucho Julush* (broom rally)", performing Madhesi songs and dance, such as "*Jhijhiya*", singing folk songs, performing folk dances and drama like "*Jat Jatain*". Women's participation in these activities helped in sustaining the momentum of the movement as well as provided them an opportunity to develop their critical understanding of the agenda, empowering them politically. They showed courage and enthusiasm while resisting the state and managed to rupture cultural stereotypes that had restricted their social lives within homes. Madhesi women had never taken part in public demonstrations in the way that they did in the 2015 Madhes movement. However, the female activists noted that their role has not been fully recognised in reports about the Madhes movement or in the political realm more generally.

4.8.1 Traditional gender beliefs

Despite women's participation in the Madhes movement, patriarchy remains deeply entrenched in Nepal's social structure, limiting women to strict domestic responsibilities. A woman's household chores such as cleaning, cooking and taking care of children never go away so, she has to ensure that these responsibilities are fulfilled alongside participating in any movement actions. As a female leader of the movement lamented:

> *I had to wake up early in the morning, get all the household stuff done before going to join the demonstration. I left my young children at home asking my neighbour to look after them. Throughout the protest, I used to think about them whether they were fine or not*

but I would reassure myself thinking that this movement was for a brighter future of my children so that they would not have to be the victim of discrimination like us today. (Madhesi woman leader 1, Birgunj)

This indicates that the gender role assigned to women is a barrier for them to participate freely like their male counterparts. The popular patriarchal belief system about what it means to be a good woman is a hurdle for them to expand their involvement outside of domestic work. Yet their key motivating factor seemed to be the prospect of creating a better future for their children. Many Madhesi women challenged this cultural attitude by joining the protest at the Nepal-India border to prevent the passage of trucks carrying goods during the 2015 blockade. This required them to stay away from their homes during the night. A female activist (who asked us to be anonymous) in Siraha mentioned:

> It is really disappointing to see the way our society looks at us. They doubt on our character. My parents and in-laws were not happy with my decision to participate in the movement activities and staying at the border during nights. For them, a good woman with moral character is not supposed to do that. My neighbour also talks much nonsense about me. They even accused me of having illicit relationships with other men. In fact, the society shows great displeasure towards the women who take up roles outside home. This is very disappointing. (Madhesi woman activist 4, Siraha)

Madhesi women were caught in the dilemma about whether to perform a role as a culturally defined 'moral woman' or to choose to become an activist for social change. As a result, they had to fight the dual battle against both the cultural hegemony as well as the state domination of their community. Despite the Madhes movement's unclear position on gender equality, many Madhesi women were self-motivated to play their part in the movement.

4.8.2 Challenges for women during the movement

Female activists reported gender-related challenges whilst participating in the movement. Firstly, protest sites were not gender friendly. As the demonstrations were organised mostly in public places, there invariably lacked toilet facilities for women. One of the female participants in FGD mentioned:

> We used to protest throughout the day but there were no toilets in the area, and it was embarrassing to use public places for excretion. We are not like man to perform the activities anywhere; it feels odd. Because of this, we, sometimes refrained from drinking enough water or eating food during the protest. (Madhesi woman activist 5, Nepalgunj)

These basic human needs are not accounted for when demonstrations were planned. Female participants in this research pointed out that the Movement Mobilisation Committees consisted mostly of male activists so, as a consequence, this basic need was often overlooked. Secondly, security forces often harassed and physically maltreated female protesters. One of the woman activists from Saptari stated:

> I always remained at the frontline of rallies during the movement. The Superintendent of Police always targeted me and got me arrested each time. The police used various abusive languages to me and hit at my sensitive body parts. Our society does not like women who have spent nights in police custody. (Madhesi woman activist 6, Saptari)

It was sensed that this woman activist wanted to describe more about her experiences during the protest but the presence of male counterparts in the FGD made her feel awkward to provide details of her harassment. Her facial expression hinted that she had experienced an abuse which was difficult to report in a group. A Madhesi female activist in Kathmandu also reported of gender-based violence on women during the 2015 uprising in which the police would tear off female protesters' blouse to embarrass them publicly. Elsewhere, Aryal (2008: 16) has also reported that '*rape and sexual assaults have been used by security personnel as a tool of revenge and harassment*' during the Maoist movement. The activists also reported torture, unnecessary interrogation, detention and cases of public embarrassment, causing long-term psychological discomfort in their lives.

Interestingly, women's involvement in mass demonstrations also created moral pressures on men who were hesitant about joining the protest. It challenged their masculinity or the notion of 'boldness' as associated with 'men' who felt embarrassed about staying at home whilst women were protesting on the streets. This is not necessarily a socially transformative behaviour that views women as equal members of the society, but a by-product of a problematic exclusionary social order. However, for some men, women's presence in the protest was a positive source of inspiration and in recent years, mainly owing to the current constitutional provision, there have been some positive shifts towards more balanced role of women in Nepali society.

Hence, the Madhes movement learnt that women were key players in the struggle as they were not only bearing the family burden by enabling their husbands to participate in the movement, but also serving as comrades-in-arms. Yet, their gendered needs and domestic responsibilities were often not accounted for in the organisation of movement activities. Those women who

joined the movement also enhanced their knowledge about the political agenda and realised the significance of their contribution to the struggle. Traditional cultural beliefs also discouraged women from protesting alongside their male counterparts. Nevertheless, many Madhesi women showed an enormous amount of courage and commitment to the struggle, and their contribution to the success of the movement requires more recognition.

Figure 13: Madhesi women in the Kucho Julus (broom rally)   Figure 14: Women protesters alongside male their counterparts

Figure 15: Madhesi women participating in the human chain

4.9 Reflections on learning in the movement

Analysis of activists' experiences in the movement shows that failure to react appropriately towards significant security incidents can damage to the course of the movement. When there is increased security crackdown on activists, causing death or serious injuries, it is likely that the

intensity of the resistance increases, and the mass becomes more aggressive. Likewise, when security forces experience loss during the protest, their response is usually more brutal and revengeful. For example, after the Tikapur incident on 24 August 2015 in which seven police officers were killed by the multitude, police turned more ruthless and engaged in harassment of the general public, and even extrajudicial killings. There was a police shootout in Bhairahawa where over a dozen innocent Madhesi people were killed. Photos of this incident were posted on Facebook by some activists which inflamed the situation by inciting more confrontations between activists and the police. As the two activists in Bhairahawa described:

> The police were in the mood of revenge because the government was determined to repress the movement. When such an aggressive state behaviour was reported in the local media across Madhes, it provoked people even to intensify the demonstration. (Madhesi leader 8, Bhairahawa)

> After the Tikapur incident, the police brutality increased, and innocent people were killed. As the last resort, people went to cease the border. (Madhesi leader 9, Bhairahawa)

Occasionally, members of Madhesi civil society organisations played a problematic role and failed to back political gains. When the draft document of 5 proposed provinces was agreed between the Madhesi parties, Nepali Congress and UML, they opposed it and accused Madhesi leaders of deceiving the movement. A Madhesi journalist who covers Madhes issues in the national newspapers lamented the role of civil society organisations:

> They blamed Madhesi leaders of abandoning the agenda of 'One Madhes, one Province'. I ask civil society activists 'what did you actually do in the benefit of Madhes?' Civil society behaved irresponsibly and could not gauge the political realities. 'One Madhes, one Province' was essentially an anti-federalism position. I had written then that 'One Madhes, one Province' was a political noose and was never going to be achieved. Now, we have gained Province 2 as the only Madhesi province. Obviously, it would have been better to secure Province 3 as another Madhesi province. But that did not happen. Madhesi civil society could not rise to the moment to make the right decision then. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

In addition to some discontent with the Madhesi civil society, activists across the Tarai felt that Madhesi leaders also sometimes failed to represent sentiments of the Madhesi people and engage in productive negotiations with the government. There was a perception that the movement leaders inadvertently fell into the trap of false assurances from India rather than drawing strengths from their own people. As a result, when India backed down, the movement lost its confidence to hold its position. The same Madhesi journalist explains:

> Madhesi leadership could not deliver the goal of the movement. They failed to recognise that it was crucial to persuade the other two ethnic communities – Khas-Arya and indigenous nationalities to secure political gains for Madhes. In 2007, Upendra Yadav used to say 'the nation is mine, but the state is not' but after the elections of 2008, he joined the Maoist government led by Prachanda and represented the same dominant national politics that undermined Madhes. Someone who complained about the failure of the state to recognise Madhesi identity, in a month's time, got politically co-opted and joined the power politics to secure his own position in the government. The Madhesi leaders could not maintain the aspiration of the movement. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

This research also finds that there is a complex relationship between the Madhesi agenda, Madhesi people and Madhesi leaders. When all three come together, Madhesi parties can effectively lead a revolutionary movement. When Madhesi parties compromise on Madhesi aspirations to prioritise their own positions in the government, this fuels frustrations among Madhesi people. As the same participant argues:

> Madhesi people have pursued the agenda of alternative politics but Madhesi parties failed to adhere to this notion. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

In recent years, there has been a concern about growing levels of corruption among some local Madhesi leaders. Some participants reported that many of those who were involved in Madhes-based politics are now leading local governments and have begun to concentrate on their own personal benefits. Their governance lacks a radical edge, and they have embarked upon the same corrupt modes, fulfilling their own personal desires such as buying new office vehicles and luxury goods rather than focusing on development programmes that would improve service delivery for the ordinary people. As a Madhesi intellectual in Kathmandu laments:

> Now, a Madhesi is the mayor of the city and village council who could deliver improved governance to show an example in practice, but they still criticise the structure and escape from their responsibility to deliver the public service which they have been elected to fulfil. (Madhesi civil society leader 1).

Despite its tangible gains, such as federalism and proportional representation in legislatives, there has not been much improvement in people's everyday life. There have been endless debates about how to transform the Nepali state but the discussion about social transformation within the Madhesi society is often downplayed in Madhes-based politics. The Madhesi journalist further comments:

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> We have observed an effective political movement that has helped movement leaders to secure positions of power, but the goal of social transformation is still at distance. (Journalist 2, Birgunj)

Despite these broader concerns, the Madhes movement has established a significant sense of pride in the Madhesi ethnic identity, and generated confidence to resist any form of discrimination. It has also increased ethnic sensitivity amongst the general population in Nepal, and remedied the culture of derogatory attitude towards Madhesi language, culture and lifestyle. These identity markers have gained legitimacy in the social domains of the capital, where Madhesis no longer hesitate to wear their traditional dress or speak their language. However, the use of the Hindi language [the main language in North India] by some Madhesi MPs in the parliament is largely perceived by Nepali speaking nationalists as disloyalty to the Nepali nation. For Madhesis, the same practice symbolises a sense of victory and restoration of Madhesi identity within the state structure. Even though there is prevalence of racism in some segments of the Pahadi communities, Madhesis no longer hesitate to defend themselves assertively. Overall, it can be claimed that the Madhes movement succeeded in bringing to the mainstream the agenda of ethnic inclusion; recognition of historical marginalisation of Madhesis and other ethnic minorities; and establishing significance of civic identities in defining Nepali national identity. A Madhesi youth noted:

> During the Panchayat era, an ordinary Madhesi would be scared of going to the police station, seeking security and justice. They would rarely go to the Chief District Officer's [CDO] office or revenue office without accompanying with someone who is educated or used to dealing with the government administrative system. But now, everyone understands that citizenship is their right. They are now confident enough to go to the CDO office directly and get their work done. (Madhesi youth activist 14, FGD, Nepalgunj)

This level of confidence has also been achieved due to the constitutional arrangement that guarantees proportional representation in the state institutions, and that local and provincial governments are now represented by many movement leaders or people of Madhesi backgrounds. In an FGD which was conducted at a local government office in Birgunj, a Madhesi villager mentioned:

> If someone from Pahadi community, who did not speak Bhojpuri, were leading this council instead of Salma Khatun [female Vice Chair from the Madhesi community], a non-Nepali speaking local person would feel nervous about approaching her to receive the government service. But now, the public representative is from our own community who speaks our own

In conclusion, the Madhes movement has enormously advanced critical consciousness among Madhesis as well as diversified the notion of identity within the Nepali nation. The federal constitution has guaranteed proportional representation in political structures, formally recognised Madhesi identity and devolved significant amount of legislative and executive powers to the provincial and local governments. The movement has also boosted confidence among ordinary Madhesis to challenge unjust policies, discriminations and various forms of injustices. Madhesi women, whose role has largely been confined within their homes, are now more aware of their rights and opportunities that the new era of politics provides to them. The movement has essentially served as a space of learning for ordinary people who are now more aware of their social, cultural and political circumstances.

The movement has also learnt to distinguish between the modes of resistance, movement agenda and leadership. Madhesi activists realise that the three Madhes uprisings played a significant role in securing federalism and their increased representation in politics, but the role of the movement in securing social transformation is still incomplete. In this sense, the struggle continues until the basic conditions of livelihood are fulfilled, deeply rooted social injustices redressed and life with dignity guaranteed. For example, social inequalities and weak governance in Madhes are key challenges. There is an increased recognition of the role of social and political activism to both capitalise on the gains of the struggle so far as well as to address inter-community injustices within Madhes in the future. Building upon the knowledge produced as a movement so far, new cycles of movement are likely to emerge in defence of the most marginalised populations within Madhes. The Tharu movement, Dalit movements and Muslim rights movements are likely to be the new manifestations of the Madhes movement in the future. In this process, there is a need to build a nation-wide solidarity among the most marginalised communities and to promote the agenda of equity, recognition of diverse voices and most importantly, improvement in people's livelihood.

5. Effects of Knowledge production and learning on the Madhes movement

In this chapter, we turn to some of the movement's key learning and knowledge production processes and identify their effects in relation to some of political dimensions that have surfaced in the Madhes movement.

5.1 Dimensions of knowledge production

Knowledge production in the Madhes movement appears to be happening across three dimensions. Firstly, at the grassroots level, activists learn about the agenda of the struggle, develop protest strategies and engage in reflective practice of movement actions. This learning takes place through the collective experience of mass mobilisation, public learning activities (e.g. activists addressing the mass; sharing information about movement actions, door-to-door canvassing) and informal interactions among activists at the grassroots. For example, activists learnt that friendship with the police could not be countenanced when movement actions aim to disrupt public order. Activists learnt about how to historicise the forms of oppression and collectivise their experiences to build solidarity for the struggle. This form of knowledge is largely undocumented, but rather circulated amongst the activists through their informal interactions.

Secondly, more formal knowledge about the history of the movement, state policies and ongoing negotiations between the movement and state is produced by social movement organisations, academics and journalists/ authors. The primary beneficiaries of the knowledge produced through academic documentation is largely the conventional political leadership, as well as organic intellectuals that emerge out of the movement actions. This kind of scholarship benefits the leadership by providing intellectual resources to advocate for the rights of the marginalised and present evidence-based arguments in support of their agenda.

Thirdly, the organisations that represent, support or lead the struggle also produce knowledge within their organisational structures. For example, movement organisations involved in negotiations with the state develop unique sets of communication skills and knowledge about how to engage in dialogue; present a case assertively with evidence; appreciate the interests and positions of opponents in the process of negotiations. They also develop knowledge about how to formulate movement strategies; set up an organisational structure to lead movement actions;

implement disciplinary measures within the organisation to avoid reputational damage; and engage strategically with national and international diplomatic/ civil society organisations. The diagram below shows these three dimensions of knowledge production that that enhance critical understanding of the agenda and sustain activists' motivations to struggle for their cause.

Academic knowledge production

Madhes Studies Journal, Academic publications, Research reports by I/NGOs

Activists' personal/ local/ ancestral knowledge, use of communication tools, protest techniques, strategic locations and routes for mobilising

Leadership skills, party policies, running party committees, project management, communication, cadre mobilising, negotiations and dialogue

Grassroots knowledge production

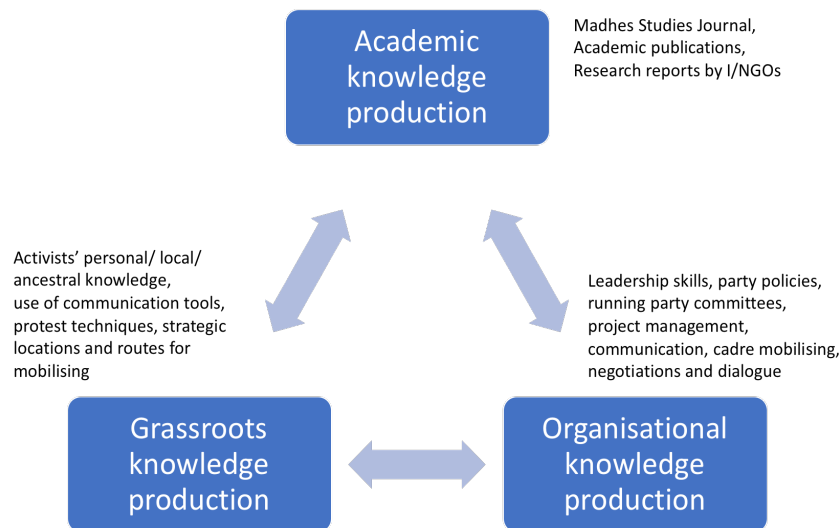Organisational knowledge production

Figure 16: Dimension of knowledge production in the Madhes movement

However, the importance of interactions between the three spaces of knowledge production cannot be overestimated. The normative methodology of knowledge production, as in academic knowledge production, through funded research and dissemination in formal closed environments of seminars and conferences, might not serve to directly strengthen the knowledge base of those who are the foot soldiers of the movement (Choudry, 2015). For this purpose, alternative pedagogical approaches would be needed. These approaches could involve culturally relevant pedagogical approaches – cultural performances through drama, public discussion forum, progressive songs, radio programmes, publications in local languages and representation of grassroots stories in order to translate complex theoretical and conceptual knowledge into meaningful public pedagogies (Doerr, 2018). In this regard, NEMAF's role could be expanded by adopting culturally and contextually relevant methodologies of knowledge production and dissemination that could enhance better integration of academic and grassroots knowledge processes. Yet, NEMAF's intellectual project has significantly contributed to legitimisation of suppressed histories, narratives of marginalisation and experiences of struggle at the national level. NEMAF has produced a substantive body of knowledge and intellectual resources about the Madhesi people, their history of marginalisation and their struggle that serves the ongoing learning needs of Madhesi activists. The task ahead appears to be how to

maximise the use of this knowledge to support the grassroots activists and facilitate the circular learning process laid out above.

5.2 NEMAF's systematisation of experience

Drawing upon its decade long systematisation of learning, NEMAF has learnt that the figure of the social movement organisation as an NGO, operating under the regulatory framework of the state, struggles to connect with grassroots populations beyond the funding of projects. The NGO structures and programming tend to bureaucratise movement actions and are reliant on the availability of funding (Lewis, 2010). There is a realisation that the agenda of social transformation should be situated within the political struggle, rather than NGO-based campaigning. Hence, the movement organisation should carefully gauge the appropriate use of external funding. However, NEMAF's scholarly activities, such as Madhes-focused public seminars, journal publications and the media-based critical analysis of Madhes-related issues have given NEMAF a unique identity as an organiation for Madhes knowledge production. It also serves as a 'school' for promoting learning for struggle and its activities promote 'popular education' that challenge unequal political structures (Kane, 2012).

Social movement organisations can also shape the agenda of the movement through their research and intellectual engagement. However, a critique of movement strategy may be viewed as unhelpful and incited by anti-movement motives, and therefore weakening the core agenda of the struggle. During the period of Madhes uprisings, NEMAF raised concerns about movement's dependency on Indian favours and its silence about internal social dynamics such as its lack of critical appreciation of horizontal inequalities within Madhes. Whilst NEMAF's contribution in producing research-based evidence to highlight inequalities between the privileged social groups representing Pahadi communities and oppressed Madhesis was welcomed, NEMAF's critique on the movement's silence about horizontal inequalities was resented by some Madhesi movement leaders.

5.3 Knowledge about injustices

The Madhes movement has produced influential knowledge about forms of oppression, social and economic grievances, and Madhesi's right to representation in key realms of society. This critical knowledge has been systematically archived as research evidence, narratives of struggle and artefacts, and circulated discursively among Madhesi populations. The process of knowledge production accelerated after the Maoist campaign expanded in the Tarai region around 2002.

Maoist activities in Madhes not only promoted a critique of the system but also offered a methodology for resistance and political change. Building upon this historical-political context, the series of Madhes uprisings advanced people's learning about forms of oppressions and injustices and how to express political claims with reference to social and economic grievances.

The Madhes movement has generated a remarkable level of political consciousness amongst ordinary Madhesis. It helped them rupture historically imposed hegemonic discourses about what counts as being a 'Nepali' (Lal, 2012). By engaging in the movement, Madhesis not only learnt about their economic, political and social marginality within the state but also learnt how to resist against marginalisation. In this process, the widespread experience of discrimination and injustices became an entry point for learning about the 'generative mechanisms' (Bhaskar, 2008) that produced those experiences. It provided them with an opportunity to engage with much deeper causes of discrimination such as the history, political system, state policies on education, language, civil service recruitment which speak to 'critical realist' approach to social inquiry (Bhaskar, 2008). A female activist in a town near Birgunj mentioned:

> I was at college during the first Madhes movement. The Federal Socialist Forum Nepal [FSFN] had organised an interaction programme in our college. There, for the first time, I got to know how Madhesis were being marginalised. Their agenda deeply interested me. In the college hostel, we, Madhesi girls used to face discrimination but had never thought about it from a political perspective. Slowly, I came to realise broader structural issues in our society. Then, I began to participate in various interaction programmes at schools and colleges. I also received training on how to politically educate and mobilise people for the struggle (Madhesi woman activist 4, Birgunj)

Similarly, another activist who had just been elected as the ward chair described his experience of police assault due to his ethnic appearance.

> I was a college boy during the first movement. I was in no way related with the movement. One day, when I was returning home from my college, the clashes were going on between the police and FSFN cadres. The police also caught me and beat up. This made me think why the police assaulted me despite me being in the college uniform with books in my hand. Then, I came to realise that police would indiscriminately treat all Madhesis harshly. From the next day, I started participating in the movement. (Madhesi activist 6, Birgunj)

In both of the scenarios above, discrimination and police assaults served as entry points for critical reflections of personal experiences and developing a sense of structural critique. The

activists' learning about the causes of oppressions united them with fellow Madhesis who were already involved in the movement more actively.

The Madhes movement observed that the involvement of its leaders in the power-sharing government led to a gradual decline of popular support for the movement. It is also revealed that the political forces which emerge out of popular uprisings are likely to be influential only temporarily unless they have gained a complete victory over the state. So, the failure to capitalise on the political influence of the movement at its peak, leads to a waste of movement energy. The movement leaders frequently made compromises on movement demands in order to secure positions of power in the government. They failed to negotiate the constitution, and instead were actively involved in opportunistic factionalism. Consequently, the first constituent assembly in which progressive forces such as the Madhes movement leaders had a strong presence, failed to promulgate a new constitution. In elections for the second constituent assembly, both Maoists and Madhesi parties faced a colossal loss, weakening their voice in the assembly. As a result, the constitution, according to Madhesis, failed to address their demands.

The Madhes movement has learnt that its ethnic exclusivity, lack of clarity in its ideological framework and inability or unwillingness to recognise different forms of inequalities within Madhes are going to be critical points of reflection moving forward. Indifference to internal social divisions may have been a political strategy of the leadership to mobilise the whole of Madhes against the Khas-Arya hegemony. But the political remedy around ethnic hegemony would not necessarily address the caste-based, gender, religious or regional domination within Madhes. The diverse Madhesi parties converge on ethnic rights but their ideological positions may be nonaligned given the diverse backgrounds of their leaders. Therefore, the narrative of ethnic exclusion requires a clear ideological positioning. Secondly, the Madhes movement and its political parties failed to build an alliance with other social movements or political parties in the constituent assembly. Even the coalition between Madhesi and Maoist parties, both of which advocated for social justice and ethnic rights in the country, could not survive. This significantly weakened the Madhesi agenda and led to a gradual polarisation of power between Madhes-based parties and the four major parties in the second constituent assembly. The result was that Madhesis did not have the influence they needed to shape the constitution in favour of Madhes.

5.4 Learning around inter-movement solidarity and geopolitics of social movements

After the promulgation of the new federal constitution in 2015, the Madhes movement seems to have entered a new phase of struggle. There are some important learning points that stem from the decade long intense resistance in Madhes. One key learning is that the Madhes movement must begin to overcome restrictive ethnic narratives and build cross-movement solidarities that address injustices experienced by different castes, women, indigenous nationalities, and ethnic minorities. Hence, the movement has learnt to find new avenues of convergence among the struggles of diverse ethnic and social communities to overcome reactionary manipulation by dominant groups. A prominent leader of the Madhes movement explains:

> The movement realised that the struggle had entered the second phase and needed to build solidarity and consensus with other communities who had been historically marginalised. So, we formed an alliance with other political forces representing a broad range of marginalised communities and alternative forces that are committed to social transformation. (Upendra Yadav, Kathmandu)

This is a significant point of learning that has, in recent years, led to building a strategic alliance with other movements and political forces to enhance movement's negotiating power with the state. The recent merger of the major Madhes movement parties with political forces representing indigenous communities, albeit fragile, seems to be the outcome of this realisation.

However, this is a challenging undertaking as Madhesis' ethnic, social and cultural character resembles that of Northern India and Madhes has been less connected with hills and Kathmandu that dominate political spheres. These social and cultural ties between Madhesis and North Indians go back to several generations in the history and remain strong even today through common practices of cross-border marital relationships. One Madhesi activist notes:

> We always had the feeling of 'otherness' in our own country. We, Madhesi, have never been able to feel that this is our nation too. We are unaware of our own history. Our history is not taught to us. More than the people of Nepal, we feel connected with the people across the border (Madhesi activist 6, Bhairahawa)

The above quote reflects the tension between distinct cultural identity of Madhesi people and the legitimised markers of Nepali national identity, and the neglect and dismissal of their cultural presence within Nepali nation has cultivated a sense of abhorrence among Madhesis towards the state and its institutions. Consequently, the habitual experiences of disenfranchisement have

resulted in a *disaffectionate relationship* between Madhesis and the Nepali nation. Concurrently, the deeply rooted anti-India sentiments among the Pahadi populations fuel nonrecognition of Madhesis as fellow patriots. The movement's reliance on the Indian support (e.g. blockade) only exacerbates these sentiments and portrays the movement as a threat to national sovereignty. Arguably, the movement's political alliance with foreign powers tends to harden ethno-nationalism, inciting anti-movement attitudes.

Additionally, India's geopolitical interests have often dominated Nepal's political dynamics. Political instabilities in Nepal have always benefited India by providing the Nepal's powerful neighbour an influential role in negotiations between different political forces. Similarly, as an ethnic turmoil along its border, India uses the Madhes movement as a bargaining tool to maintain its influence on Nepal. To this end, the Indian establishment opines that political struggles in Nepal operate with the blessings of India and are managed through Indian interlocution. As a result, the Madhes movement is viewed as anti-national or pro-Indian resistance, jeopardising its credibility as a social justice struggle of Nepal's one of the most marginalised communities. This has contributed to inter-ethnic tensions and have additionally worked against the Madhes the movement. An author and social activist noted:

> We have two powerful neighbours who intend to utilise Nepal as part of their geopolitical strategy so, they are less concerned about the legitimate struggle of oppressed communities. When India imposed blockade on Nepal, it was their geopolitical bargaining with the power holders in Kathmandu rather than their genuine solidarity with the struggle of Madhesi people which was proven later on when India withdrew its support to the movement without discussion with Madhes-based political parties. (Pahadi social activist/ author 1, Kathmandu)

5.5 Conceptualising the learning process in the Madhes movement

This study reveals that mass mobilisation is likely to be more effective in contexts where there is a greater level of ethnic homogeneity and people are organised along identity-based politics. For example, unlike the Madhes movement, Nepal's Janajati and Dalit movements have failed to mobilise people in mass demonstrations. So, we conclude that the shared experience of marginalisation, combined with concentrated habitation of culturally homogenous communities, tend to succeed in mass mobilisation.

Another interesting reflection on the Madhes movement is that a liberal political environment is conducive to social movement flourishing. Autocratic and constitutionally monolithic political

systems reduce the chances of popular ethnic uprisings. As a Madhesi leader from Western Tarai described:

> Many Madhesi leaders within Nepali congress and other political parties had raised the issue of Madhesi marginalisation at different times of democratic struggles of Nepal. Leaders like Ramjanam Tiwari, Vedanand Jha, Parshu Narayan Chaudhary, Gajendra Narayan Singh and Ramraja Prasad Singh had raised concerns of Madhesis, but the autocratic Panchayat regime suppressed their voice. But since the multi-party democracy was reinstated in 1990, Madhes-based politics flourished. The democratic polity allowed Madhesis to discuss openly about their position in Nepali society where they stood in the state structures. So, it is the people's own realisation of their rights and identity that materialised a decisive Madhesi movement after 2007. (Madhesi leader 2, Nepalgunj)

As Nepal embarked upon liberal politics in the 1990s, many Madhesi youth began to interact with state institutions to obtain their passports and other travel documents, which were needed for employment abroad. This increased level of interactions with Pahadi dominated bureaucracy exposed many of them to often unfair, derogatory and humiliating treatments. In parallel, the Maoist movement had also empowered them to resist the government. When Maoists killed security personnel and landlords in Madhes, ordinary Madhesis felt that their justice was also being served. As Madhesi youth were increasingly exposed to the changing social, political and economic environments of Nepal, they became more susceptive to discriminations.

Interestingly, we find that the experience of discrimination makes people inquisitive about the causes behind it. People also have different levels of experience of discrimination and their motivation for involvement in the struggle also differ based on their social, political and geographical locations.

The following diagram provides a synthesis of how the Madhes movement engages in learning:
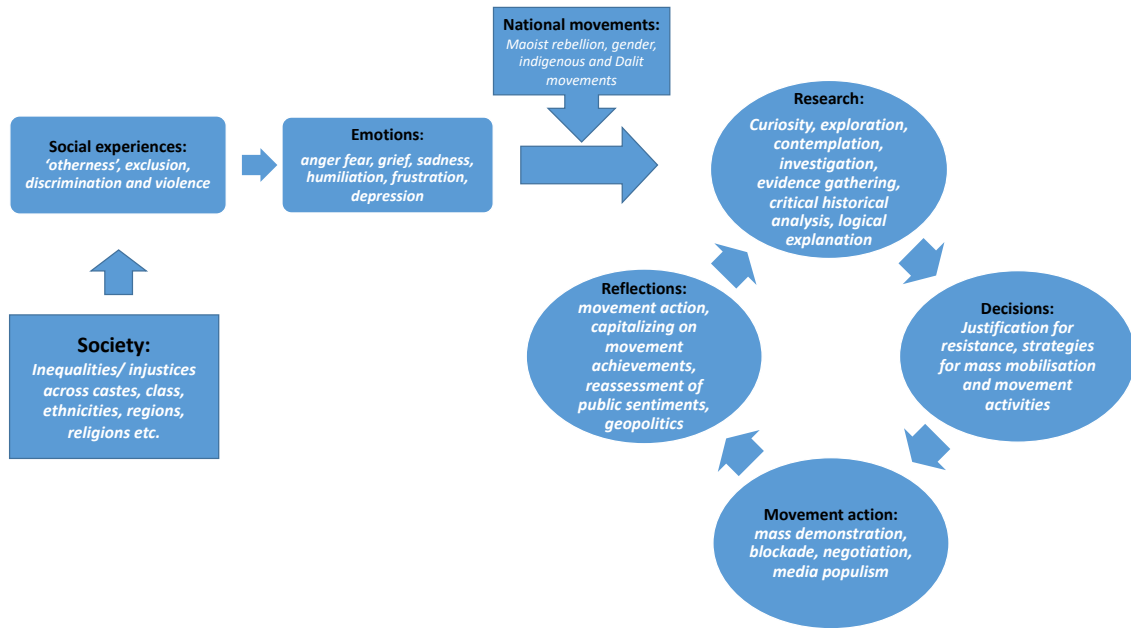
Figure 17: Conceptual model of Madhes movement learning

As depicted in the above diagram, ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged groups tend to be oppressed and treated as the 'other' in societies marred by inequalities and injustice. The experience of unjust treatment causes anger, humiliation and grief. When these communities are exposed to ideas and campaigns about justice and freedom, they begin to connect their lived experiences with the narratives of struggle. They unearth their own obscured history; research into the political and social systems that suppress them; and reconnect with their own culture, language and literature to appreciate how they got to the position of subjugation. With logical explanations to their social and political realities, they develop a rationale for resistance and engage in movement actions. They reflect on and learn from their movement actions, achievements and failures in order to strengthen their struggle for freedom and social transformation. This process of learning and reflection is supported by public education programmes through various means, such as radio programmes. A Madhesi radio journalist mentioned:

> The first Madhes movement was not much organised and systematic. But there were some people who were actively involved in institutionalising the awareness created by the movement. I also ran a radio programme called "Jagrit Madhes" through Nepal FM in 2008. I used to invite pro-Madhes public figures, such as Khagendra Sangraula, Harigovind Luitel and Bijaykant Karn as speakers who would debate the issues of Madhes. That was the first programme run from the central level focusing solely on Madhes. In another

programme called "Hello Mithila" by Kantipur FM, I used to update the weekly activities related to the Madhes movement. (Madhesi journalist 3, Kathmandu)

5.6 Post-2015 trajectories

The movement had demanded identity-based federalism and proportional representation in the state apparatus, but the Constitution of Nepal 2015 only granted federalism considering various economic, social and geographical dimensions. It included a provision of proportional inclusion rather than equitable representation, based on ethnicity, caste and gender. Madhesis believe that the provision of reservation for Khas-Arya, the politically privileged groups, in the constitution is against the norms of affirmative action; that the provincial boundaries have been gerrymandered to maintain domination of traditionally privileged groups; and that the criteria for citizenship is still unfair.

The geopolitical influence on the movement is significant, and it appears that the Madhes movement is trapped and confused about how to deal with global and regional interests of Nepal's powerful neighbours. Hence, an important question emerges as how to protect the movement from being manipulated by external players and overcome the co-opting behaviour of the state.

Another important dimension of Madhes movement is that it is silent about horizontal dynamics of Madhesi society involving tensions around caste, class, gender, religion, communal, ethic and regional dimensions as introduced in Figure 1 at the beginning of this report. These issues are rarely defined or spelt out in the movement agenda. Within the Madhesi community, there are exploitative relationships between the rich and poor, and intersectionality along the dimensions of oppression of castes and socioeconomic inequalities. For example, the upper caste Madhesis monopolise power, men are more dominant, and patriarchy is heavy. There is also Hindu domination in the leadership and Muslims are oppressed; villages in the border regions are more marginalised; there is a lack of clarity around the relationship between Pahadi (40 percent), Madhesis and the Tharu communities; and the Eastern Madhes is dominant in the movement leadership. There is no political vision for how to address inequalities around access to education, health services, land ownership and physical infrastructure. In the same way national politics is controlled by hill high caste males, the Madhes leadership also characterises the same nature of

domination. The failure to address and provide a clear roadmap on these horizontal dynamics is likely to make the Madhes movement weaker and unsustainable. For example, Dalits in Madhes were less excited about the latest Madhes uprising because there is a perception that political gains of the movement have been monopolised by social elites and high caste groups within Madhes. Dalits feel that the broad idea of Madhesi freedom does not necessarily fulfil their aspiration to overcome caste-based discrimination, and therefore feel that they need a renewed movement. Nonetheless, Madhesi leaders seem to be disinterested in empowering Dalit communities within the political stage that has been gained by the Madhes movement. Hence, the Madhes movement should deal with these complex issues in order to address the agenda of social transformation.

Unfortunately, the political parties born out of the Madhes movement seem to practise the same organisational behaviour as the large national parties - factionalism, corruption, and internal rifts between the leaders. As a result, their capacity to transform Madhesi society is limited in the absence of a progressive forward-thinking agenda. This puts the achievement of the Madhes movement at risk. As a social activist points out:

> If one is a political force born out of resistance, the grammar and lexicon of one's organisation needs to be different. Otherwise, it is difficult to implement the gains of the movement. The resistance ideology needs to be reflected in the organisational structure and discourse of the political organisation. Essentially, a more transformative ideology and new movement strategy is needed to build upon the success of the movement. (Social activist/ author 1)

6. Concluding remarks

 In this research, we have attempted to examine how the Madhes movement, located in Nepal's current social, political and economic structure, learns and produces knowledge, and how this process of learning and knowledge production assists in the development of strategy to achieve the demands of Madhesi communities. We also examined the types of knowledge it has developed around forms of oppressions, ethnic divisions, political and social systems and geopolitical tensions that undermine the Madhes movement. We then reflected upon the movement's achievements in terms of facilitating peace with social justice.

This research aimed to investigate four key questions. Firstly, the aim was to understand how the Madhes movement learns and produces knowledge, and how the process of learning and knowledge production is linked to the development of movement strategy to achieve the demands of Madhesi communities. Secondly, we aimed to investigate what knowledge the Madhes movement has developed, and what it has learned in relation to security, movement objectives, leverage for change, communication, internal cohesion, inter-movement alliances and international solidarity. Thirdly, another aim was to examine the effects of the Madhes movement on the promotion and realisation of peace with social justice in Nepal. Finally, the research aimed to theorise the process of learning and knowledge production to assess the possibilities for strengthening social movements' role in building peace with social justice in Nepal.

How does the Madhes movement learn?

Conventional social movement theories that overly emphasise socio-economic conditions with regards to movement organisation and resource mobilisation (Tilly, 1985; McAdam, 1982) cannot explain the central issues of identities in the geopolitical context of Nepal's Madhes movement. The Madhes movement is situated within the broader struggle for achieving 'positive peace', as Galtung (1976) puts it, as a social condition that is absent from structural violence. It is particularly relevant because of the Madhes movement's increased levels of mobilisation during the times of constitution-making in the aftermath of politically influential Maoist rebellion. The opportunity to promulgate a new constitution was viewed as an historic moment to redress structural inequalities that had been established and reproduced historically. The Madhes movement and its organisations represent the voice of the Madhesi people in Nepal's efforts for

peace, development and prosperity. The social movement dynamics in Nepal, therefore, rupture the dominant practices of international 'liberal peacebuilding models' that promote neoliberal policies, undermining the voices of the grassroots and civil societies (Pugh et al., 2011). Without redressing the problem of social injustices, the conditions of violent conflict could not be transformed by simply ending the war. In this sense, 'New Social Movement' theories provide a useful explanation (Buechler, 2013; Melucci, 1980) in relation to how the Madhes movement was able to raise concerns about social inequalities across the ethnic and regional levels; collectivise ethnic identity; and common lifestyle of Madhesis which had long been undermined in the process of nation building. Neoliberal economic programmes detached from the historically entrenched inequalities are likely to reproduce conditions of conflict (Pugh et al., 2011), hence affirmative actions were needed not just cursorily at programme levels but through a progressive constitution that could transform social and economic conditions through radical political actions. The Madhes movement was intensified by the quest for a dignified social life with respect for Madhesi languages, culture and heritage; the shared experience of discrimination; and a spontaneous process of building activists' networks for mass mobilisation, which formed the basis of social movement learning. Our focus in this research was to understand how Madhesi activists organised and learnt about movement approaches, and then built upon their everyday movement experience to enhance the impact of their struggle. In other words, we concentrated on the nature and process of the 'struggles of the day' (Cox and Nilsen, 2014: 17) and examined the ways people were engaged in the movement and how this knowledge could be utilised in support of the activists who are involved in the everyday movement activities (Choudry, 2015; Cox and Nilsen, 2014; Novelli, 2010). We were also interested in how the movement organisations that support the movement develop their strategies for organising and producing knowledge to support the movement's actions.

The Madhes struggle is primarily against the state structures that perpetuate exclusionary socio-political conditions that are characterised by different forms of discrimination and political exclusion of Madhesi people. These conditions provide reflective spaces for them to critically engage with the history, socio-political structures, geographical locations and ethnic construct of the state, which enable them to shape their activist identity. This was what Gramsci (1971: 5) would call a process of converting 'common sense,' under the tyranny of state hegemony into

'good sense' in which activists liberate themselves to exercise their agency informed by their own critical understanding of their everyday life experiences.

Unlike the conventional notion of formal learning in which the learner gains knowledge from their educator who provides an organised curriculum and pedagogy, social movements learn multidimensionally. Particularly, 'popular education' does not always occur in formal settings, instead people learn both informally (e.g. activists teaching each other while organising for mass demonstrations) and incidentally (e.g. while engaging in social actions) (Foley, 1999). Interactions among the activists, observations of incidents during protests and encounters with challenging situations enable invaluable learning experience to the activists. Hence, the movement itself becomes a school, and fellow activists learn from collective practical experience. There may be formal occasions such as workshops, seminars and meetings with movement leaders where more organised *formal learning* can occur but there are also other social settings (e.g. cultural organisations, party meetings and NGO programmes) where *non-formal learning* takes place.

Broadly speaking, we found that the learning within the Madhes movement takes place in three different intersecting domains: *grassroots organising, academic spaces and organisational learning*. At the grassroots, activists were learning dialectically as they organised themselves to develop their own movement strategies, public education initiatives and learning to articulate their agendas. In this sense, their actions were not always directed by their leaders but were emerged organically within the circumstances of the struggle. As a consequence, the Madhes movement has produced 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971) who contribute to the movement through their political and civil society activism. In academic spaces, Madhes movement organisations such as NEMAF carried out empirical research; encouraging academics and public intellectuals to publish peer-reviewed articles; and organised public events where the agenda of Madhes struggle were discussed. Finally, activists and movement leaders were developing their knowledge about political complexities, movement strategies and leadership skills alongside organisational and negotiation skills while working in party ranks or civil society positions. Many of them were involved in establishing movement organisations and leading public campaigns in support of the movement. There were intimate interactions between all three domains through which activists were adapting their movement strategies and protest actions.

What has the Madhes movement learnt?

The Madhes movement has mainly learnt that organising marginalised people under their common ethnic identity cannot only create political pressures on the state and its political leadership, but also lead to social polarisation and ethnic antagonism despite shared conditions of marginality with other communal groups. In this sense, multi-ethnic societies cannot cope with social movements that are fragmented along different ethnic lines because the hegemonic state frequently manipulates public sentiments by portraying ethnic movements as self-indulged, divisive struggles that are apathetic towards the grievances of other marginalised communities. Even though a movement of this nature might be aimed at achieving broader goals of social justice that would ultimately benefit other marginalised communities, the hegemonic forces often undermine and discredit the struggle citing its communal and exclusionary aims. This shows that ethnic movements that fail to collaborate and build solidarity with other ethnic, racial and caste-based struggles are unlikely to succeed in defeating reactionary political narratives.

Nevertheless, the Madhes movement has advanced counter-hegemonic knowledge in a remarkable way, and through its movement actions which combined the agenda of rights, freedom and political representation. Madhesis engaged in a 'pedagogy of praxis' (Pizzolato and Holst, 2017), enabling them to articulate '*forms of oppression and injustice, expressing political claims, identifying social and economic grievances and bringing new or neglected issues to public prominence*' (Chesters, 2012: 153). Over the last decade, Madhesis' political consciousness has intensified, equipping them with a critical understanding of power relationships with the state; historically entrenched political structures that produce Khas-Arya ethnic monopoly; and internal social inequalities that obstruct transformative change within Madhes.

This analysis also reveals that a social movement must be clear about its position on social, political, economic agendas at the national level and most importantly, on the movement's political positioning on national sovereignty. The opacity and opportunistic position of the movement on national integrity fuels the state's reactionary agenda and concerns about national security. There are other similar examples in the region such as the Gurkhaland movement in Darjeeling, the struggle of Kashmiris, Tamils in Sri Lanka and displacement of Bhutanese refugees, all of which have faced state repressions that are often justified on the ground of their supposed threat to national integrity. Hence, we conclude that when social struggles resort to political

support from their ethnically close neighbours, it fuels ultra-nationalism resulting in increased repression of the movement and jeopardising the social justice agenda.

We also find that the movement is likely to lose its wider support when it undermines people's needs of basic livelihood and survival. When the Madhes movement resorted to the blockade of the border between India and Nepal, obstructing the movement of goods in the country, it created a crisis of basic supplies in the country and those who were sympathetic to the Madhesi cause began to be suspicious about the genuine motive of the movement. Towards the end of 2015, the Madhes movement had gained some sympathy and legitimacy among the Pahadi populations but the movement's support from the Indian establishment and the blockade fuelled nationalist discourse, gradually eroding the legitimacy of the movement at national level. The movement's collaboration with Indian interests generated deep mistrust among Pahadi communities, as well as businesses and industries. The movement leaders' indulgence in political positions at the cost of people's basic livelihood also fuelled frustration among some Madhesi people. As a consequence, the movement's strategy to pressurise the political leadership in Kathmandu by crippling the daily life of working-class people turned out to be counter-productive by producing anti-movement sentiments. This method of resistance only benefitted the regime, justifying repressive measures against activists and more broadly delegitimising the struggle.

Social movement organising is a prolonged, adaptive process and when it adopts a decisive path of loss or victory, it is likely that the hitherto gains are also at stake. The lack of appreciation of likely adverse impacts caused by resistance activities is counterproductive for the movement. Unlike in armed rebellion, which may have its own risks of complete demolition of the struggle, social movements are likely to achieve sustainable gains only through a long-term struggle garnering public awareness, support and mobilisation of multidimensional forces around the movement. In other words, social movements are unlikely to persuade the state by taking direct actions, particularly with the support from external actors, i.e. economic blockade may backfire and harm the gains of the movement.

The Madhes movement's creative and symbolic actions during protests provided an aesthetic flavour to the struggle, preserving enthusiasm among protesters as well as maintaining media interest in the movement. The use of social media and local radio stations played an important role in the communication of movement messages; coordination of protest activities and increasing public awareness about the movement agenda. Similarly, the role of women was both

tactically and socially significant to the movement, not only in reducing the level of state repression during protests, but also empowering women to participate in the struggle as equals. These are significant dimensions of learning in the Madhes movement.

Our research also revealed that the lack of security sensitive strategies and inability to adapt movement tactics based on contemporary political events often leads to human loss in social movements in situations of repression. For example, the Madhes movement did not criticise killings of security personnel in Tikapur, nor was it able to sense the potential risks of state repression afterwards. Instead of halting mass demonstrations as a temporary response to tragic events in Tikapur, the activists went on with their usual resistance in Bethari, Rupandehi which led to the death of six people.

To sum up, the Madhes movement produced learning processes around various dimensions of structural violence that Madhesis had experienced for centuries. This included learning around – why were Madhesis being marginalised? Why were they excluded from rights to citizenship? Why were they discriminated against by state institutions? Why were they treated as 'second-class' citizens? Why were their language and cultures suppressed in the process of nation building? In what ways the democratic system, capitalism and neoliberal policies were undermining Madhesi grievances? Secondly, they developed knowledge about how to deal with these structural forms of oppressions. Strategically, the movement utilised the historical moment of the post-conflict constitution-making to intensify the struggle through mass mobilisation and disruption of public order. In this process, the movement engaged multidimensionally: at the grassroots through mass resistance; taking part in the elections as political parties and exerting pressures on the national leadership through their elected members; and engaging at academic and civil society levels to document knowledge, promote civic engagement and disseminate knowledge through public events. Finally, the Madhes movement promoted an alternative vision of political order through a progressive constitution. Such a constitution could be utilised to defend the movement gains, such as federalism and proportional representation of diverse ethnicities, castes and gender in politics and state institutions. Hence, the Madhes movement can be understood as a school of learning and knowledge production about the techniques of structural critique, methods of resistance and political alternatives to redress the forms of oppressions.

What are the effects of the Madhes movement on social justice?

The Madhes movement has played an instrumental role in challenging the social and political exclusion of ethnic Madhesis. As the Madhes uprisings erupted in the aftermath of the Maoist rebellion and during the period when Nepal's major political forces were involved in the process of constitution-making, the movement had a significant impact on shaping the constitutional framework. Nepal's social struggles stem from the problem of a centralised political structure that has promoted a monolithic version of national identity and obscured cultural and ethnic diversity in the Nepali society (Pherali, 2011). Hence, the federal political structure was imagined with a view to providing powers to the culturally diverse local communities so that they are able to determine their own development agenda. It can be argued that federalism, the main agenda of the Madhes movement, is a political response to the grievances of the marginalised populations who have been underrepresented in decision-making bodies. It is also a peacebuilding mechanism that is designed to decrease the monopoly of Khas-Arya community in state power and improve representation of historically marginalised communities in positions of decision-making.

The Madhes movement has occupied a central position in political debates in Nepal over the last decade. It has secured legitimacy for ethnic identities under the current constitution and set out mechanisms that can potentially reshape the nature of Nepali state. Social hierarchies along the ethnic, caste and gender lines have been ruptured, creating new spaces of contestations and convergences. In this process, Nepal has also seen a level of ethnic polarisation, yet there are also convergences through the merger of political forces that claim to represent the most marginalised populations in the country. The struggle for social transformation continues but Nepal has entered a new era of politics of social justice and equitable development, which has been enormously influenced by the Madhes movement.

These political shifts have significant implications for peace and social transformation. Nepal's Madhes movement provides new avenues for analysis of peacebuilding in the sense that peace is not merely cessation of violence but also a strategic goal that addresses various forms of structural inequalities (Galtung, 1976). The notion of 'peace with justice' cannot be achieved through the model of liberal peacebuilding which relies on liberal democracy and economic development under the free market principles, thereby undermining deeply rooted social and cultural conditions of inequalities. Without the Madhes movement, the hegemonic state's non-

recognition of cultural and ethnic identities, regional inequalities and oppressive ethnic hegemonies could not have been ruptured. What remains to be seen is how new political forces capitalise on the political capital gained by the Madhes movement to deliver tangible change in the Madhesi people's living conditions.

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Appendix I

Agreement between the GoN and Madheshi Janadhikar Forum, Nepal

Realising the sentiments of the movement of the Madheshi people as a continuity of the historic People's Movement of 2006/07, and in order to end all forms of discrimination against Madheshis, Adivasi/Janajatis, Dalits, women, backward classes and minorities, including the Muslim community, practised by the centralised and unitary state for a long time and to create an environment enabling all Nepalese people, inclusive of Madheshis, to join the single national mainstream and move forward by restructuring the state as an inclusive democracy and federal structure, the Government of Nepal and the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum [Madheshi Peoples' Rights Forum], Nepal, today, conclude the following agreement:

1. To immediately implement the government's decision to honour all Madheshi activists killed during the Madhesh movement and to provide compensation to their families.
2. To provide relief to those injured, rendered blind and disabled during the Madhesh movement and to provide immediate medical treatment for all injured people who are yet to receive treatment.
3. To withdraw all cases filed against the leaders and activists of the Forum during the Madhesh movement.
4. To ensure proportional representation and partnership of Madheshis, Adivasi/Janajatis, Dalits, women, backward classes, disabled people and minority communities, including Muslims, who have been excluded for generations in all organs and levels of government and in power structures, mechanisms and resources.
5. To immediately establish a commission of experts for state restructuring and ensure that its constitution is inclusive.
6. While restructuring the state, provision shall be made for a federal governance system with autonomous provinces/states, while keeping the sovereignty, national unity and integrity of Nepal intact. The rights, nature and limits of the said autonomy will be as determined by the Constituent Assembly.
7. To accord national recognition to the dresses, languages and cultures of the Madheshis.
8. To ensure appropriate proportional representation in all political appointments made by the government and all services, including in Foreign Service and the education sector, as well as in commissions.
9. To give public holidays on major festivals of the Muslims. To enact laws to protect Madrassa Board as well as the community, language, sexes, religion, culture, and customs and traditions of the Muslims.
10. To fully guarantee human rights by ending all discriminations based on ethnicity, language, sex, religion, culture, national and social origin, political and other ideologies.
11. To establish a trilingual language policy consisting of (a) mother tongue, (b) the Nepali language and (c) English for official transactions, education and international communication.
12. To solve the following Dalit-related problems:
    a. Make provision for severe legal punishment for practising caste discrimination and untouchability.
    b. Effectively implement the policy of free and compulsory education, at least up to primary level, for Dalits.
    c. Make provision for special opportunities and reservations in education and employment.

    d.   Make provision for alternative means of livelihood for landless Dalits by providing them with land for building houses.
13. To solve problems related to citizenship by redeploying the Citizenship Distribution Teams to villages for easy and accessible distribution of citizenship certificates.
14. To adopt a balanced and just policy for the distribution of revenue and income from the State to the Madhesh and remote regions.
15. The process of returning houses, land and other property seized by the CPN (Maoist) is continuing and will be continued with urgency along with the return of weapons seized by them [CPN (M)] to their rightful owners.
16. To establish an Industrial Security Force to industrialise the country and to guarantee industrial security, as well as increasing production.
17. Both parties to stay committed to conducting the Constituent Assembly election in an impartial, peaceful and fear-free environment. In order to ensure the impartiality of the Constituent Assembly, make necessary arrangements to prevent the misuse of the State's mechanisms, resources and power, including by the current Legislature-Parliament.
18. The Ministry of Information and Communications to appoint Madheshi media experts and journalists in all organs and levels of government-owned media, including electronic and print media, and to ensure inclusive proportional representation of Madheshis in the government communication commission, agencies and delegations.
19. To create a search team to conduct a special investigation into the abduction and disappearance of Jitendra Sah, chairperson of the Madheshi Youth Forum and to immediately make his status public.
20. To immediately establish a High-level Task Force for Inclusion to formulate policies and laws necessary for the inclusion of Madheshis, Adivasi/janajatis, Dalits, women, etc. in all organs and levels of the State.
21. To accord constitutional guarantee for the rights of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities based on the principles upheld by the United Nations and international human rights organisations on the rights of minorities.
22. To withdraw the various movements being carried out by the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum.

The GoN shall immediately fulfill those agreements that can be implemented promptly and shall fulfill other provisions in course of time. A joint Monitoring Mechanism shall be established to carry out and oversee the implementation process and to periodically review the implementation.

Sd. Upendra Yadav
Coordinator
Madheshi Janadhikar Forum,

Sd. Ram Chandra Poudel
Coordinator
GoN Talks Team
Date: August 30, 2007

NOTE: While still demanding the establishment of a republic and a proportional electoral system, the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum, Nepal shall give top priority to the Constituent Assembly election and shall participate in it while continuing its efforts to make it a success.

Sd. Upendra Yadav
Coordinator
Madheshi Janadhikar Forum, Nepal
Date: August 30, 2007

Appendix II
Agreement between the Nepal Government and United Democratic Madhesi Front, 28 February 2008 (unofficial full-text translation)

Respecting the sentiments and aspirations of the Madhesi people of Nepal, expressed during the protests and movements that they have organised time and again for equal rights, this agreement was signed between the Government of Nepal and the United Democratic Madhesi Front, to ensure (the establishment of) a federal democratic republic in Nepal (with a) multiparty democratic system of governance, by guaranteeing equality, freedom and justice for all the nation's people, as well as by putting an end to all types of discrimination.

This agreement will be immediately implemented. The points of the agreement are as follows.

1. The state shall declare as martyrs those who were killed during the Madhes movement and shall provide adequate compensation to those maimed and those who are yet to receive compensation. Similarly, arrangements shall be made for those injured during the movement to receive medical expenses and those martyred shall be given due recognition and their families shall be provided rupees 1 million as relief, and those arrested shall be immediately released.

2. By accepting the Madhesi people's call for an autonomous Madhes and other people's desire for a federal structure with autonomous regions, Nepal shall become a federal democratic republic. In the federal structure, power shall be divided between the centre and states in a clear manner according to the(constitutional) list. The states shall be fully autonomous and shall enjoy full rights. By keeping Nepal's sovereignty and integrity intact, the decision regarding details of the (constitutional) list and the division of power between the centre and the states shall be made by the Constituent Assembly.

3. The existing legal provision for 20 percent, in Sub-section 14 of Section 7 of the Election of Members to the Constituent Assembly Act 2064, shall be changed to 30 percent.

4. It shall be mandatory for the state to carry out appointments, promotions and nominations in a manner such that there is inclusive proportional representation of Madhesis, indigenous nationalities, women,

Dalits, (people from) backward regions and minority communities in all state bodies, including the security sector.

5. Proportional, inclusive and group entry [tr. entry in the army as a group] of Madhesis and other communities shall be ensured in order to give the Nepal Army a national and inclusive character.

6. The Government of Nepal and the United Democratic Madhesi Front request all armed groups agitating in the Tarai to come to talks for a peaceful political process and to find a solution through dialogue. The Government of Nepal will take immediate steps to create a conducive environment for this purpose. We appeal to everyone to help conduct the Constituent Assembly election on 10 April in a peaceful, violence-free, impartial, fair and fear-free environment.

7. The Government of Nepal will immediately release all those who have been detained, withdraw cases filed against Madhesi leaders and party cadres of the Forum as well as of other parties, and immediately implement all other points of the 22-point Agreement signed between the Government of Nepal and the Madhesi People's Rights Forum on 30 August 2007 (2064 Bhadau 13).

8. All protest programs called by United Democratic Madhesi Forum shall be immediately withdrawn. The Government of Nepal will be responsible for the constitutional, legal, political and administrative aspects of the points of this agreement. The government shall form a high-level monitoring committee including members of the Front to monitor the implementation of this agreement.

Signed,
Rajendra Mahato, National Chairman Sadbhavana Party
Upendra Yadav, Madhesi Janadhikar Forum
Mahantha Thakur, Chairman, Tarai Madhes Democratic Party
Girija Prasad Koirala, Prime Minister, Government of Nepal