



# PUT AN END TO THIS CRUELTY AGAINST ME

Lessons learned from the High Commissioner's Special  
Project on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Nepal



1990s



Refugees from Bhutan arrive in Nepal.

1991-3



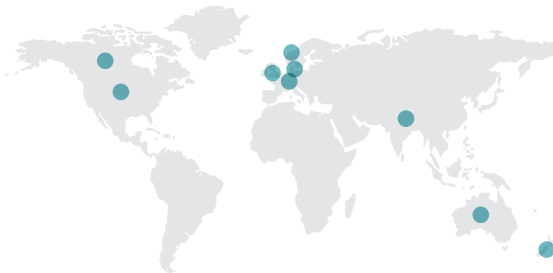
Seven refugee camps are established in eastern Nepal with the support of UNHCR and its partners.

2006



The Government of Nepal, with the support of UNHCR, conducts a census of all refugees from Bhutan in the seven camps, which determines that some 108,000 refugees reside in the camps.

2007



A large-scale third country resettlement programme for the refugees from Bhutan begins.

2008

Refugees from Bhutan start building new lives in the United States, Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Norway.

2010



The three Beldangi camps are administratively merged.

The United Kingdom joins as the eighth resettlement country for the refugees from Bhutan.

2011



Goldhap and Timai camps are closed.

2012



Khudunabari camp is closed. Only two camps, Beldangi and Sanischare, remain.

2012

75,000

The number of refugees from Bhutan resettled from Nepal to third countries reaches 75,000. Resettlement continues.

# Introduction

For many years, prevention of and response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) has been an integral component of the overall humanitarian programme for refugees from Bhutan, who have been living in Nepal since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, SGBV remains a protection concern, especially domestic violence, which accounts for almost one-quarter of the reported cases.

Lalita\* is one of the survivors of such violence. "One day, I was severely beaten by my husband and had to be hospitalised," she said. "The day I was released from the hospital, I decided to put an end to this cruelty against me."

Lalita decided to pursue legal action against her husband, applied for divorce on grounds of physical abuse and enrolled in skills training courses in the camp. The support and services available in the camps have helped Lalita and many more like her.

In 2012, the High Commissioner's Special Project on SGBV in Nepal offered a unique opportunity to more comprehensively address the issue of SGBV in the refugee camps.

The interventions under the Project made use of innovative approaches and were conceived on the basis of lessons learned over the course of the last 20 years, as well as on focus group discussions with the refugee community, and by drawing upon recommendations from external partners, such as the Women's Refugee Commission and Handicap International.

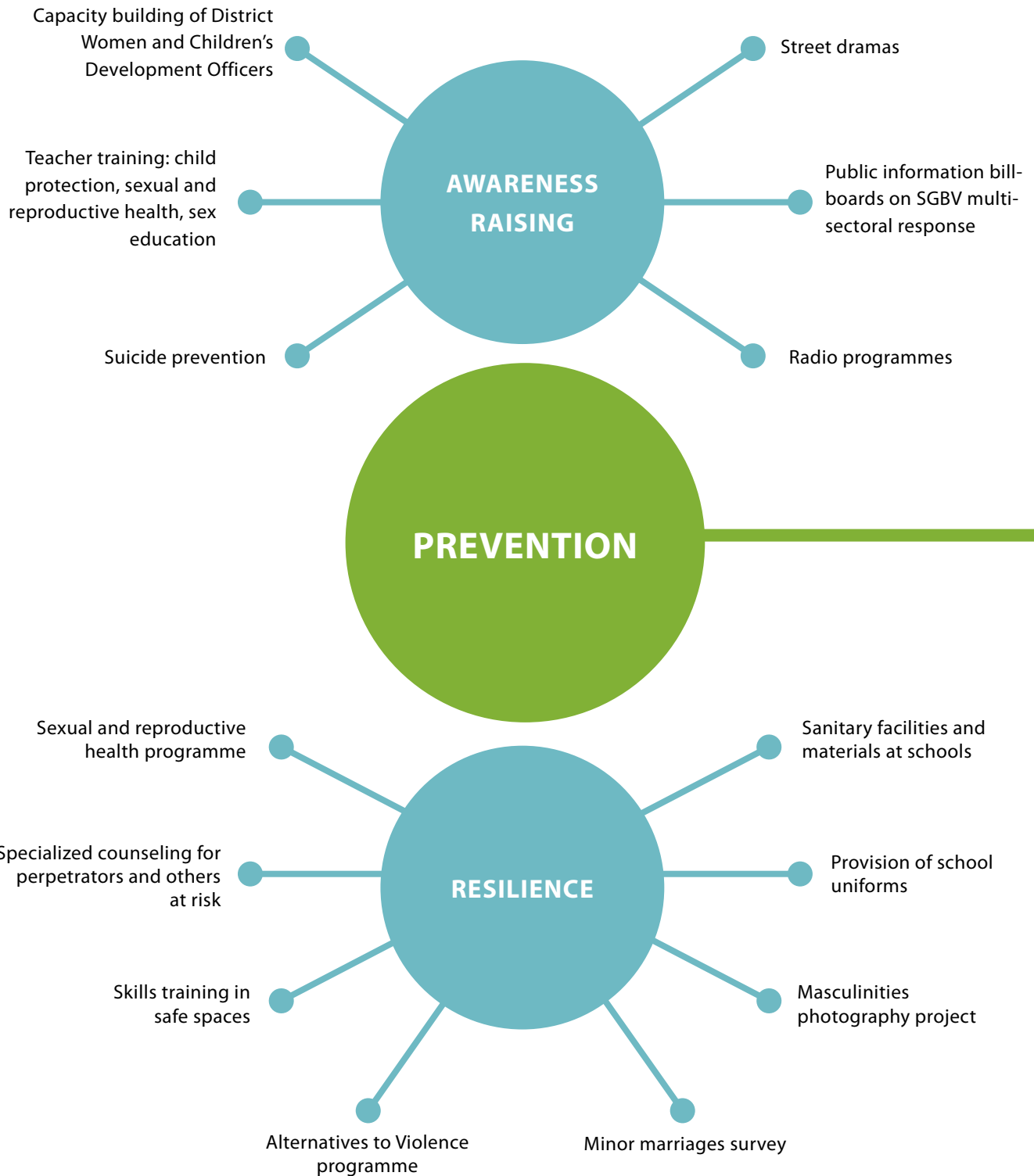
In designing the Project activities, efforts were made to involve the Government, other United Nations agencies, NGO partners and local associations in order to link up to country-wide approaches and to ensure sustainability.

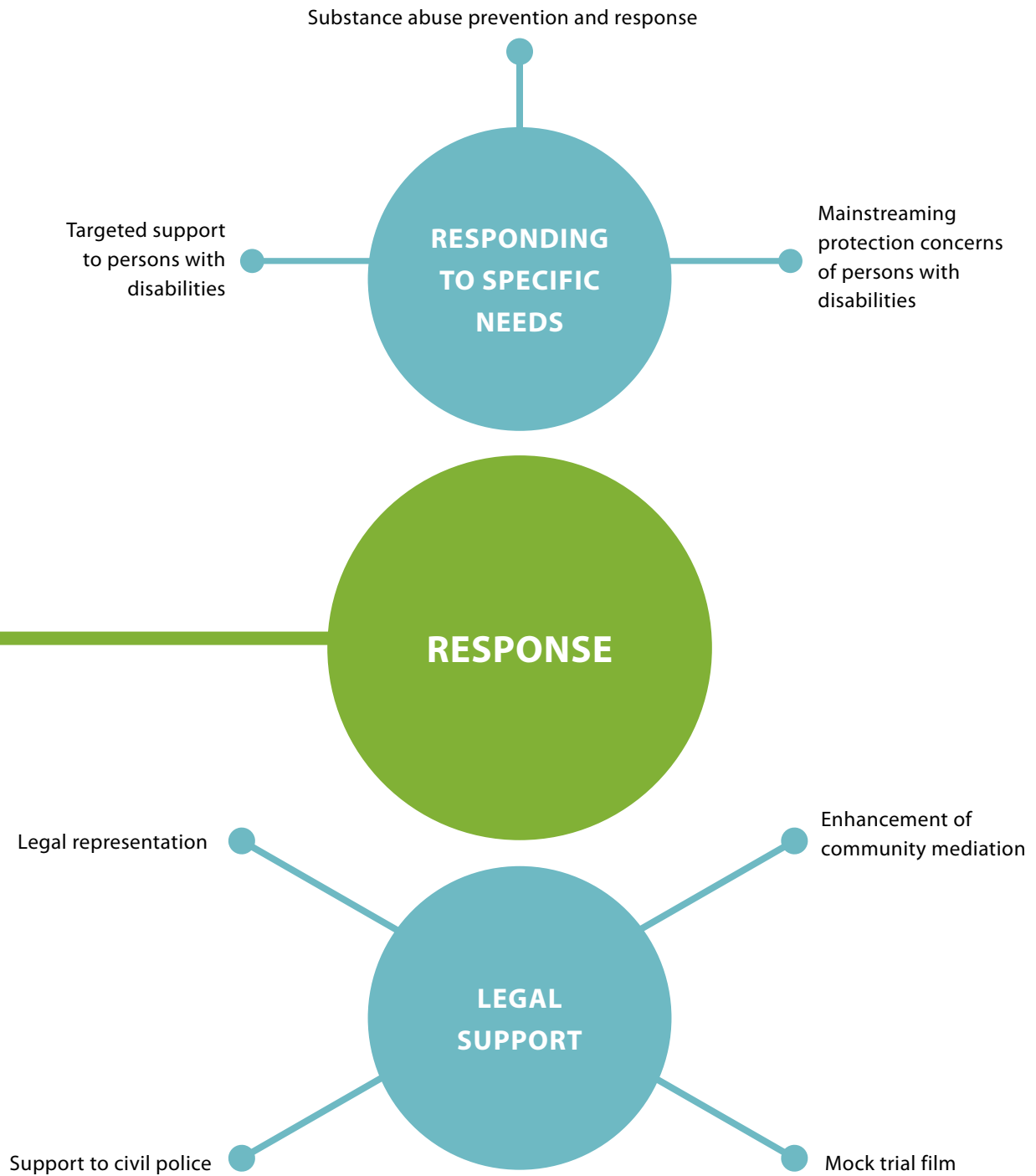
To make lasting changes on the issue of SGBV, action on multiple fronts involving multiple partners is required. In order to ensure this, the Project encompassed the following four major thematic areas:

- Awareness Raising
- Resilience of Persons of Concern
- Responding to Specific Needs
- Legal Support

This booklet provides an overview of some of the major activities implemented under the Project. An accompanying video highlights the innovative approaches used under the Project.

\* Name changed





# Awareness Raising

## Spread the word – create understanding

Survivors and their families need to know what support is available for them and how they can access it. To ensure that survivors and their families get the information they need, it is important that messages are presented at venues and in a way that is meaningful to them. Under the Project, refugee actors created radio and street dramas which were aired and performed in the camps. Information on where to go for support was posted on billboards around the camps in places where women and girls are most likely to see them.



*Awareness is about understanding that violence should not be accepted and knowing about available support and services.*



*Experiencing Violence? Find out where to get help!*



UNHCR / Shikhar Bhattarai



**Our main goal is to influence the people of our generation to seriously think about SGBV and its consequences, as the issue is relevant in our society but seldom discussed.**

**- Refugee actor**



UNHCR / Shikhar Bhattarai

## Support personal health and well-being

Increased risk of suicide is one of the effects of violence. The Project focused both on prevention and response to this risk. On the occasion of World Suicide Prevention Day, events were organized in the camps to provide information about available support and on ways and means to take action when encountering individuals at risk. In order to provide sustainable support, the Project provided training to professional and peer counselors, which enables them to identify signs of possible suicide and to provide support and intervene as appropriate.



*I had come to a point where I thought I cannot live...  
At that point I came for counseling and understood  
that life is very precious.*

*- Refugee, Sanischara Camp*



## Build the next generation

Children are especially vulnerable when it comes to SGBV. Offenders are often themselves victims of abuse, frequently from an early age. Engaging children and those in a position to protect them is central to preventing SGBV. Schools play a pivotal role in the lives of children in the camps, and thus are key to preventing violence and to empowering the next generation. Under the Project, teacher training on subjects such as child-friendly education, learning without fear, and sex education, including issues relating to SGBV, were used to engage and enable some of the most important actors in preventing SGBV.



*SGBV has devastating effects on the development, physical and mental health of children.*



*Participatory needs assessment is the basis for effective decision making on SGBV.*

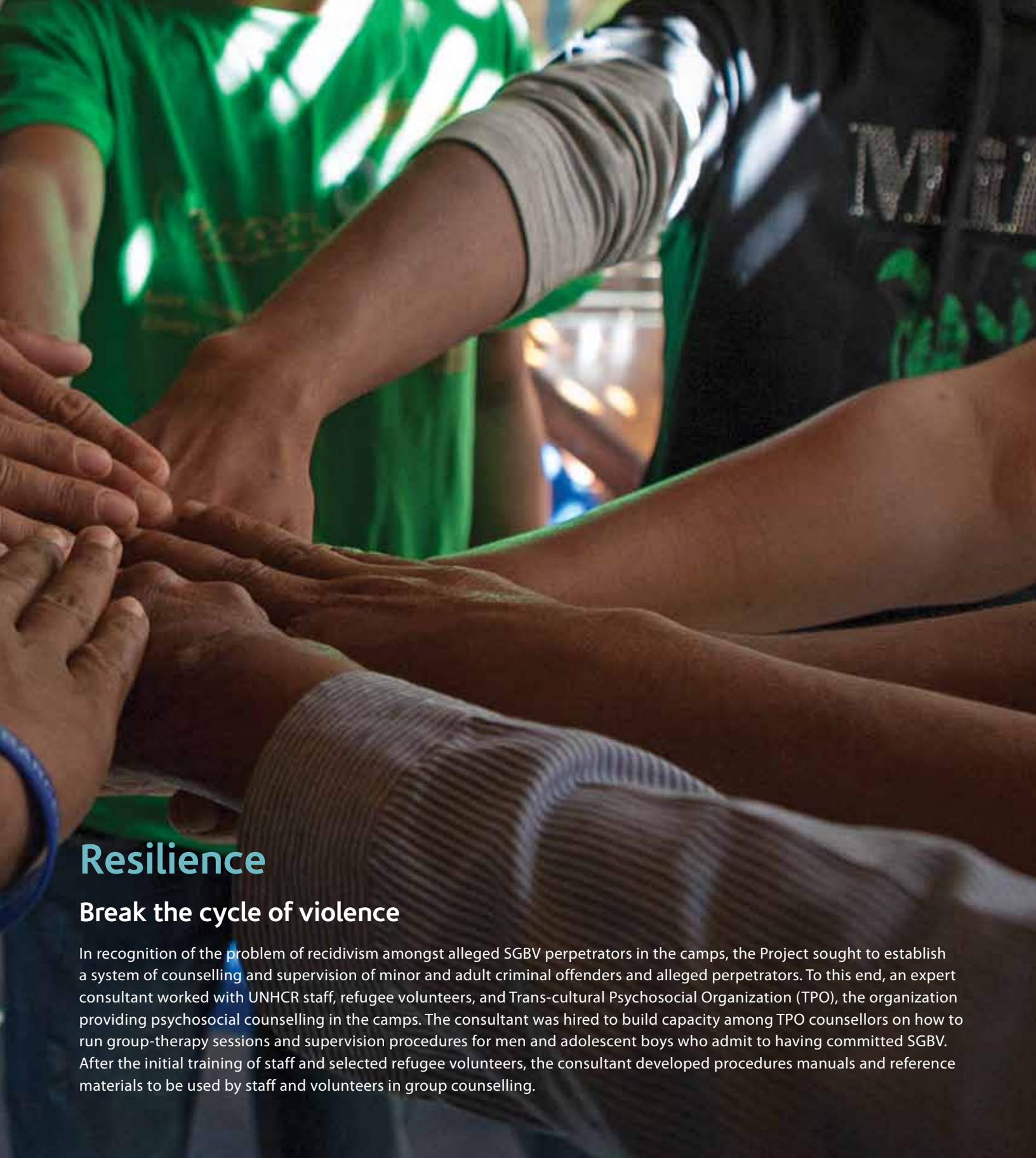
## Engage authorities in planning

In the context of Nepal, the District Women and Children's Development Officers within the Government have the main responsibility for SGBV prevention and response, pertaining both to host communities and the refugee camps. The Project conducted a series of participatory needs assessment sessions with the local authorities in refugee and host communities, resulting in enhanced decision making tools for district planning and in enhanced capacities of relevant development staff in the two districts.



You can't necessarily tell who will become a perpetrator, but if a person has been violent once it is likely that he will be violent again.

- Mohamad Mehdi, Therapist,  
Consultant for the Project



## Resilience

### Break the cycle of violence

In recognition of the problem of recidivism amongst alleged SGBV perpetrators in the camps, the Project sought to establish a system of counselling and supervision of minor and adult criminal offenders and alleged perpetrators. To this end, an expert consultant worked with UNHCR staff, refugee volunteers, and Trans-cultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), the organization providing psychosocial counselling in the camps. The consultant was hired to build capacity among TPO counsellors on how to run group-therapy sessions and supervision procedures for men and adolescent boys who admit to having committed SGBV. After the initial training of staff and selected refugee volunteers, the consultant developed procedures manuals and reference materials to be used by staff and volunteers in group counselling.



UNHCR / Shikhar Bhattarai



**We discussed what peer education is, focusing on issues and components related to reproductive health. The training was designed to be participatory so that the youth can then implement what they learned, giving back to the community.**

**Anjana Luitel, Workshop Facilitator, AMDA Nepal**



## Enhance resilience to reduce risks

Recognizing that an effective response to SGBV is closely linked with knowledge of safe sexual and reproductive health practices and behavior, the Project enhanced the skills of relevant communicators and professionals in this field. The Association of Medical Doctors in Asia (AMDA), the main healthcare provider in the refugee camps in Nepal, is an important actor when it comes to ensuring Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) among refugee populations. Under the Project, training of counselors and other relevant medical staff included not only SRH issues, but also youth-friendly counseling as well as life-skills. The training aimed at enabling medical staff to reach youth, a group previously under-served regarding SRH in the camps.

Addressing this issue from another angle, training on SRH was also offered to youth peer educators from the Youth Friendly Centres (YFC) in the camps. These are well-established fora for refugee youth, places where youth feel at ease and are generally receptive to information.



*Knowledge of healthy reproductive behavior can be helpful especially for young parents.*



*Peer counselling and gender awareness are important tools in addressing SGBV.*



The notion that men have to be strong, angry and violent to prove their masculinity contributes to SGBV. We are trying to break this traditional notion of masculinity.

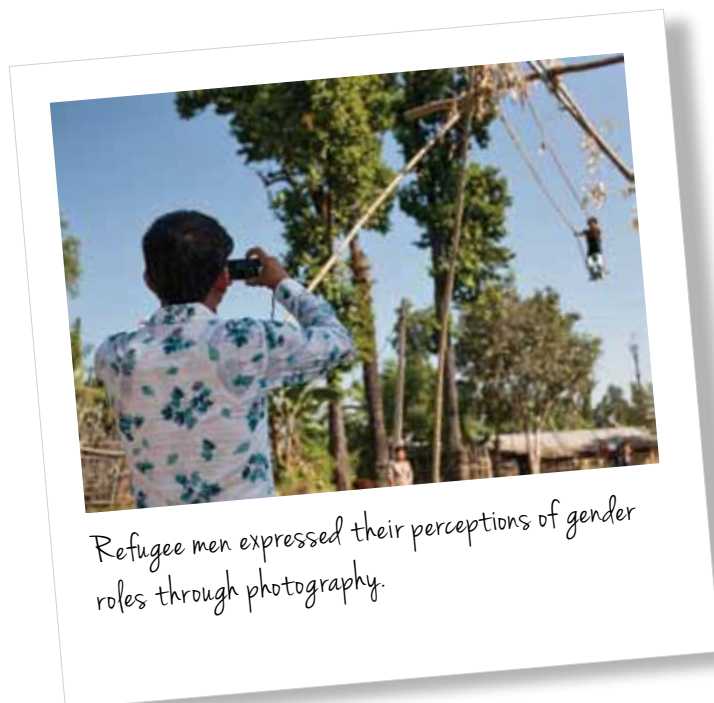
- Rajendra Mulmi, Workshop Facilitator

UNHCR / Kishor K Sharma

## Change the lens on gender

With the goal of engaging male refugees in SGBV prevention and response, the Project brought together men of different ages to explore and challenge their gender perceptions and to increase their understanding of the dynamics underlying SGBV.

After participating in a workshop on gender roles, masculinities, and family dynamics, men were encouraged to visualize their thoughts on these subjects through photographic narratives. The results of their explorations were exhibited in the refugee camps during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, in an exhibition entitled 'The Changing Lens on Gender'.



Refugee men expressed their perceptions of gender roles through photography.



*Before girls used to go out of school to use the toilet. Separate toilets help to keep them in school.*

## Remove obstacles to girls' school attendance

Education is a vital component of reducing the risk of SGBV. In order to ensure that girls attend school without interruption and under safe and sanitary conditions, separate safe toilet facilities with a readily available supply of sanitary napkins were constructed with funds from the Project. Girls were also provided with one of the preconditions for school attendance – school uniforms.

“ We rarely managed to come to school with proper uniform. Now we can come to school clean and tidy.

-Refugee girl, 8th grade

## Seek alternatives to violence

The Project trained a sizable number of volunteers who will act as peer educators in their communities to help individuals and communities seek positive outlets to help them deal with their frustrations. These peer educators will be available to advocate for peaceful and respectful behavior, for interventions and for peer counseling.



*Kaari!: Though they may have left Bhutan, these refugees have kept their culture alive. Here, a group of men in Beldangi camp play a game of Khuru.*

# Legal Support



*Illustration from the poster on support and services for SGBV survivors.*

## Understand legal procedures

Receiving accessible and realistic information about what it would entail to bring an SGBV case to court can be transforming for survivors and their families. A film on a mock trial and accompanying manual, produced under the Project, clearly explains the steps needed to bring forward an SGBV case. The educational elements of visually showing the process are invaluable for both survivors and service providers. The mock trial film is aimed for survivors and their families, law enforcement personnel and service providers, including paralegal staff.



*For many survivors the prospect of seeking legal redress is daunting. Those that do so, however, have found it very empowering.*





*Scene from the mock trial film showing a female police officer taking First Information Report (FIR).*

## Enable law enforcement

Effective SGBV response requires the availability of female police officers and other staff to guarantee the safety and well-being of female survivors. In order to ensure that female police staff are on hand in the vicinity, the Project supported the construction of a barrack for female police officers as well as provided vehicles for use in SGBV response. In addition, the Project supported the training of local police officers in the national standard operating procedures regarding SGBV response.

**“ Police are often the first people SGBV survivors turn to for assistance. Strengthening the capacity of the police and ensuring the presence of female police officers is crucial.**

**- Diane Goodman,  
UNHCR Deputy Representative in Nepal**



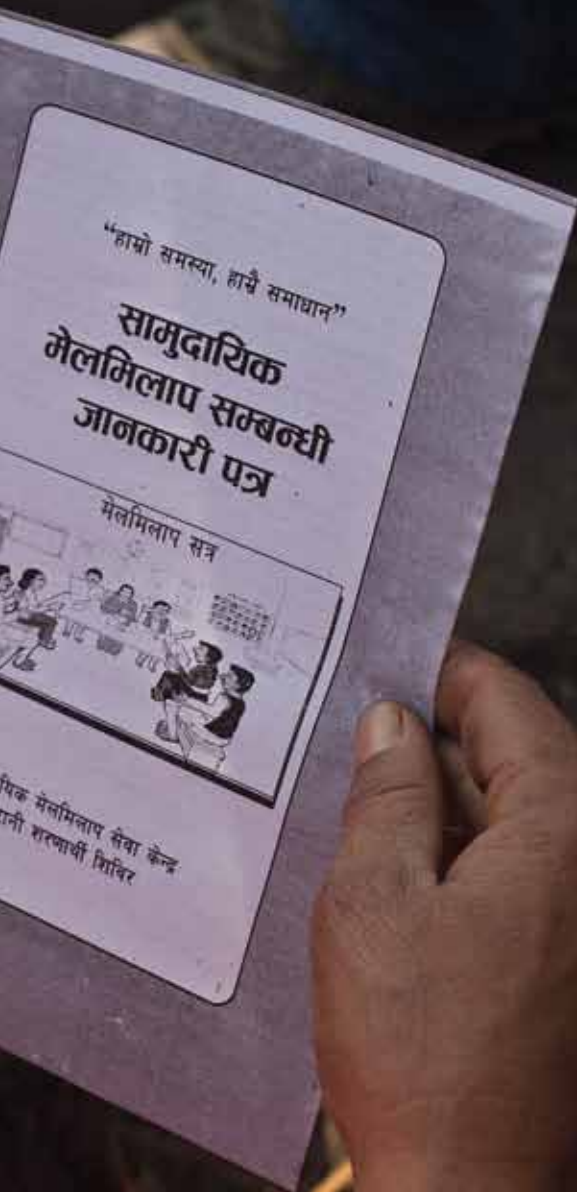
*Separate barracks are essential to ensure the presence and safety of female police officers.*





When a woman sees a woman mediator in the room she immediately feels at ease.

- Yasoda Pokharel, Refugee mediator



## Work with mediation – but do it right

Refugees in the camps often choose to resolve disputes through mediation, a legally recognized form of dispute resolution in Nepal, rather than resort to the legal system. However the traditional justice dispute resolution system which was operating in the camps often discriminated against women and raised additional protection concerns for them. The Project provided an opportunity to expand on earlier work carried out by UNHCR and its partner, the Nepal Bar Association, to professionalize mediation in the camps. Support was provided to community mediation service centres, which worked to settle disputes in a fair, equitable and confidential manner, in line with Nepalese law and international human rights standards. The Project supported a variety of awareness raising activities, specialized training for mediators and community leaders and the development of information material on appropriate mediation practices.





After 95 days of rehabilitation  
I haven't touched a drop of  
alcohol. That was 10 months ago.

- Refugee, Sanischare Camp

## Responding to Specific Needs

### Stop and prevent substance abuse

Substance abuse is often a contributing or aggravating factor in the occurrence of SGBV. Making sure that there are appropriate rehabilitation opportunities is key to breaking a cycle of abuse and violence. The Project covers both rehabilitation and awareness raising campaigns with youth and persons at risk.



UNHCR / Kishor K Sharma

## Respect all needs

Some refugees are more at risk because of their specific circumstances and needs. In the setting of the refugee camps in Nepal, women and girls with hearing and speech impairments are seen to be especially vulnerable and many service providers do not have sign language capabilities. Even amongst the hearing impaired and their families, there is a lack of sign language skills. To address this, sign language training for the hearing impaired, their families, as well as for select service providers was conducted under the Project.

As a prevention measure, aside from activities targeting specific needs, initiatives to mainstream representation of persons with disabilities in camp management and other decision making bodies have been undertaken. This includes sensitizing existing management groups, engaging disability organizations in the camps, electing disability focal points and ensuring that general awareness raising campaigns are accessible to persons with disabilities.

“ **To outsiders everything looks fine, but women with disabilities may be neglected, beaten and abused by their families.**

**Participant in a focus group of refugee women with disabilities**



“Hundreds of thousands of women are subjected to brutal acts of violence every year, and to help prevent this from happening must remain one of our highest priorities,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees **António Guterres** on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism in 2011. This was followed by the launch of the High Commissioner’s fund for special projects on SGBV in a number of countries, including Nepal.



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