

# **FINDING APPROACHES FOR NAGARIK AAWAZ TO COLLECT STORIES OF WOMEN WHO FACED ARMED CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE.**

A Research Project Paper

Presented to

The Academic Faculty

By

**GANGA SAGAR RAI**

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree in Masters of Arts

Major in Applied Conflict Transformation Studies

Faculty of Communications and Media Arts



**PAÑÑASASTRA UNIVERSITY OF CAMBODIA**

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**Dr. Desmond Molloy**  
**Director, PUC Institute of Peace**

We have read this Thesis Study  
And recommend it for acceptance for Final Oral  
Examination and Defense:

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**Dr. Desmond Molloy**  
**Major Professor**

---

**Mr. Soth Plai Ngarm**  
**Technical Advisor**

---

**Dr. Raymond Leos**  
**Member**

**Accepted for the Council Final Defense**

---

**Dr. Sin Meng Srun**  
**Chairperson**



**PAÑÑĀSĀSTRA UNIVERSITY OF CAMBODIA**  
**Graduate Studies Program**

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	Name	Degree
Masteral Candidate	Ganga Sagar Rai	MB <u>MA</u>

Graduate Program	Graduate Department	Dept. Mail Code
Applied Conflict Transformation Studies	Social Science and International Relations	SSIR
Thesis Title	FINDING APPROACHES FOR NAGARIK AAWAZ TO COLLECT STORIES OF WOMEN WHO FACED ARMED CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE.	
Time, Date, and Place of Examination	.....	
Chairperson of the Examination Committee	Dr. Sin Meng Srun	

	Name	Signature	Date Signed
Chairperson	DR. SIN MENG SRUN		
Major Professor	DR. DESMOND MOLLOY		
Technical Advisor	PROF. PLAINGARM SOTH		

<b>Member</b>	DR. RAYMOND LEOS		
Member	.....		

**Name and Signature of M.A. Candidate:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**THESIS EXAMINATION COMMITTEE**

**APPROVAL FOR PROJECT REPORT FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date Signed</b>
<b>Program Chair and PUC Academic Coordinator</b>			
<b>Dean, Faculty of Social Science and International Relations</b>	DR. DESMOND MOLLOY		

## **Abstract**

The armed conflict in Nepal (1996-2006) has left many people traumatized because both warring parties committed horrific human rights violations. A group that has never been recognized in these conflict-affected communities and is most affected are women who have suffered sexual violence related to the conflict. They have not received any dividends of the peace process and are living in pain and trauma of the past and stigmatization. Nagarik Aawaz, a non-governmental organization that works in peacebuilding since 2001, aims for healing and reconciliation of women. Using a holistic approach to healing, Nagarik Aawaz helps women deal with their pasts, strengthen their position in the present, and aims for a peaceful future for Nepal. However, documenting the memory of women who faced conflict-related sexual violence was a challenge as it dealt with the identity and security of women. The main purpose of this research was to find an approach to collect and document the memories of women who faced conflict-related sexual violence in Nepal. The research took place in the Dang district of Nepal and included women who had benefited from a project called Building Leadership for Women, Peace, Security and Equity. The project has invested in the healing of these women and has an excellent opportunity to collect the memories. Nagarik Aawaz's senior team was part of this participatory action research. The research found out that the control of the story and memory is with the storytellers (women) and Nagarik Aawaz should focus on capturing a complete story of strength and multiple identities of women. The process of storytelling and collecting the narratives is part of the bigger peacebuilding approach of Nagarik Aawaz. These narratives are memories of someone and therefore should give meaning to the storytellers themselves, and learning for future peace practitioners in Nepal.

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First of all, I would like to thank my organization, Nagarik Aawaz, who believed in me. Thank you, for investing in my growth. I would like thank the board members and the team of Nagarik Aawaz for supporting me all the way through. In particular, my *guru*, Dr. Susan Risal, PhD. I am here because of her. Her guidance and love have made me a peace practitioner today. This research is based on program created through her PhD research findings which she did in Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS).

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## **List of Acronyms**

BLW: Building Leadership for Women, Peace, Security and Equity Program

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

NA: Nagarik Aawaz

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

WCRSV: Women who faced Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

VOWM: Voices of Women Media

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Conflict Analysis**

Nepal went through violent armed conflict during 1996-2006 between the then Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist and the government. During this period in Nepal, 17,625 people were killed, 78,675 people were displaced, 1,302 people disappeared, and 4,305 became disabled (Government of Nepal, 2020). There are no official records and numbers for abducted and tortured. Rapes among all the torture, were used as the weapons of war against women. There are limited research, programs and data on sexually tortured women during the insurgencies (Risal, 2020).

Nagarik Aawaz<sup>1</sup> (NA), through its one program, has been able to reach out to more than 40 'Women who faced armed-conflict related sexual violence' (WCRSV) by using the survivor-to-survivor approach in 4 districts. This program hardly covers 10 per cent of the district's geographical area. This gives a picture of the gravity of this issue and has the likelihood to grow immensely if properly researched.

Nepal entered into the post-conflict period in November 2006 after the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement between the Maoist party and the Government of Nepal, but the conflict-affected communities were excluded from receiving the dividend of peace. It is still observed that the state and the political parties are mostly focusing their efforts on managing and institutionalizing the liberal-peace by forming big structures and concentrating on policy making. They have failed to address the structural issue which has been ensured in

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<sup>1</sup> A non-governmental organization in Nepal established in 2001, practicing peacebuilding in Nepal to promote non-violence, dealing with the past for conflict-affected women and promoting peace leaders in young people and conflict-affected women.

the Comprehensive Peace Accord and also failed to move forward the transitional justice process at the logical end.

There are limited memorialization works from the government to date in Nepal. The main memorialization work done to date are naming a small number of deceased victims and fighters as martyrs, constructing memorial gates in their names, small gardens, resting stops and naming newly federal municipalities in the martyr's names (Brett, Bickford, Sevoenko, & M, 2007). WCRSV are searching for their identity and acknowledgement for their contribution during the time of conflict (Risal, 2020). No efforts are being made to memorialize and bring out the narratives of conflict-affected women besides a few civil society organizations in Nepal.

One of the programs of Nagarik Aawaz called "Women Living with Dignity" helps heal the trans-generational grievances of young women who lost their parents in the armed conflict. Some of the participants reflected in the program that they couldn't share their loss among their peers. These young people don't have the space to talk about their loss and have a sense of belonging. Many of their friends don't know about the armed conflict in Nepal at all. The education system of Nepal hasn't included courses on the history of armed conflict in Nepal (Risal, 2020).

After the local federal structures were established in 2017 after the federal election, the coalition government invested 500 million (Nepalese Rupees) in 'war tourism'. The local federal structures of many districts where the civil war was prominent are allocating resources to build rest houses, preserve homes of civil war leaders, parks and towers where the battle occurred and many more. However, the money is being misused, and the lack of participation and ownership of the communities. It is focused on the war martyrs, especially

men leaders and martyrs. There, 'war tourism' seems like a scheme for the cadres (male) of the Maoist movement to get the dividends of the peace (Neupane, 2021).

There has been little to no effort by the government to collect the narratives of conflict-affected people. Especially the narratives of conflict-affected women. An NGO called The Story Kitchen has been trying to document the narratives of conflict-affected women. They are a training group of conflict-affected women to become a journalist to bring out stories of other conflict-affected women. The Story Kitchen uses the narratives of the conflict-affected women to advocate for the rights of the conflict-affected women to receive the dividends of peace (The Story Kitchen, 2016).

Nagarik Aawaz, a non-governmental organization in Nepal established in 2001, practices peacebuilding in Nepal to promote non-violence, deal with the past for conflict-affected women and promote peace leaders in young people and conflict-affected women. Nagarik Aawaz is a Nepali name which means "Voice of Citizens".

In 2001, Rita Thapa founded this organization for immediate crisis management to save internally displaced people because of the armed conflict. In its 20 years journey, it evolved from crisis management to individual transformation of conflict-affected youth to promote non-violent conflict handling mechanisms in communities to transformative peace leadership of conflict-affected women and youths.

Nagarik Aawaz, in its two decades of experience in peace practices, has established its own values of peacebuilding. Its founder birthed and nurtured these values by its leaders and team. One of the values is called safe space. It is a space where individuals can express themselves without fear. Learn new ideas and practice non-violence to handle conflict. Ideas of safe space were adopted in many of Nagarik Aawaz starting from 2006. These safe spaces are called community peace centres in their peacebuilding programs.

Adopting the idea of community peace centres, Nagarik Aawaz wanted to create a national peace centre. In 2017, it bought land in the geographical centre of Nepal to create this peace centre. This facility is aimed to be completed in 2025 and is currently in construction. This facility is called Padmalaya<sup>2</sup>: The Nagarik Aawaz Peace Centre. This centre will have community peace practices programs, academic courses on peace practices, spaces for celebration, interaction and dialogues, archives of stories of armed conflict and memorials of armed conflict in Nepal.

Nagarik Aawaz is thinking about the future and furthers the future it wants to see; it is immensely important to look at the past. Without acknowledging, learning and dealing with our past, we cannot think about a peaceful future (Lederach, 2004). The main goal of Padmalaya is a space to remember past injustices, heal and learn from Nepal's armed conflict in order to facilitate ongoing multi-dimensional peacebuilding efforts & learning within Nepal, in the region, and even worldwide.

For the past ten years, Nagarik Aawaz has focused its resources on transformational peace leadership and the healing of conflict-affected women. It has been able to do projects like New Voices New Leaders, Endeavor for Justice, Women Leaders in Action, Deepening Women's Peace Table in Nepal, Building Leadership for Women, Peace, Security and Equity, and Strengthening Access to Justice are some of the major projects dedicated from healing and transformational peace leadership of Conflict-Affected Women. Through six programs dedicated to conflict-affected women since 2011, Nagarik Aawaz has a well-established relationship with conflict-affected women coming from all the provinces. Nagarik

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<sup>2</sup> Padmalaya is a Sanskrit name "Home of Lotus". Nagarik Aawaz signifies our own work with conflict-affected women and youth in helping them for personal transformation from grievances to help others with their non-violence leadership.

Aawaz, through these relationships, wants to archive the stories of these brave women through their stories.

However, out of all kinds of conflict-affected women, one group that has not received recognition from the government and is socio-economically marginalized is the WCRSV during the armed conflict. These women are physically, socially and mentally suffering from the incidents they had to suffer. The Building Leadership of Women, Peace, Security and Equity (BLW) program running in small parts of Bardia, Kailali, Dang and Rolpa districts is working with WCRSVs during the armed conflict. In this relatively small project, we were able to reach out to 24 WCRSVs in Dang and 17 WCRSVs in Rolpa districts. It was more than the program had anticipated. The program has been able to bring them into a group through a survivor-to-survivor approach from the practices called peace circles. They have been able to heal collectively because of their shared past and now are able to advocate for their rights to the local representatives. We have been able to meet women who suffered sexual violence from other programs, and there are no safety nets available for them. We have created a “Peace Endowment Fund<sup>3</sup>”, and through that fund, we are supporting nine sexually-tortured women who have not been able to sustain their livelihood because of injuries incurred by the sexual tortures.

Nagarik Aawaz, as an organization that has a close relationship with conflict-affected women, is in a unique position to gather their narratives on Padmalaya. NA has yet to begin this process, which must be planned before the facility's construction is completed. Furthermore, by archiving the narratives of conflict-affected women, Nagarik Aawaz is trying to educate the next generation of peace practitioners in Nepal about the armed conflict

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<sup>3</sup> Peace Endowment Fund is an institutional fund created by the initiative of Dr. Susan Risal with support from board and the team to help create safety net to conflict-affected women who NA couldn't support from the its programs limited scopes.

and how it affects people differently. Nagarik Aawaz, through Padmalaya's memorial work and archives, wants to preserve the memories and stories of the past to educate the future. Padmalaya, while making its memorial and remembering the past, has to include the stories of WCRSV. The collective narratives of these women have to be included in that space. For that, Nagarik Aawaz needs to understand the challenges and find ways to include their stories while giving justice and dignity to them in the process.

## **1.2 Work Context**

I work at Nagarik Aawaz as the Communications Manager. My work here is to create and promote its brand value. I do this by documenting the experiences and stories of Nagarik Aawaz's members, staff team, and key actors that Nagarik Aawaz has worked with. I help in designing the messages of Nagarik Aawaz.

I have been documenting stories through audio-visuals to enhance Nagarik Aawaz's presence and brand image. I have been able to produce small documentaries showing the impact of our work. As Nagarik Aawaz works in the emotional and inter-personal changes, the audio-visual tools help in communicating our work to our donors and stakeholders. I have been able to document the stories of WCRSV through the BLW program. This was only possible because of the trust we have gained through our long-term commitment and the relationships we have built with them. It was a big challenge for me to acquire such narratives. I had to blur their faces and hide their names. I had to do that because their identity needed to be hidden. This has reduced the impact of the storytelling as viewers cannot empathize with the stories told.

At Padmalaya, I am responsible for documenting the process of Padmalaya's construction. I have to represent Nagarik Aawaz to the contractors and consultants. I had played a significant role in the conception of Padmalaya as part of the Project Management



Committee comprising Founder Rita Thapa and CEO Dr Susan Risal. Moreover, I am the given responsible for collecting and archiving the stories and narratives of conflict-affected women for Padmalaya's soon-to-be-built memorial and exhibition spaces.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

From my experience, gathering the narratives of women who suffered sexual violence is the most difficult thing to do. We have to protect their identity while telling their stories of their lives and events. Protecting their identity creates a problem of lack of enrichment in storytelling. It doesn't dignify their story to them and also to the viewers. Moreover, Nagarik Aawaz has never gathered the women's perspectives on Padmalaya's archive on how their stories should be or shouldn't be represented. Proper representation of their re-stories is vital for Padmalaya as it is a part of collective narratives of the armed conflict.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

- a. How does Nagarik Aawaz want to collect the stories of WCRSVs?
- b. How do WCRSVs want their stories to be represented by Nagarik Aawaz?
- c. What effective approaches can Nagarik Aawaz take to collect the stories of WCRSVs?

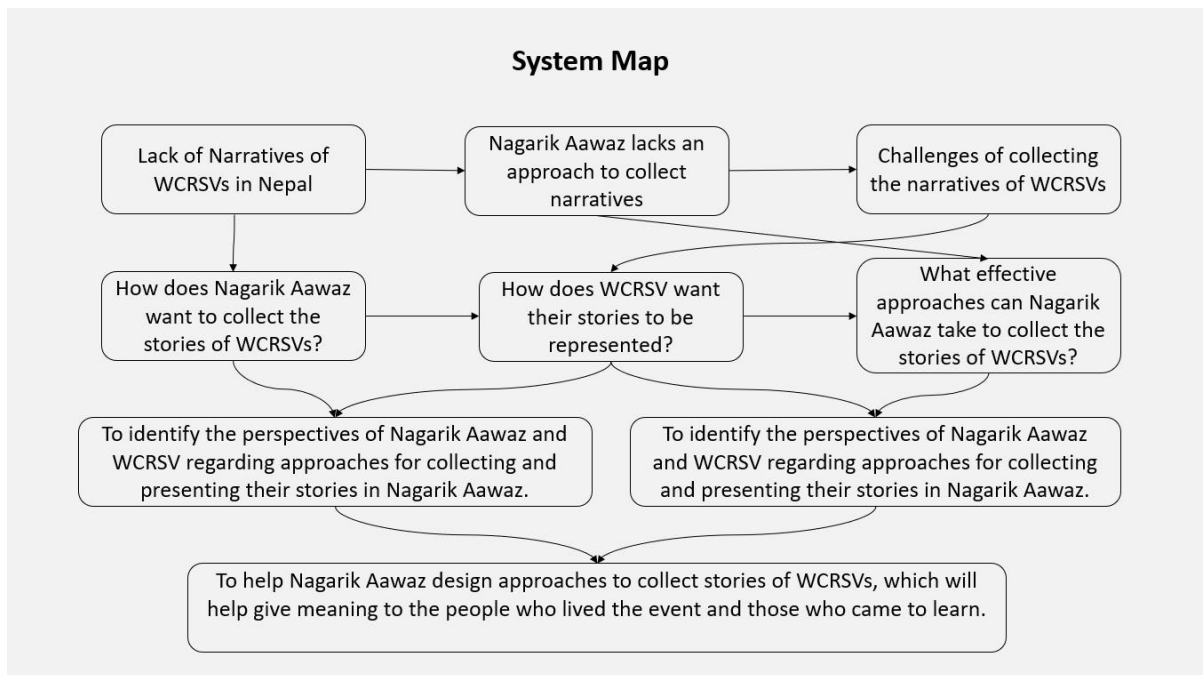
### **1.5 Research Objectives**

- a) To identify the perspectives of Nagarik Aawaz and WCRSV regarding approaches for collecting and presenting their stories for Padmalaya's archive.
- b) To develop approaches Nagarik Aawaz for re-storying the stories of WCRSV for Padmalaya.

### **1.6 Research Goal**

To help Nagarik Aawaz design approaches to collect the narratives of WCRSVs, which will help give meaning to the people who lived the event and those who came to learn.

## 1.7 System Thinking:



The above graphical representation shows my research problem, questions, objectives and goal. The arrows show the flow of ideas through my research. The main problem my research is trying to solve is the lack of proper representation of WCRSV. Nagarik Aawaz needs to do this properly and by actually taking a participatory approach with WCRSV. The questions I am raising through this research are:

- a. How does Nagarik Aawaz want to collect the stories of WCRSVs?
- b. How do WCRSVs want their stories to be represented by Nagarik Aawaz?
- c. What effective approaches can Nagarik Aawaz take to collect the stories of WCRSVs?

Through these three questions I conducted my research cycles, I derived two objectives for my research. The first is to identify the perspective of Nagarik Aawaz and WCRSV regarding the approaches. And secondly, to develop an approach to archiving, which will

help with Padmalaya's goal. The research will eventually help Padmalaya tell effective stories of WCRSV through its archive.

### **1.8 Operational Definition:**

Conflict-Related Sexual violence: United Nations describes this as, "The term refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict." (United Nations, 2020)

Storytelling: Storytelling is the act of telling stories, which are narratives with a beginning, middle, and end. Storytelling is the act of telling or writing stories, or narratives. Typically, stories are told for entertainment, for informational purposes, or for educational purposes. (National Geographic, 2022)

## **2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Memory and History**

In the article written by Pierre Nora called 'Between Memory and History', he talks about the significant difference between memory and history. He argues that memory is an individual or actual collective phenomenon which accommodates facts that suit them. Whereas history is a reconstruction through the historians' analysis and criticism. He argues history belongs to everyone and to no one, but memory belongs to someone. History is relative, and memory is absolute (Nora, 1989).

This research wants to challenge the critical history which is mainstreamed in Nepal - regarding the armed conflict. The history of Nepal does not incorporate the narratives of many people. Sexual violence in the history of armed conflict was never acknowledged. Through Padmalaya, Nagarik Aawaz wants to challenge the current history of armed conflict by preserving the narratives of women who faced sexual violence during that time.

### **2.2 Time and Peacebuilding**

In his book 'The Moral Imagination', Lederach argues that time is an important part of peacebuilding. He says the web of life is juxtaposed between the realities of time, memory and potentiality. He argues that time is multidimensional. Past is not something that needs to be defeated, purged, forgotten, or tamed. Neither it has the solution for the future. We as a peace practitioner should be able to give meaning to the past so that we can build trust and relationships in the past. Everything we do now was affected by the past, and everything we do now will affect generations to come. Lederach expressed through his 'expanded framework of peacebuilding' that further we look for the desired future, we have to look further back in the past. We have to find those broken narratives as peacebuilders (Lederach, 2004).

The narratives of WCRSVs are not collected in Nepal. After 16 years of peace accord their voices is unheard. In the last few years some organizations are trying to bring out their narratives of the past event as an advocacy for their rights. However, as Lederach has argued it is not only enough to narrate the past but to find meaning from it so we can build a better relationship. It's not enough for peace practitioners to know what happened in the past. We are not looking for a quick solution like government providing compensation for these women. We are trying to see patterns in the past so that WCSRVS can re-story "Who they are?". Likewise, this is a process of how healing, build relationships and look for a better future by re-negotiating their identity.

### **2.3 Re-storying**

Psychiatrist often uses the concept of restorying in narrative therapy. Merscham points out that restoring is a collaborative effort of the therapist to focus on alternate stories, which are less focused on dominant problem-centric stories. The goal of this therapy is to aid the client in constructing new, strength-based stories and to facilitate the client's personal agency (Merscham, 2000).

Similarly, Lederach argues past is not something we need to defeat or also forgotten. He says we must restory the past to find narratives that give meaning to life and ongoing relationships (Lederach, 2004).

My research aims to find approaches to looking for narratives of WCRSVs that give more strength to their personal agencies, give meaning to their lives, meaning to our collective memory and build new relationships or improve the ongoing relationships. Re-storying is to look at their past in a more holistic manner, look for the strength and their resilience. It is not giving too much emphasis in past traumatic events but it's a process of finding meaning to from their past.

### **3 Research Methodology**

This research is intended to be an action research study. Action research is the process of identifying a problem, planning a solution, implementing the solution, collecting data, and determining whether or not it works. This research is also being used to plan an approach to address a problem that Nagarik Aawaz is now dealing with. Because the research concerns conflict-affected women's viewpoints, perceptions, sentiments, and emotions, I was used a qualitative technique. The following are the methods I used to plan my action research:

#### **3.1 Research Design:**

This study will use a participatory action research approach as I will be working with the Nagarik Aawaz staff, board members, founder, and WCRSV. I have used multiple focused groups discussion (FGD) with my team members and WCRSV. I designed questionnaires for the FGDs and will use journaling to track the research's progress. The research will take a participatory approach using appreciative enquiry as a tool. This research is qualitative in nature. I used a quantitative approach when the team and WCRSVs made a collective decision.

#### **3.2 Research Site Selection:**

The research is based on a program run by Nagarik Aawaz called Building Leadership of Women, Peace, Security and Equity. Although the program is running in districts, the research is focused on WCRSVs of the Dang district. The site is selected because of my access, and the trust Nagarik Aawaz and its partner have gathered. As the research needs to be done in a limited time, only one district is selected.

#### **3.3 Research Sample Size:**

The main people involved in the research are:

Nagarik Aawaz team: The team includes the Chief Executive Officer (female), Program Development Coordinator (female), Program Manager (male) two Senior Psychosocial Counsellors (male and female), and two Senior Program Officers (both females). All the members are aware of the BLW program and Padmalaya. All these team members have worked in Nagarik Aawaz between 5 to 19 years. The age group range from 30 to 49 years.

WCRSV from Dang: They are the main respondents of the research. These women are participants and target groups of the BLW program implemented by Nagarik Aawaz in partnership with a district organization called Nepal Women Community Service Centre, Dang. The FGD was done with 9 WCRSVs. These women are aged between 35 to 65 years and are mostly from ethnic caste Tharu, Dalit caste and some are from Brahmin/Chettri.

### **3.4 Nature and Sources of the Data:**

The information used in the study are primary and secondary. For WCRSVs and team members, a questionnaire for focus group discussion. The FGDs will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Regarding the sensitivity of the research, I had consent of WCRSVs. I had to hide their identity throughout the research process for women who participated in the FGD.

### **3.5 Tools of Data Collection:**

Desk Study: For the research, I analyzed the videos I made for the BLW project.

Questionnaire: For the research, I prepared an open-ended collection of questions for focus groups discussions.

FGD: Various focus groups will be held with conflict-affected women. The FGD will be tailored to the nature of the participants' shared experiences during the armed conflict.

### **3.6 Process of Data Analysis:**

I gathered data from previous short documentaries, FGD, other organization work on case documentation. I transcribed the FGDs and my observation. I analyzed the gathered information with my literature review, research problems and questions. After analysis I took a generalization to find answers to the research questions.

### **3.7 Action Research Cycles:**

Cycle 1:

Purpose: Revisiting Storytelling for Nagarik Aawaz

Plan: Analyze past storytelling efforts and discussion with Nagarik Aawaz team.

Action: Analyzing short documentaries from conflict-affect women related program called Building Leadership of Women, Peace, Security and Equity. Meeting with the team members (FGD) who have been working for more than 5 years in Nagarik Aawaz to understand the what does documenting and preserving the stories of women mean to Nagarik Aawaz.

Reflection: After understanding what Nagarik Aawaz considers as a good storytelling from the past short documentaries and discussion with the team, it helped me draft questions for the WCRSVs and plan to conduct Cycle 2.

Date: July - August 2022

Cycle 2:

Purpose: Taking ideas into action

Plan: Understanding the perspectives of WCRSVs and if possible, take ideas into action.

Action: Focus Group Discussion with WCRSVs and document a story with a willing WCRSV from the learning of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 (FGD).



Reflection: Compared the reflection of Cycle 1 with the FGD done with WCRSVs. Analyze the differences and similarities between the perspectives of the Nagarik Aawaz team and WCRSVs. Analyze the documented stories of the past and a story done in action research according to the theoretical framework of my action research.

Date: August 2022.

Cycle 3:

Purpose: Designing NA's Approach to Collecting Stories of WCRSVs

Plan: Further analyze the learning and reflection of cycle 1 and cycle 2 to design approaches of re-story.

Actions: I will study other practices of collecting armed-conflict related memory collections efforts by other organizations. I will use the theoretical framework of my action research, perspectives of NA team and WCRSVs and NA's practices of collecting stories to build an approach for collecting and presenting stories of WCRSVs.

Reflection: Analyze and study the need for storytelling for Nagarik Aawaz and its future application in Padmalaya and its future peace practices.

Date: September 2022.

### **3.8 Significance of the Study:**

This research will be significant in the following three areas:

First of all, this research has significance in creating ownership of Padmalaya by WCRSVs. This research will inform them about the importance of the space and collective memories of the armed conflict.

Secondly, the research will help in the effectiveness of Nagarik Aawaz on collecting narratives of WCRSVs.

Thirdly, this research help in designing projects of memorialization in Padmalaya.

### **3.9 Limitation of the Study:**

This research can't be generalized because it's exclusively relevant to Nagarik Aawaz. The findings are based on the trust and relationship Nagarik Aawaz team has created with WCRSVs. The research will not be relevant to any other organization who has not created that relationship beforehand. There is a limited study in re-storying of WCRSVs in Nepal, therefore there is limited knowledge generated in this subject. Lastly, the researcher has limited knowledge and experience in the storytelling of WCRSVs.

### **3.10 Ethical Consideration:**

This research was conducted with the participation of all participants on a voluntary basis. Participants in the focus group gave their verbal consent, and their names were kept confidential when they were not willing to open their identity. The researcher and person doing the FGD with WCRSVs avoided talking about the past traumas with them which was a sensitive issue.

## **4 Description of Research**

In this chapter, I describe how my action research was conducted in each research cycle. I have explained my learning through my desk study, interactions with colleagues, and WCRSVs.

### **Cycle 1: Revisiting Storytelling for Nagarik Aawaz**

My research began during the final implementation year of a three-year-long project of Nagarik Aawaz called Building Leadership for Women, Peace, Equity, and Security (BLW). This project focuses on the psychological and social reconciliation of WCRSVs. As it was designed with the learning of Dr. Susan Risal, PhD, the BLW has been a monumental program for Nagarik Aawaz. It has successfully assisted in the psychological healing and rebuilding of broken relationships between conflict-affected women and their communities, as well as local institutions. Simultaneously, Nagarik Aawaz was in the midst of the construction process of Padmalaya. A place where NA hopes to memorialize broken narratives and nonlinear peacebuilding processes to promote healing and learning.

The learning from BLW and the plan of Padmalaya have made the NA team think about collecting the narratives of conflict-affected women. BLW has given excellent opportunities to document visual stories of conflict-affected women, especially WCRSVs. I was involved in documenting the project's outcome and the nuances of human strength. However, the stories of WCRSVs were not captured in a meaningful manner for me, the program team, and the women themselves. The program lead of BLW, Ms. Sikha Bhattarai, expressed, "At the beginning of the program, WCRSVs were not willing to show their identity. That was acceptable. However, during the final year, women were willing to show

their faces and wanted their stories to be told. NA was highly sensitive and avoided showing their faces/identities. We couldn't show the final stories to these women because it was not her story as we hid her identity. " This brought me to the first research question of my action research:

- How does Nagarik Aawaz want to collect the stories of WCRSVs?

The following actions were taken to obtain answers to the questions:

1. Reviewing the small documentaries of the BLW Program

The BLW program began in 2020. Since then, I have filmed 10 short documentaries about conflict-affected women. The stories captured were the memories of women and how they gave meaning to their lives. One particular documentary was from an ex-Maoist combatant, Ms. Jaya Chaudhary ([click here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4WEt9NpeoY&feature=youtu.be)<sup>4</sup>). Her husband was an ex-Maoist combatant as well, but he was injured during the armed conflict. After the armed conflict and his injuries, they were abandoned by the Maoists. Both of them had depression and were dissatisfied with their conditions and each other. They had regular bouts of violent outbursts with each other, and Jaya even tried to commit suicide in the past. After the intervention of BLW, Jaya's relationship with her husband has improved, and they are now mending the broken ties with local institutions and have significantly improved their living conditions in the past 2 years. Jaya says it was because of the psychosocial counseling, peace circles, and peace dialogues of the BLW project. The short documentary was filmed in November of 2021, after almost 2 years of implementation of the BLW program.

Reviewing Jaya's short documentary, I related it to the literature of my action research:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4WEt9NpeoY&feature=youtu.be>

Time and Peacebuilding: The story of Jaya did capture how Jaya was dealing with the past after the interventions. Jaya's future was dependent on dealing with her broken narratives of the past. She felt betrayed by her Maoist party, and her husband's injury was a curse for her. However, the short documentary focuses on how Jaya dealt with her past for a better future. Therefore, this story does capture accounts of the peacebuilding approach of NA. NA's intervention helped Jaya reconcile with the past and look for a better future.

Memory vs. History: In this short documentary, we can know it is Jaya's story. The short documentary is narrated by Jaya herself; it is her facts and she tell it as it suits her. This short documentary is not a history of Nepal. In the history of Nepal, the Maoists and the people lived happily ever after the peace accord and interim compensation. A Maoist cadre who is now a state-level parliamentarian in a peace dialogue with NA said, "Human history is 75 percent full of conflict and 25 percent of peace. We shouldn't dwell on the past as it's for the greater good of Nepal. " But for Jaya, history does not equate to her memory. This documentary tries to capture her memory. This is Jaya's memory and it is very important to her.

The story has a structure where Jaya has a journey where she talks about her strength to come out of the dark part of her life. Now she has been able to give that story meaning. Through storytelling, she is giving her life meaning. She was not able to tell that story just in a day's process. It took 2 years of working with her inner feelings and the efforts of the program team to get to this level. Therefore, this short documentary is proof of the peace practices that NA has been helping women with. Jaya is not identifying herself as a left-out ex-combatant but as a change agent. She has more meaning in her life.

NA is imagining archiving Jaya's short documentary in Padmalaya in the future. It is her memory, identity, and accounts of how peacebuilding practices help give meaning to the

lives of people. But Jaya does not identify as WCRSV, so making a short documentary was easier for the program team, filmmaker, and NA as a whole. However, this is not true in the case of WCRSVs. The program team has been following Ms. Sonaam (pseudonym) since 2020. It has been trying to capture the transition of Sonaam for the past 3 years. In two years, the program team has been able to witness a tremendous interpersonal and socio-political change in her. The program team has been able to help Sonaam find meaning in her life. She was ready to commit suicide multiple times. She has now developed the inner strength to become a ward member of the local government body. This is an amazing transitional story of a person finding meaning in life.

My argument is to compare it to the literature again. I, and the program lead of NA, have some dissatisfaction regarding her storytelling. NA is skeptical in regards to telling stories of WCRSVs. It was a question of dignity and security for NA. I made three separate short documentaries highlighting Ms. Sonaam in three years. In all three, I had to hide the identity of Ms. Sonaam. It was always a debate in the NA team whether to show their faces or not. The essence of the 3 videos of Sonaam doesn't match with Jaya's short documentary. Here are my reflections on the 3 documentaries:

Time and Peacebuilding: In the first documentary made in 2020, Sonaam's identity is hidden ([click here to see](#)<sup>5</sup> start watching from time: 2:35 minutes). She could only share her stories of past traumatic events. In that story, she was just recollecting her past without any learning. It was clear that her narrative was broken in the video. She couldn't see her life having any meaning after those traumatic events. Another video was made in 2021 ([click here](#)<sup>6</sup>), after the counseling, peace circles, and peace dialogues. Sonaam's inner strength is lifted in the video.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_\\_ISf5nGLOk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__ISf5nGLOk)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjRjzWO20qE>

She was starting to see the meaning of her life. In the video, she says, "We can only reach the stars if we live today, so I want to live today." The third and final short documentary ([click here](#)<sup>7</sup>) made during my AR period is a short video of how Sonaam transitioned from having lost meaning in life after her traumatic event to being a ward member. She could do that by reconnecting her broken narrative and now has the aspiration to help others like her. Help other women like her find meaning in their lives.

Memory and History: All these videos are memories of Sonaam. In two of the videos, she is telling her story by herself, and in the final program lead, Ms. Sikha Bhattarai, is narrating her story. Because Sonaam is a WCRSV, NA decided to hide that, and Sonaam's identity was changed. In the last two videos, there were debates among the program team on whether to show her face. Sonaam didn't mind seeing her face in the last two short documentaries. The video had to go to the donors; therefore, the identity of Sonaam was hidden. However, it has taken the essence of storytelling because identity is associated with memory. We could not show the video to Sonaam and make her feel proud of her achievement. Therefore, it does not become a memory but a history of the armed conflict and its impact, or about a project and its achievement. By hiding Sonaam's face, the short documentary does not become Sonaam's memory but becomes a part of the history of armed conflict.

Re-storying: The BLW has helped Sonaam to find a different alternate story of herself with help from counseling and other program-related activities dedicated to healing and mending the broken relationship. The short documentaries have been able to show her transition to a point where she could gradually redefine her life's meaning. The area of re-storying could have been improved by the use of story structure. The lack of self-narration in the final video again takes away the re-storying aspect of the storytelling.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpIIVAbtsjk>

Both Sonaam's and Jaya's videos were project-oriented impact stories. I highlighted NA's contribution to the interpersonal and socio-political transformation of conflict-affected women. The videos served as a means of verification for the indicated outcomes of the project. Nevertheless, these videos do feature the elements of the theories of my action research. They help tell the memories of conflict-affected women rather than tell stories about historical events and their remembrance. These are the stories of women who are looking at the past and finding narratives that will help them find meaning in their sacrifices and grievances. Both Jaya and Sonaam are looking forward to better possibilities in their future. Through the efforts of the BLW project, both Jaya and Sonaam have been able to re-story their narratives of their lives. They have found meaning in their lives. However, the short documentaries were not designed to acknowledge these theories. With further discussion and analysis, NA can restory the narratives of WCRSVs, which will give meaning to their lives and also educate future peace practices. These videos were not used as an advocacy tool or case documentation to record trauma of people.

## 2. Focus group discussion with the Nagarik Aawaz team

As I was trying to find the answer to my first research question, I turned to my fellow team members to discuss the question. I reached out to team members who have contributed more than 5 years to NA. They have deep knowledge of NA's work and have played a significant role in NA's strategic direction. For the focused group discussion, the following team members were present:

- Dr. Susan Risal, PhD, CEO
- Prasansa Karki-Program Development Coordinator
- Sikha Bhattarai-Senior Program Officer
- Sudip Sigdel-Senior Counselor



- Antina Ranjit-Senior Counselor
- Bishnumaya Gharti-Senior Program Officer

I designed a set of questions to discuss in the FGD. The questions were created to have a flow of conversation about what memorializing and collecting stories of women means to NA. The flow of the discussion moved spontaneously, and I didn't have to ask all the questions.

However, the following were the main questions that the discussion revolved around:

- Why is it important to collect the stories of WCRSVs?
- How do we collect the stories of WCRSVs?
- What are we trying to memorialize?

The FGD was carried out on August 8, 2022.

The following were important quotes from our team members in the FGD regarding the importance of collecting and presenting the stories of WCRSVs:

- Dr. Susan Risal, Ph.D.
  - "The donor community assumes that conflict is linear and that peacebuilding should be done sequentially. As a result, the projects are divided into phases. Peace and conflict, however, are not linear. In BLW, we used a process-led approach to peacebuilding. First, we created a space for them to express themselves. In addition, we worked on their insecurities. Within themselves, they have lost their sense of trust and belonging. We helped them heal. Finally, they could resonate their stories among themselves and beyond in the socio-political sphere. They could express the injustice they faced."
  - "When real narratives start coming out, then only social healing can happen. Social healing is a part of reconciliation. Social healing is important in Nepal

and it has only been reconciled at the political level. It has never gone to the lived experiences of people (especially women), which will become part of their justice process. "

- "Storytelling is not an isolated activity. These women are very important to Nagarik Aawaz, and we have invested a lot of trust in them and vice versa. It is only after this investment that we will be able to uncover the true narratives. This is a documentation of conflict patterns and Nagarik Aawaz's peacebuilding approach. This is not a case document of armed conflict. "

- Ms. Prasansa Karki,

- "To a larger extent, it is making sure the armed conflict does not repeat. It is to teach people how to help people heal. It is not only reparation and money that helps heal. It is inner healing that is more important. It is important for the next generation to know about the strength of these women. This helps in nation-building, to understand the impact of armed conflict and peacebuilding processes."
- "When collecting stories, we sometimes see women with only one identity. There are multiple identities among the women we work with. Their experience in the armed conflict should not be viewed solely as victimization. Within their suffering, they have so much strength and resiliency. Women's multi-identity should be incorporated into the stories we collect. "

- Ms. Shikha Bhattarai,

- "Women have lived a life with fear. They are insecure that their past will not be accepted by their family members and society. However, it was not their fault and they have contributed to the socio-political change in Nepal. Their story is a major part of history. They need to speak and raise their voices. In

BLW, women are now proud to tell their stories, they feel heard, and they demand respect for their contribution. "

- "This is their story and they should have the right to tell it. These stories are not for NA's benefit, so it should be their choice. "
- This story of strength and resilience can only come out after a significant investment in their healing. Women used to cry for hours and not say a word at the beginning of the BLW project. They should be able to reconcile with themselves and should start believing it was not their fault. Then only we can and it's the right time to collect their stories. "
- "When we memorialize their stories of strength and resilience, it will resonate beyond the cases of armed conflict. It will resonate with people who faced violence."
- Mr. Sudip Sigdel,
  - "I worry women are at peak of their transformation. We are project driven. They might say they are willing to share their stories now, but, no one can predict the future. It will not be a constant. We open their identity now but they can become vulnerable in the future."
  - "We have to focus our storytelling on the transformation than focusing on the trauma. Specially in transformation regarding, how she deals with herself and society. And how society is dealing with now."
- Ms. Bishnumaya Gharti
  - "We should use organization coding system when we have to hide their identity.""
  - "Written consent should be taken from women after we show her the final product. If she is happy by the story."

I reflected on my key learnings from Cycle 1 after completing both processes:

- Nagarik Aawaz is not planning to collect the cases of WCRSVs for advocacy and judicial processes. The documentaries were intended to tell the narratives of women and their lived experiences during the armed conflict and beyond. We are trying to preserve the memories of these women. These memories will be resonated among the women themselves and with people who practice peace. These stories of strength and resilience will not remain inspirational stories among the conflict-affected communities and peace practitioners but also might resonate with people living in violence not related to armed conflict.
- The story collection is not an isolated event. I cannot go to random conflict-affected women and ask them to tell their stories. It takes a great degree of investment to build that trust for someone to open up about their past. Nagarik Aawaz through the BLW project invested in the inter-personal and socio-political transformation of WCRSVs. They can find meaning in their life because of the program. They have finally been able to see the alternative strength-based stories of their life. The project helped them re-story their narratives. The collection of the stories is a small part to justify their stories and give recognition for their contribution.
- When I approach women, I shouldn't do it alone. As the trust with women was built by the BLW project, Cycle 2 needed to involve the active involvement of BLW Program Leader, Ms. Sikha Bhattarai. I approached her regarding this and she was more than willing to accompany me for the Cycle 2 part of my research.

### **Cycle 2: Taking ideas into action**

The second cycle was conducted in the early weeks of August 2022. It coincided with the final review and reflection of the BLW project. In this cycle, it was important to me to

know what WCRSVs thought about storytelling. I wanted to explore the possibility of documenting a story aligned with the learning of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. There were two main actions in this cycle:

1. Meeting with WCRSVs to gather their perspective.

The FGD was conducted in Dang, a district on August 15, 2022. There were eight women present in the FGD, and all of them were target group members of the BLW program. They have been working together on this project since 2021. Ms. Sikha Bhattarai conducted the FGD for me. Sikha and I discussed the learning from cycle 1 and came up with simple questions regarding the action research. The following were the questions that were asked in the FGD with WCRSVs:

- Has anyone collected you in the past? What was the experience?
- Do you think collecting stories about WCRSVs is important?
- If we ever collect stories of WCRSVs, how should we do it?
- Where do you feel safe sharing your stories?

Initially, I thought I would sit as an observer in the focus group discussion with WCRSVs. However, the local organization's program team informed us that they would be uncomfortable expressing themselves about the event. We decided not to talk about past events in the FGD. We focused the questions on the process of the story collection. Just before the FGD began, I felt I should not be in the FGD. I felt my presence in the FGD would make women uncomfortable talking openly. We agreed to audio record the FGD. Sikha later debriefed her observation of the FGD with me.

The following are the highlights of the FGD:

- Nobody has ever asked them these questions in their lives ever. Therefore, it took time for them to think about it. They have never contemplated the idea of telling their stories to anyone.
- Some journalists have come to capture their stories. However, they did not tell them their full or real stories. They have never trusted anyone with their real story.
- A space and a place are important to keep records of history. They expressed that it would be impossible for anyone to come to everyone's home to learn about our story.
- One woman shared that she kept a diary every day during the armed conflict. She regrets that she threw away the diary. She said she would have loved to give NA that diary.
- Most of them shared that they want to tell their stories themselves through video. They are proud of our lives; therefore, they want to show our faces. Women shared that they want their children to see that video. so that they could feel proud of their mother's story. They feel videos are the best medium to tell their stories.
- They felt they needed a space where they could go and tell their stories. They felt at the time that they needed counselling to help them heal. They would need a lot of psychosocial support. Then only they can open up after the healing. A story about trauma would be impossible to tell.
- When asked if everyone would not be comfortable coming out with their identity, the women shared that they could use art and audio records to bring out their narratives.
- Some of the women felt real narratives would help in seeking justice. It will help pressurize the government to listen to these narratives. It will help give voice to their demands and needs for justice.

## 2. Documenting a film about Maya (pseudonym)

After the FGD, a WCRSV came up to Ms. Sikha Bhattarai and expressed she wants to tell her story through a video. After Sikha discussing with her came up to me and asked whether we could do it. I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to apply the learning of my action research. We decided to record her video the following day. We along with a psychosocial counsellor went to her home the next morning. Following were the highlights of the process of documenting her story:

- We asked Maya to narrate her story without any editing or preparation. I asked her to tell her story by looking at the camera as if she was telling it to others. Her total narration was 40 minutes. It was recorded in her home. After her narration, I filmed her doing her regular work at her home and her small shop.
- As Maya narrates the story of her life, she reflects on all the hardships of her life and her strength and resiliency to live her life. She shares that she is proud of her life and she has meaning in her life now.
- Maya's mother has been her biggest support and strength during the during her incarceration and post-conflict situation.
- She admits that at one point in her life, she had lost the will to live. Then, after joining the BLW program, she received counselling and met women like her. These helped her change her perspective on life. She was thankful to the psychosocial counsellor, as she credited her with better mental health at present.
- Maya recalled how conflicted women from the BLW project celebrated her birthday. She shared that nobody had ever done that for her. She finds solace in these women. They have become like her family.
- Maya is not ashamed of what happened to her in the past. She is proud that she has contributed to the change that has come. People can express themselves freely

because of their contribution to change. She shared that she wants people to see who she is. She wants people to identify with and understand her contribution.

- Maya later shared that her community and her mother were so proud to see people coming to document her story. They praised her for all the good work she is doing. She shares that she is extremely happy to be able to tell her story and others can see her change.

Cycle 2 helped me reflect, analyze, and compare the perspectives of what NA is trying to do and what women are saying. I took to learning in action. It helped me reflect as a peace practitioner and storyteller. NA is trying to tell a different story, as Dr. Susan Risal, Ph.D. puts it, "We are trying to narrate the conflict patterns and peacebuilding approaches." Therefore, we are seeking to find a complete narrative of struggles, trauma, strength, and resiliency. We are willing to invest in that complete story.

### **Cycle 3: Designing NA's Approach to Collecting Stories of WCRSVs**

Cycle 3 began in late August to mid-September. In this part of my research, it was time to reflect on all my learning from the processes of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 to think of the approaches I and NA can take in the future while collecting and presenting the stories. I took an introspective approach to come up with an answer to the following question:

- What effective approach can Nagarik Aawaz take to collect the stories of WCRSVs?
  1. Learning from what others have done

During my action research as part of the desk study, I found it important to see if other organizations are doing similar work. I came across an NGO called Voices of Women



Media (VOWM). They have a website called Truth, Memory, and Justice ([click here](https://www.memorytruthjustice.com/#:~:text=Memory%2C%20Truth%20%26%20Justice%20is%20a,in%20Nepal%20from%201996%2D2006)<sup>8</sup>). The VOWM is using multimedia like video, audio, and photos to record the testimonies of the conflict-affected people. They are archiving these stories to dignify their memories and for remembrance. VOWM states that these testimonials are used for educational and advocacy purposes (Voices of Women Media, 2022).

The video testimony of almost 102 conflict-affected people is archived on the website. In these videos, the people are talking about events in history where their lives changed because of the armed conflict. Some are sharing their stories of losing loved ones, torture, painful incidents, and their experience of armed conflict in Nepal. The videos are concentrated on broken narratives. It is broken in the sense that it does not tell the complete story of a person. The testimonies are focused on the traumatic event and are broken because the person does not seem to give meaning to their experience. As a viewer, it does not transmit meaning to me but helps to transmit transgenerational trauma. The peacebuilding process should be able to deal with the past and find meaning from the past for the present and for the future.

The website and the NGO are able to archive the memories of the people who survived the armed conflict. The purpose of these videos is for advocacy and education. Videos did do that. It collected the memories of past events and used them as a tool to challenge the history of Nepal.

As peace practitioners, it becomes our responsibility of ours to accompany people in a healing process. They should be able to heal, resonate with their experiences, and find meaning in their experiences. According to our team members, NA is not interested in

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.memorytruthjustice.com/#:~:text=Memory%2C%20Truth%20%26%20Justice%20is%20a,in%20Nepal%20from%201996%2D2006>.

producing such videos, and storytelling is an important part of the peacebuilding process. It is the process of reenergizing women's strength and resiliency.

## 2. NA Designing the Approach of NA

At this point, I have a well-rounded understanding of the perspectives of both NA and WCRSVs regarding how to collect and present the stories. The approaches NA needs to take are different from VOM's. NA is not trying to document cases for its project and advocacy. NA is not documenting these stories for its own sake, but for a better understanding of conflict patterns and peacebuilding approaches in general. I considered the goal of the research. We are trying to collect memories while giving meaning to the lives of WCRSVs. While designing approaches, I considered the importance of the program team, the documentation person, and NA as an organization. I learned that storytelling is part of a whole. It is a validation of the process of understanding the conflict patterns and peacebuilding approaches to give meaning to people's lives in the end.

## 5 Findings and Discussion

During the research period, I have had important learning and insights into ways to collect stories of WCRSVs. The findings are centered on NA's overall goal as a peacebuilding organization and the trust of WCRSVs in NA. Some of the key findings are as follows:

How does NA want to collect the stories of WCRSVs?

- NA is not interested in documenting stories for advocacy purposes. It is trying to document approaches to how people find meaning in their lives after traumatic events. It is trying to find complete stories of women with a strong beginning, middle, and end. It wants to learn how women find meaning from their past. It is the process of dealing with the past, reenergizing the present, and finding ways to a better future.
- Collecting stories of WCSRVS is a small part of the investment. NA values the importance of space, healing, and resonance before documentation. Therefore, it is seen as part of the process of peacebuilding. Collecting stories for mere memory will not be complete for NA as it won't help WCRSVs to find stronger alternative stories.
- NA is gathering stories to better understand the nuances and approaches that helped women find meaning in their lives. The stories collected are validation of these meanings. NA wants to gift these stories back to women and people to find lessons and inspiration.
- NA's documentation of stories is not interested in the exact event of the trauma. It is more focused on the transformation and reconciliation of an individual.

How do WCRSVs want their stories to be represented?

- Within 2 years of the program, WCRSVs associated with NA went through a process of interpersonal and socio-political transformation. Through this, they have been able

to find meaning from past traumatic events, and therefore, they are willing to share their narratives with Nagarik Aawaz.

- Healing and the importance of psychosocial counselling were imminent for WCRSVs to deal with their trauma. They are proud to share their stories if they get a chance to heal from past traumatic events. Through the investment of NA in creating space, dealing with the past, and creating resonance, WCRSVs
- WCRSVs want control of their stories. Most of the WCRSVs want to narrate their stories by themselves. Women who have found meaning in their lives and dealt with trauma want to identify themselves in their stories. They do believe it's their memory and want their children to remember them for their contribution, strength, and resiliency.
- When women feel empowered to tell transformative stories, they are more likely to do so. Where they can concentrate on their strengths and resilience, where they don't identify themselves as the victims of the event but are portrayed as the heroes of their story.
- Women shared space to tell and keep their stories, which was important for them. A space where they can come to tell their stories and a place to keep them safe. These stories can resonate and can also be used as a tool for their search for justice.

What effective approach can Nagarik Aawaz take to collect the stories of WCRSVs?

- The timing of the story collections should come into consideration. We are not attempting to document a case of past events, but rather complete stories with WCRSVs. Therefore, we should consider when to start collecting stories. We should collect when women are ready to tell their stories. Not before that. We are considering

this through the perspective of time and also through peacebuilding. The story should merge people dealing with the past and finding meaning for their life.

- A person in charge of gathering stories must locate a complete narrative of WCRSVs. The person shouldn't only consider the past traumatic event. This will limit the identity of WCRSV as victims. We should find the strengths and resilience of these women. We should tell stories of how women find ways to reenergize their strengths. As we are looking for a woman with multiple identities, we should research what has built the resilience of that woman. This process will help identify the meaning of life for these women.
- The narration of the stories should be done by the women themselves. As it is their stories and their narratives, the narration should have a good beginning, middle, and end. The filmmaker should consider this process in structuring the stories.
- Most women thought multimedia like video, audio, and photos were the best options to tell their stories. Other creative means using art can be used for women who are not comfortable sharing their identities.
- Collecting stories of WCRSVs is a small part of the bigger peacebuilding approach. The overall goal of NA is to help women heal, give them the strength needed to deal with their past, re-story their lives, and finally help others to do the same. Therefore, when capturing their story, the program team (including the psychosocial counsellor) must be there as they are the ones who invested in their transformation and they are the ones who WCRSVs trust.
- The creation of space for collecting and presenting stories would help women to feel comfortable narrating and sharing their stories.

## **6 Conclusion and Recommendations**

In its 21 years of experience, Nagarik Aawaz has been able to design and elicit methods of peacebuilding approaches. This knowledge of peace practices needs to be documented for future generations. These practices are intertwined with the recent history of armed conflict in Nepal. As history is a critical debate, NA is trying to find narratives and voices that have been silenced by this history. This research is part of the peacebuilding process of NA to give those voices meaning and strength. It is the journey of inner and outer peace. In the process of research, I have greater respect for the work of NA. This research has been able to understand the conflict patterns, the resiliency of women, and practices that helped reenergize the strength of women. The stories collected by NA and kept in Padmalaya will help resonate with the dignity of the women who are telling the stories and the people who come to learn from them.

As a person responsible for collecting and presenting stories, I have a clearer understanding and confidence in how to approach storytelling. However, this is not a solo role; it takes a lot of investment by the organization and the program team to bring out the narratives. Our responsibility is to validate and justify WCRSVs stories as best as we can. As I reflected on the research process, I came up with the following recommendations:

Recommendations for the program team of NA:

- The team should continue to work on creating safe spaces for healing and resonating stories. This has helped in the interpersonal and socio-political transformation of WCRSVs.

- Psychosocial counsellors are the heart of healing for these women. The alternative strength stories these women were able to see were because of the efforts of the counsellor.
- The program team should envision this story collection beyond the scope of the project and as a larger contribution to peace writ large.
- The women's narratives should be first consulted among the program team. They are the people who will know when a woman is ready to tell her story.

#### Recommendation for a Storyteller (a person collecting stories)

- The story's focus should be on the rights of women. They should have the right to narrate their story. Therefore, the stories should make the women as the 'heroes' of their story rather than focusing on what way they were victims.
- Stories should not be limited to traumatic incidents. The filmmaker or person making the story should research to find an alternative story of the strength and resilience of these women.
- Consent should be taken after the final video is created and presented to the women themselves.
- The process of collecting the stories should not be isolated from the program team. The trust of the program team will help bring out the real narratives of women.
- The storyteller should see story collection as not the ultimate goal but rather a small part of peace practices of NA. The story can only come out when NA has invested in the reconciliation process of WCRSVs.

#### Recommendation for the Nagarik Aawaz:

- These stories are at the heart of the peacebuilding approach of Nagarik Aawaz. NA needs to invest institutionally in the proper collection of the interpersonal and socio-political transformation of women.
- NA can design a project focusing on collecting the narratives of women working within Padmalaya. Women need a space for storytelling and resonating, and Padmalaya can provide that space for them.
- Long-term psychosocial support for these women is needed to help with their mental well-being.
- Nagarik Aawaz should develop data management of personal information to protect it from misuse and misrepresentation.
- NA needs to train more human resources who can collect the narratives of women.

In this research, I had simple questions: how does NA want to collect stories of WCRSVs? How do WCRSVs want their stories to be represented? And what are some effective approaches NA can take to collect their stories? These questions came to me while collecting stories from BLW project in the last 2 years. I always thought the storytelling process of armed conflict always focused on the traumatic event. Focusing only on the traumatic event may help on advocacy but it will promote the transmission of transgenerational traumas. NA never approached a collection of stories as an advocacy tool. It will never try to as well, because it is a peacebuilding organization not a human rights organization. The collected stories of NA are to show the impact of its peace practices on the effort of healing women. NA has been successful in even healing the deep traumas of WCRSVs. Through this research, I have more confidence in myself about what approaches I can take to elevate the process of collecting stories to give dignity and meaning back to women who are telling stories. Maybe I have found a way to make women, NA, and storytellers (like me) proud to show how peace practices work. It will help others to learn the



process of inner and social reconciliation. Through this research, NA does not need to be skeptical anymore in telling the stories of WCRSVs and can finally let their memories be heard by those who need to hear them. However, this research does not answer, how will the non-affected communities will interpret and learn from the stories we present? A separate action research will be needed to find out the answers for this next question.

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## **Annex**

### Questions for Focus Group Discussions of Nagarik Aawaz Team:

- Why is it important to collect the stories of WCRSVs?
- How do we collect the stories of WCRSVs?
- What are we trying to memorialize?

### Questions for Focus Group Discussion with WCRSVs.:

- Has anyone collected you in the past? What was the experience?
- Do you think collecting stories about WCRSVs is important?
- If we ever collect stories of WCRSVs, how should we do it?
- Where do you feel safe sharing your stories?