

USAID-NFRP
Protection of Women and Children (Component 5)

Better Life Option Program
BLOP

The Concept

The Better Life Option Programme (BLOP) contains a comprehensive life skill-based package, initially, focused on raising the self-esteem of mainly the adolescent girls and young women. The package includes gender equity, child rights, reproductive health and sex education, HIV AIDs, early marriage and early pregnancy and personality development, non-formal education, peace education and vocational training.

Strategically, in the implementation of the programme, girls, boys, parents, community members and leaders are challenged to address gender inequality and inequity.

However, the adolescents represent the underutilized resource of the society. So, working with adolescents provides a unique opportunity to break a number of vicious and intergenerational cycles of gender discrimination, violence, human trafficking, and poverty, unsafe and unwanted sex. Therefore, providing adolescents with skills, information, support and services increases their capabilities to avoid or overcome many of the physical and social problems they are likely to encounter in their own life, in the family, community, society and the nation as they grow.

BLOP aims to:

- promote the level of self-esteem in the adolescent girls and boys;
- enable the target girls and boys to identify their issues and problems and overcome them on their own;
- create a conducive environment for the adolescent girls to become competent partners with the adolescent boys and the members of the community;
- assist the adolescent girls and boys to improve their capacity to combat against stereotype and generation gap;
- make the adolescents and the community people aware of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other forms of violence;
- provide the target groups knowledge on resource mobilization and encourage them to use the optimum level of the locally available services; and
- accommodate the various issues concerning the adolescent girls and boys such as marriage, reproductive health, family planning, vocational skill, non-formal education, life skills and legal issues.

Principles

1. the adolescent girls and boys have the rights to make choices so that they can determine their future, and
2. they can develop their capabilities to make choices. The adolescents can learn to make choices by: developing self respect and self esteem; creating supportive peer relationships; expanding their skills in analysis, decision making, problem-solving, negotiating and having increased an access to resources.

The Focus

- Self-esteem
- Human life cycle and Adolescence
- Goal Setting and planning
- Better understanding on family and gender relationship
- Community resources and service centers
- Gender discrimination
- Violence
- Human Trafficking
- Human Rights
- Safe migration
- Legal rights
- Environment
- Reproductive and sexual health

The participating adolescents can make qualitative achievement in their life in the areas of marriage, child bearing, health, family relations, education, work, legal status, and community involvement. This they can do by critically analyzing their issues and the options open to deal with them. By becoming self-aware, they can learn to redefine the social values and gender roles which may come in their way to future destinations. They can learn to define their needs and identify the resources to achieve them.

Learning process

BLOP is very popular among the adolescents because works on the ‘experiential learning’ model. In the sessions, the participants bring out their own experiences, analyze them, bring out the issues and draw up a list of activities and address them themselves. The facilitator-trainer works as a guide at the background. The participants draw up conclusions and make lesson learning for the future. This way, the experiential learning model is found to:

- involve girls and boys in activities that help them reflect on and analyze their experiences;
- motivate the girls and boys to change their old behaviors and adopt new ones;
- promote their participation in the learning process; and

- base the relationships on respect and trust.

Still, why do girls and boys need to choose a future is a very crucial question, particularly, in the context of rural Nepal, because, here, many girls and boys lack information, choices and options. They are restricted by poverty, stereotypes, and poor health care. For some, violence and fear are facts of daily life. Lack of access to reproductive health education and services can often lead to early motherhood and fatherhood and adult responsibilities before they are fully mature. This is critically true in case of girls in Nepal. With variation, boys also are limited in their perception and knowledge of gender roles and lack the understanding of why gender discrimination against girls and women affect their lives. By accepting the lower status given to their female counterparts, boys also accept the stereotypes that can make it difficult for them to express themselves, and confine themselves to a role that stifles sensitivity and creativity.

Approach

The BLOP is a right based approach to the development of the adolescents in Nepal. As a comprehensive programme, it can go as a youth development programme as well. The following activities could be taken as

- mass communication: hoarding board, street drama, cultural program, documentary\ film, radio \television programs;
- peer education;
- family counseling;
- parental education;
- orientation to other stakeholders;
- BLOP centers;
- linkage and coordination with other programs such as education, health and income generation;
- support activities to institutionalize the programme.

BLOP in the context of Human Trafficking, Gender, Life planning

Human trafficking is considered organized crime against humankind. It is spread mainly in under developed countries and even in the poor and backward communities. Adolescents are the major victims of trafficking. They are most vulnerable groups and high chances to be misguided by the brokers. A preventive major can be adopted through this program. For nine months Adolescent girls are to be educated in the skills to live carefully and actively. The issues are quite important for increasing life skills, goal setting, and acquiring information for better life options.

Prevalence of gender discrimination, early child marriage, dowry, early child bearing, girl trafficking and sexual abuse/exploitation of children, especially girls, are some of the major problems faced by the adolescent girls in Nepal. Most of these issues are

continuing due to low level of awareness among adolescents, parents and other members of the community.

The BLOP aimed to reduce gender discrimination, involve adolescents to deal with the problems of adolescents by themselves, increase their self confidence, self reliance and self respect, provide life skill to adolescents, promote positive and fruitful friendship with their peers, enhance the capabilities of adolescents to analyze, make decision, debate, and to solve problem. It also aims to improve access to resources and opportunities, improve the attitude and dealings of family and society towards adolescents and facilitate for their better future

A batch of trainees includes 20-25 girls and boys of the above age and the BLOP center runs for 3 days a week for 2 hours. The training is organized in the community; mostly at schools or at community centers and a locally trained facilitator facilitates the sessions. One facilitator usually runs two centers. A resource-book (having participatory learning activities) developed by CEDPA is used as guidebook for the facilitator. The sessions are periodically monitored by the implementing organization.

This program aims to enhance knowledge and empowerment of adolescent girls on various aspects affecting their personal health, security and personality development. The BLOP is implemented in integration with other program e.g. learning, health and livelihood program.

The indicators are:

- The implications of early marriage
- The importance of education
- The prevalence of domestic violence
- The benefits derived from listening to one's children
- The importance of household and environmental sanitation and cleanliness
- The role of gender discrimination behind not taking the right decisions
- Making aware what is human trafficking
- The adolescent education and its importance
- How we have adopted the traditional rituals and practices and what adverse situations these have created on us

Contents (Choose a Future)

As has already been mentioned above, the adolescent girls and boys were offered course contents through separate manuals: Choose a Future: Issues and Options for Adolescent Girls and Choose a Future: Issues and Options for Adolescent Boys. Some themes are common and some are gender-specific and there is maintained sensitivity in the modality of content delivery.

First an overview of the course contents of the manual Choose a Future for the girls. The outline contents are given below module-wise:

Module I: Self-Aware:

Module II: Goal Setting and Planning:

Module III: Our Family:

Module IV: Community:

Module V: The World of Work:

Module VI: Peers:

Module VII: Marriage, Married Life and Responsible Parents:

Module VIII: Puberty and Reproduction:

Module IX: Health:

Module X: Legal Rights:

Module XI: Environment:

Module XII: Let us Fly for the better future

Second, an overview of the course contents of the manual Choose a Future for the adolescent boys. The outline contents are given below module-wise:

Module I: Self-Aware (two sessions). This module encourages for healthy communication with self and others and helps determine hopeful expectations for the future. It tells a boy's self image is based on positive self worth, supportive feedback from peers and feeling as if he has control and input over the process of his life.

Module II: Values Identification (three sessions). This module focuses on the values permeate a person's identity, family and society. It is vital for boys to understand values and how they are used. Through contemplation, discussion and active games, boys identify the feelings and meanings that accompany values. They explore how values shape family and society.

Module III: Gender Awareness (two sessions). This module emphasizes to restructure the limiting gender roles created by society. Throughout their lives, young men are bombarded by messages from family, media and society regarding gender and sex roles. These messages tell them how to act and how they should treat women. These men need to understand that they have a choice in constructing a gender identity, as do the young women in their lives.

Module IV: Feelings: Where are they and what do I do? (Four sessions). This module teaches to learn respect for self and others in the vast and varied arena of emotions. All too often, families and societies put pressure on boys and young men to deny and submerge their anger and other unpleasant feelings. This may lead to confusion, anxiety and violent behaviour. It is vital that young men learn what feelings are and how to communicate them in a healthy manner.

Module V: Communication Skills (four sessions). This module illustrates how valuable communication skills are between young men and their female friends, co-workers, and family members. It focuses on the issues of problem solving, resolving conflict and maintaining positive relationships are vital to the lives of young men and women. If a young man learns the skills of negotiation and reducing violence he will have more success and comfort in his personal and professional life.

Module VI: Interpersonal Relationships (four sessions). The sessions in this module focus on peer relationships and romantic relationships. It focuses on how to be supportive of one another and explore their thoughts about relationship with girls. Developing and maintaining positive friendships is an important life skill for boys and young men to have. They need to be able to tell the difference between positive and negative friendships and beneficial and harmful peer pressure. There are emotions that come with dealing with male and female friends.

Module VII: Our Families (four sessions). This module discuss about the positive contributions women make to family, country and the world. It also discusses about the constructive communication with male and female family members and the problem of sexual violence against young women. It emphasizes that families are very influential in assigning gender roles and expectations. They need to recognize the achievements of boys and girls. Boys may feel pressure not to cook or spend time with their family. They may ignore the strengths of women and girls. However, boys and men can learn to be positive caregivers for children and home.

Module VIII: Community (three sessions). The sessions in this module discuss that a boy is not only influenced by his family; his community can exert strong influences as well. Communities have norms about what boys and girls are expected to do and not to do. Community resources can be tapped to improve education, health, marketable skill and quality of life. Boys and young men can have a positive influence on their communities in such areas as politics, construction, finance and social work.

Module IX: The World of Work (five sessions). This module involves boys to explore and discuss non-traditional occupations for men and women. It provides the skill to discover the personal choices in the world of work. Society and family will often dictate certain professions to men and others to women. Many men understand the lifestyle of working in a profession while women toil at menial jobs. Men need to consider that both genders can make a choice as to which type of work they choose. There are work ethics involved in every job. Once they understand those values and start that work, it is important to comprehend the concepts of money management and savings accounts.

Module X: Puberty (four sessions). This module discusses about the positive and negative connotations in the vocabulary of sexuality, the rites of passage into manhood and sexual behaviour and its accompanying values. It tells about the adolescent boys who are well informed about sexuality and reproduction can learn to exercise responsible and healthy behaviour. They can also learn to involve their partners in sharing responsibility for sexuality and reproduction. It is important understand the differences in sexual development of males and females. Decisions regarding sexual intercourse must be well thought out and responsible.

Module XI: Reproduction (four sessions). This module discusses the importance of understanding the male and female reproductive cycles and systems. It tells about how sexuality and pregnancy and parenthood affect men and women. It is vital that boys acquire this knowledge because it affects every aspect of their lives. They need to understand that having a child requires information, time, and a great deal of thought.

Module XII: Health (six sessions). This module helps boys to understand the critical health concerns so they can prevent or improve them: traditional practices, poor household and personal hygiene, drug abuse and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It tells that Boys and young men must be in good health to be able to make choices about their life options. Poor nutrition and lack of exercise will affect their friendships, relationships and work. If a boy is weak because of chronic disease, poor diet, and compromised physical health, he is unlikely to pursue an education, expand his skills, or assert his rights. He needs to understand the value of physical and mental health for boys and girls.

Module XIII: Marriage, Partnership and Parenthood (seven sessions). The sessions in this module involve thinking about how gender-related expectations affect marriage, family, and community and how traditions may sometimes be changed. It discusses on how a man's relationship with his wife is a very important part of his life. Decision making in the family has normally been a male role even though decisions affect women. Many women want to be equal participants in the marriage and family. What are the healthy options for men and women in marriage? How can men interact better with their wives? What are the rights of wives and children? These questions and many more are discussed in this module.

Module XIV: Legal Rights (four sessions). The sessions in this module introduce adolescent boys to learn about their legal rights as well as to educate them that women also have equal rights. It also discusses about two important legal rights issues: sexual harassment and rape. It is pivotal for adolescents to know their legal rights.

Module XV: Environment (two sessions). The sessions in these module discusses about the environmental problems and makes enable boys to assess the local conditions and plans to deal with environmental problems. It discusses about the environmental degradation (of water, land and air) has a direct impact on all of us. We must deal with shortages of water and fuel, poor disposal of garbage, and the harmful effect of air

pollution and unsafe water. The future prospects of youth are very much connected to the conditions of the world around them. Without a healthy environment, their energies will be drained by coping with shortages of local resources and environment related health problems. Young people can be active participants in improving their local environment.

Module XVI: Taking off from here (three sessions). In the previous modules the sessions were designed to enable the adolescent boys for analyzing their self-worth and how they can be agents of change not only in their own lives, but also in their communities and their families. The sessions in the final module provide them with the opportunity to appreciate their accomplishments, to contemplate new goals or alternatives, and to consider ways to continue to support one another and work together.

The program is proposed to be launched as:

Training of facilitators

A training of facilitators is to be organized for 5 full days and additional sessions will be taken in the morning and evening time.

The facilitators are to be selected as per the following criteria,

- Woman
- At least SLC level passed
- Willing to work with adolescent girls
- Adolescents are preferred if qualified
- Inclusion perspective is to be considered

BLOP sessions

The sessions will be run 2-3 hours a day, 3 days a week in the alternative days. There fore a facilitator may run two centers in a week. Every session is taught for behavior change and to develop commitment.