

Engaging with the Bank for better child protection measures in projects

In 2020, TPO Alliance, a Nepalese CSO, became involved with an irrigation project in western Nepal funded jointly by the World Bank and the Nepalese government. TPO's role was to monitor whether the construction sites were complying with international protections of children's rights, especially regarding child labor and sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEA/H). TPO conducted field site visits and systemic assessments including focus groups, case studies, and identifying and talking to child laborers. The organization then analyzed the information they received and presented their findings to the implementing agencies within the government, the Bank focal point, and other officials. Their impacts were both swift and apparently ongoing: In one area, wire fencing was put on both sides of the planned canal to protect children from falling in. In another construction site, the assessment team identified the severe incidence of child fatality and SEA/H. These were reported to the Bank and the relevant government authority. The project brought on a safeguarding official and gender specialist. When the assessment team returned to a construction site in a separate field visit in 2022, they found no children working there.

BIC's role in this project included technical support, access to decision makers, and capacity-building. In monthly consultation meetings, BIC provided TPO with technical advice for designing and implementing field studies, communicating what they learned to others, and developing strategy. Beyond having an impact on TPO's action plan in the irrigation project itself, however, BIC helped TPO learn an entirely new approach to this form of advocacy and engagement it had not yet done - development project monitoring. Though it was already a sophisticated and experienced organization in mental health advocacy, education, and services, monitoring development programs was totally new to TPO. BIC's guidance during this period grew TPO's capacity to intervene on projects that would directly impact vulnerable communities, and to gain credibility with the government and banks so that TPO is now able to hold its own in these meetings and be heard.

Additionally, BIC's support in facilitating global connections among TPO and other partners in the child welfare and protection space has helped broaden the organization's perspective to think about things in a different way. BIC brought TPO members to the annual Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meeting, where they were able to meet other people from across the world engaging with similar issues in development projects. For example, learning of a project in Bolivia in which CSOs were struggling because of contextual issues, such as a lack of government support, encouraged TPO to think about how it could prepare to deal with more hostile parties or backlash against findings the Nepalese government might not want to hear.

What ultimately changed was how the organization is placed to maximize impact in development projects. This is a particularly important achievement as TPO remains involved with upcoming development projects in Nepal.