

National Inter-Religious Network (NIRN) – Nepal

FIVE YEARS STRATEGIC PLAN
2021-2025

Kathmandu

2020

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ACRONYMS

CP	Child Protection
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
FBOs	Faith Based Organizations
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HTPs	Harmful Traditional Practices
INGOs	International Non-Government Organizations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MOFAGA	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
MOHP	Ministry of Health and Population
MOWCE	Ministry of Women, Children and Elderly
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIRN	National Inter-Religious Network
NPC	National Planning Commission
SWC	Social Welfare Council
SWOC	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Challenge
UNICEF	United National Children's Fund
UNFPA	United National Population Fund
WVI	World Vision International

FOREWORD

“When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” Anonymous

Harmful Traditional Practices have an impact on women, girls, boys, men and as a whole in a society. National Inter-Religious Network (NIRN) Nepal envisions social harmony, promote gender equality, religious harmony and reduce harmful traditional practices through regular dialogue, collaboration, partnership based on coexistence with interfaith organization and stakeholders. I am therefore, pleased to present Five Years Strategy of NIRN (2021-2025).

The strategic plan stressed on ensuring that NIRN contributes towards strengthening NIRN’s capacity to reduce existing Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) in the Nepali society. NIRN believes that Integrating religious perspective into the development interventions contributes to enhancing better outcome among general population. With this spirit, the objective of the strategic plan is to promote a harmonious society where all people including marginalized groups enjoy full respect, dignity and participate to contribute towards social development. To achieve this objective, the activities will be worked on three pillars i.e. a) Capacity Building of religious leaders; b) reduce harmful traditional practices and; c) Organizational capacity of NIRN. The strategic plan will provide detail on operational framework, influencing and partnership strategy; quality approach and practice improvement and development of new competencies; resource management and more. I believe this strategy is a first step towards having clarity and guide on NIRN’s vision to achieve its envisioned goal.

I would like to extend my gratitude to NIRN board members Dr Anoja Guruma-Vice President, Isu jung karki-Secretary, Arrman Miya Thakurau-Treasure, Roshani Kamachraya, Piya Dassi, Rati Devi Joshi Shrestha, Irfan Pokharal, Kamal Baraile-Members. My since thanks goes to NIRN advisors Dr Narrendra Pande, Kesahav Prasad Chaulagai, Prakesh Pokharel, Tika Data Baral, Nazrul Husan, Dr Namrata Pande, Lok Manay Golcha, Dharama Murti and Seema Khan who has provided inputs on this document. My appreciation goes to NIRN Coordinator Ms. Nahida Banu and the consultant to lead the process Ms. Nishee Shrestha Adhikari, they have indeed done an immaculate job in forging this strategy during this crisis. I would also like to grasp this moment to thank the funding agency World Vision International (WVI) for providing needful support for preparation of this strategy. Lastly, let me end by stressing that integrating religious perspective in development intervention is a shared responsibility. It is a responsibility for all development sector including government and non-government organizations. Strategic plan is a practical guidance for NIRN and also committed for its implementation.

With this I conclude this brief foreword.

Harsha Thapa
President
National Inter-Religious Network (NIRN) Nepal

INTRODUCTION OF NIRN

National Inter-Religious Network (NIRN)-Nepal is a network of different faith based organization with representation from Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islam, Jainism, Kirat, Sikh and other religious minority. NIRN was established in December 2008 and is registered in District Administration Office in Lalitpur.

Nepal exhibit traditional and cultural practices that are harmful specifically to women and girls. Practices that abound Nepal include domestic violence related to dowry, child marriage and son preference. The severity of practices differs between communities and geographical context as well. Cultural relativists argue that these practices are long-standing, voluntary religious and ethnic traditions. However, studies reveal that this assumption does not account for the evolution of these practices. Practices sometimes rationalized as religious tradition have evolved to a point where they conflict with religious tenets.

Considering the situation, since its establishment, NIRN Nepal is playing active role by linking and providing a platform for religious communities to come together jubilantly for the promotion of gender equality and to reduce harmful social practices existing in the communities. NIRN believes that religious leaders could influence enormously in the society, where their thoughts are respected, heard and followed. NIRN is putting full effort in bring innovations to influence general population to eliminate harmful traditional practices and promote gender equality based on religious scripts.

NIRN Nepal envisions 'Social harmony, promote gender equality, religious tolerance and peaceful society'. Mission of the NIRN is to promote gender equality, religious harmony and reduce harmful traditional practices with regular dialogue, collaboration, partnership based on coexistence with interfaith organizations and stakeholders.

CONTEXT:

Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) are prevalent and often perceived and practiced as part of culture in the communities which prevents individual and groups from reaching their full potential. As a result of HTPs, many are denied dignity and liberties which poses as an obstruction for people to enjoy their basic human rights. Referring to the results of the Community Perception Survey conducted in 2017 by UN Country Team (UNCT) in Nepal, it has been recognized that harmful practices stands as a serious barrier to developmental outcomes, particularly for women and girls. These practices hinder inclusive governance and political participation, economic development, education, agricultural development, health and more, and ultimately prevent the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the principle of Leaving No One Behind.

The Constitution of Nepal 1990 defined the country as a “Hindu Kingdom”, however, the government did not interfere in practices of other religious groups, and religious tolerance was broadly observed. Despite of this situation, there were some restrictions posed by the government. The Interim Parliament, through the Interim Constitution, officially declared the country as a secular state in January 2007; however, no legislation specifically affected freedom of religion. Nonetheless, many believed that the declaration made it easier to practice their religion

freely. Government of Nepal, under the Constitution of Nepal 2015, which was promulgated on September 20, 2015 has declared a nation as secular country. The Constitution provides full rights and freedom to practice one's religion. The Constitution also specifically denies the right to convert people to different religions. The Government took positive preliminary steps with respect to religious freedom, spelling it clearly in the legal framework contributing to the free practice of religion.

For the sake of this strategic document the analysis was conducted focusing on Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges (SWOC) of NIRN. The outcome of SWOC analysis is as follows;

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unique setting having solidarity and commitment among interfaith leaders ▪ Study and collection of positive message from all religious Scripture ▪ Wider recognition of NIRN religious leader ▪ Extended network of NIRN in different districts adopting common goal 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited expertise of interfaith leaders on different development issues specially on human rights issues ▪ Lack of branch offices of NIRN for swift actions implementation ▪ Short term collaboration with government and non-government stakeholders ▪ Lack of organizational guiding documents
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trust of general population towards religious leaders and sermons ▪ NIRN's recognition among stakeholders as an organization advocating based on multiple religious' harmony ▪ Possible access to local government resources through its networks ▪ Positivity of religious institution towards NIRN representative 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited human resource and organizational capacity on networking and fund raising ▪ While challenging HTPs, negativity may grow towards religious leaders ▪ Emerging competition among interfaith organizations ▪ Negative press/media coverage

SECTION ONE: OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

1.1 Operational framework

NIRN have been working in Nepal since long however, it is still in a crawling stage by setting up its network in different partners of the countries. Involvement of religious leaders in development areas is not yet perceived as a priority either by the national, provincial, local government, or by donors. Despite of this situation, there is a slight level of sensitization that has been done in recent year on importance of advocacy based on interfaith believe to reduce the existing harmful practices in the communities.

The capacity of the religious leaders itself is still needs to be improved to bring rights based approach to ensure dignity of every human being living in the society despite of their gender, age, disability, geography, ethnicity and economic status. Being a young organization, not very known among wider stakeholders, NIRN is now positioning itself, and strategy process to serve this purpose. The strategy has been developed based on identified needs of role play of religious leaders in social change, the potential added value, feasibility and fund raising opportunities for NIRN to intervene in few sectors. With this context, the timeframe of the strategy has been decided for five years. Hence, the strategy draws path for the year 2021-2025 and the operational strategy summary is as follows;

General Objective for 2021-2025	
Promote a harmonious society where all people including marginalized groups enjoy full respect, dignity and participate to contribute towards social development	
Operational Pillars	Expected Results
1. Capacity Building: Support religious leaders to understand the evolving development context to create inclusive society by promoting crucial roles of religious leaders to bring positive impact in the society, combining both religious and human rights perspective	1.1 Religious leaders gain adequate knowledge on national and international human right policies and role of religious leaders
	1.2 Religious leaders start considering rights based perspective during religious events and also contribute towards influencing social justice
2. Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs): Promote community sensitization to change mind-set among general population to reduce existing HTPs in the society and ensure social participation of all people, while preventing the social conflicts	2.1 The HTPs (child marriage, dowry, son preference, gender discrimination, untouchability etc.) are reduced in the areas where NIRN implements its activities
	2.2 Gender equality is embedded at organizational level interventions as well as in program implementation of NIRN
3. Organizational Development: Strengthen NIRN's organizational capacity by developing needful organizational policies/strategies, expanding NIRN's network, developing capacity of religious leaders and strengthening fund raising strategies	3.1 Organizational policies (gender, child protection, human resources, fund raising and others) are developed and updated in regular basis and strengthened its implementation
	3.2 Network of NIRN in all seven provinces are established as well as the district level networks are strengthened
Cross cutting themes	
Gender, Child Protection, Inclusion, Influencing	

1.2 Influencing

The program is actively committed towards implementation of the advocacy component as directed by the five years' strategy. However, some needful cautious needs to be taken as advocacy action could endanger the reputation of NIRN and also safety of the NIRN representatives and staff members when implemented without needful accuracy.

In-country Influencing:

- a. Local Government: Priority will be given to the advocacy interventions with local government at local level. The advocacy with local government will be done through NIRN's network established at district level. NIRN national level will focus on capacity development of the district network on thematic areas and on advocacy strategy. Based on this an advocacy action plan will be developed. Following advocacy action plan, district level network will advocate with local government to mainstream religious perspective into the development interventions and also on allocation of resources for mobilization of religious leaders on different interventions to be taken at district level.
- b. Provincial Government: with representation of selected district level network members will form provincial level NIRN network. The provincial level network will start from one province and will be expanded to other six provinces. The provincial network will be trained on advocacy intervention at the provincial level followed by development of the provincial network advocacy action plan. The provincial level network will advocate with provincial government to mainstream religious perspective into provincial level policies/strategies and also advocate to allocate resources to implement different activities to sensitize local population to reduce harmful traditional practices in the communities. The pro
- c. National Government: NIRN national team will advocate strong with ministries', SWC and other government authorities to advocate integrating religious perspective while promoting the protection issues. The national level will also stress on mainstreaming religious perspective in development interventions developed at national level by the government i.e. policies, strategies, action plan, periodic plans etc. National team will also advocate for participation of religious leaders in different consultation related to key agenda associated with elimination of harmful traditional practices.
- d. International agencies: At national level NIRN team will organize series of consultation with international organization like UN agencies, INGOs, embassies and other international agencies working in Nepal, on importance of inclusion of religious perspective on development interventions to bring positive change in the society. The advocacy will also include important role of religious leaders in this process. The provincial and district level network will also make necessary coordination at respective level to coordinate and collaborate with existing in international organization.

1.3 Partnership strategy

- a. **Authorities:** A strong collaboration will be established with the authorities at national, provincial and district level. National level collaboration may include National Planning Commission (NPC), Ministry of Women, Children and Elderly (MoWCE), Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Administration (MOFALD), Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) as well as other line ministries. Provincial level collaboration may include Ministry of Social Development and district level collaboration may include respective municipal offices. The new federal governmental structures in the country and the necessary bureaucratic procedures has convinced the NIRN team to dedicate part of the workload of the board members and network members to establish and strengthen relation with the authorities.
- b. **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** NIRN intends to engage as much as possible in partnership with national level civil society organizations, specially who are working on the theme of gender equality and elimination of harmful traditional practices. Shared accountability, shared responsibility and mutual commitment are guiding the choice of partners for NIRN. Partners are organizations implementing activities around the mentioned social issues who engage with NIRN in a joint intervention partnership. The understanding on solid and long term impact through religious leaders is still lacking among CSOs, NIRN will bring its added value through the development of partnership and provide needful technical support on religious perspective to the interventions.
- c. **Donors, UN Agencies, international organizations:** Since its establishment, NIRN has experience working in partnership with UN agencies like UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, INGOs such as Caritas Nepal, Plan International and World Vision International on the issues related to child marriage, gender based violence, senior citizens. NIRN is also invited by donors on various occasions to discuss about possible collaborations that may contribute towards targeted goals of social change. Considering time required for establishing contact, regular follow up and consultation, NIRN board members and network members will take part of the responsibility to strengthen relation with international agencies.
- d. **Others:** In addition to authorities, CSOs and international agencies, NIRN will explore and dedicate its possible partnership with other faith based organizations, private sector and other possible institution to work on the common cause drafted by NIRN. NIRN board members and network members will bring innovations to buy in their interest and get involved on their capacity building.

1.4 Geographical strategy

Currently, NIRN is working in 26 districts of Nepal establishing the district level networks. In next five years, NIRN targets to establish provincial level network in seven provinces. Similarly, district level network is targeted to expand in 10 more districts.

SECTION TWO: QUALITY APPROACH, PRACTICE IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW COMPETENCIES

2.1 Harmonizing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Set-up:

NIRN has set clear ambition with regards to the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). During the strategy timeframe, NIRN is willing to have a completely harmonized M&E setup. NIRN also commits, as a good practice, to perform regular assessment of the M&E system focusing on system's ability to a) ensure meaningful participation and protection of beneficiaries and stakeholders in all program phase; b) collect and report high quality data; c) produce evidence based learnings for program's improvement and decision making. M&E assessment will also be used to identify gaps in resources, skills and capacities and monitoring improvement of the five years' strategy.

2.2 Strengthening capacity in M&E mechanism:

M&E task will be assigned clearly to the NIRN board and staff members by forming a M&E Committee, who will be adequately trained on M&E mechanism to fulfil their responsibilities. M&E topic may also include data quality and the procedures for quality assurance. External expert will be hired and develop capacity building package as per the identified need of NIRN and ensure orientation on M&E standards and procedures are provided to all concerned at national and local NIRN network. NIRN will also ensure that ad hoc training on M&E to its board members is organized on annual basis. Moreover, NIRN will try to have one dedicated M&E staff to ensure quality MEAL mechanism.

2.3 Quality

Quality will be ensured throughout the project cycle including: developing quality indicator in planning phase looking at the intermediary outcomes and the expected high level changes. Monthly, quarterly and annual report reviews will be conducted among NIRN central team and with participation of provincial and district network as much as possible.

Routine data quality check will be performed as part of continuous supervision with an objective to maximize data accuracy and reliability and to ensure the relevance of data is maintained along the program life. NIRN will also aim at developing minimum standards and procedures for participation, accountability, transparency and information sharing.

2.4 Learning and documentation

In order to measure impact, NIRN will form a committee comprises of board members, provincial and district network members and staff member, to regularly develop the tools/techniques to monitor and capture the changes made by NIRN's interventions. The committee will consider innovations while developing the tools/techniques to demonstrate wider level impact. Special focus will be made on proper documentation to minimize loss of information. Proper documentation system will be introduced and implemented. NIRN will ensure collection of evidences from the working areas every quarter. Evidence based lessons learned will be a compulsory output at the end of every project. NIRN will also ensure production for learning papers based on evidences collected in annual basis which will be shared internally and externally and will be used for decision making and future planning.

SECTION THREE: COMMUNICATION

3.1 Internal/External Communication:

An official communication flow chart will be developed in order to structure the communication among the NIRN board member / central team, provincial network, district network and with external stakeholders. The program is committed to implement the communication flow chart and also to develop ad hoc communication tools in order to keep information flow smooth among central, provincial and district network.

3.2 Emergency Communication:

Considering different geographical areas potentially at risk of natural hazards, NIRN will develop a short emergency communication plan to apply in case of need.

SECTION FOUR: RISK AND ASSUMPTIONS

The different identified risks are related to the timeframe of the strategy and NIRN has also developed mitigation measures for each identified risk:

Risks	Mitigation Measures
1. Inappropriate communication management among NIRN central and local networks	▪ Identify communication focal person, production of communication flow chart, sensitization of NIRN team (including networks) on communication management
2. Donor budget cuts result in insufficient funding for integrating religious component in the program activities	▪ NIRN team's (including networks) proactive attitude, based on a twofold action: visibility with stakeholders/intense fundraising activity. Target fundraising based on the five years' strategy.
3. Major natural hazards	▪ Commitment for the emergency preparedness plan for emergency natural hazards; develop emergency communication plan; provision of incident reporting; security situation follow up
4. Religious leaders become victimized of anti NGO feeling	▪ Frequent analysis of situation both at central and local level; strengthen coordination with other NGOs/CSOs; planning on various scenarios
5. Program data/document management and safety	▪ Organized regular (weekly/monthly) back-ups; install security software
6. Government authorities doesn't approve partnership with religious networks	▪ Clear strategy of NIRN to blend religious thoughts with human rights approach with an objective to eradicate harmful traditional practices and promote gender equality; evidence based advocacy with the authorities
7. Turn-over of staff members and loss of memory/expertise	▪ Reinforcement of NIRN staff members; systematic handover report; lessons learnt and program evaluation document

SECTION FIVE: RESOURCES NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT A STRATEGY

5.1 Human Resource:

On the basis, and with the ambition of creating HR setup able to support the operational strategy and the potential expansion of the program. The new organogram will be developed following the principles of flexibility and simplicity. The pace of transition will depend on the availability of the budget, impacting especially the size of NIRN staff members. The major action points include a) development of organogram considering potential projects; b) revise job description of staff members; c) capacity building plan for the staff members; and d) promotion of pleasant and attractive working environment

5.2 Financial Resources:

Despite of number of organizations working on the thematic areas, NIRN being only actor delivering activities oriented to religious perspective, it is likely that the presence of NIRN will be guaranteed to add value for interventions by various organizations (donors, I/NGOs). NIRN despite of being young organization into human rights issues, a funding opportunity may be provided when and if donor start to fund in some more comprehensive activities.

5.3 Key financial objectives:

a. Funding coverage is improved and funding sources diversified:

The main avenues identified to achieve this objective are: developing strong link with some key donors, INGOs who are already in contact with NIRN in order to intercept funds, stressing the added value of NIRN as a unique sub in major consortia. Advocating with authorities at central and local level to put religious perspective into government agenda and access government resources to implement it.

b. Adequate HR support:

Skilled human resources will be budgeted. Adequate human resources will be planned in project planning as needed to ensure quality program implementation. This will be budgeted and presented justifying it to donors and authorities.

c. Compliance:

Compliance with donor's regulation can and need to be improved within NIRN. NIRN keep producing financial document of high quality, monitoring its compliance, and therefore limiting the impact of audits.

d. Financial Outlook 2021-2025:

Description per Sector	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Capacity Building	900,000	120,000	150,000	170,000	170,000
Harmful Traditional Practices	5,000,000	7,000,000	8,000,000	7,000,000	9,000,000
Organizational Development	800,000	1,000,000	1,200,000	1,500,000	1,600,000
Operational cost	1,500,000	1,700,000	1,800,000	2,000,000	2,100,000
Total cost	8,200,000	9,820,000	11,150,000	10,670,000	12,870,000

Annex-1: Detail Strategic Plan

Pillar	Activities	Year				
		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Pillar 1: Capacity Building: Support religious leaders to understand the evolving development context to create inclusive society by promoting crucial roles of religious leaders to bring positive impact in the society, combining both religious and human rights perspective	Expected Result 1.1: Religious leaders gain adequate knowledge on national and international human right policies and role of religious leaders					
	Activity 1.1.1 Produce training manuals / develop toolkits for training to religious leaders on human rights mechanism and role of religious leaders					
	Activity 1.1.2 Develop toolkit as collection of different trainings to religious leaders on human rights mechanisms and role of religious leaders including tip sheets, facilitation guide					
	Activity 1.1.3 Organize trainings on human rights mechanism to the religious leaders (federal, provincial and district level) to capacitate them to play their role for social justice for those in need					
	Activity 1.1.4 Organize refresher training on human rights mechanism (federal, provincial and district level)					
	Activity 1.1.5 Conduct advocacy skills development training for religious leaders					
	Expected Result 1.2: Religious leaders start considering rights based perspective during religious events and also contribute towards influencing social justice					
	Activity 1.2.1 Organize inter-religious workshops among faith based leader to support integrating human rights mechanism into daily religious courses (federal, provincial and district level)					
	Activity 1.2.2 Conduct round table meetings with government stakeholders to create space for religious leaders in development interventions specially at local level					
	Activity 1.2.3 Conduct interfaith dialogue with national and international stakeholder to showcase religious leaders' active involvement to promote social justice (federal, provincial and district level) based on NIRN's learning at different level					
	Activity 1.2.4 Participate in day celebrations (Interfaith week, 16 days campaign Violence against women, women's day....) to promote peace and diversity based on holy scripts					

Pillar 2: Harmful Traditional Practices: Promote community sensitization to change mind-set among general population to reduce existing HTPs in the society and ensure social participation of all people, while preventing the social conflicts	Expected Result 2.1: The HTPs (child marriage, dowry, son preference, gender discrimination, untouchability etc.) are reduced in the areas where NIRN implements its activities					
	Activity 2.1.1 Organize evidence based policy dialogue sessions with National Human Rights Commission, ministries and other government stakeholders to draw attention on role of religious leader to reduce HTPs					
	Activity 2.1.2 Organize awareness raising events to promoted peace and diversity as interpreted by the holy scripts					
	Activity 2.1.3 Establish partnership with media and get regular space for religious leaders to talk/write to reduce HTPs					
	Activity 2.1.4 Establish sustainable link with existing mechanism to response in case of human rights violations					
	Activity 2.1.5 Conduct dialogues/workshops at different level linking religious beliefs with human rights mechanism to reduce HTPs					
	Expected Result 2.2: Gender equality is embedded at organizational level interventions as well as in program implementation of NIRN					
	Activity 2.2.1 Establish link with women's group, mothers' group and their network to advocate for gender responsive justice system					
	Activity 2.2.2 Promote dialogues targeting parents, guardians, adolescents to discuss about cause and consequences of HTPs to make them understand their role to reduce it					
	Activity 2.2.3 Engage with men and women, boys and girls to orient on rights of girls and women promoted by different religion and human rights mechanisms					
	Activity 2.2.4 Organize training to religious leaders to interpret the religious scripts with special attention to ensure dignity and right of girls and women during different religious events/occasions					
	Pillar 3: Organizational Development: Strengthen NIRN's organizational capacity by developing needful organizational policies/strategies, expanding NIRN's network, developing	Expected Result 3.1: Organizational policies (gender, child protection, human resources, financial and others) are developed and updated in regular basis and strengthened its implementation				
Activity 3.1.1 Gender policy, child protection policy is revised/updated and monitor it implementation						
Activity 3.1.2 Develop and practice financial strategy						
Activity 3.1.3 Develop communication Strategy (regular and in case of emergency), orient network members and revise as needed						
Activity 3.1.4 Develop influencing strategy						

capacity of religious leaders and strengthening fund raising strategies	Activity 3.1.5 Develop NIRN's website and update regularly to promote importance of religious interventions to promote peace and diversity in the community		■	■	■	■
	Expected Result 3.2: Network of NIRN in all seven provinces are established as well as the district level networks are strengthened	■	■	■	■	■
	Activity 3.2.1 Established office of NIRN in 7 province	■	■	■		
	Activity 3.2.2 Mapping the faith base organization to make bridges between NIRN and FBOs	■				
	Activity 3.2.3 Policy level Interfaith dialogue with province and federal government focusing on budget allocation		■	■	■	■
	Activity 3.2.4 Training on power and privilege in society					
	Activity 3.2.5 Training on pathway on social justice		■	■	■	