

A FRESH START NEPAL

By Nick Veldwijk, May 2016

I write this, looking over a buzzing square in Kathmandu. Surrounded by the smell of exhaust gases mixed with fine Nepalese spices, experiencing the heat and humidity like somebody is aiming a hairdryer in your face 24/7, the persistent honking by the taxi drivers and annoying salesmen who try to sell their beloved Purple Haze (the so-called best Hash in the world); just another day in Nepal. I love it. I look back on my last 2 weeks of work.

The past 14 days in Nepal were replenished with our work for the Bridging the Gaps 2 (BtG2) programme in Nepal. As country manager for Nepal, I am responsible for the work with People who Inject Drugs: a key population who inextricably have a higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. The new BtG2 programme commenced in 2016 and will end in 2020.

Effectiveness of outreach work

The International programme manager and the international trainer Mainline have started to set up a work plan and a new budget for the coming 6 months together with local implementation partner Youth Vision.



Mainline with the Outreach Workers from Youth Vision

In the coming six months, we will collaboratively increase the effectiveness of outreach work among Needle Syringe Programmes in Kathmandu Valley.

Based on the work plan and a needs assessment (which will be continued in August), the international trainer will provide training in Harm Reduction and we will focus on how to better monitor and evaluate current work.

Mapping PWUD in Kathmandu

Next to the development of the work plan, Mainline's senior partner from Pakistan - Nai Zindagi - has visited the local partner in Nepal to provide a mapping exercise. The goal of this exercise is to map all injecting users in all three districts in Kathmandu Valley; this also served as input to increase the effective Outreach Work.

Where you see a street-based drug scene in other countries, it is relatively quiet on the streets of Kathmandu. As the mapping shows, a lot of injecting users choose to inject at homes or indoors, which makes it difficult to reach them. In order to get in touch with these hard-to-reach groups, a specific methodology has been developed where users receive incentives if they bring other peers for the mapping.

Implementation of harm reduction services challenging

At the end of my visit, we have organised a consultation meeting for Harm Reduction experts, network organisations, several ministries (such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Home Affairs), law enforcement officials and UN-agencies to align our programme within the prevailing structures and existing work in this area.

Overall, the implementation of harm reduction services in Nepal seems to pose a great challenge. However, a positive challenge none the less! An afternoon with enthusiastic field workers ensures that you become enthusiastic of the practical and important work our partner does. Eventually, we hope our joint efforts with Youth Vision will improve the health and quality of life of drug users in Nepal.