

## Concerns over emigration and democracy dominate youth debate in Nepal

By Alexander Dörzenbach

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***Kathmandu (Nepal) – The drain on Nepal’s workforce from emigration and the state of the country’s democracy were among topics raised by a youth forum at FES Nepal, held to welcome the new country office director.***

Emigration is a leading concern for Nepal’s youth, according to an open discussion held May 3 by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in the country. Other pressing issues included the domestic economy, the rule of law and problems with political probity.

The event welcomed the new resident representative of FES Nepal, Annette Schlicht, and bade farewell to her predecessor Dev Raj Dahal, long-standing director of the country office. Also in attendance was Christiane Kesper, head of the division for international cooperation at FES, which coordinates the foundation’s offices in more than 100 countries.

The debate, under the guiding topic “Democracy in Nepal seen from a Youth Perspective”, brought together students, trade-union cooperators, political reporters, young political leaders and members of several civic youth organizations, to discuss the political situation from their varied perspectives.

Emigration was one of the main topics mentioned. The domestic economy is not strong enough to retain the country’s best workers, said Seema Lamichhane, a law student and member of youth organization AYON. The lack of rule of law - and of any visionary and accountable politicians - also does not make staying in Nepal an attractive long-term prospect for young workers, she said.

“Young people that go abroad are called to be the elite,” added Santosh Pariyar, assistant professor at the K&K College for Gender Studies. “Meanwhile, the ones staying and trying to change things are not taken seriously.”

The same political elites have ruled the country for more than 25 years, another participant pointed out. This problematic continuity of power had not even brought the benefit of any stability in policy matters, he said.

With the political situation being rather unforeseeable, uncountable newly emerged technocratic parties would try to capture the disenchanted youth from the longstanding political elites.



Nepal’s decade-long civil war ended with the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which paved the way for the country’s following transition into a secular, democratic and federal republic. The promises of the evolving constitution were wide-ranging: social, economic and political transformation accompanied by the implementation and protection of human rights.

Ten years on, the seed for political pessimism and dissent seems ready to sprout again. Progress in economic and political development has been limited, and the new democratic institutions and rights exist mostly on paper, giving little cause for celebration.

But besides the lack of inner-party democracy, the widening gap between theory and practice in government, and the youth migration problems, participants also stressed the importance of a constructive attitude. “The political situation is created by all of us, we can’t go on and blame only the politicians”, said Deepa Bhardjwaj, a trade union associate.



In the end there was consensus under the participants, that even if things are slow to progress, there are still changes happening. But in the end there is an obligation on every citizen to contribute to the creation of active social movements and foster a strong civil society, independent from party-political alignments.

Such social movements could be effective advocates for the country’s young workforce, and for ongoing political reform. Because, in the words of Professor Santosh, “a democracy needs democrats.”

Alexander Dörzenbach is an intern at the FES Nepal Office. For further information about the work of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Nepal contact the office team at [fes@fesnepal.org](mailto:fes@fesnepal.org).