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CHAPTER 5

Basic Education

The Convention on the Rights of the Child places responsibility on governments to ensure that all children have access to primary education. Nepal is a signatory to Education for All, and is attempting to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. These instruments mean that Nepal is committed to 'ensuring that by 2015, all children—particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities—have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality'.

Status of Education

The public education system in Nepal has grown at a steady pace since the early 1950s when there were fewer than a hundred schools. Today, there are tens of thousands of primary schools across the country, greatly extending access to basic education. In addition, secondary school education is becoming more accessible to larger numbers of students each year.

Children in Nepal formally start school in Grade 1 at the age of five years. Primary school education extends from Grade 1 to Grade 5, lower secondary from Grade 6 to Grade 8, and higher secondary from Grade 9 to Grade 10. After completing 10 years of formal education, students take the School Leaving Certificate (SLC). This is also the qualifying test to transit to tertiary education.

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports, net enrolment rates for 2004 were 84 per cent for primary school, 44 per cent for lower secondary school, and 32 per cent for higher secondary school [12]. However, non-ministry sources tend to indicate lower rates of enrolment. The National Living Standards Survey 2003/04 reports that net enrolment rates for 2003 were 72 per cent for primary school, 29 per cent for lower secondary school, and eight per cent for higher secondary school [44]. The differences between these sources can be explained by several factors including the way data are collected, the sources used, and simple errors in data compilation. However, one important element that distorts the ministry's figures is incomplete reporting by private schools. While private schools are required to register with the District Education Office and submit data on an annual basis, they do not always do so. In 2003, the Ministry of Education and Sports recorded 2700 private schools [12]. However, PABSON, a national association of private

Key education indicators

	Total	Boys	Girls
Primary GER (2004) (%)	131	137	124
Primary NER (2004) (%)	84	90	78
Primary completion (2003) (%)	50	50	51
Survival to Grade 5 (2004) (%)	76	72	81
Gross Intake Rate (2003) (%)	117	125	108
Net Intake Rate (2003) (%)	76	80	73
Repetition rate in Grade 1 (2003) (%)	34	34	34
Dropout rate in Grade 1 (2003) (%)	15	15	16
Transition rate to secondary school (2003) (%)	75	77	73
Secondary GER (2004) (%)	50	55	45
Secondary NER (2004) (%)	32	35	29
Literacy rate for 15+ years (2001) (%)	49	63	35
Literacy rate for 15-24 years (2001) (%)	70	81	60

Sources: [12;13]

schools in Nepal, estimates the total to be 8500. It is clear that the registration of private schools has not kept up with the growth in their number. According to the National Living Standards Survey 2003/04, the proportion of children attending private schools at the primary level has increased from six per cent in 1995/96 to 14 per cent in 2003/04 [44].

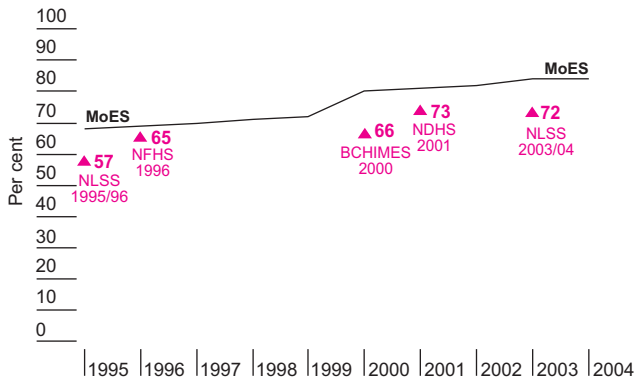
A notable achievement over the last decade has been the increase in net enrolment rates. Figures from the Ministry of Education and Sports are presented in Figure 13 along with figures from other sources. This increase is corroborated by the National Living Standards Survey 2003/04 which found that net enrolment rates had increased by 16 percentage points for primary school, by 11 percentage points for lower secondary school, and by six percentage points for upper secondary school between 1995 and 2003 [44].

As another indicator of improvements in education, the literacy rates for 15–24 year olds have increased over the last decade from 50 per cent in 1991 to 70 per cent in 2001 [13]. The ratio of literate women to men in this age group has also improved significantly from 0.48 in 1991 to 0.75 in 2001, indicating that the gender gap is narrowing [13]. In addition, survey findings show that fewer young women attend adult literacy programmes, indicating that nowadays young women are becoming literate through the formal education system [1]. The NDHS 2001 found that only 40 per cent of literate women aged 15–24 years had attended literacy classes compared to 85 per cent of literate women aged over 35 years [1].

While these achievements must be welcomed, there are several distinctive characteristics of Nepal's education system

FIGURE 13:

Primary net enrolment/attendance rates 1995–2004



Sources: [1;9;12;44;48;150]

that indicate many children are not receiving the opportunities for an education that they should or that the education they receive is of poor quality. This analysis will concentrate on primary education, as this is the focus of the Millennium Development Goal.

While the Ministry of Education and Sports can report that today there are 24,700 primary schools with around four million students, this still leaves nearly two in every 10 children aged 5–9 years out of school [12]. Other sources indicate that this figure might be closer to three in every 10 children [44]. The majority of these are girls and children from disadvantaged groups in rural areas. The net enrolment rate in 2004 at primary level was 78 per cent for girls compared to 90 per cent for boys [12]. In addition, while Dalits and *janjati* make up approximately 57 per cent of the country's population, they represent only 34 per cent of the children at primary school [12]. Only 71 per cent of children in rural areas attend primary school compared to 83 per cent of children in urban areas [44]. The *terai* has some of the worst-performing districts in terms of education, especially for girls.

Within primary school, repetition and dropout rates are high, especially in Grade 1, and the completion rate is low. While completion has improved from 41 per cent in 1999 to 50 per cent in 2003, half of children still do not finish a primary education [12]. Student learning achievements are also low, although there have been improvements over the years. In 2003, the national assessment showed that mean scores in Grade 5 achievement tests were 33 per cent in Mathematics, 45 per cent in English, 56 per cent in Nepali, 61 per cent in Social Science, and 67 per cent in Environmental Science and Health Education [151]. These averages mask regional disparities, with the Mid-Western and Far Western Development Regions and the mountains performing worse than other areas. Private schools have better achievement scores than public schools. The latest figures published by the Department of Education show that 83 per cent of students in private schools passed the SLC examination compared to 46 per cent of students from public schools.

EDUCATION AND THE CONFLICT

Displacement

The conflict has had a significant impact on the education of children in Nepal. Displacement has caused many children to suspend their education. A recent study showed that only 39 per cent of children who had left school because of displacement had rejoined school in their new area of residence. The remaining 61 per cent were either staying at home or were working in low paid jobs [43]. There are undoubtedly many reasons why children are not enrolled in a new school; however, a major reason appears to be a lack of the required documents especially when displacement has occurred suddenly or in secret. Recognizing this, the Ministry of Education and Sports has recently relaxed the rules on documentation and has instructed district education authorities to allow out-of-district children to be enrolled in school immediately rather than insisting on correct documentation first. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Sports is piloting a child-tracking system to facilitate children who have had to leave their home districts, although in some areas it is not being fully implemented.

When the breadwinners of households are displaced, their children often drop out of school either because there is not enough money or because children have to look after the home [26]. In these cases, it is often children from the poorest families who are most affected. One study found that children from wealthier families who are displaced tend to transfer to private schools in urban areas or overseas rather than drop put of school [30].

Bandhs and strikes

Frequent national and local *bandhs* also affect the schooling of children, by disturbing both the pace and quality of education. INSEC reported that most schools were only open for an average of 120 out of 180 mandatory days in 2002/03 [26]. As well as general *bandhs* called by the Maoists or other political groupings, schools have been affected by educational strikes that often require their closure for extended periods of time [30]. For example, in June 2004, schools throughout Nepal were closed for over two weeks [30]. These strikes are usually called by student

organizations affiliated to either the Maoists or their political opponents to demand changes to the current education system. Defiance of *bandhs* and educational strikes by individual schools can result in violent retaliation, with the private sector being more aggressively targeted [30]. School property has been destroyed at several schools that have defied Maoist-inspired *bandhs*. However, not all schools close for all *bandhs*: it depends on who has called the strike and how secure the local school authorities feel. For example, Maoists sometimes insist that government schools in Maoist areas remain open (Udayapur, Panchthar) during non-Maoist bandhs. In district headquarters where schools feel more secure, both private sector and government sector schools will sometimes defy Maoists *bandhs*.

On occasion, disruptions have focused on particular events such as examination days or the start of the school year. Students have been prevented from taking important examinations held on specific days [30]. However, the National Coalition for Children as Zones of Peace (CZOP) successfully persuaded both parties to the armed conflict to allow the 2004 and 2005 SLC examinations to be held without disruption [30].

Schools

Attacks on schools are rare. However, their impact can be devastating, as children are traumatized by their experiences or become fearful of what might occur. On a couple of occasions schools have been caught in crossfire during fighting, and students have been killed [30]. See chapter on Protection for more details. Schools have also been requisitioned for use as barracks by both government forces and Maoists, and property belonging to schools has been commandeered. Some districts (Achham, Panchthar) have seen trench-digging campaigns carried out by Maoists, where students and teachers are ordered to dig defensive trenches around school grounds.

In Maoist areas, classes are often disrupted by visiting Maoist cadres. One common reason for Maoist visits is to carry out indoctrination sessions with students and teachers. These sessions are either carried out on school grounds or students and teachers are abducted and forced to walk to a place that the Maoists consider to be more secure from attacks by the military. CWIN reports that during the last 10 years over 27,323 students along with their teachers have been abducted. During the period January to August 2005 alone, over 11,800 students and teachers were abducted [139]. Maoist activities in school include 'cultural' programmes where children are forced to perform revolutionary song-and-dance routines, and participation in parades, drills and political indoctrination [30]. In general, secondary schools have been more affected than primary schools [30].

In some Maoist areas, the curriculum is being politicized. Teachers have been pressurized to start *'janabadi'* education (people-oriented education), and the teaching of Nepali history and culture has been curtailed [37]. Schools have been told to follow a new education calendar that celebrates events related to the ideology and history of the Maoist movement rather than the present government and religious holidays. Schools must also display political banners with revolutionary slogans, wall paintings, and flags [37]. In reply, the government has insisted on an increasingly royalist emphasis to certain teaching. This has made teachers uncertain of which directive to follow, and they are fearful of punishment or retaliation by both parties [37].

The fear of what might happen at school has caused many families in conflict-affected districts to stop sending their children to school or to move them to other schools in safer areas. Enrolment has declined by 20 per cent in one conflict-affected district since the violence escalated during 2003 [37]. The resulting low attendance and general level of fear has meant that in some districts (Dadeldhura, Bajura, Achham) schools have closed down [30].

As lack of security has affected the the movement of government officials, many schools are no longer receiving monitoring visits from District Education Office personnel or Resource Persons. In one conflict-affected district, out of 27 open schools, 20 had not been visited for the past three years [37].

However, in this district most schools not visited by government officials were being 'monitored' by the Maoists [37].

Teachers

Since 1996, more than 160 schoolteachers from all parts of Nepal have been killed, according to the National Teachers' Association [30]. This is usually because the politicization of teaching unions has meant that teachers are considered to be important political targets (as informers or collaborators) by both Maoists and government forces. The Maoists have been particularly critical of teachers bringing non-Maoist political agendas into the classroom. As a result of intimidation, the Department of Education estimates that over 3000 teachers have left rural districts, as they flee to district headquarters in search of security [30].

Maoists have also forced teachers throughout the country to make 'donations'. Media reports suggest that the rate for 'donations' is approximately 10 per cent of a teacher's salary. However, this rate can vary at the discretion of the local Maoist leaders. For example, a media story in June 2004 reported that teachers in Jumla were forced by Maoists to donate their entire monthly salary to the Maoist party and wear military dress [30].

Examinations

The conflict has also caused a significant fall in the number of students taking examinations. For example, one conflict-affected district saw the proportion of enrolled students taking their final examinations fall from 72 per cent in 2002/03 to 53 per cent in 2004/05 [37]. The reason for this decline is mainly related to the lack of security available at examination centres. It is often not possible to ensure the safety of small examination centres in remote areas, so examinations have been moved to district headquarters by the Department of Education. However, students are afraid to travel long distances to these centralized places and, therefore, fail to take their examinations. This appears to particularly affect girls [37].

Private schools

As mentioned above, the Maoists have targeted the private sector and have forced the closure of hundreds of fee-paying schools in many districts. In early 2005, the Global IDP Project estimated that over 700 private schools, primarily in Gorkha, Baglung, Syangja, Tanahun, Dang and Surkhet, had been closed [30]. PABSON estimates that if all private primary and secondary schools were to close, as demanded by the Maoists, about 1.5 million children would be affected.

When private schools close down, students either drop out or move to government or other private schools. Overcrowding has become a serious problem for government schools in some conflict-affected districts (Saptari, Sunsari, Udayapur) [30]. These schools are often under-resourced in the first place, and the influx of large number of displaced students has stretched meagre conditions to the limit [30]. These problems have been compounded by the Maoists insistence that schools cannot charge fees. It is common practice for government schools to collect contributions (fees) from parents to pay for additional teachers and materials or to improve school facilities. In some cases, the lack of these resources has threatened the closure of schools (e.g., in Kailali District) [30].

ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

The main problems associated with primary education in Nepal are: not every child is in school; children are ill prepared for learning; schools do not always provide an environment that is conducive to learning; and the education delivered is of poor quality. In order for Nepal to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education it is necessary to analyse what causes children to stay away from school and why so many who enrol in primary school fail to complete a full cycle.

Why are children out of school?

Poverty

Poverty means that some families cannot meet the direct costs of sending their children to school. Although primary tuition is free, parents often have to provide stationery, food for a snack, and school uniforms. The cost of

these basic requirements is beyond the means of some families [152]. The National Living Standards Survey 2003/04 found that the poorest quintile of households spent about NRs 400 per child on education each year compared to NRs 8700 for the richest quintile [44]. Even where reimbursement programmes exist, families have to purchase their items before reimbursement can be processed; this can be difficult for cash-poor families (with several children) [153]. The reimbursement process is also bureaucratic and lengthy—some communities have had to wait for two years to receive reimbursement for textbooks. In a small study in Banke District, over half of the 253 families reported that it took longer than four months to be reimbursed [154]. In addition, some families do not send their children to school, as they cannot afford the opportunity costs in terms of lost income or labour.

Girls from poor families are most disadvantaged. When resources are limited and a choice has to be made between sending a son or a daughter to school, a son will usually be given priority [155]. Poor families often use different strategies to educate their sons and daughters. Girls are sent to non-formal education classes such as the Out-of-School Programme instead of formal school, as it is cheaper (and less time consuming) [153]. In another common scenario, girls are sent to public school while their brothers are sent to private school. A survey in Parsa District in 2003 found that 30 per cent of boys enrolled in school were in private schools compared to only 24 per cent of girls [156].

Traditional division of labour also disadvantages girls, as they are more likely to have to work in the home while other family members go out to work [153]. This is particularly true in poorer families, where the duration of schooling is markedly shorter than in richer families: mean years of schooling for the poorest quintile is 5.1 years compared to 9.2 years, nearly double, for the richest quintile [44]. The opportunity costs of educating a girl can be higher than those of educating a boy. In addition, the heavy burden of household chores leaves little or no time for girls to attend school [155]. This is a particular problem for the eldest daughter of a family, who is usually 'responsible' for looking after her preschool-aged siblings [153].

Value of education

For many families, the value of education is not recognized. It is seen as irrelevant to rural life and livelihoods. This is particularly true for families that expect their children to enter work that can be accomplished with little by way of literacy skills such as farming or labouring [157]. Parents are afraid that children who acquire an education will no longer want to be farmers or artisans and, consequently, will no longer be willing to help their families on the land or in the workshop [157]. In addition, they fear an erosion of their traditional values [157].

Moreover, it is often difficult for people to see a direct connection between the educational level of a household and its greater economic security, better health, and overall social progress [158]. Sometimes the visible unemployment and underemployment of local educated youths discourages families from acquiring an education for their own children [159]. Families feel that there are few job prospects for their children, even if they acquire an education [157].

The value of educating girls is a particular issue for many families, especially in the terai. Parents question the use of educating a daughter who will one day be given away in marriage to another family—'why water your neighbour's tree?' [160]. Some feel that 'women's work'—household chores—does not require an education [160] or that women who do have an education feel that it is 'beneath their dignity' to carry out such work [159]. Some families will only enrol their daughter in school while they receive an incentive or direct benefit such as cooking oil; once the incentive is discontinued, girls can sometimes be removed from school [159].

This general lack of awareness of the value of education is not helped by the high number of families with no tradition of literacy [152] and the low involvement—up to now—of communities and parents in educational planning and school development [160; 161].

Spatial distribution of schools

In Nepal, the spatial distribution of schools is determined by political/administrative boundaries rather than the size of the school-going population or its distance from school [158]. This means that for some children, school is either too full or too far away from home. A major constraint to universal education in Nepal is the lack of school places. In densely populated areas, such as the *terai*, there are too few schools, resulting in a severe shortage of places. For example, in Kapilvastu District in the *terai*, there are 21 VDCs that have only one primary school. Given the population density in this area, this coverage is far from adequate.

Although the Ministry of Education and Sports states that most primary schools are within a 30-minute walk for the majority of children in Nepal, in practice, many children have a much longer journey [162]. This is particularly true in the hill and mountain areas, where large, sparsely-populated VDCs mean that the educational facilities are often far from scattered settlements [152; 155]. The National Living Standards Survey 2003/04 found that 36 per cent of children from the mountains and 33 per cent of children from the rural hills lived more than 20 minutes from the nearest primary school. This contrasts sharply with 94 per cent of children in urban areas living less than 20 minutes from the nearest primary school. The poor condition of roads and trails can mean that the route to school becomes impassable in the monsoon [152]. In particular, long distances to school can be a serious disincentive to girls who often face cultural restrictions on their mobility [158].

Documentation

Although not an official requirement, children are usually obliged to produce their birth certificate or parents' citizenship papers before they can enrol in school, receive free textbooks or enter examinations [155]. This practice is especially common in the *terai* where families and communities have cross-border ties. Although schools are known to accept children without birth certificates for attendance, a child is usually not allowed to take the year-end examinations and so his/her schooling cannot be officially recognized. Many families do not possess the requisite documentation and do not know how to go about obtaining it. This is a particular problem for Dalits, orphans and displaced children. For some, particularly the landless and disadvantaged, such documentation might open access to the exercising of other rights that could expose the power structure within their communities; therefore, local elites block their attempts to obtain the necessary papers [153].

Why do children fail to complete their primary education?

Preparation for school

Many children entering school at the age of five years are poorly prepared for the experience [163]. They find school to be a frightening place that is not child-friendly. Few have had the chance to engage with adults outside their families, and they tend to be extremely shy. If they cannot speak Nepali, they may be unable to understand or communicate with their teachers. They are not familiar with numbers or letters, and have no experience of sitting through a long day. They find the curriculum and teaching style challenging. In many cases, parents have never been to school and are unable to prepare their children in any way. These problems are often more intense and create greater hurdles to educational attainment for girls, Dalits, ethnic minorities and the disabled [163].

Physical facilities

Many schools have sub-optimal infrastructure and facilities that discourage children from wanting to stay. Classrooms can be poorly equipped, with no seating, no desks, a non-functional blackboard, a lack of adequate lighting, and a roof that leaks when it rains [153; 157]. Many schools do not have space for a playground, especially in urban areas, or do not have stimulating playground equipment [160]. Few schools have a laboratory or a library [160].

Schools and classrooms are often not child-friendly spaces, particularly for girls and children from disadvantaged groups. They do not address a child's right and need for privacy and a safe environment. The lack of toilet facilities is a particular concern for many girls, especially as girls grow older and start menstruating [160]. Girls would rather not come to school when there are no separate facilities,

UNICEF/NEP/IMAGE 01359/ Chandra S. Karki

as they cannot use the open space around schools for urinating and do not like to share joint facilities with boys [160]. The lack of adequate water supplies results in unsanitary conditions around toilets, and makes it impossible for children to stay clean during the school day. It is also common for schools to lack a fence around the compound; this can be a security concern for some children, especially girls and youngsters [160].

Teaching methodology and teaching materials

Teaching methods are not child-centred, and instruction is not stimulating [158]. The teaching–learning process is driven by the examination system. Parents often complain that the curriculum imparts knowledge that is irrelevant to the everyday lives of their children, and cite lack of learning as a major reason given by their children for dropping out.

There is a chronic shortage of child-oriented teaching materials, and teachers who have been trained in such methodologies [157]. Classroom materials supplied by the government for teaching and learning such as textbooks and teachers' guides are insufficient and often late [153]. In 2004, only one-third of students received textbooks within one week of school opening [12]. Another study found that 14 per cent of students in two districts had not received textbooks after one month [154].

For girls, the heavy homework burden can act as a disincentive, as they often have to do household chores when they return home and have no time to study [160].

Lack of trained teachers

There are currently over 70,550 teachers working at primary level [12]. Almost all primary school teachers meet the government-prescribed minimum qualification of an SLC; however, only 38 per cent are fully trained [12]. The government's recommended student-to-teacher ratio is 40 for the mountains, 45 for the hills, and 50 for the *terai*. The national ratio for 2004 was 39.7 to one, but this masks wide variations across districts, with the Kathmandu Valley having a student-to-teacher ratio of 24 to one [12].

In many schools with five grades, there are only three teachers. This lack of teachers means that grades are often combined. However, most teachers do not have appropriate training or support to handle multiple grades [161]. This results in poor teaching methods, with lessons becoming lectures and children learning by rote [157]. Although the government has a system for in-service teacher training, teachers complain that they do not have sufficient input into selecting which training they need, and that the training they receive is often of limited use in the classroom because of other constraints such as lack of space or materials.

Teachers say they receive little appreciation or support from the district education authorities or the community; and are often expected to work in stressful classroom environments, made more difficult by the conflict. They are underpaid and often paid irregularly. Even when teachers are dedicated, the lack of consistent academic support and backstopping they experience can soon dampen their enthusiasm. The supervision and monitoring of teachers both within the school and through the Resource Centres is weak, with little time for meaningful management and technical support [152; 155; 164]. These factors result in de-motivated teachers whose time on task is not always up to the mark [164].

Overcrowded classrooms

Some schools do not have enough classrooms or classroom space, which

creates overcrowding, with up to 120 pupils in one class [153]. Moreover, where programmes to increase enrolment have been successful, the increased number of students has put a severe strain on already inadequate infrastructure [161]. Another problem for formal school is the number of overage and underage children in Grade 1. When older children attend school, they often take their younger siblings to school with them and leave them in Grade 1 for 'care'. This swells the population of already overcrowded classrooms, and makes the teaching–learning environment for appropriately-aged children particularly difficult. In many districts, the gross intake rate is around 120 per cent.

Lack of female teachers

The lack of female teachers causes a particular difficulty for girls, especially in the *terai*. In communities where social norms demand that girls are subservient to men, it is not easy for female students to interact constructively with male teachers. In addition, there are certain sensitive subjects that cannot be taught by male teachers to female students. The government policy on female teachers was revised in 2004 to ensure at least two (increased from one) female teachers in each primary school. Nevertheless, statistics show that more than 10,000 primary schools do not have a single female teacher [12]. At present, about 24 per cent of primary school teachers are female [12]. Of these, 38 per cent are fully trained [12]. The actual distribution of female teachers shows a heavy concentration in and around urban centres, with an average of four female teachers in primary schools in Kathmandu and other district headquarters.

Some parents have concerns for the safety of their daughters in male-dominated environments with no adult females to provide supervision [158]. Although the demand for female teachers is strong, the existing system of teacher management does not encourage women to work in rural areas [160]. Many girls drop out because they do not feel comfortable with the lack of adult females at school; they need someone to offer a layer of protection and with whom they can communicate easily. Parents also say that they find it easier to speak to women teachers. In schools that employ female teachers, enrolment rates for girls are reported to increase [158;159;160].

Early marriage and cultural practices

Early marriage for girls usually brings an end to schooling, as household responsibilities take precedence. This is particularly common in disadvantaged communities [155]. Even if schooling is continued after marriage, early child-bearing compels these girls to leave school before completing a full cycle of education [159]. As well as the conflicting practicalities of being a wife and attending school, many people believe that a wife should be less educated than her husband, so parents are afraid to educate a daughter too much, as it might restrict the number of suitors available to her [159]. In addition, in some communities the more educated a girl the greater the dowry her family is expected to pay to her husband's family [155;159]. Girls can also be prevented by cultural taboos from continuing with their schooling once they have started to menstruate [152;159].

Discriminatory attitudes

Within the classroom, some teachers' attitudes can be unsympathetic or even discriminatory [157]. Teachers are not always trained to promote the participation of children, by encouraging them to speak out and express their views and take initiative on issues that concern them. Corporal punishment and verbal abuse are commonplace [155]. Teachers are not trained to be gender sensitive and often favour boys over girls [160]. Caste discrimination, and particularly the stigma attached to being 'untouchable', can make it difficult for the children of certain castes to attend school [152;157]. It creates an inferiority complex in these children, and diminishes their confidence in their ability to study. Sometimes children are directly discriminated against by teachers and other students. In some communities, Dalit children at school are compelled to eat their lunch in a separate place to non-Dalit children; this is humiliating and causes children to drop out [159]. Few teachers are Dalits or from other disadvantaged groups [153]. The poor relationship between teachers and students is often cited by children as a major reason

dropping out of school, particularly by girls and disadvantaged children [158].

Another group that is often ignored are those with some form of disability. It is estimated that some 10 per cent of primary-aged schoolchildren may have a physical or mental disability. Most of these children are out of school [158].

Language of instruction

The language of instruction is a major problem for many children. Although Nepali is the most-widely spoken language in the country, for about half the population it is not the mother tongue. For many children, school might be the first and only place that they hear Nepali, and they simply cannot understand what is being taught. Moreover, teachers who do not speak the local languages find it difficult to communicate at any level with these students. This is a major reason for children dropping out early in Grade 1, and is a particular problem for children from disadvantaged communities [152]. The Ministry of Education and Sports reports that there are now primers in 12 languages, but there is yet to be any large-scale piloting of what is becoming a system priority. Where teachers who speak the local language have been employed, they too have a problem using and understanding the Nepali textbooks [152].

RESPONSE TO EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Education for All National Plan of Action

In response to problems encountered in the education system, Nepal has formulated an Education for All National Plan of Action 2001–2015. Following consultation with education stakeholders at national, regional, district and sub-district levels, an Education for All Programme 2005–09 has been developed. It incorporates the six policy goals of the Dakar Framework for Action and aims to meet the following main objectives.

- Ensure access and equity in primary schools: The core commitment of the programme is that every child will receive a quality basic education, regardless of disability, religion, economic status, ethnic, religious and linguistic background. The goal is to raise net enrolment to 96 per cent by 2015.
- Enhance quality and relevance of primary education: The focus is on developing national minimum standards for a quality and relevant education. This will be achieved by expanding early childhood development, training teachers, improving learning environments and teaching materials, and facilitating the development of locally relevant curricula.
- Improve system efficiency and institutional capacity of schools and institutions at all levels: The Ministry of Education and Sports plans to implement a Human Resource Development Plan to help teachers and education personnel develop their competencies; encourage the participation of civil society at all levels of planning; and improve education management with a focus on transparency, accountability and equity.

International development partners such as Denmark, Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom and the World Bank provide support of approximately US$ 155 million dollars under the Joint Financing Agreement Framework. Other partners such as JICA and the ADB as well as multilateral agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA and UNDP support the Education for All Programme under different support modalities. In addition, INGOs such as the Save the Children Alliance and Plan International support the programme at both national and district levels.

Budget

The education sector has, over the years, enjoyed a priority in budget allocation. The share in government expenditure has increased from about nine per cent in the 1980s to about 15 per cent in 2003/04. The basic education component, within the education sector, has been between 55 per cent and 65 per cent since the early 1990s [68;164;165].

Decentralizing school management

A major strategy of the Education for All Programme is to decentralize management of

primary schools. This has been legislated for under the Education Act and its regulations. One critical element is the institution of School Block Grants to allow resources to be allocated directly to schools. This is a major shift in the way education resources are managed and in line with the push to move resources to schools and communities. The School Grants Operation Guidelines 2004 provide a framework for channelling resources to schools in the form of block and conditional grants based on tangible, transparent and equitable criteria. The government has proposed three types of block grant: basic grants, as well as Level 1 and Level 2 grants that will be tied to a school accreditation process. Basic grants, estimated at NRs 150 per student per year, will be transferred to all schools during the first year of programme implementation for non-salary recurrent expenditures (i.e., learning materials, library books, cleaning supplies, and basic maintenance). During this period, schools are required to conduct a self-assessment, with a simple instrument, that includes agreed-upon criteria for each level of accreditation. Following self-assessment, which is reviewed by a School Evaluation Committee at district and sub-district levels, schools will be categorized as Level 1 or Level 2. This is done to develop a baseline with respect to the allocation of performance grants, which reward achievement and increased performance on a number of criteria.

At the heart of this process is the School Management Committee, empowered to receive, direct and monitor the funds allocated to each school. The School Management Committee of each school is drawn from the local community and must include women and representatives of local disadvantaged groups. The committee devises a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that outlines how resources will be used and how the school will be managed. It may receive inputs from students, teachers and other interested parties (see box). In order to strengthen local management of schools, the Ministry of Education and Sports supports the capacity development of head teachers, members of School Management Committees and personnel from the District Education Office.

By June 2005, some 2015 schools had been handed over to community management and handover was planned for an additional 2000 schools in 2005/06 [67].

Resource Centres and Resource Persons

One element of sustaining quality education is the timely, systematic provision of education support to teachers in school. This task is undertaken by over 1300 Resource Centres, covering 15–35 schools per area. In keeping with the spirit of decentralization and user management, each Resource Centre is run by a Resource Centre Management Committee, comprising the head teachers of all the schools within its area. The committee recommends the appointment of a Resource Person, who is accountable to the Resource Centre Management Committee for quality, to the head teacher of each school for administration, and to school inspectors for programming. The Resource Person is expected to provide teacher support to all schools in his/her area, and is also mandated to attend the School Management Committee meetings of each school in his/her area at least twice a year.

Teachers

A few years ago, the more than seven teachers unions, each affiliated to a political party,

Children's participation in school management

Student participation in school governance is not required in Nepal. Nevertheless, field reports suggest that students are, in some cases, participating in the School Management Committees, or finding ways to express their views. This is mostly done through school-based child clubs supported by NGOs.

In Sunsari District, a child club was formed in a school in Kapitangunj VDC to promote greater participation of children in the running of the school as well as extracurricular activities. Following discussions, the children approached the school management with a proposal to ban the use of all tobacco products in school premises and, in what is for Nepal an innovative move, requested that this should apply equally to teachers and parents on school premises. After consideration, the school management agreed to this request.

Source: [167]

combined to form the National Teachers' Association, speaking for all teachers. The Association and the Ministry of Education and Sports are currently exploring the issues of system reform and teacher management. While there are several contentious matters to be negotiated, it has begun the process of securing the full support of teachers to the Education for All policy initiatives.

Scholarships

In an effort to increase enrolment and retention of girls and children from disadvantaged groups, scholarship or incentive programmes have been implemented in a number of districts [152]. The provision of scholarships (or other incentives) is believed to boost the educational participation of girls and poor children by mitigating the economic barriers that their families face. In general, these programmes have been successful but to a limited extent [161]. A number of common problems have emerged that mean not all who could benefit do so [158]. The size of a scholarship is small, at NRs 350 a year for Dalit and girls scholarships, and may not have much impact on the economic situation of a family, particularly where opportunity costs are long term and ongoing. The quotas for scholarships are often district wide, so the number of scholarships going to each school is small. This means that schools in particularly disadvantaged areas have far more eligible candidates than available scholarships. The criteria and procedures for identifying candidates are weak, with selection often being at the discretion of individuals within the local community. One study found that a quarter of the Dalit children surveyed in two districts did not receive the scholarship, and some Dalit parents believed that they were not eligible [154]. This lack of transparency has caused many complaints [152]. These programmes are often implemented through the District Education Office, and coordination with local government bodies and schools is poor, resulting in duplication of government and NGO programmes. Corruption, lack of transparency and monitoring means misuse of scholarship money; some children receive more than one scholarship. Finally, although one aim is to increase enrolment of out-of-school children, these programmes are usually administered through schools and target children already receiving an education; outside school, potential beneficiaries are often not aware of the programme [158]. All these factors have limited the effectiveness of scholarship programmes in bringing out-of-school children into the classroom.

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING

The Government of Nepal promotes alternative learning opportunities for children aged 6–14 years who have never entered formal education or have failed to complete primary school. In addition, there are literacy programmes for adults, especially women. These alternative learning programmes are handled by the Non-Formal Education Centre, a specialized unit within the Ministry of Education and Sports that was established in 1999 to lead and coordinate non-formal education in Nepal. Non-formal education has been allocated 1–2 per cent of the education budget since the early 1990s.

Alternative learning programmes for children are based on the idea that formal and non-formal education should share the same content but have different methods of delivery. This is important, as it links alternative programmes to formal ones and makes mainstreaming easier. Moreover, it creates a dynamic linkage between formal and non-formal education that can be exploited at the community level to raise awareness of the value of schooling. In particular, it ties in with the new concept of an Education Promoter—a paid volunteer in the community who plays an active role in addressing local school attendance and ensuring that out-of-school children are integrated into the education system as early as possible.

There are three packages for children: the Out-of-School Programme, Flexible Schooling, and the School Outreach Programme. In addition, there is the Adult Literacy Programme. A complete picture of the scale of these programmes is hard to derive, as statistics are poor.

Out-of-School Programme

The Out-of-School Programme (OSP) aims to provide basic literacy and numeracy skills for children aged 10–14 years with an emphasis on learning the Nepali language. Although it has a separate curriculum and textbooks, a deliberate effort has been made to match the curriculum to that of formal primary education so that it can be used as an entry point into the formal system. It is funded and/or managed by a number of agencies including UNICEF and INGOs. However, implementing agencies are either the government or local NGOs. The Out-of-School Programme is known as Bal Shikccha in Nepali.

UNICEF/NEP/IMAGE 00846/ MUKUNDA BOGATI

In 2004, the government implemented the Out-of-School Programme for about 28,000 children in 55 districts [168]. However, programmes implemented by local NGOs are not recorded; if they were included, the number of students would increase substantially. For example, in 2004 local NGOs implemented the programme for 29,000 children for UNICEF alone [169].

There are two levels of the Out-of-School Programme—OSP I and OSP II [170]. Each level takes nine months to complete, and classes run for two hours each day at a time that is convenient (either morning or evening) for about 20–25 participants. Classes are led by a facilitator who has received a nine-day training and a three-day refresher course. Completion of OSP I leads to the equivalent of a Grade 3 education and completion of OSP II leads to the equivalent of Grade 5.

About 75 per cent of children complete OSP I. Of these, just over half go on to OSP II. Nearly 20 per cent join a formal school only, and the remaining quarter do not carry on with their education [170]. Of the children joining OSP II, about 40 per cent are also attending formal school; most of these children view OSP II as extra tutoring [171]. About one in 10 participants of OSP II are school dropouts [171]. Although the programme is targeted at children aged 10–14 years, there are in practice many younger children in the classes. Studies have shown that children as young as five years sometimes attend, and that many children are aged 7–9 years [170]. There are also a few overage children; mostly girls [170].

Although out-of-school children generally appreciate the opportunity to acquire some education, they often say that they would prefer to be in formal school, as they would receive an official certificate of completion as a 'reward' for each grade level they pass [170].

Learning opportunities for graduates of the Out-of-School Programme are also an issue that is not adequately addressed. The lack of opportunities to use the knowledge and skills acquired can result in their loss. The lack of reading materials for neo-literates, particularly for young people in rural areas, is a concern. In some urban areas, children have organized a child club after completing the Out-of-School Programme. This phenomenon has emerged out of the children's desire to continue the social interaction and group learning of the programme; working children have found this especially valuable.

Flexible Schooling and the School Outreach Programme

Flexible Schooling is intended for children aged 8–10 years. It has a condensed curriculum of Grades 1–5 and completion takes three years. It was designed for urban working children, although it has not been widely used. The School Outreach Programme is for children aged 6–8 years, with a school-based curriculum delivered in a non-formal way. Both these initiatives are new. Consequently, there is little information currently available about their uptake and impact.

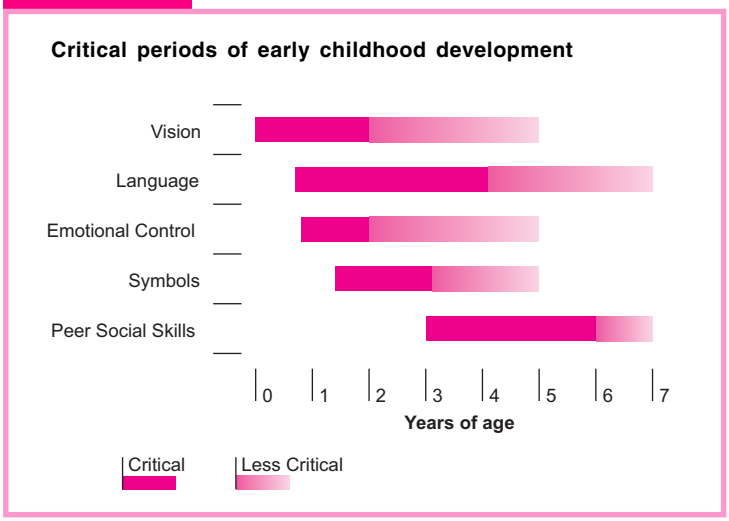
Adult learning

Since the 1970s, the Ministry of Education and Sports has provided basic literacy and numeracy classes for illiterate adults through the Adult Education package. The programme focuses on reading, writing and numeracy for adults aged 15–45 years. The idea is to develop functional skills and build self-confidence. There is a special focus on women in adult literacy initiatives in Nepal. In addition to the Adult Literacy Programme and the Women's Literacy Programme, Community Learning Centres are an innovation within the Education for All Programme. They aim to increase literacy; increase community access to functional and useful knowledge; and establish a link between development activities and education. These community-based centres, of which there are now some 40, have the potential to become real resources for communities.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

To develop and grow to their full potential, young children need plenty of love and care. Care is needed for protection and for health, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene. Care is also needed for a child's psychosocial development—emotional, cognitive, sensory-motor, linguistic and social. For these aspects of development to progress well, a child needs to feel secure and loved. There is also a need for different kinds of stimulation, response and attention, such as talking and singing, and playing with shapes and colours. As seen in Figure 14, it is also important that all of these developmental aspects of care start early in life. Since most children in Nepal spend their first year almost exclusively in their home or with their parents, the care provided at home during these early years is key to good child development. Unfortunately, little has been documented about this care given. However, considering the inadequate care provided for nutrition and health, it can be assumed that care for childhood development is also inadequate and needs to be improved.

FIGURE 14:



The care of young children is generally considered to be the mother's responsibility in Nepal, often helped by her older children. A father's involvement is very limited. One study found that less than four per cent of men felt that it was part of their role to assist their wife with the care of young children [172]. Awareness about the importance of early child development and the need for affection and stimulation is low. There seems to be a false understanding that child development happens on its own. Thus, when the parents work outside the home, young children are often left to themselves for extended periods of time.

Unfortunately, there are few opportunities for caretakers to learn good parenting skills. Parents seldom come across professionals such as psychologists, pedagogues or social workers, and the healthcare workers they occasionally meet have limited knowledge of child development. Teachers, healthcare practitioners and other service providers largely fail to give adequate attention to early childhood stimulation, interpersonal communication, problem-solving, decision-making or self-development. Little attention is also given to the need to stimulate the child's creativity, responsibility, emotional development or social skills.

Home-based care

Although it can be assumed that there is considerable need to improve the care that young children receive in the home, little has been done to accomplish this. One of the few activities implemented with the implicit objective of improving the care of young children in the home is the Home-based Child Development Programme developed by Seto

Gurans and CERID. The aim of this programme is to assist parents and guardians to support children's holistic development through home-based activities. It focuses on making caretakers aware of their role and responsibilities, and encourages them to use the household environment and routine activities as opportunities for children to learn. Children are encouraged to become involved in household activities and interact with parents, guardians and family members while these family members are engaged in their daily household activities. A trained local facilitator forms groups among parents and organizes interaction sessions once every two weeks. The facilitator also makes home visits and provides necessary support to parents and guardians. Support for this programme is provided by the Save the Children Alliance and UNICEF.

Topics covered by parenting orientation

- The need for parenting orientation
- Early childhood growth and development
- Early childhood needs
- How children learn
- Child rights
- Discrimination between boys and girls
- Care during pregnancy
- Care for mother and child after birth
- Nutrition
- Immunization, diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections
- Prevention of childhood accidents
- Importance of child development centres
- Birth registration

Efforts have also been made by UNICEF's Decentralized Action for Children and Women (DACAW) programme to increase parents' awareness of children's need for stimulation and interaction. This is done by introducing the issues that surround early childhood development to parents at community group meetings. Trained facilitators and community mobilizers then facilitate discussion on how the care provided can be improved. Efforts are also being made to incorporate the basic components of Seto Gurans' home-based child development programme into the structures of DACAW.

Parenting orientation

Although broad in scope, one of the key objectives of parenting orientation is to increase caretakers' awareness of young children's developmental needs. Parenting orientation is a non-formal education activity for mothers, fathers, grandparents, elder siblings, and others who take care of young children. The course explores a wide range of topics, with the objective of ensuring a nurturing and caring environment for young children (see box). The materials—posters and picture books—and activities are mostly discussion-based, reflecting the fact that the majority of participants, particularly women, are illiterate. Each course is conducted by a trained facilitator, and runs for three months, two hours a day, six days a week, at hours and places convenient for and selected by the participants. There are usually about 25 participants in each class.

Generally, local NGOs conduct the classes. They provide a 10-day training for local facilitators, and assist communities to establish and run classes. Seto Gurans National Child Development Services (an NGO) helps to ensure the quality of parenting classes by conducting monitoring, supervision and counselling, and by assisting in the training of facilitators. The Save the Children Alliance and UNICEF are key financial supporters for parenting orientation.

Child development centres

Another approach to early childhood development is the establishment of special centres where young children can spend part of their time. There are many advantages to these organized centres: they offer holistic child development activities facilitated by specially trained staff; they give children an opportunity to interact with other children of the same age group; they provide mothers with greater freedom to pursue activities besides childcare; and they relieve older siblings of the burden of looking after younger siblings and, thereby, give them the opportunity to attend school.

There are several different kinds of child centres in Nepal. For the youngest children, there are day-care centres, run either by NGOs or the private sector. Although little is known about the number of such centres and the participating children, it is assumed that they are few and primarily urban based.

For children aged three and four years, there are child development centres mainly run either by the government or NGOs. A few are also run by the private sector. At present, relatively few children benefit from these centres. For 2004, the Ministry of Education and Sports reports a total of 7023 government-supported centres throughout the country, reaching some 512,000 children [12]. Although this would correspond to coverage of about 20 per cent of 3–4 year olds, the figure seems high, as it would mean an average of 73 children per centre. According to the same report, there are an additional 1346 centres supported by I/NGOs and other agencies.

The Ministry of Education and Sports further reports that the Kathmandu Valley, with five per cent of three and four year olds, has 23 per cent of the facilities [12]. There is little disparity by caste and slightly greater disparity by gender [12]. Gross enrolment is lowest in the mountains and highest in the Kathmandu Valley [12]. Access in urban areas is far greater than in rural areas [12]. Currently, about 11 per cent of children enrolled in Grade 1 have experience of these centres [12].

There are two types of centre: those located in schools and those within the community. The school-based centres are most often managed by the government, whereas community-based centres are managed by a local management committee supported by an NGO. Although both types are guided by a common objective of child development, the school-based centres have tended to be more of a downward extension of primary school. Community-based centres are aimed at more holistic child development, intending to create an enjoyable learning environment that fosters physical, mental, social and emotional development of children. With the new curricula recently developed by the Department of Education, it is expected that school-based centres will become more development oriented, and that the difference between the two kinds will be reduced.

Most community-based centres are open between three and five hours a day, six days a week, and accept up to 25 children. The programmes are run by trained local facilitators, selected by a management committee. These facilitators are paid a small salary by the committee, equivalent to about a quarter of a primary schoolteacher's salary, and most have participated in a short initial training course and short refresher courses [163]. The local management committee is trained and supported by a local NGO, receiving support from organizations such as Seto Gurans, Plan Nepal, World Vision, the Save the Children Alliance, and UNICEF.

Benefits of early childhood development centres

Children's gains, both cognitive and social, have been dramatic enough to attract attention not only from family members but from other community members. Parents, teachers and others see children who have attended child development centres as neat and clean, respectful and obedient but, at the same time, as self-assured, animated, outgoing and highly motivated [163]. Such children are described as avid learners, intellectually curious, and quick to pick up new skills and information. They are also felt to have more highly developed social skills. These characteristics are in sharp contrast to those displayed by children who have not attended a child development centre.

A study conducted by Save the Children found that although parents initially questioned this approach to child development as insufficiently serious or academic, they had come to see the value of play, stories and songs as joyful avenues to learning. Parents said they have become more interested and involved in their children's lives, less likely to use physical punishment, and more convinced of the value of learning through play and supportive interaction [163]. They were also committed supporters of their local child development centres, and were closely involved in their management and maintenance.

Children who have attended child development centres are more likely to go to school and

perform better than children who have not. They are described by both parents and teachers as being well prepared and enthusiastic about starting school. Their familiarity with letters and numbers (and in the case of minority group children, with the Nepali language), their ease with adults, their propensity for learning, the fact that they are accustomed to regular attendance, all help to smooth the transition to school [163]. Their readiness for school is such that 11 per cent of those who had been to child development centres skip Grade 1 and go directly into Grade 2 [163].

These advantages translate into better school success and retention. Children from child development centres pass their examinations in Grades 1 and 2 at markedly higher rates than other children (32 per cent and 38 per cent higher, respectively) (Figure 15) [163]. In 1999, the repetition rate at Grade 1 for children from child development centres was only 5.5 per cent; nationally, it was 36.5 per cent. The differences are even greater for Grade 2. In addition, Dalits who have attended child development centres perform much better than their Dalit peers who have not.

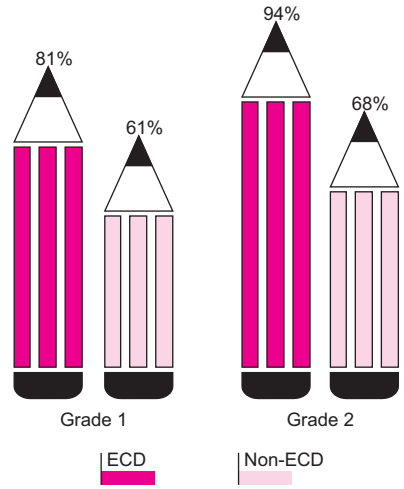
Issues

Although the benefits of access to child development centres are visible and noteworthy in Nepal, there are a number of issues with the programme that need to be resolved [173]. There is an inadequate number of qualified facilitators, and few institutions are involved in training facilitators. The conditions of service and the remuneration for facilitators are considered to be poor; this makes it difficult to attract and retain high-quality personnel. There are also limited funds for preparing local educational materials.

One of the key problems for community-based centres is sustainability. Even if centres are successfully established, the need for local communities to generate ongoing funds means that it is challenging to achieve self-sustainability and financial independence, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized communities. This is exacerbated by ineffective monitoring systems that fail to identify centres with problems at an early stage.

FIGURE 15:

Children's achievement in school



Source: [163]

Policy

In the last few years, the Department of Education has taken several steps to strengthen the Early Childhood Development Programme. An Early Childhood Development Council was formed in 2005, with representation from the main actors in early childhood development. It will act as a technical committee advising on policy and implementation. A new early childhood development policy has been developed. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) sees early childhood care as a priority, and intends to increase coverage of child development centres to 32 per cent of the population by 2007 and 80 per cent (through 74,000 centres) by 2015.

In 2005, the Department of Education released a guideline for the Early Childhood Development Programme, covering all phases from planning to execution. The Department of Education has disseminated the guideline broadly in an effort to unify the procedures of different early childhood development implementers.

Various NGOs, especially the Save the Children Alliance, Plan International, Seto Gurans National Child Development Services and UNICEF play key roles in early childhood development in Nepal, in cooperation with various ministries, local government bodies, and community groups or local NGOs.