Nepal Citizens' Education Report 2022

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List of Abbreviations

AAIN: ActionAid International Nepal
CBO: Community Based Organisation
CER: Citizens' Education Report
CSO: Civil Society Organization
ECED: Early Childhood Education and Development
EMIS: Education Management Information System
ICT: Information and Communication Technology
MOEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
PTA: Parent Teacher Association
PRS: Promoting Rights in School
SDG: Sustainable Development Goals
SESP: School Education Sector Plan
SIP: School Improvement Plan
SMC: School Management Committee
SSDP: School Sector Development Plan
STR: Student Teacher Ratio
WASH: Water Sanitation and Hygiene

FOREWORD

Education is the foundation to create an equitable, democratic, and prosperous society. In the present context, it is very crucial to bring transformative changes to the public education system to build a prosperous and better future. ActionAid International Nepal (AAIN) is prioritising education as one of the most important priority areas for action since its establishment in 1982. AAIN strongly believes that a robust public education system can be a great foundation for establishing an equitable society, enhancing democratization, and promoting sustainable development and focusing on it. AAIN has always put effort to build great alliances of civil society, coalitions, and movements at all levels to advocate for the right to free and quality public education for all children especially girls.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 acknowledges education as a fundamental right; however, education sector has not received adequate focus and resources from the government. Poor retention rate, poor quality, and a lack of political will to fully implement the desired education policies have resulted in a gradual deterioration of this sector. In addition to these factors, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought another type of exclusion and inequality in the form of the 'digital divide' among the students from urban & rural, rich & poor etc.

A study conducted by AAIN estimated that, 97% of resources for education would need to come from domestic resource mobilization and countries must maintain or increase their own domestic funding for education towards or above 20% of their national budgets. The Government of Nepal has also committed to such increased funding for education in various international forums; however, continued inadequate funding for education is likely to hamper the achievement of SDG4 where the government of Nepal has signed off and committed.

In this backdrop, AAIN has been promoting the idea of quality education through progressive domestic resource mobilization with a goal to ensure that all children (especially girls and those from marginalized groups) have improved access to free public education of a high quality, financed through better government support and progressive taxation. The Citizens' Education Report presented here is the result of the initiatives that we have been doing on the ground to advance evidence-based advocacy. This report reflects AAIN's initiative to engage citizens in improving the quality of education through action research. We hope that that the findings of this research related to the status of different indicators pertaining to the right to school education will inform the various reform initiatives at different levels.

Last but not the least, I would like to extend my gratitude to education expert Dr. Pramod Bhatta who supported the process, Education and Youth Specialist Mr. Devendra Singh and entire AAIN Team, local partners, parents, teachers, head teachers, members of school management committees and parent-teacher associations, and local government officials who have contributed to produce this document through collective engagement. I hope this document will be helpful to highlight the education related lapses and way forward to strengthen quality of public education in Nepal.

Sujeeta Mathema
Executive Director
ActionAid International Nepal

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background, Objectives and Approach

This Citizens' Education Report (CER) 2022 is a description and documentation of the status of school education in Nepal's public schools from the lens of the Promoting Rights in Schools (PRS) Framework (Box 1) developed by ActionAid. The PRS Framework focuses on ensuring 10 fundamental education rights through active engagement and empowerment of parents, students, teachers, communities and local civil society organisations (CSOs) in collectively monitoring and improving the quality of public education.

This report is the third in the series of its kind produced by ActionAid International Nepal (AAIN) since the first report in 2012 and second one in 2017. The overall aim of the report is to generate evidence on the extent to which Nepali children have been able to equitably access high quality education through public schools. In doing so, it also seeks to empower local people by enabling them to act as data collectors and analysers of the information related to the functioning of public schools through participatory action research. The data and

The Promoting Rights in Schools Framework

1) **Right to free and compulsory education:** there should be no charges, direct or indirect, for primary education. Education must gradually be made free at all levels.

2) **Right to non-discrimination:** schools must not make any distinction in provision based on sex, race, colour, language, religion, political opinion, nationality, ethnicity, ability, or any other status.

3) **Right to adequate infrastructure:** there should be an appropriate number of classrooms, accessible to all, with adequate and separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys. Schools should be built with local materials and be resilient to natural risks and disasters.

4) **Right to quality trained teachers:** schools should have a sufficient number of trained teachers of whom a good proportion are female; teachers should receive good quality pre-service and in-service training with built-in components on gender sensitivity, non-discrimination, and human rights. All teachers should be paid domestically competitive salaries.

5) **Right to a safe and non-violent environment:** children should be safe on route to and in school. Clear anti-bullying policies and confidential systems for reporting and addressing any form of abuse or violence should be in place.

6) **Right to relevant education:** the curriculum should not discriminate and should be relevant to the social, cultural, environmental, economic and linguistic context of learners.

7) **Right to know your rights:** schools should teach human rights education and children's rights in particular. Learning should include age-appropriate and accurate information on sexual and reproductive rights.

8) **Right to participate:** girls and boys have the right to participate in decision making processes in school. Appropriate mechanisms should be in place to enable the full, genuine and active participation of children.

9) **Right to transparent and accountable schools:** schools need to have transparent and effective monitoring systems. Both communities and children should be able to participate in accountable governing bodies, management committees and parents' groups.

10) **Right to quality learning:** girls and boys have a right to a quality learning environment and to effective teaching processes so that they can develop their personality, talents and physical and mental abilities to their fullest potential.

All the schools have a child club that are involved in conducting various cocurricular and extracurricular activities for the students such as sports competitions, quiz, public debates, cultural programs and awareness-raising activities such as conducting public rallies on specific days.

information used for the report has been collected from 31 basic and secondary public schools from six districts in four provinces (Koshi, Madhesh, Lumbini and Sudur Paschim). The data collection and analysis for the individual school CERs has been done by different local partner CSOs of AAIN. The data was collected through extensive school visits comprising surveys with the school administration, teachers and students, and focus group discussions with parents, school management committee (SMC) and parent-teacher association (PTA) members, and interviews with the local government officials. This national CER is a consolidated output of all the individual school CERs. It is not a nationally representative survey and the results are not meant to be generalised across the public schools in the country. Instead, it is our expectation that the report be used to understand where gaps exist in the realisation of school education as a fundamental human right and what actions can be undertaken to further strengthen and promote public education in Nepal.

Status of education rights in schools

- **Right to free education:** Students and households continue to pay various kinds of fees for their participation in the school even though the schools do not charge monthly tuition fees. This shows that basic education is not free; however, compared to the findings from the 2012 and 2017 CERs, it has become 'more free' in the sense that students from primary grades are not required to pay any regular fees apart from those raised in the name of examination fees, Saraswoti Pooja or other specific events/purposes. Likewise, it is good to note the gradual progress being made in expanding the provision of midday meals and free textbooks. At the upper basic and secondary levels, schools continue to raise various fees from students and their parents. Also, there is no evidence that the local governments have enforced compulsory education at the basic level despite the enactment of the Compulsory and Free Basic Education Act 2018. Almost 50% of the schools have hired teachers locally through school's internal resources, with a higher incidence of local teacher recruitment in the Tarai compared to the hills, and school fees are important revenue source for providing salary to such teachers. Local government support for teacher recruitment in schools with teacher shortages has partly addressed teacher shortages faced by schools, and has also contributed to reduction of user fees.

- **Right to a safe and enabling school environment:** there have been gradual improvements in the schools' overall physical environment including classrooms, WASH facilities, and learning resources. However, classrooms are inadequate for all grades, including ECED in 15% of schools, 63% of schools do not have libraries, 53% of schools do not have basic ICT facilities, 83% of schools do not have science laboratories, and 70% of schools do not have a separate room for teachers. In terms of WASH, nearly 46% schools do not have separate toilets for girls and boys, 55% of schools do not have treated drinking water, and 94% do not have basic first aid facilities. The lack of the above basic physical and educational infrastructure is bound to have significant effects on the quality

of learning inside the classrooms and schools. In terms of safe and non-discriminatory school environment, responses from teachers and school management suggest that discrimination based on gender, caste/ethnicity, disability, etc and various forms of physical and psychological abuses do not occur inside school premises. Yet, information collected from students suggests that discrimination occurs in schools mainly based on caste/ethnicity and disability, and to a lesser extent gender. Further, children from Dalit and Janajati communities reported higher frequency of experience of verbal and other forms of abuse as compared to children from Brahmin-Chhetri and Madheshi communities.

- **Right to participate in school governance:** The majority of schools have formed SMCs and PTAs as per the existing legal provision. However, in the majority of schools (23 out of 31) SMC and PTA members have not received any training or orientation on their responsibilities after becoming a member of the committee. Likewise, head teachers from 19 schools (out of 31) had not received any leadership training after their appointment as head teacher. All the schools have a child club that are involved in conducting various cocurricular and extracurricular activities for the students such as sports competitions, quiz, public debates, cultural programs and awareness-raising activities such as conducting public rallies on specific days. In some schools, child clubs are also engaged in monitoring student and teacher attendance. In terms of transparency and accountability at the school level, only 20 schools have formulated annual plan and budget, only 21 have conducted parent assembly, 24 have conducted social audits, and 28 have conducted financial audits. Findings suggest that overall parental participation in school affairs is generally low and such participation is not geared towards educational activities. In terms of local government engagement with schools, the majority of schools acknowledged receiving some additional support on top of the federal conditional grants from the local governments for school physical facilities improvement (classrooms, toilets, drinking water, etc), teacher support, ICT equipment, furniture, and

learning materials. However, nearly 33% of schools (10 out of 31) stated that the local government officials have not conducted any monitoring and supervision visits to the schools.

- **Right to good quality education, including the right to qualified and trained teachers:** Evidence suggests huge discrepancies in student teacher ratio (STR) across different local governments, districts and ecological belts, from a low STR of 7.0 in Palpa district to a high of 77.6 in Siraha district. The STR is higher in the Tarai compared to the hills and in secondary schools compared to basic schools. Further, only 20% of schools have stated that they have adequate teachers for different grades and subject. Of the total teachers, only 34.5% were permanent, and 37.4% were temporary and relief teachers. About 28% of the teachers were locally recruited (through the schools' internal resources, by the local governments and through other local resources). The majority of teachers are qualified but nearly 43% have not received

any continuous professional development training partly because they are locally hired. Likewise, none of the teachers acknowledged having received any training in the past two years. Lecturing and question-answer/discussion were the two most common teaching/pedagogy methods practiced by teachers. In the majority of classrooms, the walls were devoid of any educational materials, including those produced by students, and there was little evidence of the use of other student-centred and participatory methods such as demonstrations, group work, project work and community work.

Recommendations

- **Need for greater resource mobilisation:** There is an urgent and continued need to increase federal allocations to education, and within it to school education, to fulfill the state commitment towards free school education. Such allocations need to be made towards creation of new teacher positions, strengthening of school safety and resilience, supporting the direct and indirect costs of children likely remain out of school, and for providing inputs aimed at enhancing the quality of learning environment such as libraries, labs and ICT infrastructure in the schools. Likewise, additional resources need to be allocated for teachers' continuous professional support at the local level given that pre-federal institutional arrangements for teachers' professional support and supervision have been dismantled. Various studies indicate the need for greater domestic resource mobilisation to ensure education financing, and this also calls for more innovative approaches to domestic resource mobilisation such as progressive taxation and dedicated taxation for education. This seems feasible given that households are already contributing more than 50% of national education financing.

- **Need for strengthening local governance of education:** according to the Education Sector Analysis conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2021, 54.4% of local governments did not have an education officer in

in capacity development of local governments in the areas of planning and budgeting, providing professional support to schools and teachers, and better use of data for additional need-based resource allocation. At the school level too, given that the SMC, PTA and the head teacher are the most important actors responsible for school governance and management, it is important to develop their capacity and expertise in these areas and to be able to perform the basic functions related to transparency and accountability towards the school community.

- **Need for continued civic engagement with public schooling:** As stated earlier, the aim of this CER is to not only ascertain the state of public schooling with respect to the cluster of education rights but also to support in its improvement in the process. In the whole process, schools have been visited multiple times by the researchers (members of various CSOs that have been closely associated with the schools), first to collect the data and information and later to share and disseminate the findings. This process of continual engagement with the school-community is expected to improve and rectify areas where gaps exist. Experience from previous CERs shows that this participatory action research process has led to immediate improvements in the condition of toilets for the students, infrastructure for ECED and grade 1 students, regularity of students and teachers, and parents visiting schools on a more regular basis and inquiring about their children's progress. This points towards the need for an enhanced role for civil society organizations over a sustained period of time in improving the overall process of schooling in these communities.

2020. While this situation has improved since then with nearly 85% of the local governments with at least one education officer in 2022 according to the data from the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, understaffing and placement of underqualified staff particularly in rural and remote municipalities remains a problem, which has immediate impact on the frequency and quality of school monitoring and supervision. Hence, the federal government needs to revisit its policies with respect to the staffing of local governments. Likewise, given the increasing responsibilities placed on local governments with respect to the delivery of school education, there is a need for supporting

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Introduction

The most recent
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The Nepali state continues to accord high rhetorical priority to strengthening its public school system. Universalizing primary education has been emphasized in the reports of all the national education commissions formed in Nepal since 1951, when Nepal embarked on an era of democracy and development. The most recent Constitution of Nepal 2015 mandates education as a fundamental right for all Nepali citizens. The constitution states that basic education (grades 1-8) shall be free and compulsory and secondary education (grades 9-12) shall be free (MOLJ, 2015). In addition, the constitution states that higher education shall be made free for various marginalized groups such as Dalits, children with disabilities and other excluded groups. To implement the constitutional provision, the Government enacted the Compulsory and Free Basic Education Act 2018 and Regulations 2020, including Local Government Operation Act 2017 in a way that that puts the onus on the Local Governments to implement most provisions included in the Act, particularly those related to making education free. However, fulfilling this constitutional commitment requires additional investments well above what the state currently allocates to public education. Various reports have estimated that the government would need to double the allocations made to school education to make it free (HLNEC, 2075 v.s.; Kushiyait, 2018).

State Initiatives in School Education

Nepal's school education system consists of at least one year of pre-primary education (also known as early childhood education and development or ECED), eight years of basic (grades 1-8) and four years of secondary (grades 9-12) education. The Constitution of Nepal has mandated the provision of free and compulsory basic education and free secondary education. School education is provided mainly through two types of schools–government aided public or community schools, and unaided private or institutional schools. In addition, there are a small number of religious schools providing education in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions. The share of student enrolments in private schools has been rapidly increasing, with private schools accounting for about 25% of all enrolments in 2021, which was 13% in 2012.

Universalising primary and basic education has been a high priority for the government, more notably since Nepal committed to the global education for all movement in the early 1990s, and subsequently reiterated in 2000 and there after. After committing to the global Education for All targets and the Millennium Development Goals, Nepal has implemented a series of large-scale reforms in the school education sector since the early 1990s. These include the Basic and

Primary Education Program I & II (1992-2004), the Education for All Program (2004-2009), the School Sector Reform Plan (2009–2016), the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP, 2016–2022), and the most recent School Education Sector Plan (SESP, 2022–2032). The major objectives of these reform initiatives have been to enhance access and equity, improve quality, and strengthen the governance and institutional capacity of the school education system. The country has been generously supported in these reforms by various development partners, more recently through a sector-side approach (SWAp). The primary and basic education levels have been the major beneficiaries of these reforms. The most recent of such sector plans is the School Education Sector Plan (SESP, 2022–2032) with the stated mission "to develop a capable, well-governed, accountable, and competitive public school education system that is able to ensure citizens' right to acquire relevant and quality education comparable to regional and international standards" (MOEST, 2022: 23).

However, the right to education needs to be understood not only as the right to access and enrolment but also to inclusive classroom teaching-learning processes and learning outcomes, and needs to encompass access to schooling that is relevant and contributes to enhancing human capabilities.

Citizens' Education Report: What and Why?

This Citizens' Education Report is an attempt to unpack some critical issues related to the delivery and management of school education in the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal from a rights perspective.

We have continued this initiative since 2012 precisely because of the lack of the citizens' perspective in the existing public documents prepared periodically from the assessments of the progress made towards universalising and improving public schooling. We found a sheer lack of concerted efforts and critical involvement of citizens, especially stakeholders at the local level, in raising locally experienced important issues pertaining to the right to education and school governance. The extant approach to generating information on the functioning of the public school system is not wholly participatory and does not yield valid reports of actual school contexts. The school information thus generated is utilized to formulate important educational policies and strategies. It is also used as evidence to plan activities and allocate resources to schools through the local governments. In fact, the policies, strategies, plans and resources allocated generally do not match the actual needs of schools and communities. Therefore, the enduring absence of quality and equity in basic education even with seemingly affirmative policy support and prioritised national investments can be attributed, to a reasonable extent, to the lack of serious effort in the system to seek the citizens' perspective in the school reform and improvement processes.

The CER is therefore a documentation of the people's views of what purpose the school is serving and how education rights are assured (or not assured) in schools. It asserts that locally engaged civil society organizations, with appropriate technical support, are better placed to produce the school level CERs through community mobilization and participatory inquiry processes and by working closely with school authorities to incorporate their analyses of school facts, figures and contexts. The

school level CERs are, in essence, the foundation of those of the district and national levels.

The CER uses the **Promoting Rights in Schools (PRS) Framework** developed by AAIN and the Right to Education project that focuses on ensuring 10 fundamental education rights. The PRS framework (Box 1.1) aims to actively engage and empower parents, students, teachers, communities and local civil society organisations in collectively monitoring and improving the quality of public education.[1]

The CER is understood to be an on-going process, with the prospect for periodic updates based on continued research in the already surveyed schools along with the inclusion of more schools and wider geographical coverage in the successive years. This is an ambitious task which would not be possible without multiple stakeholders' (national and international) collaboration and a mutual willingness to mobilize required resources. For AAIN, the production of CER based on research in some selected schools is both its priority and of immense interest as promoting rights in schools is a global initiative of ActionAid.

Box 1.1: The Promoting Rights in Schools Framework

1) **Right to free and compulsory education:** there should be no charges, direct or indirect, for primary education. Education must gradually be made free at all levels.

2) **Right to non-discrimination:** schools must not make any distinction in provision based on sex, race, colour, language, religion, political opinion, nationality, ethnicity, ability, or any other status.

3) **Right to adequate infrastructure:** there should be an appropriate number of classrooms, accessible to all, with adequate and separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys. Schools should be built with local materials and be resilient to natural risks and disasters.

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Source: Right to Education Project, Promoting Rights in Schools: Providing Quality Public Education, -to-education.org/ resource/ promoting- rights- schools-providing-quality- public- education

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1   Right to Education Project, Promoting Rights in Schools: Providing Quality Public Education, http://www.right-to-education.org/ resource/promoting-rights-schools-providing-quality-public-education

Objectives

The main purpose of this CER is to describe the extent to which education rights are promoted in Nepal's public schools and thereby contribute to the school sector's effort to make policy and planning processes more participatory, responsive and rights-based. More specifically the CER process has been initiated to:

- Involve citizens and civil society organizations in the participatory assessment of the extent to which right to education is assured through the development and use of people-centred advocacy tools;
- Identify progress and challenges in the delivery of public school education vis-   -vis the assurance of every citizen's right to education; and
- Popularize education rights as echoed in the international and national legal and policy frameworks.

The Approach

This report is the third in the series of CER. Like the previous studies conducted in 2012 (ActionAid, 2012) and 2017 (ActionAid, 2017), it is not a nationwide representative survey of the state of public schooling in the country that aims to make sweeping generalizations about the state of school education in Nepal provided through public schools. Rather it aims to describe and reflect upon the state of public education in schools that are attended by the majority of Nepali children, and draw implications for renewed focus of both the state and non-state actors and groups to ensure equitable access to a high-quality public-school system for all children.

Figure 1.1: Framework for Assessment of Education Rights

Framework and Indicators. This CER is based on the PRS Framework described above (Box 1.1). For the CER process, we have clustered the 10 education rights into four broad areas – (i) Adequate financing for free education, (ii) Child, gender and disable-friendly, safe school environment, (iii) quality education, and, (iv) School governance (Figure 1.1). We developed specific indicators for data collection for each of the four broad areas that were subsequently developed into checklists, questionnaire and interview schedules.

School selection. 31 schools in six districts of Koshi Province, Madhesh Province, Lumbini Province and Sudur Paschim Province, where AAIN has on-going programmes in collaboration with local non-governmental organisations/community-based organizations (NGOs/CBOs), were identified for the CER process (See Annex 1). Of these, nine schools were operating classes from grades 1–5, 14 schools were operating classes from 1–8, four schools were operating classes from 1–10, and the remaining four schools were operating classes from 1–12. The districts in which these schools are located are among the ones with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) in Nepal. While selecting the districts, care was taken to ensure that the country's three distinct topographical belts, namely, the Tarai, Hill, and Mountain were represented. The schools were selected in close consultation with AAIN's local partners that have education programs in the schools. The school visits involved school surveys and in-depth interactions with a number of stakeholder groups, including SMCs, PTAs, head teachers/teachers, students, parents and local government representatives and officials.

Structure of the Report

This report is structured into four broad chapters, with each chapter looking at a specific issue of the public school system from the PRS framework described in Figure 1 above. Chapter 2 describes the status of free and compulsory education in the selected schools. Chapter 3 focuses on the overall school environment, mainly on the status of children's access to an enabling physical and social environment. Chapter 4 looks at the school-community relations and the role of the local stakeholders in school management. In Chapter 5, we provide an account of the quality of education imparted in public schools, focusing on the issue of teacher availability, teachers' perceptions of the quality of education and the continuity of education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, in Chapter 6 we analyse the existing gap between the state rhetoric and local realities of education rights, and highlight some implications and recommendations for overcoming them.
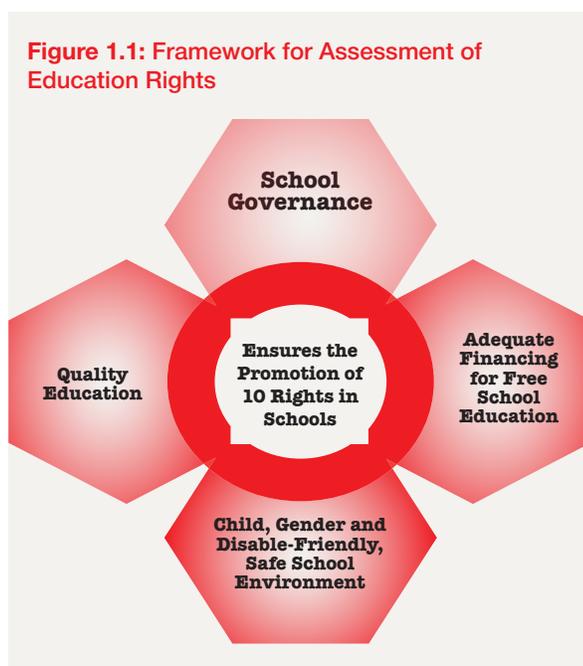
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The Status of Free and Compulsory Education

The majority of the out-of-school children are from Dalit families. Disability is another variable influencing access to basic education.

Background

As emphasised in Chapter 1, universalizing primary education has been a stated goal of all governments formed at various times. The most recent Constitution of Nepal 2015 mandates education as a fundamental right for all Nepali citizens, stating that basic education shall be free and compulsory and secondary education shall be free. In addition, the constitution states that higher education shall be made free for various marginalized groups such as Dalits, children with disabilities and other excluded groups. In this chapter we explore the extent of participation of children in school education, and the degree to which such education, particularly at the basic level is free and compulsory.

School Enrolment

The majority of schools have recorded a significant increase in student enrollments over the past five years. Data from the 31 schools revealed that there were very few children out-of-school in the school catchment area in the sense that the majority of children had their names registered in school. The majority of schools did not have any systematic database about the out of school. However, teachers and students reported instances of dropout of their students and peers mainly due to instances of early marriage (child marriage) and disability. Evidence from individual school report shows that the number of out-of-school children is particularly high in Doti and Parsa districts, and to a lesser extent in Siraha, Tehrathum, and Bardiya districts. Caste is still a defining variable in enrolment. The majority of the out-of-school children are from Dalit families. Disability is another variable influencing access to basic education. It was reported that the majority of out-of-school children had gone to India either individually in search of work or with their parents. In none of the local governments did the CER team observe the implementation of compulsory schooling in accordance with the legal provisions outlined in the Compulsory and Free Education Act 2018.

Some schools have recorded significant decline in enrollments over the past five years, particularly in Palpa and Tehrathum districts. This was mainly attributed to migration from the rural to urban centres and from the hills to the Tarai, increasing trend of student enrollment in the private schools, especially at the basic education level, and the decline in population growth rate. However, this does not mean that dropout rates have increased.

The majority of schools have continued to conduct enrolment campaigns and door-to-door or household visits at the beginning of the academic year to ensure that all school-age children enrol in the school. However,

the schools do not have systematic database of the number of school-aged children and the number of children of the relevant age group not attending school in their respective service area. We explored the role of SMCs and teachers in influencing enrolment in their respective service area. All schools have been part of the broader enrolment campaign, which the state has been going on regularly over the past decades with active participation of civil society organizations (CSOs). The success of the enrolment campaigns and related public actions are contingent upon careful planning that identifies school-aged vulnerable children, a clear road map to influence the decision of their parents/guardians and coordination with local CSOs. However, very few schools have taken this necessary preparation because it requires sensitivity on the part of the school management and political will of the SMC and head teacher to work in tandem with communities and CSOs to ensure the rights of poor and excluded children. The CER has noted, in line with other similar studies, that government policies related to provision of scholarships for targeted groups and midday meals for targeted grades have led to increased participation and retention in basic education by reducing both the direct and indirect costs of education.

Barriers to Regular School Attendance

We came across a number of barriers to school attendance, the most notable being the requirement for children to support their family during the agriculture season (seasonal effect). The gender biasness is another hindering factor for girls due to responsibility of domestic work. The cost associated with basic education is another barrier. Though basic education is tuition free, the practice of imposing user fees continues to exist across the selected schools (see below). There are other costs necessary for school attendance, which are relatively high for poor families, and which also result in significant opportunity costs of schooling. Discrimination, particularly based around caste/ethnicity and disability within the school also discourages regular attendance.

The Status of Free School Education

The Nepali state has committed to the provision of free basic education as one of the major public policy initiatives in the aftermath of the political changes ushered in by the 1990 democratic revolution. As a result of the policies adopted by the state, the major education sector programs implemented in the post-1990 period have included budgetary provisions for free textbooks, scholarships, midday meals, and other activities aimed at reducing the direct

costs associated with attending school. The Federal Constitution promulgated in 2015 explicitly states that "Every citizen shall have the right to get compulsory and free education up to the basic level and free education up to the secondary level from the State" (Nepal Law Commission, 2015: 16). Subsequently, the state enacted the Compulsory and Free Education Act in 2018 and Local Government Operation Act 2017 to pave way for implementation of the constitutional right to education.

Against this backdrop, a major focus of this CER was to ascertain the extent to which school education is free. In the selected schools, we have found ample of evidence that shows that school education is neither free nor compulsory. The proportion of schools levying user fees in the primary grades (1–5) is 3%. The corresponding figures for schools charging user fees at the upper basic (6–8) and secondary grades (9–10) is 10% (Figure 2.1). While this is a significant improvement compared to the findings from the previous CERs, these findings reveal that implementation of the free education policy is challenging especially at the upper basic and secondary levels. In some school communities, local organizations and parents had lobbied against schools charging fees, while in others the local governments formed after 2017 have been actively promoting free basic education, as a result of which it was noted that there has been a significant change in the past practice of charging fees, especially at the basic level.

Types of User Fees and Reasons for Charging

Even though the Free and Compulsory Education Act 2018 prohibits the schools from charging fees, schools continue to raise resources from students and parents under various headings. The most common form of fee

Figure 2.1: The status of free education in the schools by levels
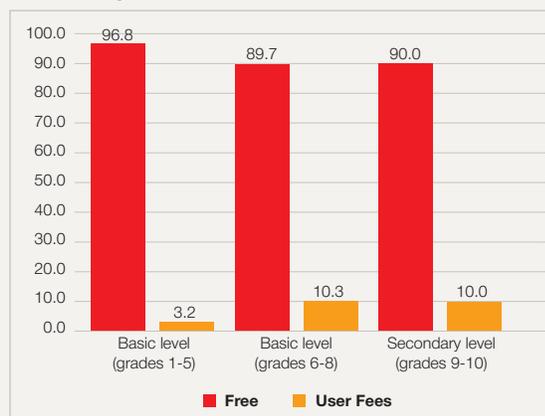
Source: CER Field Survey, 2022.

is the examination fee, which increases by grade level and is dependent upon the number of examinations conducted by the school annually. There are also instances of students paying fees for participation in sports activities, computer lab, libraries, Saraswoti Pooja function, and annual support fees. In schools that have been conducted classes in English medium, students are also required to pay annual admission fees, monthly tuition fees, and also required to buy the additional English medium textbooks, in addition to the examination fees and other charges. School authorities gave various reasons for raising different types of user fees, that have primarily to do with the insufficient resources provided by the government. For example, the practice of examination fees has to do with the raising resources for the management of examinations, including the cost of printing the question papers and procurement of answer sheets. In the case of schools that did not impose such fees, the students were asked to bring their own answer copies in the format specified by the school that would then be stamped by the school. In the context of schools raising annual support and admission fees, this was done mainly to provide salaries for the locally recruited teachers and administrative staff.

new teacher positions alone is estimated to require an additional NPR 65–70 billion annually over the current expenditures in education. Likewise, another major area that requires additional resources is the implementation of the constitutional mandate of free and compulsory basic education and free secondary education, including implementation of the Free and Compulsory Basic Education Act 2018. Apart from the requirement for additional teachers (discussed above), additional resources are required for the recruitment of new ECED facilitators and increasing the salary and incentives of

Figure 2.2: Percentage of national budget allocated to education

National Budget for Education and Implications for Free Education

While the absolute amount allocated to education has been increasing over the years, the percentage of budget allocated to education has been decreasing since 2009/2010 when Nepal started the implementation of its School Sector Reform Plan with the aim of enhancing equitable access to quality school education for all Nepali children (Figure 2.2). What is worth noting is that the downward trend continued even after the promulgation of the federal constitution in 2015 that had for the first time explicitly stated the right to free and compulsory basic education and free secondary education as a fundamental right. Various studies have shown that significant additional resources are required to make education free. An internal study commissioned by the Center for Education and Human Resource Development of the MOEST has calculated a net teacher deficit of more than 65,000 over the current teacher positions if Nepal is to maintain the national student teacher ratio of 50, 45 and 40 in the Tarai, Hills and Mountain regions of the country (Working Group for Reallocation of Teacher Positions, 2018). Based at current prices, creation of

existing facilitators, free textbooks, scholarships, school meals, stationery, uniforms, school non-teaching staff and other recurrent school operation grants required for the full implementation of the constitutional mandate (Kushiyait, 2018).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the status of free and compulsory education in the CER schools. In general, we have observed a positive popular perception towards the value of education. There is growing awareness and belief that children should participate in schooling as reflected by the fact that the majority of children are in school. Provisions such as targeted scholarships and midday meals have largely aided this process. However, the prevalence of various forms of discrimination, corporal punishment, substantial direct and indirect costs of schooling, and lack of adequate linkage between schooling and everyday life continue to act as barriers for those children that are still out of school. These factors also contribute to irregular attendance and dropout of those who have enrolled.

3
The School Environment

All the schools have a child club that are involved in conducting various cocurricular and extracurricular activities for the students such as sports competition.

Background

A physically well-equipped, safe and resilient school that is free from all forms of discrimination is one of the most essential components of an enabling learning environment, one in which students can learn productively and without fear. The government has introduced a number of mechanisms to ensure that all schools conform to the minimum standards of the physical and the social environment. According to the Nepal School Education Sector Plan (SESP, 2022–2031), a school's physical environment includes provision of adequate and disaster resilient classrooms, separate toilets for girls and boys, drinking water facilities, water, sanitation and health (WASH)science labs, ICT labs, connectivity, libraries, and a playground. Likewise, the SESP aims to improve the physical and educational environments by making school free from fear, discrimination and abuse, and conducive to diversity so that children can participate in learning activities in a child-friendly (including gender-responsive and disability-friendly) environment (MOEST, 2022). It should be noted that the focus on school safety and resilience has heightened after the earthquake of 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic. In this chapter, we look at the adequacy and overall quality of the school environment in the 31 schools we visited.

The Physical Environment

A school's physical environment consists of the quantity and quality of classrooms, libraries and laboratories, WASH facilities, dedicated rooms for teachers, head teacher and administrative staff, playgrounds and other related facilities that induce learning and overall well-being of the students. In this section, we describe the adequacy of provision of such facilities in the selected schools.

Adequacy of Classrooms

In general, we observed that the selected schools did not have adequate classrooms and furniture for early childhood education and development (ECED) and other grades. In general, schools with a longer history of establishment tend to have adequate and better equipped school buildings than those that were established later. It was observed that the ECED and early grade classrooms in the majority of schools have carpet flooring and floor sitting arrangement. However, in the schools that did not have adequate classrooms, it was found that the children in ECED were mostly combined with grade 1 students, and taught together. Moreover, in cases of acute shortage of classrooms, we came across instances of children in ECED and early grades sitting on the verandah or in the open ground.

Figure 3.1: Availability of classrooms and other facilities in the schools

Source: CER Field Work, 2022.
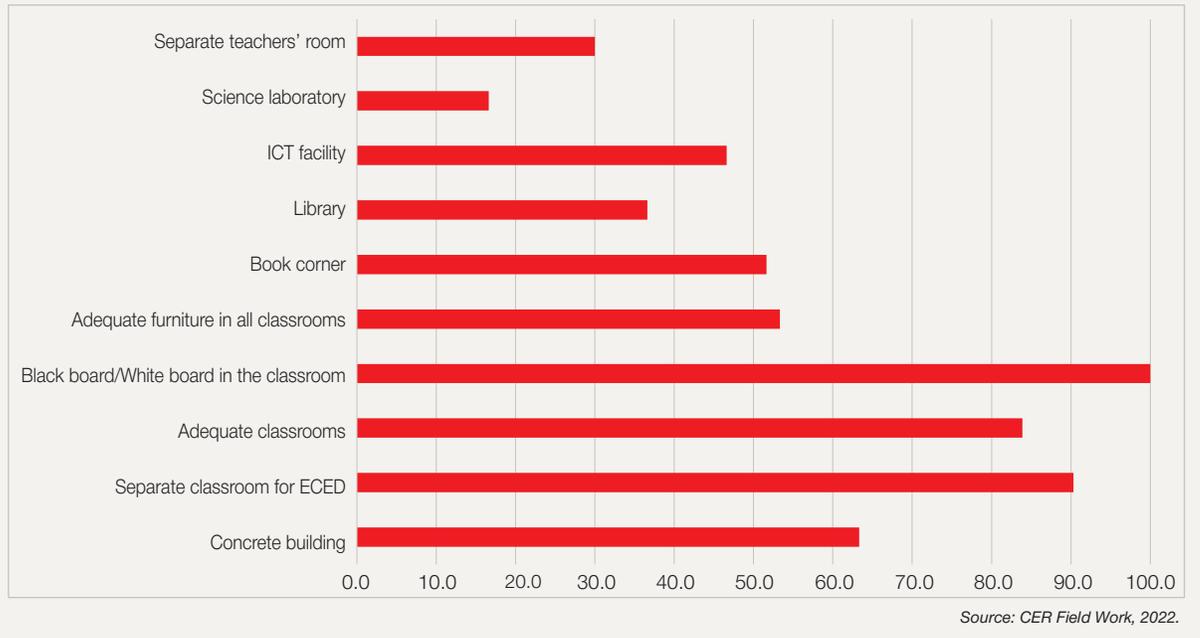
Students from various grades reported that teaching would be affected during adverse weather conditions. The overall impression that we gathered was one of poor physical facilities as shown in Figure 3.1.

Nonetheless, despite the overwhelmingly disappointing state of the classrooms, we also came across classrooms that we felt were conducive to good teaching-learning. In several schools, we saw classrooms for the early grades that were carpeted, with flexible furniture arrangements to enhance group work, book corners with relevant children's books, various types of learning aids, and walls decorated with posters, pictures and other materials often made by the students and teachers. Compared to the past, there is increasing evidence of classroom conditions become better e.g., through carpeted floors, white boards, although classrooms are very dull and non-decorated.

Drinking Water, Toilets, and Basic Health Facilities

Of the 31 schools selected for the study, two did not have any drinking water facilities within the school premises. In such schools, students had to walk to the village source of water to fetch drinking water. In the case of toilets, we found that nearly 50% of the schools did not have separate toilets for girls and boys despite the stated national policy for the same (Figure 3.2). The toilets were mostly filthy, lacking water and basic cleaning accessories such as brush, cleaning liquid

and soap. Only two schools had basic first aid facilities in the school; however, it was encouraging to note that more than 80% of the schools were conducting health check-up, medicine distribution and vaccination campaigns.

Other Components of an Enabling Environment: Libraries, Laboratories and ICT infrastructure

As we move towards higher order facilities, it is not surprising to note that even fewer schools have them (see Figure 3.1 above). For instance, we observed that 19 schools had no library or library materials. Of the remaining schools that reported having a library, we

Figure 3.2: Availability of toilets, drinking water and health facilities

Source: CER Field Work, 2022.
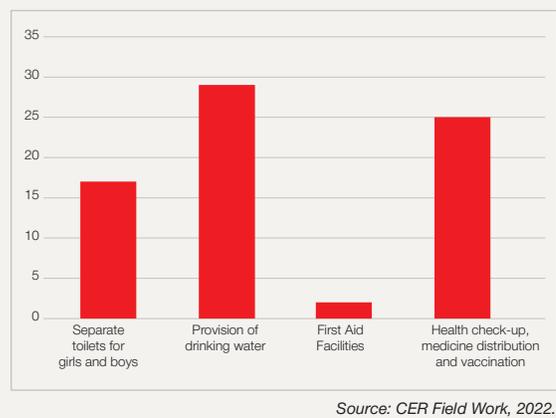
found that only three were what we could realistically call a library, in the sense that students could access the materials contained therein on a regular basis. Most often, whatever library materials the school possessed were locked up in a cupboard in the office room for display rather than for use. In some of the schools that had a functioning library, we found some innovative mechanisms of library management, including the formation of a committee comprising teachers and students that is responsible for issuing the books and looking after the library. However, many libraries in secondary and higher secondary schools had more books for the upper grades and relatively few books for the primary grades. Only five schools had a science laboratory and science equipment, even though there was very little evidence of such labs being used for supporting the teaching and learning of science subjects. About a third of all schools had a separate room for teachers, and 15 schools had some basic ICT facilities.

The Social Environment

The CER team came across instances of discrimination based on caste/ethnicity, disability and gender. Children from Dalit and Janajati communities reported higher frequency of experience of verbal and other forms of abuse as compared to children from Brahmin-Chhetri and Madheshi communities (Figure 3.3) However,

we were informed that corporal punishment is on the decline in the school.

Gender discrimination which originates in the family is also reflected in one way or the other in schools. Female students complained that they were not given equal opportunities in sports, quiz, public speaking and other co-curricular activities. Such activities were often considered by both teachers and students alike as exclusively "male" domains. However, both female and male students agreed that the prevalence of gender-based discrimination was lower compared to other forms of discrimination (see Figures 3.4 and 3.5 below).

Conclusion

In general, most of the schools we visited lacked even the basic components of an enabling physical environment, such as adequate and well-equipped classrooms, playgrounds and basic playing facilities, functional toilets, drinking water, libraries and laboratories, etc. At the same time, many schools also lacked an enabling social environment free from all forms of discrimination and abuse. This contradicts the state rhetoric of an enabling physical and social environment that can promote learning in a physically safe environment without any discrimination and fear.

Figure 3.3: Students' response to abuse and discrimination in school
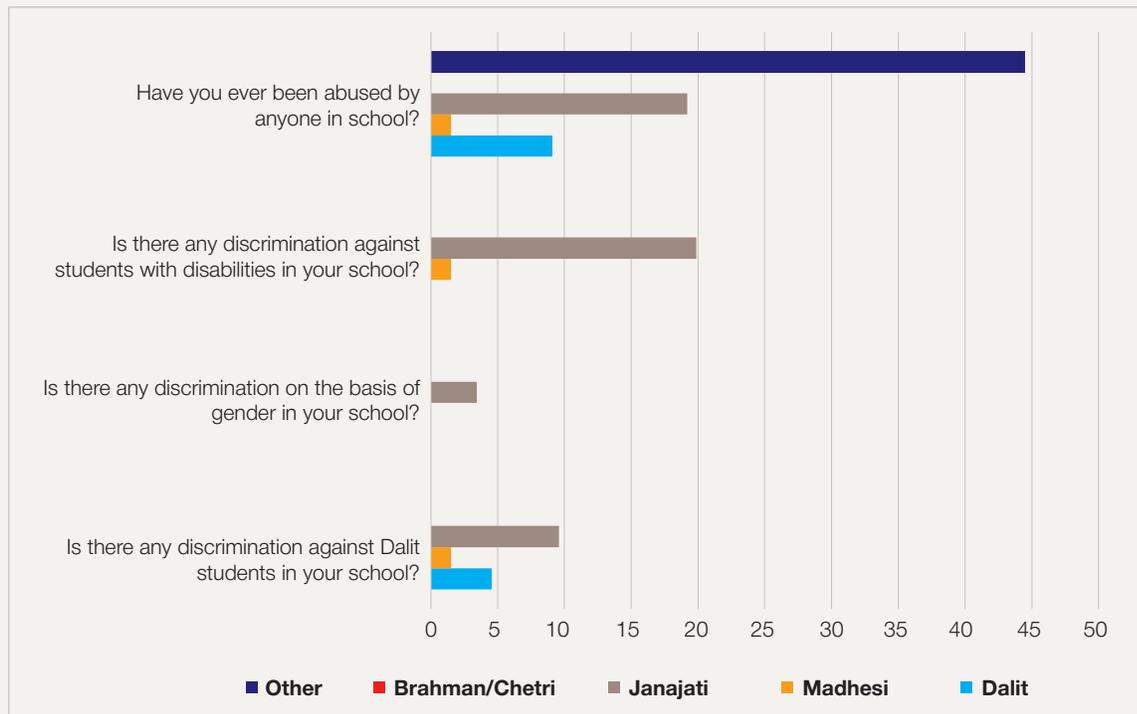
Source: CER Field Work, 2022.

Figure 3.4: Male students' perceptions of discrimination & abuse in school (%)

Personal experience of abuse — N/A: 20.38, No: 66.24, Yes: 13.38

Discrimination against students with disabilities — N/A: 0.64, No: 89.8, Yes: 9.6

Discrimination on the basis of gender — N/A: 0.64, No: 96.2, Yes: 3.18

Discrimination against dalits — N/A: 0.64, No: 90.5, Yes: 8.92

N/A   No   Yes
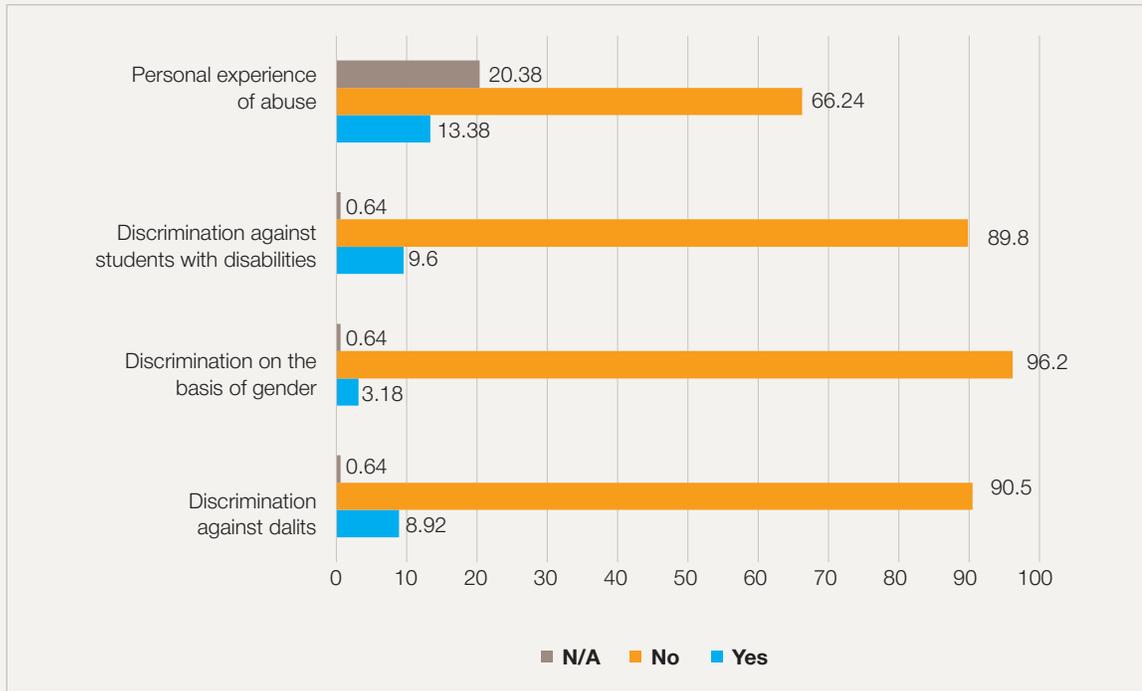
Source: CER Field Work, 2022.

Figure 3.5: Female students' perceptions of discrimination & abuse in school (%)

Personal experience of abuse — N/A: 18.7, No: 70.5, Yes: 10.8

Discrimination against students with disabilities — N/A: 1.2, No: 89.8, Yes: 15.0

Discrimination on the basis of gender — N/A: 1.2, No: 98.8, Yes: 0.0

Discrimination against dalits — N/A: 1.2, No: 96.4, Yes: 2.4

N/A   No   Yes
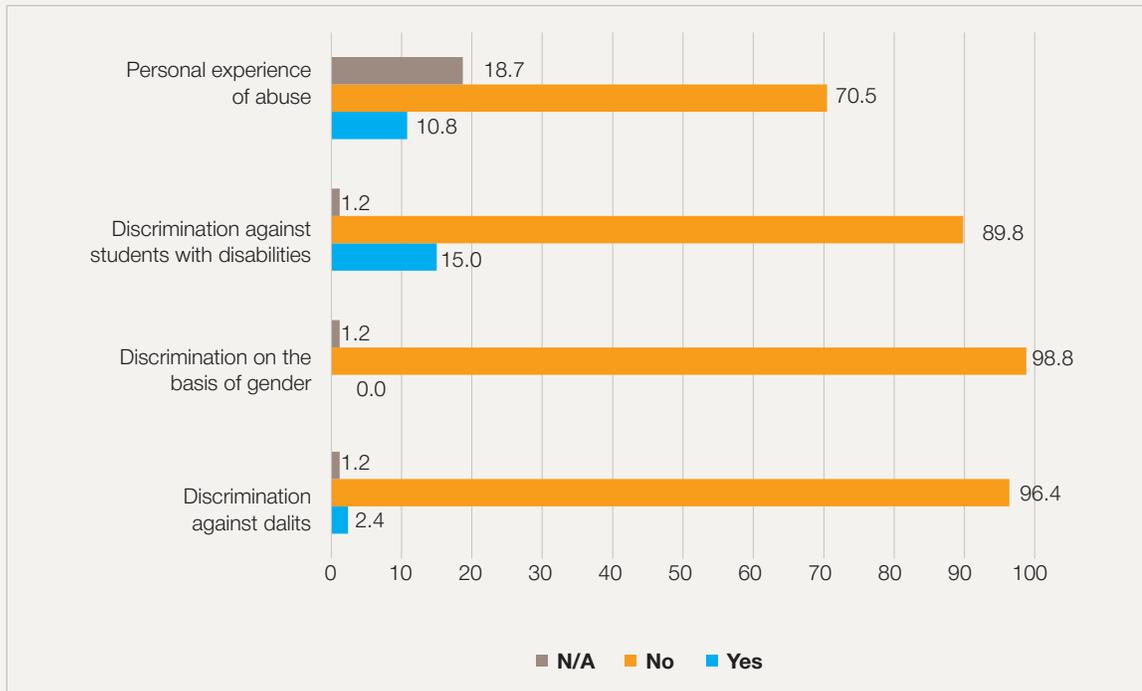
Source: CER Field Work, 2022.

4
School Governance and Management

" The provisions made in the Seventh Amendment to the Education Act 1971 in 2001 are particularly worth highlighting, because these amendments led to the renaming of government schools into "community" schools to instil the feeling of community ownership.

Background

Community participation in school education has always been a stated objective of the Nepal government since the 1950. Since the 1980s, successive development plans for the education sector have framed community participation in school management and governance as a remedy to many of the problems plaguing the public education system. The provisions made in the Seventh Amendment to the Education Act 1971 in 2001 are particularly worth highlighting, because these amendments led to the renaming of government schools into "community" schools to instil the feeling of community ownership. This amendment happened concurrently with an ambitious decentralization initiative in education whereby schools were asked to accept a greater role in school management, including in the development of school improvement plans (SIP). In terms of financing, this was followed by allocation of considerable amounts of funds to the local school – the majority of them earmarked for specific activities while some nominal amount to be spent at the discretion of the school for the implementation of the SIP. Decentralized financing was followed by mechanisms to enhance local accountability and transparency, employing tools such as school audits (both financial and social) to be conducted by elected parent groups such as the SMCs and PTAs. At the same time, child clubs have also been formed to ensure greater participation of students from all walks of life in co- and extra-curricular activities to enhance their holistic growth and development. In this chapter, we look at the reality of public school governance, and the role and participation of the parents and community members in the same.

Realities of Community Participation and Governance

Even before the federal restructuring of the country, Nepal's education system was described as a highly decentralized system, with significant roles and responsibilities for school management committees (SMCs) and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) in the governance of the school. However, as we describe in the ensuing sections based on our observations in the selected schools, this reality ends right there. At the local level, the SMC and PTA form the most important avenues through which parents and other local stakeholders participate in school governance. Both of these bodies are supposed to be democratically elected, representative bodies consisting of parents and teachers. At the same time, the newly formed local governments form the most important avenues for communication between the federal MOEST and the schools in the context of decentralized management.

Parental Participation in Education

In general, parents have participated in various activities such as formation of the SMC, parent assembly, public hearings, and annual functions organised by the school; however, there is very low participation of parents in the school activities related to teaching-learning processes. Parents stated that they are not invited to schools whereas teachers and head teachers pointed out that parents do not show up even when they are repeatedly invited. We found parental participation to be very high in two areas. The first is school construction. As in the past, we found that parents continue to support the establishment and physical expansion of the school through various means such as free labour, monetary donation or other forms of voluntary contribution. In most of the schools, parents reported to have been highly involved in the construction of the school. According to them, "our role is only to provide donation and free labour to the school when required." The second area is related to events wherein parents and community members are formally invited to participate. These include, among others, formation of the SMC and PTA, public dissemination of the school's social audit, school's annual function (if any) and, to a lesser extent, students annual result distribution. In contrast, parental involvement in more internal matters of the school (such as determination of fees, selection of teachers, development of the SIP, and regular monitoring of the school) was minimal. Head teachers and teachers too agree with the fact that there are no systematic mechanisms in place to invite parents to the school regularly to discuss their children's performance.

## School Management Committees and Parent-Teacher Associations

SMC and PTAs exist in in all the 31 schools we visited. In the majority of the schools, the SMCs have been formed through consensus rather than elections. Parents reported to have participated highly in the formation of the SMC. SMCs also seem to be largely representative and socially inclusive bodies in accordance with the provisions outlined in the education act and regulations. In the majority of schools, SMCs hold meetings regularly, and such meetings are held together with the PTA. SMC is the major governing and decision-making body at the school level. However, in the majority of schools (23 out of 31) SMC and PTA members have not received any training or orientation on their responsibilities after becoming a member of the committee. It was reported that most of the decisions made by the SMC are related to construction of classrooms, toilets, drinking water and compound wall. In some cases, it is also involved in selection of teachers recruited through school's internal

resources. Some SMC members have also stated their involvement in scholarship distribution, decisions related to the conduction of remedial and coaching classes, and resource mobilisation for the schools. However, there is relatively little involvement of SMC members in activities related to improvement in student learning.

Student Clubs and Student Participation

All the schools have a child club that has been formed by the school management. These clubs have facilitated student involvement in various activities that would otherwise not be available to them, and have resulted in promoting student leadership and organizational skills development. The child clubs are involved in conducting various activities for the students such as sports competitions, quiz, public debates, cultural programs and awareness-raising activities such as conducting public rallies on specific days. In some schools, child clubs are also engaged in monitoring student and teacher attendance.

Response from students indicate that they have the opportunity to participate in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in the school. The majority of students have participated in quiz competitions, sports activities, and singing and dancing. In contrast, fewer students have participated in debate, public speaking, story/poetry writing, and drama activities (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Student participation in various activities (%)
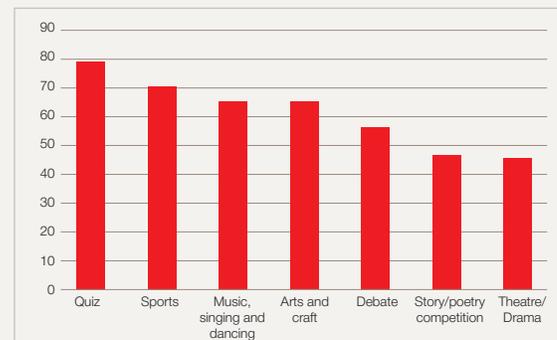
Source: CER Field Survey, 2022.

Decision-making and Transparency in the School

Existing law require the schools to adhere to a number of provisions to ensure transparency and accountability in the schools. These include, among others, the formation of SMC and PTA (see above), conduction of school financial and social audits and their public dissemination, development and regular updating of the

school improvement plan, formulation of school annual plan and budget, and the formulation of the school's academic calendar and teacher lesson plans. The status of these indicators in the selected schools is described in Figure 4.2 below. In general, whilst the majority of schools have complied with these legal provisions, there are a number of schools that have not, especially with respect to the development of annual program and budget and its public dissemination, timely conduction of social audit and its dissemination and regular holding of parents' assemblies for enhanced transparency and accountability.

Figure 4.2: The status of various school governance indicators in the selected schools
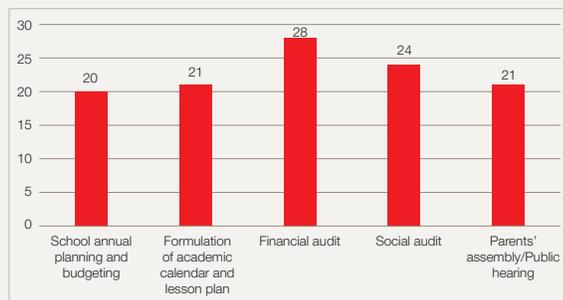
Source: CER Field Work, 2022.

In addition to the above, all the schools have distributed scholarships to target groups (mostly in the form of cash but in some cases in the form of kind as well). Some schools had distributed additional scholarships needs and merit-based scholarships to students that have difficulty in continuing studies in the absence of such support. For this purpose, such schools have established some form of endowment funds largely with individual donations. Likewise, schools have developed codes of conduct for the teachers and students in order to enhance their accountability towards each other. Such codes of conduct were displayed on the school building walls, and in the case of teachers displayed in the teachers' rooms where such rooms were available. However, there are no mechanisms in place to systematically monitor the extent to which students and teachers have adhered to such codes, and take action in case of breach of the code of conduct.

Relationships between Local Governments and Schools

After the federal restructuring of the country, the management and delivery of school education has been devolved to the local governments. It was reported that schools have been receiving the federal conditional grants through the local governments on a timely basis. More than 67% of schools (21 out of 31) stated that the

local government officials have conducted monitoring and supervision visits to the schools. Likewise, all the schools are reported to have received some form of additional financial support on top of the federal conditional grants from the local governments. Such support was reported to be mainly for school physical facilities improvement (classroom construction and renovation, construction of toilets, provision of drinking water facilities, boundary wall construction, playground, etc), teacher support, ICT equipment, furniture, and learning materials. In some cases, local governments have also conducted inter-school sports competitions, quiz contests, etc. However, very few schools (11 out of 31) have stated that they are engaged with the local governments through the municipal education committee.

Conclusions

In general, we can see that there are formal avenues for participation of parents, community members and even students in the affairs of the school. However, such participation revolves more around the general management of the school and there are no meaningful avenues for participation of parents in areas pertaining to the quality of teaching-learning in the school and the education of their children.

5
Quality of Education
"

Teachers are one of the most important actors in any education system, primarily because what students learn ultimately depends on the way in which teachers structure and lead their classroom teaching-learning processes.

Background

It is extremely difficult to define what we mean by the quality of education Quality of education is the most difficult to define although it is inherent to any education system. It is common to look at education quality at three levels: (i) the level of input, (ii) the level of process, and (iii) the level of output and outcome. It is also common to look at educational quality in terms of how efficient the system is (i.e., system performance in attendance, dropout, repetition and promotion, and cycle completion rates); an efficient system is also thought to be of a good quality.

We have already dealt with input-related quality issues to a large extent in Chapter 3, where we have in particular looked at whether the overall school environment has the minimum enabling conditions for learning as defined by the state. In this chapter, we look at the status of teachers in the selected schools, classroom teaching learning processes, the local perceptions of quality of education, and the (dis)continuity of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on these, we attempt to make some broad claims about the general quality of education in Nepal's public schools.

Student-Teacher Ratio and Adequacy of Teachers

Teachers are one of the most important actors in any education system, primarily because what students learn ultimately depends on the way in which teachers structure and lead their classroom teaching-learning processes. This, in turn is dependent upon a number of factors including the adequacy of teachers, student-teacher ratio (STR), time spent teaching, teachers' service conditions and their continuous professional development.

The student-teacher ratio (STR) in the selected schools varied greatly from 7.0 to 77.6, indicating a wide discrepancy in the equitable deployment of teachers. In general, the STR is higher in the Tarai compared to the hills and mountains, and is higher in the secondary schools compared to basic schools, which fits neatly with the national scenario as well. According to the school records, the majority of teachers hold the minimum qualifications and teacher license mandated by the Education Act and Regulations.

There exist various types of teachers in the school system with different terms and conditions of service and career paths, which significantly affect teacher

performance. Of the total teachers, only 34.5% were permanent, and 37.4% were temporary and relief teachers (Figure 5.1). About 28% of the teachers were locally recruited through the schools' internal resources, by the local governments, and through other resources.

Figure 5.1: Types of teachers in the schools

Others, 9.0
Recruited by local government, 9.0
Hired from school's internal resources, 10.1
Relief, 18.7
Temporary, 18.7
Permanent, 34.5

Source: CER Field Work, 2022.
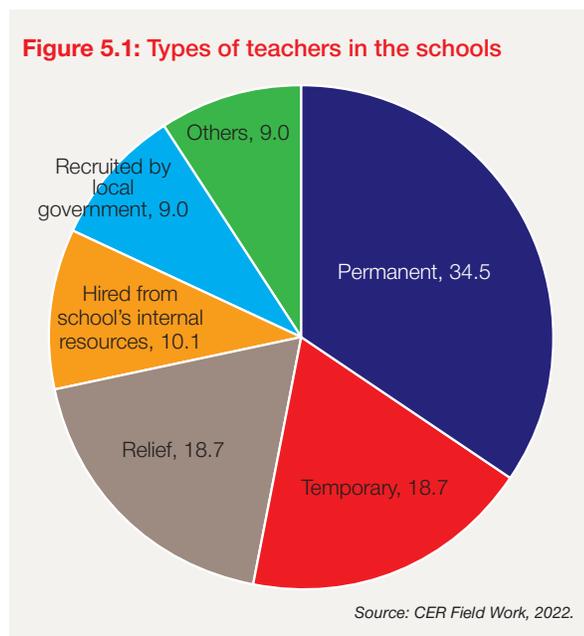
We found that almost 50% of the schools have hired teachers using their internal resources. The tendency to hire teachers through local resources was higher in the Tarai compared to the hills, which is largely because of the higher STR in the Tarai. At the same time, local governments seem to be playing an important part in fulfilling teacher shortages, with such teachers accounting for 10% of all teachers working in the schools. However, despite the various measures adopted to fulfill teacher shortages, only six schools (five basic and one secondary) reported that they had adequate teachers for the different levels and subjects.

Training Status of Teachers and Classroom Teaching-Learning Processes

Of the total teachers working in the schools, only 57% reported to have received some form of in-service teacher professional development opportunities in the past two years. This is significantly low compared to the MOEST's EMIS data which reports that approximately 76% of teachers at the basic and secondary levels have received such training. The low in-service training status of teachers can be attributed to the fact that nearly 56% of the teachers are non-permanent teachers (temporary teachers working in permanent positions, rahat or

relief teachers, and teachers hired by the school or local governments through own resources) who are less likely to be prioritised in the teacher professional development opportunities provided through the MOEST system. The low coverage of in-service training can also be attributed to the net decline in the number of teacher training institutions (the Education Training Centres or ETCs) and the abolishing of the Resource Centres (RCs) after the federal restructuring in 2017. Further, there are no opportunities for teacher professional development at the school level. Only four schools reported that they have conduct some form of teacher professional development activities at the school level conducted by the school itself.

The Quality of Teaching-learning in the Schools

The application of training in classroom pedagogy falls under the professional and moral code of conduct of trained teachers. However, in our classroom observation we found that trained teachers were largely content with applying traditional teacher-centred teaching-learning procedures. The majority of teachers almost exclusively relied on blackboard and textbooks, and we did not see any use of other teaching materials. This finding is not surprising given the lack of such materials in the classrooms (although this does not necessarily imply that such materials are not available in the school itself). Many trained teachers stated that the existing classroom conditions are not conducive for conducting student-centred and participatory teaching-learning activities, while others stated that such materials are expensive and difficult to make. We also found that the majority of teachers did not prepare a daily lesson plan for teaching. In the majority of schools surveyed, some students did not have access to the full set of textbooks; teachers also did not have much information on the recent revisions in textbooks, particularly with respect to the integrated curriculum for the early grades, and had insufficient access to the national curriculum which the textbooks are supposed to deliver. Nevertheless, teachers opined that the new, revised textbooks were of a higher quality than the previous ones.

Discrepancy in the terms and conditions of employment between permanent, temporary and Rahat, and locally recruited temporary teachers is the prime reason for the frustration of these temporary teachers that accounted for nearly more than 60% of teachers in the selected schools. Such temporary teachers also felt that their contribution has not been assessed properly by the schools, government and communities. They felt that their performance was better than that of the permanent teachers.

We also asked teachers regarding their perception of the quality of education in the school in which they are engaged. It is interesting to note that the majority of the teachers feel that it is good compared to other schools in the locality (Figure 5.2). None of the teachers felt that it was lower compared to the other schools.

Figure 5.2: Teachers' perception of school quality in comparison to other schools within the same municipality (%)

Very Good ■ Good ■ Same ■ Bad ■ Very Bad
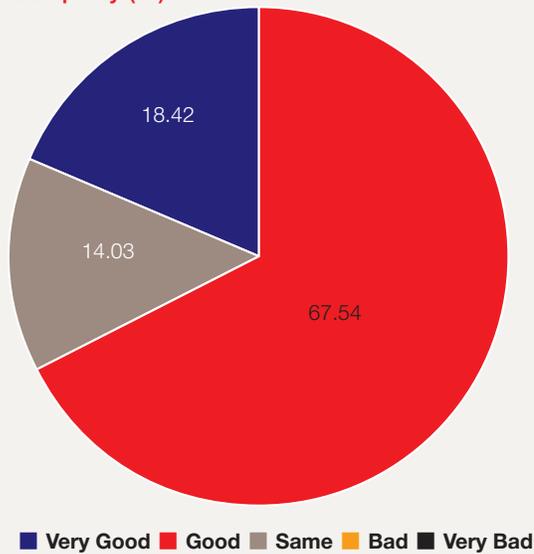
Source: CER Field Work, 2022.

The CER was conducted during a time when schools had been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, we were also interested in how the schools continued their teaching learning activities during the pandemic. The results are shown in Figure 5.3 below. It can be clearly seen that the majority of schools relied on tole shiksha and distribution of self learning materials for the students.

Figure 5.3: School interventions during COVID-19
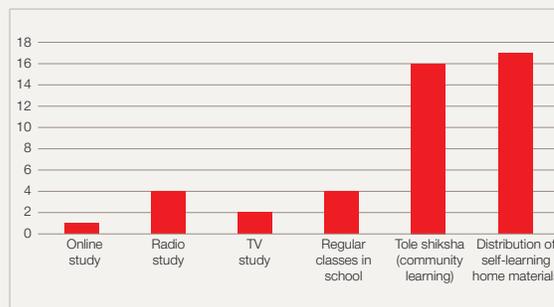
Source: CER Field Work, 2022.

Conclusion

Our observations across the selected schools suggest that while teachers have the greatest responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning, we came across various instances where this has not happened. From the perspective of the teachers, the prevalence of many types of teachers with various career development and incentive mechanisms has led to a loss of morale and degradation of the teaching profession. Variation in STRs and great reliance on local recruitment of teachers together with insufficient opportunities for teacher professional development has also contributed to low quality of education.

Our observations regarding the quality of education in the schools surveyed, while showing a variety of performance scenarios, nonetheless indicate the need to further strengthen the quality of teaching-learning in order to enhance student learning outcomes. For this, public schools need to be systematically supported in aspects that will strengthen their overall teaching-learning environment, including improvements in the school's physical environment as well teachers and their professional development. Likewise, public school teachers need to be made more accountable for student performance or lack thereof because local communities perceive the role of the teachers as the most important for any efforts to improve education quality. However, there is a more fundamental aspect of quality which is the relevance and connection of education to the everyday life of the people. Ongoing efforts to introduce the local curriculum and other sets of skills and competencies in school education need to be cognizant of this need for a relevant education.

6
Conclusion and Recommendations

> A large part of this disjunction between the rhetoric and reality of free and compulsory schooling for all emanates from the fact that the state continues to make "deliberate" ambiguities with respect to the definition of free and compulsory schooling.

There continues to persist a huge gap between the state rhetoric of compulsory and free basic education and the realities in the selected schools. Although free and compulsory basic education has been touted as a state goal and asserted by the constitution, children from marginalized areas and groups continue to remain out-of-school. Even for those who participate, they may eventually drop out of the system without acquiring the functional and basic literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, despite the state rhetoric of free education, children and households continue to pay for schooling. A large part of this disjunction between the rhetoric and reality of free and compulsory schooling for all emanates from the fact that the state continues to make "deliberate" ambiguities with respect to the definition of free and compulsory schooling, and does not allocate adequate resources for the effective implementation of the same. Whilst the enactment of the Compulsory and Free Education Act 2017 is a step in the right direction, it does not do justice simply by putting all the burden of implementation of the local governments without adequate guarantee of resources.

There continues to remain a high level of mistrust and lack of confidence in the public school system; however, this has not barred parents from sending their children to schools. On the contrary, parents are always seeking improved and better schooling opportunities for their children. This has resulted in parents sending their children to private schools, which together with out-migration particularly in the hilly and mountainous areas, has led to decline in the number of students in some of the selected schools. Such transfer flock of children from public to private schools is results from the legitimacy crisis that our public school system continues to face, which in turn emanates from the disjunction between the state rhetoric and local realities of public schooling.

Status of Education Rights in Schools

- **Right to free education:** Students and households continue to pay various kinds of fees for their participation in the school even though the schools do not charge monthly tuition fees. This shows that basic education is not free; however, compared to the findings from the 2012 and 2017 CERs, it has become 'more free' in the sense that students from primary grades are not required to pay any regular fees apart from those raised in the name of examination fees, Saraswoti Pooja or other specific events/purposes. Likewise, it is good to note the gradual progress being made in expanding the provision of midday meals and free textbooks. At the upper basic and secondary levels, schools continue to raise various fees from students and their parents.

Also, there is no evidence that the local governments have enforced compulsory education at the basic level despite the enactment of the Compulsory and Free Basic Education Act 2018. Almost 50% of the schools have hired teachers locally through school's internal resources, with a higher incidence of local teacher recruitment in the Tarai compared to the hills, and school fees are important revenue source for providing salary to such teachers. Local government support for teacher recruitment in schools with teacher shortages has partly addressed teacher shortages faced by schools, and has also contributed to reduction of user fees.

- **Right to a safe and enabling school environment:** there have been gradual improvements in the schools' overall physical environment including classrooms, WASH facilities, and learning resources. However, classrooms are inadequate for all grades, including ECED in 15% of schools, 63% of schools do not have libraries, 53% of schools do not have basic ICT facilities, 83% of schools do not have science laboratories, and 70% of schools do not have a separate room for teachers. In terms of WASH, nearly 46% schools do not have separate toilets for girls and boys, 55% of schools do not have treated drinking water, and 94% do not have basic first aid facilities. The lack of the above basic physical and educational infrastructure is bound to have significant effects on the quality of learning inside the classrooms and schools. In terms of safe and non-discriminatory school environment, responses from teachers and school management suggest that discrimination based on gender, caste/ethnicity, disability, etc and various forms of physical and psychological abuses do not occur inside school premises. Yet, information collected from students suggests that discrimination occurs in schools mainly based on caste/ethnicity and disability, and to a lesser extent gender. Further, children from Dalit and Janajati communities reported higher frequency of experience of verbal and other forms of abuse as compared to children from Brahmin-Chhetri and Madheshi communities.

- **Right to participate in school governance:** The majority of schools have formed SMCs and PTAs as per the existing legal provision. However, in the majority of schools (23 out of 31) SMC and PTA members have not received any training or orientation on their responsibilities after becoming a member of the committee. Likewise, head teachers from 19 schools (out of 31) had not received any leadership training after their appointment as head teacher. All the schools have a child club that are involved in conducting various cocurricular and extracurricular activities for the students such as sports competitions, quiz, public debates, cultural programs and awareness-raising activities such as conducting public rallies on specific days. In some schools, child clubs are also engaged in monitoring student and teacher attendance. In terms of transparency and accountability at the school level, only 20 schools have formulated annual plan and budget, only 21 have conducted parent assembly, 24 have conducted social audits, and 28 have conducted financial audits. Findings suggest that overall parental participation in school affairs is generally low and such participation is not geared towards educational activities. In terms of local government engagement with schools, the majority of schools acknowledged receiving some additional support on top of the federal conditional grants from the local governments for school physical facilities improvement (classrooms, toilets, drinking water, etc), teacher support, ICT equipment, furniture, and learning materials. However, nearly 33% of schools (10 out of 31) stated that the local government officials have not conducted any monitoring and supervision visits to the schools.

- **Right to good quality education, including the right to qualified and trained teachers:** Evidence suggests huge discrepancies in student teacher ratio (STR) across different local governments, districts and ecological belts, from a low STR of 7.0 in Palpa district to a high of 77.6 in Siraha district. The STR is higher in the Tarai compared to the hills and in secondary schools compared to basic schools. Further, only 20% of schools have stated that they have adequate teachers for different grades and subject. Of the total teachers, only 34.5% were permanent, and 37.4% were temporary and relief teachers. About 28% of the teachers were locally recruited (through the schools' internal resources, by the local governments and through other local resources). The majority of teachers are qualified but nearly 43% have not received any continuous professional development training partly because they are locally hired. Likewise, none of the teachers acknowledged having received any training in the past two years. Lecturing and question-answer/discussion were the two most common teaching/pedagogy methods practiced by teachers. In the majority of classrooms, the walls were devoid of any educational materials, including those produced by students, and there was little evidence of the use of other student-centred and participatory methods such as demonstrations, group work, project work and community work.

Recommendations

- **Need for greater resource mobilisation:** There is an urgent and continued need to increase federal allocations to education, and within it to school education, to fulfill the state commitment towards free school education. Such allocations need to be made towards creation of new teacher positions, strengthening of school safety and resilience, supporting the direct and indirect costs of children likely remain out of school, and for providing inputs aimed at enhancing the quality of learning environment such as libraries, labs and ICT infrastructure in the schools. Likewise, additional resources need to be allocated for teachers' continuous professional support at the local level given that pre-federal institutional arrangements for teachers' professional support and supervision have been dismantled. Various studies indicate the need for greater domestic resource mobilisation to ensure education financing, and this also calls for more innovative approaches to domestic resource mobilisation such as progressive taxation and dedicated taxation for education (ActionAid, 2020). This seems feasible given that households are already contributing more than 50% of national education financing.

- **Need for strengthening local governance of education:** according to the Education Sector Analysis conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2021, 54.4% of local governments did not have an education officer in 2020 (MOEST, 2021). While this situation has improved since then with nearly 85% of the local governments with at least one education officer in 2022 according to the data from the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, understaffing and placement of underqualified staff particularly in rural and remote municipalities remains a problem, which has immediate impact on the frequency and quality of school monitoring and supervision. Hence, the federal government needs to revisit its policies with respect to the staffing of local governments. Likewise, given the increasing responsibilities placed on local governments with respect to the delivery of school education, there is a need for supporting in capacity development of local governments in the areas of planning and budgeting, providing professional support to schools and teachers, and better use of data for additional need-based resource allocation. At the school level too, given that the SMC, PTA and the head teacher are the most important actors responsible for school governance and management, it is important to develop their capacity and expertise in these areas and to be able to perform the basic functions related to transparency and accountability towards the school community.

- **Need for continued civic engagement with public schooling:** As stated earlier, the aim of this CER is to not only ascertain the state of public schooling with respect to the cluster of education rights but also to support in its improvement in the process. In the whole process, schools have been visited multiple times by the researchers (members of various CSOs that have been closely associated with the schools), first to collect the data and information and later to share and disseminate the findings. This process of continual engagement with the school-community is expected to improve and rectify areas where gaps exist. Experience from previous CERs shows that this participatory action research process has led to immediate improvements in the condition of toilets for the students, infrastructure for ECED and grade 1 students, regularity of students and teachers, and parents visiting schools on a more regular basis and inquiring about their children's progress. This points towards the need for an enhanced role for civil society organizations over a sustained period of time in improving the overall process of schooling in these communities.

In sum, public schools continue to be the major avenues through which the majority of Nepali children have access to and participate in schooling. So, these institutions should be the major avenues through which reform initiatives should continue to be launched. In general, this would call for greater efforts on the part of the federal MOEST as the parent body and the local governments as the de jure and de facto operators of school education service delivery to understand the nuances and complexities of public school and how these can be locally addressed under the federal system. This requires doing away with "more of the same" to one that allows and enables local governments to identify and act upon through a variety of grounded approaches to improve the functioning of public schools.

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Annex 1: List of Schools selected for CER 2022

SN	Province	District	Municipality	School	Grades offered
1	Koshi	Tehrathum	Aatharai Rural Municipality	Puranagau Basic School, Sakranti	1–5
2	Koshi	Tehrathum	Aatharai Rural Municipality	Kalika Basic School	1–5
3	Koshi	Tehrathum	Aatharai Rural Municipality	Shinghabahini Basic School	1–5
4	Koshi	Tehrathum	Aatharai Rural Municipality	Janta Basic School, Waku	1–8
5	Koshi	Tehrathum	Aatharai Rural Municipality	Janta Basic School, Barbote	1–8
6	Koshi	Tehrathum	Aatharai Rural Municipality	Krishna Secondary School	1–12
7	Madhesh	Siraha	Lahan Municipality	Lekhnath Secondary School, Gobindapur	1–10
8	Madhesh	Siraha	Lahan Municipality	Dalit Bhanubhakta Basic School	1–5
9	Madhesh	Siraha	Lahan Municipality	Basic School Jahadi	1–5
10	Madhesh	Siraha	Lahan Municipality	Khadarbhut Basic School, Pidarbony	1–8
11	Madhesh	Siraha	Lahan Municipality	Saraswoti Basic School, Pakkitole	1–8
12	Madhesh	Siraha	Dhangadimai Municipality	Mahabir Secondary School, Dhangadi	1–12
13	Madhesh	Siraha	Dhangadimai Municipality	Basic School Kailashpur Bhorleni	1–8
14	Madhesh	Siraha	Dhangadimai Municipality	Janta Kalyan Basic School, Gadame	1–8
15	Madhesh	Siraha	Aurahi Rural Municipality	Janata Basic School, Aurahi	1–8
16	Madhesh	Parsa	Paterwa Sugauli Rural Municipality	Nepal Rastriya Primary School, Kanchanpur	1–5
17	Madhesh	Parsa	Paterwa Sugauli Rural Municipality	Shree Nepal Rastriya Basic School, Belwa	1–8
18	Madhesh	Parsa	Paterwa Sugauli Rural Municipality	Shree Nepal Rastriya Basic School, Paterwa	1–5
19	Madhesh	Parsa	Paterwa Sugauli Rural Municipality	Shree Nepal Rastriya Basic School, Pathraiya	1–8
20	Madhesh	Parsa	Paterwa Sugauli Rural Municipality	Shree Nepal Rastriya Basic, Laxmipur	1–8
21	Madhesh	Parsa	Paterwa Sugauli Rural Municipality	Janata Basic school, Pathraiya	1–8
22	Lumbini	Palpa	Bagnaskali Rural Municipality	Bhagawati Basic School	1–8
23	Lumbini	Palpa	Bagnaskali Rural Municipality	Shreeram Basic School	1–12
24	Lumbini	Palpa	Mathagadi Rural Municipality	Karnadhar Basic School	1–10
25	Lumbini	Palpa	Mathagadi Rural Municipality	Karnadhar Primary School	1–5
26	Lumbini	Bardiya	Rajapur Municipality	Nepal Rastriya Pashupati Basic school Daulatpur	1–8
27	Lumbini	Bardiya	Rajapur Municipality	Nava Jyoti Basic School, Nayagaun	1–5
28	Sudur Paschim	Doti	Sikhar Municipality	Durgadevi Basic School	1–8
29	Sudur Paschim	Doti	Sikhar Municipality	Bhawani Secondary School	1–10
30	Sudur Paschim	Doti	Dipayal Silgadhi Municipality	Durga Secondary School	1–10
31	Sudur Paschim	Doti	K.I. Singh Rural Municipality	Bhumiraj Secondary School	1–12

Glimpses from the National Report launching and Sharing Workshop of Effect Spawned by Youth-led Remedial Classes and Citizen's Education Report 2022.

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