



Improving the Quality of Education and Building Disaster Resilience in Schools

A case study of ROTA's project in Nepal and experience of applying the INEE Minimum Standards



I. Overview of Educational Situation in Nepal

According to the 2010 Human Development Report of the UNDP, Nepal ranks 138 among the 172 countries worldwide. The Human Development Index (HDI) value of Nepal is far below the average for South Asia. This is reflected in the low literacy rate, where only 57.9% of the population over 15 years of age is found to be literate and only 15.4% of the population over the age of 25 has achieved a secondary level of education.

The education system in Nepal is facing significant challenges related to quality and access. Poor management, rote teaching methodology, and the lack of competent teachers and training programs are affecting the quality of education and causing an extremely high dropout rate, as well as high student to teacher ratios. This is especially the case in Outer Terai, a far western region of Nepal¹.

In Nepal, major access constraints to education include inadequate school physical infrastructure and the mountainous topography of the country. Schools are often located in the most neglected and unsafe areas, and take an average of 30-minutes walk to reach. Schools in the region do not have sufficient classrooms and furniture. Additionally, limited water and sanitation services are commonplace, leading to poor sanitation and water-borne diseases. Access to education is also affected by cultural constraints, and Kailali District in Outer Terai, is home to exclusionary social practices such as a bonded labor system, sex trade, and caste-based discrimination. This adversely affects access to schools and rights to education.

Nepal is also prone to natural hazards. Out of 198 countries, it ranks 11th and 30th respectively with regards to earthquake and flood vulnerability. Each year, resulting disasters cause around 13,000 deaths in addition to significant loss of land and education infrastructure. Natural hazards destroy school buildings, as well as physical access to them. In many cases, schools are used as safe shelter by communities during disasters. For example, during the September 2009 floods, 56 out of 136 schools in Kailali District were used as safe shelter². As a result, schools are open for an average of 110 days instead of the mandatory 220 days per year.

ROTA's intervention³ "Improving the Quality of Education and Building Disaster Resilience in Schools" evolved in direct response to the impact of disasters on education in already vulnerable areas with low education access and quality, and is based on a successful pilot project that ROTA implemented in 8 Village Development Committees (VDCs)⁴ in Kailali District. The new project is being implemented in 2 municipalities of Kailali District with 22 VDCs.

The project's objectives are to:

- Enhance knowledge in disaster risk reduction (DRR)

¹ National Education Support Strategy Nepal (2008-2013), UNESCO, 2008.

² District education office in Kailali, 2009.

³ ROTA's intervention is a cooperation between Mercy Corps and Action Aid International Nepal, with co-funding by Vodafone.

⁴ VDCs are a geographic and government classification.

- Build capacity of teachers and students to improve teaching-learning environment and school governance
- Design and promote safe school standards through disaster prevention and mitigation initiatives
- Enable students from disadvantaged groups (particularly girls) to continue their secondary education
- Undertake small rehabilitation work to increase accessibility and safety in 157 schools in the district.

The project expects to directly benefit around 54,050 students, as well as teachers and administrators from 157 schools.

ROTA's engagement with INEE and staffs' subsequent training in the Minimum Standards influenced the lens that has been applied to the project's implementation. ROTA's project manager used the INEE framework to ensure that the project had been designed and is being implemented using best practice.

II. Implementing the INEE Minimum Standards in all project phases

Foundational Standard: Community Participation

Community participation has been an integral part of the project since its inception and also cross cuts the implementation of all the Standards described below. The needs assessment and project design are based upon engagement with Junior Youth Clubs (JYCs)/ Child Clubs and workshops with the community and parents. Lessons learned during the pilot phase have significantly helped in shaping the current project. During implementation, the project directly engages students, teachers, School Management Committees (SMC) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) to strengthen broader community preparedness and responses to disasters, through enhancing their capacities, plus knowledge and awareness of DRR.

Participation Outcomes

- 68 **school social audits** have been conducted in a participatory manner. Community participation in the social audits has promoted transparency and accountability in school management. These events have also facilitated efficient and transparent use of school funds.
- 78 schools have completed **Participatory Vulnerability Analysis and Vulnerability Capacity Assessments** with the active participation of Junior Red Cross (JRCs), Child Clubs, SMCs and PTAs. Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) tools like mapping, seasonal calendar, organizational setup, and hazard ranking were used for the assessments.
- 78 project schools have developed or updated "safe school" action plans or **Disaster Preparedness (DP) plans** in a similarly inclusive way. The plans have initiated small scale mitigation in 54 project schools, with approximately 80% of the work completed at this stage of the project. Examples of safety schemes include raised water pumps, seismically

sound classrooms, river spurs, toilets, school boundary walls, and toe wall construction in rivers.

- **Community Contribution for Emergency Fund:** The project supported JRCs to establish school emergency and maintenance funds through fundraising. Thus far, 38 project schools have an emergency fund. The funds are to be used during emergencies to replenish First Aid Kits, and to maintain Early Warning Systems (EWS) and Search & Rescue equipment.

Foundational Standard: Coordination
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To be able to cover the whole of Kailali District effectively, ROTA partnered with two different organizations to implement complementary components that have the same goal. This project level coordination has been a good platform for sharing and learning between all partners. In order to ensure the project's sustainability, recognition from national authorities, and wider impact at local, district and national levels, the project management also works in close coordination and collaboration with concerned governmental bodies.

Coordination Outcomes

- **VDC and school selection:** The project management worked together with the District Education Officer (DEO) for setting the criteria for the selection of target schools in the entire Terai Region, since the disaster scenario and the school situation is similar across Terai. Through this collaboration the documents that will be developed on Safe Schools via the project will have the endorsement of the government, and thus could be used across the region.
- **Formation of a District Project Advisory Committee:** The D-PAC is a consultative committee established for the project and comprising of six district level government agencies that meet quarterly to discuss the progress and challenges faced by the project. D-PAC has been established to support the project in achieving better outcomes.

Access and Learning Environment: Standard 1; Equal Access
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During the project design the selection of the target population was based upon specific criteria that aimed to improve access by focusing on flood affected VDCs, flood affected schools, comparatively remote VDCs (less accessible geographical settings, more discriminatory and exclusionary socio-cultural practices, and politically less prioritized), and those VDCs engaged during the earlier pilot phase.

The project has also undertaken a rapid assessment of the education system in Kailali district using a framework, popularly known as “4As of education.” This framework is widely used for analyzing education from a human rights perspective. The project therefore takes into account full and inclusive participation. One of the project strategies is to support two freed Kamaiya and Badi groups⁵, to advocate for education rights at district level. This aspect of the project serves to build

⁵ The Community Support Group (CSG) and The Freed Kamaiya Society (FKS).

the groups' capacity to analyze education policies and initiate a campaign to end discrimination against freed Kamaiya and Badi children in target schools,

Equal Access Outcomes

- 25 individuals (i.e., community members) have been through five-day training on becoming REFLECT facilitators. REFLECT is a network of actors working towards empowering marginalized groups by educating them on their rights, including the right to education.
- 264 school-aged children from disadvantaged communities have been enrolled in various schools.
- 51 youth from marginalized groups have received scholarships from the project to attend vocational and technical training in different subjects.
- The project is developing an Annual Citizens' Education report which is a powerful tool to provide citizens' feedback on public services. Initial discussions on developing the publication are underway, guidelines are being prepared, and the work will begin in year two of the project.

Access and Learning Environment: Standard 3; Services and Facilities

Through the project, infrastructural and service needs in the schools have been assessed and are being addressed to ensure the safety and well-being of all those in the school environment.

Services and Facilities Outcomes

- In order to reduce the impact of earthquakes in the project schools, small scale infrastructure has been constructed in order to create a better learning environment. These initiatives include libraries improvement, building seismically resistant classrooms, raised drinking water, and construction of boundary walls, as well as adapting training for technical resource persons in the district and central education offices.
- 83 schools have been rehabilitated and equipped with First Aid kits and Child Centered Learning (CCL) material.
- Additional 75 schools will also be rehabilitated and equipped in 2012-2013.

Teaching and Learning: Standards 1 & 2 Curricula; Training, Professional Development and Support

The project is supporting the development of a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) curriculum, which is appropriate to the local context. This curriculum will take into consideration the social and cultural significance of the locality.

The Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials used by the project are user-friendly and easily understood by the local community members. For example, a cartoon film used for creating DRR understanding and awareness among children, has been dubbed in the local language and the context shown in the film is realistic and relevant in terms of the landscape, people, culture and their needs. All IEC materials are produced in both written and pictorial form, given the high rate of illiteracy in the project target area. Additionally, drama performed by school

students is used as an effective sensitization tool for orienting schools on the concept of school-based DRR.

The project strongly focuses on the capacity building of teachers, students, plus SMC and PTA members, on DRR. This includes training on school-based DRR, undertaking education in emergency for teachers, simulations or mock drills on disaster preparedness, Early Warning System training, and training for disaster response.

Teaching and Learning Outcomes

- The project has pioneered the Child Centered Learning (CCL) approach in the district and has started ToTs and generic training on CCL for the teachers in the 157 target schools.
- The project organized the following range of capacity building trainings for different community groups and community resource persons:
 - School based DRR for 1836 students and teachers
 - First Aid training for 429 teachers and students
 - Search and Rescue training for 325 teachers and students
 - Early Warning System training for 322 teachers and students
 - Quality Education and Life Skill training or Child Centered Learning (CCL) for 53 teachers
 - Leadership training for 51 teachers
- 24 resource persons/ facilitators have been trained in educational policies and programs through workshops, field simulations and close monitoring and support. This included government staff, front line Head Teachers, teachers, and School Management Committees.

Educational Policy

The project is engaged in educational policy advocacy at both the district and national levels. The focus is on ensuring the integration of DRR into school curriculum, as well as on enabling the design and implementation of “safe school” models. Furthermore, improving access to education for marginalized groups (such as the freed Kamaiya and Badi social groups) is also a priority area for the project.

Sharing Lessons Learned

Challenges in applying the Standards

Coordination has been the most significant challenge as it has adversely affected the smooth flow of project activities. There is a great deal of support from the government agencies engaged in education; however, bureaucracy, involvement of multiple levels within the agencies, and different priorities and issues have hindered the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives.

Although the small-scale infrastructure inputs were successfully completed, the **Access and Learning Environment Standard** proved to be a challenge because of the enormity of the task

involved in improving the poor physical environment that typically characterizes so many of the schools in these remote VDCs.

Applying the standard of ***Teaching and Learning*** has taken time and effort, particularly in the area of strengthening school management. Field staff have provided capacity building of school teams and regular, close follow up to ensure the sustainability of the project.

Successful approaches in applying the Standards

Community Participation has been a key for the success of the project. In particular, the project team uses the strategy of developing local resource persons to ensure knowledge and skill dissemination to wider community. This has helped in creating the community's acceptance and ownership of the project.

Despite the challenges, ***Coordination*** has also resulted in greater project impact, efficiency, and information sharing. Including different agencies and networking with related institutions (Government and Non-Government) from the beginning of the project has had a positive affect during implementation. For instance, the project team coordinated with DEOs, VDCs, JYCs, and schools during the project design and selection of schools. It is therefore currently easier for the project team to work with these institutions and there is a higher level of acceptance from the community. Moreover, coordination of the project with national level stakeholders has provided better exposure of the project at the national level and with wider audiences.

The project focused on using new ***Teaching and Learning*** techniques which have proved successful in reaching students and their parents. Using drama as a tool maintained audience interest in the concept of DRR and was a way in which they were able to easily comprehend the information. Cartoons organized in schools have been another creative and influential medium of awareness-raising on DRR among children.