ADDRESSING THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF COVID-RELATED SCHOOL CLOSURES IN NEPAL

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CURRENT SITUATION IN NEPAL

- All educational institutions from ECED to University are closed since 19 March
- 8.8 million enrolled learners (all levels) are out of school
- Nationwide lockdown since 24 March, scheduled to end 7 April
- Number of cases and deaths low
Girls are staying at home, and relatively safe as compared to the earthquake context.

Girls may be engaged more in the household chores which may put them in disadvantaged position.

It is likely, if there is extended closure, girls may be more susceptible to dropping out of the school altogether. They may lose interest or find it difficult to catch up after a long detachment from the study.
LESSONS FROM PREVIOUS OUTBREAKS

- No specific evidence exists in Nepal

- There are many cases where children are prone to leaving the school altogether after a long period of absence from school either from illness or other causes

- The economic hardships caused by these outbreaks may result in early marriage or domestic violence or disengagement of boys from school education.

- The lesson is that there must be serious efforts to keep them in the learning cycle, so that they are not afraid to return back to school.
NEPAL GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS

- It is the end of the academic year
- Students have just finished the final exam, and are waiting for the results and new admissions
- The loss, in the immediate term is not serious
- However, there is a need for response. The plan is to develop and supply materials through context appropriate media: radio, TV, online channels, mobile apps and printed media.
RESPONSE PLAN: 5 STEPS

1. **Stock-taking**: materials that exist already...

2. **Materials development**: where there is a dearth of such materials (audio, video, online and printed materials and mobile apps)

3. **Delivery or implementation**

4. **Intensive support**: if the situation prolongs—full implementation plus psycho-social support

5. **Recovery stage**: Getting the school ready at the earliest; make it a safe place; trace the students; assess loss and then plan to compensate such losses.
ADDRESSING GENDER DIGITAL SKILLS DIVIDE

- From the coverage perspective: there are discussions going on to subsidize the cost so that all can access materials.
- However, there may be questions of gender digital skills divide: that needs to be considered while planning for these resources.
- Further, context specific media will be utilized so as to respond to the learners in the diverse contexts, skills-wise, or geographically...
Financing should be needs-based. Particularly, the schools need to plan for remedial instruction programs for the needy students, including girls. Direct cash transfers or financial assistance are often used. However, the efficacy of these programs for enhancing learning are still to be established. There must be some options that help improve learning.

The role of Local Governments will be crucial in designing appropriate support programs.
ACTIONS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN GAINS IN GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

- Gender sensitive learning support program during the school closure (e.g., considerations for IT skills divide).
- Tracing the non-attendees within a week of school reopening, so that they are brought back to schools immediately (with support from the Local Governments and the School Management Committees)
- Focus on learning so that their stay in school is meaningful