

# Nepal



प्रदेश २ को शैक्षिक अवस्था र अबको कार्यदिशा  
विषयक  
खलफल कार्यक्रम



A participant during the interaction organised by NCE Nepal with the Bagmati Province Government to advocate for ensuring right to free and compulsory education

## COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES



Population:	29.6 million (Worldometers, 2021)
Population aged 14 years and younger:	29.57% of total population (Statista, 2021)
2021 Global Index Score:	66.52/100 (SDR 2021)
2021 Global Index Rank:	96/165 (SDR 2021)
SDG 4 Dashboard:	● Challenges remain (SDR 2021)
SDG 4 Trend:	↗ Moderately improving (SDR 2021)
SDG 10 Dashboard:	● Significant challenges remain (SDR 2021)
2019 HDI Value/Rank:	0.602, 142 out of 189 (HDRO, 2020)
GNI per capita (PPP\$):	3,457 (HDRO, 2020)
Gini Index:	34.62 (Statista, 2020)
Income Group:	Lower-Middle Income Status (WB, 2020)
Education Expenditure:	4.22% of the GDP in 2019 (EU Nepal Education Brief, 2019), 10.93% of the total budget in 2021 (MoF, 2021)
Secondary Net Enrolment:	Total: 75.7% Female: 76.9% Male: 74.6% (Economic Survey, 2020)

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## Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2021

### I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Nepal is a landlocked country with diverse geographical structures, from mountainous regions to hilly regions. It has a developing country status in terms of economic growth and per capita income. It is a disaster-prone country and its economy is affected by natural calamities, such as earthquakes, landslides, floods, and droughts. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the economy of Nepal, particularly its economic growth, which contracted by 2.12% (Economic Survey by the Ministry of Finance 2020/21). Due to the widespread impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic restrictions, Nepal will not achieve the forecasted economic growth for 2021 and beyond.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, more than 600,000 people have contracted the coronavirus, while confirmed deaths were 8,506 as of June 15, 2021. The health institution lacks basic health services and facilities, especially in the rural and remote areas. There are shortages in oxygen and ventilators and limited hospital capacity to attend to the infected and a lack of vaccines for every citizen. It is likely that more will be infected due to the unprepared health system.

The Human Development Index (HDI) of Nepal is 0.587 in 2019. The HDI status in urban areas stands at 0.647 and 0.561 in rural areas (Nepal Human Development Report, 2020). Around 66% of the population depends on agriculture for livelihood.<sup>1</sup> However, youth face challenges in their livelihood as around 35.2% of the youth population in the country is deprived of employment, skills development training, and education.<sup>2</sup> Only 48.3% of working aged males and 22.9% of females are in employment (ILO, 2021). The ratio of women to male participation in the labour force is only 0.61.<sup>3</sup>

Nepal's Multidimensional Poverty Index is 28.6% and worse, there is slow progress in poverty reduction, especially for marginalised groups. Many people continue to face discrimination and inequality in terms of access to health, labour market, and education and training services on account of gender, wealth, ability, location, caste/ethnicity, language, and identity. It is also alarming to note that there has been an increase in child marriage (with more than 37% of girls married before age 18 and 10% before age 15), cases of physical or sexual violence (more than one fourth or 26% of women ages 15 to 29 experience physical or sexual violence) acid attacks, cyber crimes, domestic violence (ILO, 2021). Nepal has a poor Gender Inequality index value of 0.476.

1 <http://www.fao.org/nepal/fao-in-nepal/nepal-at-a-glance/en/>  
2 UNICEF Youth and Employment Report  
3 SDG Progress Assessment Report (2016-2019)

## II. EQUITY AND FINANCING CONCERNS IN SDG 4 AMIDST COVID-19

The Constitution of Nepal envisions free, quality education for all. The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP 2016–2022) contributed to the improvement in access to education. Nepal's efforts towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is being implemented to meet the targets and baselines set. The Constitutional delegation of power (Annex 8 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 has allocated 22 rights to the local government) to local governments as absolute rights for management of school education is one landmark legislation exercising the autonomy of local government. The Local Government Operation Act of 2017 has further defined and clarified the 23 education-related responsibilities for the local government under its jurisdiction to oversee the basic and secondary levels education, but it has curtailed the specific rights related to education curriculum and teacher's management.<sup>4</sup> The Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education 2018<sup>5</sup> promulgates the constitutional right to access free and compulsory education up to the basic level and enables local governments to manage free day breakfast, tuition, stationary, and text-books up to basic or secondary level. But, the public schools, in one way or another, continue to collect fees from parents. Nepal has completed five years of the SDG plan implementation with efforts exerted on multiple cross-cutting issues, including financing, teacher management and professional development, infrastructure, and equity measures.

There are remarkable achievements on many of the indicators as of the National Framework for the SDGs over the last five years. With the implementation of SDG 4 targets, Nepal has improved access to education for all, including the poor and disadvantaged groups. The Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in primary education had reached 97.2% in 2018/19, where the target is 99% in 2030 (NPC, 2020). The ratio of students' retention up to Grade 8 is 79.3%, gross enrolment in secondary education is 60.6% (NPC, 2020). And the literacy rate of six years and above is 82%, for 15 to 24 years 92%, and for above 15 years only 58% (ESP, 2021).

However, these achievements have not been celebrated by all social groups equally and disparities in access, participation and learning quality remain, leaving certain groups of students and learners behind. Decentralisation of power at the local level has been identified as one of the ways to include those excluded groups in the education sector. Unfortunately, the educational gains have been challenged by the COVID-19 crisis in Nepal.

Women's literacy rate is only 57.7%.<sup>6</sup> It also shows that the large proportion of children and youth in Nepal are still not literate. There have been promises from the government to strengthen the public education system and improve literacy in Nepal through adult and women's literacy programmes, which will contribute to the quality of lives of people. However, the low adult literacy rate, particularly among women and underprivileged groups, is a factor in the continuing lack of participation in education of girls and children from underprivileged communities.

The national Gender Parity Index (GPI) is also being improved with enrolment for primary schools at 1.01 GPI where participation of girls is higher than boys and for secondary

level at 0.95, where girls' and boys' participation is almost equal (National Planning Commission/NPC, 2020). However, there are concerns about the quality of learning for both girls and boys. On average, reading comprehension is 43.5% (43.65% boys and 43.77% girls) and numeracy skill is 37.2% (39.11% boys and 35.92% girls) (Education Review Office, 2021). Low teaching/learning quality, a lack of timely distribution of textbooks, poor minimum enabling conditions in public schools, and weak evaluation and accountability are some of the major problems affecting education quality.

On one hand, there is lower investment for each student, which is NRS.18,000 (USD 149.67)<sup>7</sup> per year, which impacts the quality of education and is reflected on the low performance of students (NPC, 2020). On the other hand, the right to equal access to quality education of all students, irrespective of the caste, ethnicity, and gender, as envisaged by The Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education 2018, SDG 4, and SSDP seems to have become rhetorical in the context of Nepal. The development of the National Framework for SDG 4, 2030 would have contributed to the localisation of the SDG 4 targets and attainment of targets from the grassroots and local levels, however, policies, including the SDG 4 framework, have not been disseminated and localised.

The government is not moving progressively towards its commitment to allocate 20% of the national budget to education. FY 2021/22 budget has decreased to 10.93% from 11.64% of last year. This will pose challenges in achieving the SDG 4 targets in the COVID-19 era. It has been four years since the government has started reviewing the budget from the gender lens. The share of the education budget to directly support gender-responsive programs is 67.76% for FY 2021/22. Despite the progress over the years in terms of GPI, gender disparities in terms of education access, income, access to the labour markets, and employment opportunities remain. The mean monthly earning for males is NRS. 19,464 (USD 161.87) while it is NRS. 13,630 (USD 113) for females (CBS, 2018). This shows that a male worker earns 30% more compared to a female worker. Despite the gender parity of 1.03, Nepal's education system has yet to address the gender inequalities in terms of educational outcomes.

The education of nearly 9 million children has been impacted by the COVID-19 school closures and lockdown situations. More than 1.4 million of children are at risk of dropping out of school due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Education Cluster, 2020). The discrimination in access to learning has worsened and the digital divide has widened. More than 30% of children with disabilities ages 1 to 12 years are being deprived of school education and 14.1% of school-aged children are in child labour (ILO, 2021). Nearly 3% of school-age children Grades 1 to 5 and 6.6% of basic level children from Grades 1 to 8, and 52.4% of secondary level children are out of school (Education Sector Plan, 2021).

With education shifting to online and offline modes, 66% of students are deprived of access to learning devices and technology, 64% said the online learning system is not effective, and 94% of parents have no adequate mentoring capacities and educational attainment to support the learning of their children at home. Similarly, the research conducted by NCE Nepal in 2020

4 <https://www.edukhabar.com/news/10830>

5 <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Act-Relating-to-Compulsory-and-Free-Education-2018.pdf>

6 SDG Progress Assessment Report (2016-2019)

7 The currency converter used for the NRS figures in this document was XE Nepalese Rupee to US Dollar conversion, Retrieved Jul 7, 2021, 16:47 UTC from <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=19464&From=NPR&To=USD>



on COVID-19 impact on Public Education demonstrates that 74% of teachers did not engage in making interactive learning materials and 25% of students did not engage in any modes of learning and not even in self-learning. Among the overall population of Nepal, only 58% of economically active people can use the Internet. In more than 35,000 schools in Nepal, only 34.7% of schools have access to electricity and only 12.7% of schools have Internet facilities (ESP, 2021). This shows that the education system is unprepared to address the impacts brought about by the crisis. Only 31% of the working-age population could access vocational and technical skills when the target was 38% (ILO, 2021).

The government formulated the Alternative Learning Facilitation Guideline 2077 and Student Learning Facilitation Guideline 2077 (2020) for the effective management of the digital learning system during the pandemic. However, research conducted by NCE Nepal (2020) shows that around 25% of children do not have access to digital and online learning provided by the government in an attempt to continue education. The government also launched the School Opening Guideline 2020 and School Disinfection and Sanitation Guidelines 2020 to ensure school sanitation and hygiene in time for school reopening. It also prepared the Contingency Plan in education as a response to the education and learning system during the crisis. Accordingly, the MoEST prepared the Curriculum Adjustment Framework 2077, Education Related Emergency Work Plan, Different Radio and TV programmes, Online Learning Portal, and a decision regarding the internal evaluation of the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) and Grade 11.

CSOs have been proactively contributing towards securing the right to education for all during the pandemic. NCE Nepal continued to mobilise communities to empower them, engaging women and girls, Dalits, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised as well as vulnerable and excluded communities to ensure that they are well sensitised on their right to education and learning, especially during crises. CSOs are also monitoring the efforts of the government and its education responses addressing the impacts of COVID-19. With the evidence gathered from the local level, CSOs are engaging in advocacy work and lobbying for urgent responses to ensure learning continuity, especially of marginalised communities. CSOs are also providing technical support in the policy, plan, and budget development so that local governments will be able to prioritise and fully fund education.

### III. EMBEDDING SDG 4 IN OTHER SDGS

Education is the driving force for the achievement of all other SDG targets and indicators. It is a key enabler for skills development, transitions from education to employment, community participation and sustainable development.

The government has made efforts for the development and empowerment of women and girls, taking steps towards gender equality and eliminating discrimination based on race, caste, and geography. As part of its initial efforts to integrate SDG 4 to SDGs 3, 8, and 16, the government has undertaken education programmes that intersect with health, livelihood, culture, and the promotion of peace.

- Some of the notable programmes implemented by the government to reduce inequalities and empower marginalised groups include the establishment of the National Women's Commission in 2017 and the national initiatives of the Department of Women and Children under the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens. Both agencies are working towards building women's political leadership towards implementing the minimum target of 33% of women's participation in governance. Gender-responsive budgeting and gender auditing are also initiated by the National Planning Commission, alongside the prioritisation of marginalised groups in public services, including Dalits, Indigenous People, Madhesi communities, and persons with disabilities. A policy in the local government has been put in place to ensure that there is at least one woman representative in the chair and vice-chair positions of the local government. Such a provision helped increase women's political representation. Currently, women comprise and represent 33.5% of the National Parliament, 34.4% of the Provincial Parliament, and 40.8% of the local government.<sup>8</sup>
- The inclusion of educational programmes in budget for F.Y. 2078/79, such as the health services facilities at the community schools, one school one nurse programme, regular health check-up programmes for students, sanitary pad distribution for safe menstrual hygiene, day meal for children up to Grade 5 to provide nutritious food, and WASH facilities help promote good health and well-being.
- Access to quality technical and vocational training and education (TVET) and tertiary education that aim to provide lifelong opportunities for learners to uplift their standard of living and economic status.
- Empowerment of youth and adults through relevant skills development, including technical and vocational skills and education aimed at building capacities of individuals to secure productive and decent employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. This also contributes to the creation of national-level job opportunities, decreased migration rates, and will lead to decent employment and growth, thereby reducing poverty and promoting economic growth.
- Promotion of the national culture and protection of human rights through a sustainable change in the overall education system.
- Awareness and sensitisation through education will help in removing the various forms of violence and will promote a culture of peace.
- Education measures have been instituted to realise gender parity in education and education outcomes that will empower women to participate in the labour market and profession. The development and upgrading of child, gender, disability-friendly education facilities provide safe, inclusive, and conducive learning environments in school.
- In an attempt to continue learning during the pandemic, the government has started an assessment of access to information and communications technology (ICT) of students and communities. It has also embarked on the development of ICT schools at the community level with access to digital technology for learning. Further, it has conducted capacity development for teachers for digital learning and the use of technology.

## IV. ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT RECOVERY

Education is a fundamental right that enables people to exercise their other human rights. Faced with the pandemic, education plays a crucial role in strengthening people's capacities to work towards sustained recovery and resilience. To bring about sustainability and resilience through education, the government and relevant stakeholders need to fulfil their commitments and responsibilities. The educational recovery plan has been included in the government's plans, which includes three different categories for the continuity of learning during pandemics. But for these education plans to be responsive, they will need to go beyond business as usual and to seriously take into consideration the impact of the pandemic on the lives of children, youth, and adults.

There are several critical concerns and debates on education going on in the country such as: How can education systems address the anxieties and stress of learners and provide psycho-social support to ensure learners' mental health and well-being, considering the fact that there was a substantial increase in suicide cases by 25% in the four months of the lockdown in 2020<sup>9</sup> and suicide among adolescent girls increased by almost 40%<sup>10</sup>? How can the current alternative education systems deliver high-quality and accessible learning for all children, youth, and adults? Strategically, how should education systems change in a post-pandemic context so as to promote sustainable development that does not deplete the economic, cultural, and social resources of the planet? What kind of resilience should be encouraged to prepare new generations to meet the demands of the future? How can sustainable educational development during and post-pandemic be financed? These are the pertinent questions that the government and other actors need to address to promote resilience and sustainable development through education.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Education is key to social transformation and requires a strong political commitment and effective resource mobilisation. The following recommendations are proposed:

- Allocate and utilise at least 20% of the total budget and at least 6% of the GDP to the education sector by federal, provincial, and local governments because financing is critical to ensure safe schools and equitable access to quality education in both online and offline modes.
- Ensure efficiency in education expenditure and allocation so as to minimise the existing gap in education sector.
- Promote domestic financing in education and ensure its effective utilisation to ensure that every citizen enjoys the right to education as envisioned by SDG 4 and the Constitution of Nepal.
- To enable resilient and sustainable development, education systems must be financed from domestic revenues. This will require developing and implementing fiscal reforms within the framework of tax justice to ensure funding for a stronger public education system that will contribute to sustainable development.
- Provide platforms for more informed discussions around innovative finance initiatives that will provide additional resources, provided they do not undermine the right to education, exacerbate inequalities, increase debt or deepen dependence or lead to for-profit ventures in education. These initiatives must be aimed towards strengthening the public education systems.
- Promote Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across the curriculum by developing criteria, norms, and standards so that education is directly linked to work and sustainability that consider the specific learning needs of all learners.
- Review literacy in relation to sustainable development and invest in developing strategies to ensure that all citizens' right to education is guaranteed at all levels - from Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) to primary to secondary to adult education. Devise educational programmes to ensure access to equitable and inclusive education for marginalised groups and those with vulnerabilities.
- Accelerate education programmes targeting marginalised sectors. Develop databases and methods for continuous tracking of progress of all learners to ensure "no one is left behind." Focus on the empowerment of the youth, women, Dalits, marginalised communities, persons with disabilities, and other minority groups who are left behind in terms of learning, skills, employment and other opportunities in life.
- Follow the spirit of federalism regarding the principle of inter- and intra-agency co-existence, coordination, and cooperation so as to synergise the work on SDG 4 at all levels. Prioritise the localisation of the SDGs and ensure that plans, and programmes prepared at local and provincial levels are aligned to the attainment of the SDG targets and indicators.
- Ensure partnership and collaboration with CSOs, including women and youth groups, at all levels of education and in all aspects, including education sector planning, policy development, programme implementation, and monitoring.

9 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344580351\\_An\\_increase\\_in\\_suicides\\_amidst\\_the\\_coronavirus\\_disease\\_2019\\_pandemic\\_in\\_Nepal](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344580351_An_increase_in_suicides_amidst_the_coronavirus_disease_2019_pandemic_in_Nepal)

10 <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/press-releases/working-together-prevent-suicide-among-children-and-young-people-nepal>



Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

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NCE Nepal is a national network of 409 member organisations including CBOs, I/NGOs, teachers, education and journalists working for equitable, inclusive, quality and lifelong learning opportunities for all in Nepal. Its members include I/NGOs, teacher organisations, education journalists, and community-based organisations. It was established as a national chapter of Global Campaign for Education Nepal (GCE Nepal) in 2003 and it was registered as National Campaign for Education Nepal in 2009. It focuses on evidence-based policy advocacy to ensure the equitable quality inclusive education for all children. NCE Nepal is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).