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CSOs and Public demands governments, political parties, and parliamentarians to take immediate action for Public Education Transformation during NCE-Nepal's creative campaign on the occasion of the Global Action Week for Education (GAWE) 2024

## 2024 CIVIL SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON SDG 4

### I. CONTEXT

According to the most recent economic survey 2023/24<sup>1</sup> report, Nepal's economy is growing at a pace of 3.87% and experiencing 6.08% inflation. Nepal ranks 143rd in the world ranking of human development (Human Development Report, 2021). The Flash Report 2022<sup>2</sup> of the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) showed that there was an increase in the net enrolment rate of each level in the Academic Year 2022.

The net enrolment rate (NER) has reached 96.1% at the basic level (classes 1-8), with the girls' enrolment rate at 95.7 and boys' 96.5%. The NER decreases at the secondary level (classes 9-12) to 57.4%, with girls' enrolment at 55.7 % and boys at 59.5 %. The dropout rate at the basic level is 2.9%, among which the dropout rate for girls is 2.7 and for boys is 2.9, and at the secondary level, it is 0.7% of girls and 0.8 % of boys. Most of the marginalised girls and children with disabilities are either out of school or have dropped out of school because of discrimination, the lack of girls-friendly and disability-friendly infrastructure, harassment, safety, and security at school. To date, only 3% of the public schools are disability-friendly. On 3rd November 2023, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck the Jajarkot and Rukum Districts of Karnali Province, which damaged 341 out of 742 schools.

Nepal is seen to be progressive in meeting the target of the SDGs indicating that it has achieved 58% of the target set for 2022 and 41.4 % of the target for 2030. On average, around 60% of the SDGs' targets have already been met in Nepal.

### II. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SDG 4

To promote inclusive education, there are currently 33 special schools across the county, 23 consolidated

schools, and 380 resource classes for students with disabilities.

For students who are blind, the government developed free braille textbooks. 53,680 children with disabilities received scholarships in 2023. The new curriculum has been endorsed during 2023 and the assessment system has been modified from a grading system to a number system (pass Mark), which means students must score a minimum of 35 marks in each subject to be able to pursue higher education. Otherwise, the students will be considered as ungraded. There are 14 Annex schools for promoting technical and vocational education in Nepal.

There have also been some progressive improvements in the number of female teachers during 2023 where among the 208,688 teachers in Nepal, 42.2 % are female teachers and 57.8% are male teachers in total. Last year, a total of 3,090,640 students from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to Grade 5 were provided with mid-day meal facilities which has helped the increment of enrollment and retention of children at school education. Similarly, a total of 1,143,631 students got scholarships that motivated them to go to school. Out of 27,090 schools, 58.1% of schools have access to information technology and 25.1% of schools have information technology labs. The net enrolment rate during 2023 is increasing, thereby growing closer to the targets set.

### Advancing Climate Change through Education

Nepal is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, experiencing frequent disasters like floods, landslides, heat, fire, storms, heavy rainfalls, droughts, earthquakes, and epidemics, which cause significant human and financial losses annually. Women, girls, youth, and persons with disabilities bear the brunt of these impacts, facing increased household responsibilities and reduced access to food, water, and education. To address this, 29 schools have integrated climate change into their curriculum. The Government of Nepal allocated 5.21% of its budget to climate change in 2019/20, rising to

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES	
Population:	30.723 million (2023)
GNI per Capita (PPP\$)	5,240 (2023)
Income Group	Lower-Middle Income
HDI: Value/Rank	0.601 / 146th out of 193 (2022)
Education Expenditure (% GDP)	3.65% (2022)
Upper Secondary Completion Rate Female / Male	35.9 (2021) 34.6 / 37.7
Literacy Rate (15-64 Yrs.) Female / Male	71.2 (2021) 63.3 / 81.0
2024 SDG Score/ Rank	67.07 / 95th out of 166
SDG 4 Trend	Challenges remain
SDG 4 Dashboard	Moderately improving
Climate-related disasters:	
Total No. of disasters* Regional Mean/ Median	9 (2020-22) 9.3 / 4
Risk Management Index:	
Climate-driven Hazard & Exposure	3.9 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.6
Lack of coping capacity	5.5 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.3
Vulnerability	4.4 (2022) Regional Mean: 3.4
*Drought, Extreme temperature, Flood, Landslide, Storm, Wildfire	

<sup>1</sup> /Economic%20Survey%20-%202024.pdf

<sup>2</sup> https://cehrd.gov.np/file\_data/mediacenter\_files/media\_file-17-1330449615.pdf



5.96% in 2023/24. Significant progress has been made in volunteer mobilisation during emergencies, with over 100,000 volunteers trained and deployed.

Nepal's government has developed various plans and policies to continue teaching and learning activities during emergencies and epidemics, such as the National Education Policy (2019), National Framework on Schools as Zones of Peace and its Operation Guideline (2068), National Framework on Child-friendly School (2067), SDG 4 National Framework for 2030, School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), and School Education Sector Plan (SESP).

## **EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

Nepal has made remarkable progress on equity, inclusion, and access to education in comparison to the previous years. The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) at the secondary level has increased to 80.3% from 71.64%.<sup>3</sup> The share of Dalit students in upper secondary has increased to 10.4% from 8.7%. Similarly, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Dalit and Janajati girls at the secondary level is 1.06 and 1.09 respectively. According to the census, the literacy rate of Nepal is 76.2% - with female literacy rate at 69.4% and male at 83.6 %, which indicates the gender disparity in literacy. The literacy rate of females is less than men in all provinces and at the national level as well because of poverty, gender stereotypes, cultural norms and values, early marriage, pregnancy, etc.

Early marriage remains prevalent in Nepal, which has one of the highest rates of child marriage in South Asia (UNFPA, 2023). The recent Flash Report 2022 revealed that 3.9% of all children and 4.3% of girls are out of school. At ECD, primary, and secondary levels, only 73.4%, 78.4%, and 83.1% of schools have sanitation facilities, while 67.2%, 78.4%, and 79.7% have access to clean drinking water. Despite the national budget allocating funds to distribute free sanitary pads, the program's actual reach and effectiveness have not been comprehensively studied. As a result, students with disabilities and girls are either out of school or forced to drop out due to the lack of accessible infrastructure and facilities, and disability-friendly school environments. The absence of inclusive policies has hindered these students from receiving an education based on inclusivity and equity principles.

## **EDUCATION FINANCING**

Although the Government of Nepal has committed to allocating 20% of the national budget and 4-6% of the GDP to the education sector, 2023 marked only a slight increase in the education budget by 10.95% (Budget Analysis 2024/25).<sup>4</sup> Regarding the expenditure scenario for the year 2022/23, it was indicated that only 52.82 billion out of the 70.05 billion federal education budget was spent, amounting to 75.47%, with 24.53% remaining unspent. Without sufficient allocation of the education budget, it is impossible to implement free and compulsory education provision ensured by the Constitution as well as the SDGs.

Figure 1 shows that among the SDGs prioritised for an in-depth review in this year's High- Level Political Forum (HLPF), the funding for Goal 4 is the highest, while the funding for Goal 17 is the lowest. The government funding for climate change is still nominal. The government must increase the funds for climate change adaptation since it has negative impacts on the progress of the other SDGs.

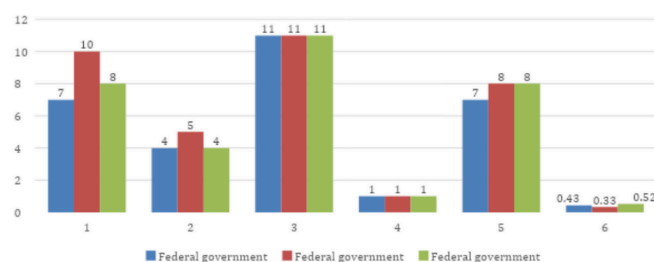


Figure 1. Budget for the SDGs

## **DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Nepal developed major three policies: the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), the Digital Nepal Framework 2019, and the National Education Policy 2019. These policies have a provision for compulsory digital and Information and communications technology (ICT) education in all schools and colleges.

After the pandemic the Government of Nepal developed digital and alternative learning policies, like the Education Cluster Contingency Plan 2020, Student's Learning Facilitation Guideline 2020, School Reopening Framework 2020, Emergency Action Plan for School Education 2020, Closed User Group (CUG) Service Implementation Guideline, ReAL Plan, and the School Education Sector Plan (SESP).

These policies gave Nepalese schools a way to encourage the use of online and remote learning, facilitated teacher-student communication, offered direction to help schools reopen as lockdowns were loosened, and integrated digital education into the curriculum as a whole. Schools in Nepal still lack resilience building, both the physical infrastructure and teaching-learning activities, so that no learning is stopped in any emergencies in a planned way. This should be properly addressed in the School Improvement Plans, but currently, schools are lacking in this. However, challenges such as the lack of knowledge about ICT, insufficient and unstable internet connectivity, and the lack of availability of digital gadgets all contribute to the digital divide leading to inequities in education.



## **QUALITY EDUCATION**

As per the ERO 2020 report,<sup>5</sup> the percentage of students passing the basic proficiency levels in mathematics, science, Nepali, and English is lower compared to those who only achieved below the basic proficiency level. This indicates the low competency level of the students as the majority of the students have achieved or mastered less than 50% of the curriculum in mathematics and science subjects. Results reveal that the boys score better than girls, showing the noticeable gender disparity. The gap ranges in scale scores of 12 in mathematics, 5 in science and 10 in English, though normally there is no gap in Nepali. This indicates that work is needed on gender equity in learning achievement.

<sup>3</sup> [https://cehrd.gov.np/file\\_data/mediacenter\\_files/media\\_file-171330449615.pdf](https://cehrd.gov.np/file_data/mediacenter_files/media_file-171330449615.pdf)  
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3249>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ero.gov.np/upload\\_file/files/post/1714106483\\_750174923\\_NASA%20GRADE%208%20REPORT.pdf](https://www.ero.gov.np/upload_file/files/post/1714106483_750174923_NASA%20GRADE%208%20REPORT.pdf)

## ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION (ALE) AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The Government of Nepal has been focusing on adult learning and lifelong learning. One such policy is the SSDP, which intends to enhance access to continuous education and literacy programs, while also boosting literacy and quality, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. The SSDP seeks to provide continuous education for 18,000,000 children, adolescents, and adults, including the non-literate and neo-literate, as well as flexible education for 60,000 children aged 5 to 12 years.<sup>6</sup> The primary delivery system for these programs was the envisioned 3,610 community learning centres (CLCs), of which only 2,151 were created and operated during SSDP implementation.

Consequently, non-formal education and literacy targets were partially reached, with the general literacy rate reaching 78% in 2021 against a target of 87%, the literacy rate for 15-24-year-olds reaching 98% against a target of 95%, and the literacy rate for those aged 15 and above reaching 58% against a target of 76%. Additionally, 121 open schools and 173 non-formal adult schools have been operating to promote open schooling. The government approved the Non-Formal Education (NFE) Policy in 2020, and the National Policy 2076 calls for developing a lifelong learning culture through non-formal, alternative, traditional, and open education. The CEHRD has also launched the "Literate Nepal" campaign, with 61 districts declared literate. Having completed the SSDP, the government has rolled out the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) to address School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) gaps, currently in the localisation process, which also supports ALE.

The major challenges for ensuring ALE and lifelong learning for all include the various needs of diverse learners considering their intersecting identities, functional limitations, literacy being lower than basic literacy- limited only to recognising letters and numbers, and the literacy knowledge being unable to connect with literacy skills hence interest has been shifted from adult learning.



## III. CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SDG 4 IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP, AND MONITORING

The Government of Nepal carried out positive initiatives to create national targets and indicators that align with the global target of the SDGs and made institutional arrangements for the program implementation and monitoring. After completing the SSDP (2016 to 2021), the government has rolled out the School Education Sector Plan (2023 to 2031) to implement the National Education Policy to achieve SDG 4.



*Through the strong presence in Local Education Group (LEG) forums, SDG Review Mechanism, and mid-term review; civil society organisations (CSOs) offer vital recommendations on government plans, policies and for efficient education financing. Moreover, there will be different education clusters at the provincial and local levels for representation as CSOs. NCE Nepal, representing the SESP thematic committee, has been advocating for the inclusion of marginalised groups and the effective implementation of the SESP. Despite the recognised role of CSOs in various documents, the government of Nepal often overlooks their contributions.*



## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Allocate at least 20% of the national budget and 4% of GDP to the education sector with efficiency in allocated budget utilisation, and gradually increase the budget for climate actions to ensure climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Prompt the promulgation of the School Education Bill 2080.

Put in place institutionalised mechanisms for CSOs' participation in the government forums and the LEG. This will help CSOs build stronger ties with other education actors, which will be instrumental in generating positive outcomes.

Establish an institutionalised structure in all three tiers of the government to promote adult learning and education (ALE) and lifelong learning.

The learning and educational activities should not be disrupted by any natural or unnatural calamities or emergencies, and sufficient resources should be mobilised to manage the necessary alternatives to continue the teaching-learning activity.

Integrate climate change education into the curriculum, and develop and align innovative teaching approaches and tools with the curriculum and textbooks to enhance students' understanding of how to build climate change resilience and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Teachers should also be trained on effective climate change topics through action-oriented methods.

Priorities capacity building sessions at the local level to ensure that there is a timely response to the climate change situation.

Climate change and its adverse effects on education, and the mitigation measures, should be reflected in the School Improvement Plans (SIPs). The local-level policies should be developed to address the same in alignment with the local-level education policies.

The monitoring and follow-up of the SDGs' progress demands a systematic and disaggregated data generation, analysis, and management system, hence there should be strong data generation, management, and monitoring mechanisms at all the units of the government.

Ensure a child-friendly environment at schools, especially for girls.

# YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

The National Census 2021 indicated that Nepal consists of 62% actively working population aged 15-59 years. This is a great opportunity for Nepal to obtain a demographic dividend. Thousands of youths are forced to leave the country in search of jobs with departures estimated to reach 800,000 by the end of this fiscal year. Students too are leaving the country in droves for higher studies.

During the recent period, 82,000 No Objection Certificates (NOCs) were issued by the government for students seeking to study abroad. This indicates a huge brain drain. There has also been a high increase in the number of youths opting for foreign employment. In FY 2022/23, 5.5 million youths got labour permits from the Nepal Government. This number drastically increased from the 300,000 youths in the last fiscal year (Economic Survey, 2022).

One important program implemented by the government was the Prime Minister Employment Program, but it doesn't seem to be that effective. Under the Prime Minister Employment Program, 14,084 unemployed individuals out of 841,378 listed have employment until the fiscal year 2022/23. Out of 708,245 enlisted unemployed, 163,708 got employment in the fiscal year 2021/22.

Some of the policies and provisions that support youth education include the Constitution 2015, National Youth Policy, Youth Vision 2025, and the 14th Development Plan. While the government has formulated different policies and programs to support young people, there remain challenges in the implementation, compounded by the lack of adequate funding to address the lack of employment opportunities leading to the rise of youth migration and brain drain.

Youth also face other issues such as difficulties in accessing formal job markets without well-connected networks, which leaves them employed in informal and precarious work or unemployed. Marginalised youth are also vulnerable to labour exploitation, as well as violence, sexual abuse, drug abuse, and even the trafficking of young girls.



## Some of the youth demands to the government are:

- ✓ The government should have clarity on the education system that is linked with skill development including both vocational and technical education that will create employment opportunities within the country, e.g. “padhdai Sikdai kamaudai,” which refers to the reading, learning and earning approach.
- ✓ Focus on apprenticeship and skills-oriented education, focusing on technical and vocational education and training, along with financial and income-generating support, to continue youth's education, specially the education of marginalised youth.
- ✓ The policies supporting skill-based education must be formulated by the local governments as per the context and opportunities in the local units so that the youths are engaged in income-generating activities after the completion of their education.
- ✓ The Prime Minister's Employment programs should be effectively implemented and proper monitoring should be done by the local governments.



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NCE Nepal is a collaborative nationwide network of 490 member organisations including community-based organisations (CBOs), international non-government organisations (INGOs), teachers, educators and journalists working for equitable, inclusive, quality and lifelong learning opportunities for all in Nepal. Its primary objective is to bring about a positive transformation in the public education sector of the country. It was established as a national chapter of Global Campaign for Education Nepal (GCE) 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).

With support from

