

Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2022



■ Young people participate in NCE Nepal's GAWE 2022 event to demand for increased investment for education and accountability of the government.

I. BACKGROUND

Nepal is a diverse country with 126 caste/ethnic groups speaking 123 different languages.¹ The current population is 29 million² including caste/ethnic groups, Dalits, and Muslims as underprivileged groups facing multiple exclusions. A large number of people (18.7%) are in poverty (who earn less than US\$ 1.25 per day). The country's HDI stands at 0.602 ranking 142nd out of 189 countries in the world.³ The surge of COVID-19 which lasted for more than two years had hit the country's economy hard, from which it is still recovering. Nepal's economy is projected to grow by 5.84% in the current fiscal year with a GDP of Rs.

1 Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012
2 Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021
3 Human Development Report, 2020

4.85 trillion (USD 38.7 million).⁴ Even so, one-quarter of the GDP is contributed by the remittance of about 4 million migrant workers in foreign countries.⁵

Nepal has promulgated the new Constitution of Nepal 2015 with a prime focus on economic and social development. Efforts have been given to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 through several sectoral policies and plans. SDG 4 is one that aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all." The effort of achieving the Goal has been made through

4 Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022. 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>
5 <https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/no-country-for-young-men/>

the new School Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2021-2030) in continuation of the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) (2016-2021). Nepal has made some remarkable progress in achieving the SDGs in the last seven years, but the COVID-19 pandemic affected the socio-economic and educational sphere and may set back the progress of the SDGs.

II. EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION: STATUS AND GAP ANALYSIS

Equitable access to education is a prime concern in Nepal. Many children from underprivileged groups/communities (Dalits, Janajatis, economically poor, and religious minorities) are out of school. A large number drop out without completing a cycle of a particular level of school. The attempt of enrolling them in schools and participating in meaningful learning for a long time could not be translated into reality. The following table shows the status achievement and gap analysis on key indicators of equitable access to education.

The table shows that almost all the performance indicators were unmet as targeted to achieve in 2020/21. It seems impossible to achieve the Gross enrolment ratio (GER) in Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) in 2025 (+18.8) when compared to the achievement

Table 1: Status and gaps of achievements on access in different levels of education

Indicators	Baseline in 2015 (A)	Achiev. in 2019/20	Target in 2021 (B)	Achiev. in 2021 (C)	Gap (B-C)	Target in 2025 (E)	Gap (C-A)	Gap (E-C)
GER in ECED	81	87.6	89.5	86.2	-3.3	105	5.2	18.8
NER in Grades 1-5	96.6	97.4	98.5	97.1	-1.4	100	0.5	2.9
NER in Grades 1-8	89.4	94.7	97	93.4	-3.6	100	4	6.6
Comp. Rate of basic	69.6	75.3	85	72.7	-12.3	98.7	3.1	26
GPI in NER in Grade 1-8	1	1.01	1	1.01	0.01	1	0.01	-0.01
NER in Grade 9-12	37.7		53	47.6	-5.4	60	9.9	12.4
Sur. Rate to Grade 12	11.5		25	24	-1	31	12.5	7

Source: SSDP (2016) and SESP (2021)

made in the past five years (+5.2). The achievement of Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in Grades 1-5 and NER in Grades 1-8 are difficult as compared to the achievement in 2021 (+0.5 and +4.0) and the target in 2025 (+2.9 and +6.6).

It is noticeable that still, 2.9% of school-age children of grades 1-5 and 6.6% of basic level children from grades 1-8 are out of school. Further, there is an alarming gap in achieving the completion rate of the basic level (+26.0) in 2025 as compared to the achievements (+3.1) within the past five years. It is too far to achieve the literacy rate as targeted in 2025.

Gender parity seems to be achieved at the basic level. Both boys and girls have access to basic education. It has been predicted that the dropouts of the learners are increased due to the accelerated low economic status of those who were in poverty as there is an almost stagnant state of economic activities in the COVID-19 pandemic situation for more than a year.

III. QUALITY EDUCATION: STATUS AND GAP ANALYSIS

Quality education is another serious concern as the recent studies of the Education Review Office (ERO) have shown decreasing learning outcomes of the students. A majority of Grade 5 students (72% and 55%) have a lower level of competency in Mathematics and Nepali. The students with below competency in math are not able to write numbers and do basic operations. Thus, the majority of the students have no grade level minimum ability as expected by the curriculum. Only one-fourth (28%) are at the proficient level and have adequate knowledge and skills in their grade level, mathematical ability who could logically solve mathematical problems, find the relationship between two quantities, and think critically. In Nepali, the majority of students (55%) can only either pick some direct information from the very short text but cannot understand the meaning of the text well or have only the understanding required to grasp the knowledge and skills taught in the classroom. Millions complete primary education without acquiring basic competencies for further learning.

A majority of Grade 10 students (63%) in science have below competency. Almost half of the students of Grade 10 have minimum competency in Mathematics, Nepali, and English subjects. Overall, the majority of students are below grade level and an alarming gap exists between the



■ Education stakeholders, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, call on the government make education a priority agenda and improve response to the education sector during the Global Action Week for Education (GAWe) 2022

intended curriculum and the achieved curriculum in Grades 5 and 10. The achievement of a large number of students in Math and Science indicates their poor competency level. Only a small number of students have a higher level of proficiency. Learners from poor households are far more likely than those from wealthier homes to leave school without acquiring basic skills.

IV. EQUITY STATUS AND GAP IN LITERACY AND TVET

The term lifelong learning appears in association with literacy: 'literacy enables adults to engage in lifelong learning and helps to develop capabilities to sustain their livelihoods and participate fully in society'. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been given importance to promote employment opportunities. The Government of Nepal has initiated technical and vocational education and training in 384 community secondary schools. The following table shows the progress in

literacy and the TVET sector.

The table above informs that the target of achieving literacy rates in 2021 was not met. It is too far to achieve the target in 2025 if the pace of progress was achieved as that in past years. The gap in achieving a literacy rate of 15+ years is very wide (29%). This shows that more efforts and resources are needed to achieve these big gaps cumulated in the past years. The achievement on Gender Parity Index (GPI) shows that there are a large number of women/girls who still have no access to literacy programmes.

The above data shows that Nepal is lagging behind in terms of ensuring vocational training and technical education for the working-age population. Only 31% of the working-age population has received training against the target of 75% by 2030. There is still a large population of young people who do not have access to TVET. This is also a major hindrance in the upliftment of the living standard of young people and ultimately the country's economy.

Indicators	Baseline in 2015 (A)	Achievement in 2020	Target in 2021 (B)	Achiev. in 2021 (C)	Gap (B-C)	Target in 2025 (E)	Gap (C-A)	Gap (E-C)
Lit. Rate of 15+ Yrs.	57	57	75	66	-9.0	95	9	29
Lit. Rate of 15-24 Yrs.	88.6	88.6	95.0	91.0	-3.0	98	2.4	7
GPI on Lit. (15+ Yrs.)	N/A	N/A	0.62	0.65	-0.03	N/A	N/A	N/A
Working-age pop. With TVET (%)	25	N/A	N/A	31	N/A	N/A	6	N/A
Youth and adults with TVET (in thousand)	50	N/A	N/A	165	N/A	N/A	115	N/A
Ratio of girls' enrollment in TVET	0.53	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Internet Users	46.6	75	N/A	82.8	N/A	N/A	36.2	N/A

Table 2: Status and gap in literacy and TVET sectors.

Source: Economic Survey 2020/21; 15th Plan; VNR Report of NCE Nepal 2020

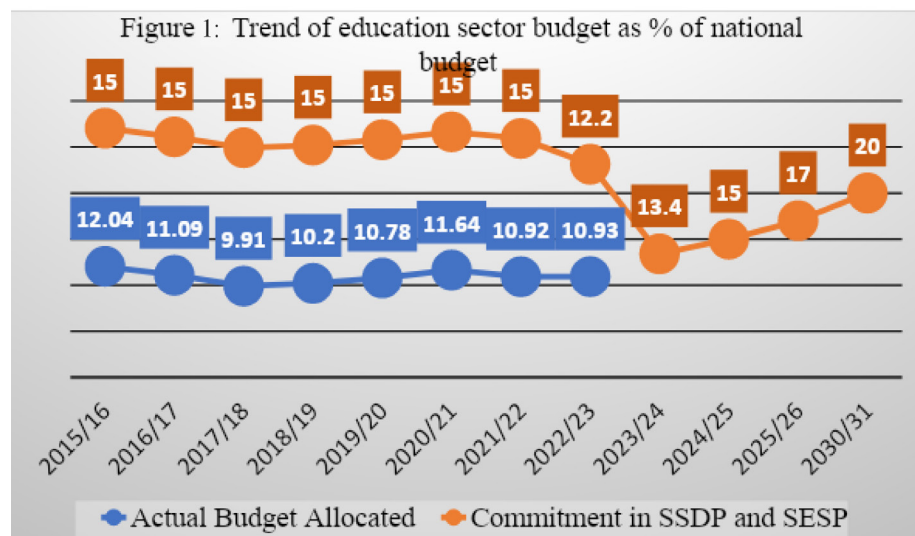
V. THE GAP IN FINANCING OF EDUCATION

The inadequate budget that has been apportioned for achieving SDG 4 shows the less priority of the government in education. The SSDP aimed to strengthen school education by allocating 15% of the total national budget. However, the government was insensitive to increasing the budget during the SSDP period. The federal education budget has been hovering around 10% of the total budget. However, this excludes the budget of provincial and local governments. The budget is estimated to have increased to some level if included in the provincial and local allocations, but the big gap in the budget could not be fulfilled by the small allocations of the province and local governments.

Figure 1 reveals that the budget in the educational sector has a fluctuating trend. The amount is less than that of the international commitment made to allocate 20% of the national budget to the education sector. The budget allocation increased from F.Y. 2017/18 to 2020/21 but as the graph shows, it declined in 2020/21. Due to the health and humanitarian crisis inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government's focus on education deviated. Further, the budget is minimum for the combined ministries of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science and Technology unless otherwise, these were separate ministries before 2016/17. On the other hand, there remain problems of leakage, mis-utilisation, or the freezing of the allocated fund. The alarming gap in budget allocation in education indicates that it is difficult to achieve the targets of SDG 4 by 2030.

Challenges and Issues of Public Education

- Compulsory and free education has rarely been translated into reality as many public schools have still been collecting fees from the parents in the name of managing inadequate teachers and infrastructure development. The private schools operate like profit-oriented business firms collecting fees in different headings without the consent of parents and violating the processes of the fee-determining policy⁶ of governments.⁷
- Safety and security of children and youth are still a prime concern as many



of them have no access to health and nutrition facilities in schools. Many of the girls have been facing physical, sexual, social, and emotional violence in and outside of the schools.⁸

- Child marriage in some indigenous communities, Dalits, and other economically weaker rural people who are illiterate is another challenge. Many child labourers are vulnerable to unequal, unfair, and often abusive treatment. They are facing maltreatment, abuse, exploitation, and violence, particularly those who are live-in workers.⁹ The pandemic also contributed to increasing in child marriage and child labour. It was reported that as the lockdown would save the wedding cost, the number of marriages increased.
- There is a growing concern about the participation and retention of students in schools of which about one million children are enrolled in Grade 1 and only one-third of the children remain in Grade 10 (NCE, 2020). This shows that the retention rate of the students at the basic and secondary level are challenging as millions of them enrolled in Grade 1 drop out without completing the cycle of a particular level. On the other hand, there are still a significant number of school-aged children who are unenrolled in schools.
- Declining the quality of education in different levels of school is another challenge. The competencies of the learners from underprivileged groups are lower than the learners from other privileged groups. The schools and students that are less equipped with ICT infrastructures faced challenges

in learning continuity because of lack of access to online learning. Also, 92% of teachers have had no training for facilitating student's learning during the pandemic.¹⁰

- The schools have not been made accessible to a large group of learners with disabilities in Nepal. Of the approximately 200,000 children with disabilities in Nepal, a study found that around 30.6% of them did not attend any school at all.¹¹ The learners with disabilities who are exposed to special or integrated education have less access to appropriate learning materials. In Nepal, disability is viewed as reparation for sins committed by the individual in previous lives, and people with disabilities are often marginalised by family and society.
- The low adult literacy rate, particularly among females and underprivileged groups, is another challenge. Around 1% of the total budget of education that goes to non-formal and lifelong learning¹² has compelled the recruitment of technically ill-equipped human resources.

VI. INSIGHTS FROM CSOS AND SDG 4 LOCALISATION

Several CSOs working towards a right-based approach to education. The National Campaign for Education (NCE) Nepal has more than 437 member organisations across the country and has been advocating for the right to education for all, especially those from marginalised and deprived communities. The CSOs have significant

¹⁰ A study conducted by NCE Nepal (2020)

¹¹ See <https://borgenproject.org/inclusive-education-in-nepal/#:~:text=Some%20schools%20utilize%20%E2%80%9Cresource%20classes,offering%20them%20to%20disabled%20students>

¹² See <https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/national-literacy-campaign-nepal>

⁶ Institutional School's Fee Fixation Guidelines (2016)

⁷ Adhikari, R. (2019) Published in The Himalyan Times on May 10, 2019. Available at: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/private-vs-public-schools/>

⁸ A study conducted by NCE Nepal (2019)

⁹ The World Lutheran Federation Nepal (2013). Shadowed domestic workers: Problems, policies, and practices in Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan city. Kathmandu: Author.

contributions to promoting equitable quality education for all. For example, as an impact of the interventions of NCE Nepal, there were 230 local governments of 32 different districts of Nepal preparing a Local Education Plan and Education Sector Local Contingency plan in line with SDG 4 (NCE Nepal, 2021). NCEN (2021) claims that there were several local governments allocating budgets to address the challenges faced by drop-out learners and build child-friendly infrastructure.

Most of the civil society organisations and NGOs working with the community people in rural areas and urban slums are providing non-formal education and literacy classes. For example, the National Resource Centre for Non-Formal Education (NRC-NFE), a network-based organisation with 40 different NGOs, works to promote literacy for girls/women. The centre has contributed in improving the quality of life and income generation, organisation of training of literacy instructors, and development of Community Learning Centres (CLCs). The CLC organises non-formal education programmes to help the local people to identify their problems through mutual discussion and dialogue. NGOs through community radio are promoting literacy and awareness in the remote areas of Nepal.

CSOs have a crucial role in ensuring learning continues even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. I/NGOs also have a catalytic role to empower local and national stakeholders in regard to the issues of education in emergencies and to implement the government's policy of alternative learning facilitation strategies.

VII. KEY FINDINGS

The enrolment of learners at different levels of schools including the ECED was not met as targeted in 2021 by SSDP. The target set to achieve in 2020/21 in participation and survival of the students was not only unmet but far below the targets. It

is difficult to achieve the new targets of 2025 as compared to the achievement in the past years. The long impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further magnified the possibility of unschooling learners from marginalised and deprived communities in the post-COVID educational context.

The quality of education is worsening year by year at all levels of school education as the majority of students have performed lower than the level of competency envisaged by the curricula. The COVID-19 pandemic has advanced the disengagement of students in meaningful learning processes thereby lowering their proficiency.

The target of achieving a literacy rate in 2021 is unmet by a significant difference. The state's vision of making literate Nepal seems difficult to achieve even in 2025 and 2030 if the pace of progress slows as in recent years. Gender parity in literacy shows that a large number of women/girls do not participate in the programmes.

Gender disparity is still there in the TVET sector. There is less participation of women in TVET due to the emphasis given to male-dominated training and gender stereotypes of not engaging in male-controlled work. Working-age population with TVET has increased but the trend of outmigration of workers does not indicate that the youths and adults are engaged in the country with skill-based employment.

The alarming gap in allocating budget in the education sector informs that it is difficult to achieve the targets of SDG 4 for strengthening public education. This has created a challenge to ensure equitable quality education for all.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

a. The three layers of the government of Nepal need to have extra efforts and resource allocation for achieving the targets of equitable access set for 2025 and then 2030, with a significant increase in the education sector

financing to meet the educational needs of learners, particularly from the underprivileged groups. The local government should develop a plan and implement it with close monitoring of the schools. They should also be more responsive to the recovery of learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- b. The schools should be equipped with child-friendly infrastructures and learning materials for enhancing quality education. Initiatives should be taken by the government for increasing access to online learning, especially from the underprivileged and marginalised communities, and addressing the digital divide. Fulfilling teacher quotas and professional development are crucial for enhancing quality education.
- c. A large number of learners with disabilities and those from poor, remote areas, low caste and indigenous communities, religious minorities, and disadvantaged caste/ethnic groups are still out of school. The local levels should be responsible for identifying out-of-school learners and bringing them into education.
- d. Community Learning Centres and literacy programmes should be enhanced to increase literacy and promote lifelong learning. The focus should be given to participating women/girls who are out of the programmes. The literacy programmes should promote contextual knowledge and life-affirming skills.
- e. It is crucial to have inter-governmental coordination and collaborative work of different layers of governments with a special focus on empowering local governments and identifying contextual equity barriers. It is better to formulate effective programmes, plans, and strategies to overcome such barriers in the post-COVID-19 context. •



The 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.

Unit 106 Sterten Place Condominium, 116 Maginhawa Street,
Teachers Village East, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
Tel/Fax: 63 2 8441 4594
Email: aspbae@gmail.com | Website: www.aspbae.org

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**NCE
NEPAL**

National Campaign for Education Nepal (NCE Nepal)
P.O. Box: 14421, Babarmahal Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-01-4223420
Email: info@nccnepal.org.np
Website: <http://nccnepal.org.np/>

NCE Nepal is a national network of 460 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).